



WINGing IT

*Worldwide broker network
provides solutions
to international businesses*

By Elisabeth Boone, CPCU

Large international organizations obtain insurance and risk management services from large international brokerages, right?

Not necessarily. For more than 25 years, the Worldwide Insurance Network Group (WING) has been providing insurance, employee benefits, and risk management solutions to entities that operate on the global stage. With 73 members located in 53 countries with 582 offices and more than 10,500

employees, WING offers clients an alternative to what can be an overly corporate approach on the part of large multinational brokers, according to WING Chairman Martin Wicks. He is also regional managing director for WING member Bluefin Insurance Services Limited, a Lloyd's broker based in London.



Photography by Paul B Riley

Martin Wicks
Chairman
Worldwide Insurance Network Group

“We succeed by offering a more personalized, individualized approach than the mega-brokers,” Wicks declares. “We serve more than 1 million customers around the world and have gross written premium of over \$10.6 billion.” In essence, WING seeks to fill the gap between mega-brokers and local brokers.

What is now known as WING was established in 1989 in Europe with an agreement among a number of well-known family brokers who merged with INTERPOOL, another independent broker network. WING is a legal entity registered in Switzerland as a *Verein*, or commercial association. To keep costs low

for members, it maintains no offices or staff.

The selection process for WING brokers is rigorous, Wicks explains, but size isn’t a critical factor. “A broker could have three employees but still be great at what it does,” he says. “Size isn’t the criterion.”

What are the criteria for membership in WING? “The broker must have a book of international business,” Wicks responds. “It must have experienced and knowledgeable staff, provide first-class service, and offer a wide range of market-leading products.”

The vetting process includes references from insurers and other members; checks for sanctions; an interview with a WING board member, and presentation at an assembly where all members in attendance are required to vote on the applicant’s appointment.

The largest number of WING brokers is in Europe (28 countries), with 11 members in Asia and Australia, 11 members in North and South America, and three in Africa.

“We’re looking to expand our representation in North America, specifically in the United States and Canada,” Wicks says. In September he made a presentation to the North American brokers who belong to the Greenwich Group at the behest of WING member Michel Drouin, whose agency is based in Quebec. “We’d welcome individual Greenwich members to apply to join us, and we’d certainly be happy to consider them joining us as a group,” Wicks declares.

In response to requests from interested brokers, Wicks says, WING also plans to expand its footprint in developing countries in the Middle East, the Far East, and Africa.

How it works

The members of WING operate autonomously while cooperating to meet the insurance, risk management, and employee benefits consulting needs of clients with international operations. The merger of the two previous broker networks brought together a cadre of brokers around the world that had long-standing informal trading links with partners in each country. The creation of the “new” WING formalized those links and strengthened the ties among members.

Members must adhere to a strict code of ethics and must agree to provide their clients a coordinated and integrated approach to insurance and risk management in each country in which they operate. (See the WING Promise on the last page.)



“We succeed by offering a more personalized, individualized approach than the mega-brokers.”

—Martin Wicks



A key benefit for WING clients is access to brokers in 53 countries who understand local issues and regulations and can guide clients through what otherwise would be a disorienting maze. WING offers some examples of situations in which such local knowledge can save the day:

- In **Germany**, gradual pollution may be included in a typical general liability policy.
- In **France, The Netherlands, and Spain**, employers liability may be included in a general liability policy.
- In **Japan**, earthquake coverage must be purchased in the domestic market from a licensed insurer.
- In **India and three Chinese provinces**, premiums must be paid before coverage is provided.
- In **Malaysia**, a separate policy is required for each legally registered company even if all companies are owned by the same parent at the same location.
- The **insurance premium tax** varies substantially by country.
- In many countries, **claims** must be paid in local currency; the local broker is responsible for **collecting and paying taxes and charges**; and **nonadmitted policies** are illegal. In countries including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States, a **local broker** is either required or highly recommended.



WING member brokers have access to the products and services of selected

trade partners based in London with which WING has established relationships. LONMAR Global Risks places coverage for specialty risks on both a direct and wholesale basis. The Health Insurance Group arranges personal, business, and expatriate health insurance. St. James's Place provides wealth management and financial planning services to individuals, trustees, and businesses.

"We're also in the process of establishing partnerships with professionals like lawyers and accountants so that our brokers will have access to their services in various locations," Wicks says.

WING conducts two general assemblies each year: one in the spring and the other in the fall. The principal assembly is held in the spring in a different location each year with a different member serving as host. The second general assembly is held at a location in Europe. The 2014 fall assembly took place in Barcelona; the spring 2015 meeting was in Marrakech, and the fall 2015 meeting was in Amsterdam.

Kudos from a member

Expressing high enthusiasm for the advantages of belonging to WING is Michel Drouin, president and chief executive officer of Charlebois Trépanier, a brokerage that is based near Ottawa, Canada. The firm also belongs to the Greenwich Group, an organization of 18 brokers who meet to exchange ideas and hear from experts on key industry trends.

"The primary purpose of the Greenwich Group is to give members a forum to share best practices in property/casualty insurance and employee benefits," Drouin explains. "A secondary purpose is to give members the opportunity to be solutions providers to each other via referrals."

In contrast, he continues, "The major reason brokers join WING is to exchange referrals. The base of the membership is European, but there are members on almost every continent. Some members are more likely to send out business to other members, whereas others primarily receive business."

He offers an example. "If you're in an emerging country, you would probably be a receiver because you're the local expert for coverage that is needed for the clients of fellow brokers from the developed world who may be opening offices in your area. This is the case for brokers in countries like India and the Eastern European countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union and are now democracies with emerging markets."

In developed nations like the United States, Canada, and the countries of Western Europe, Drouin says, WING member brokers are primarily producers of business rather than receivers.

Drouin's firm has been a member of WING since the spring of 2014. He sees several advantages to belonging to WING.

"When we talk to clients, even those who may not have international operations, we find that many of them have aspirations to someday operate on the global stage," Drouin says. "When we meet prospects or existing clients, it's nice to be able to say that we're connected to a worldwide network of partners who can help us find solutions."

Another advantage, Drouin says, is that "when we deal with a broker who belongs to WING, we know that due diligence has been done on that broker. We don't have to do it ourselves, and we don't have to take chances with brokers we find on the Internet about whom we know nothing. In that situation we have no control. When we're doing business with a WING broker, we definitely have more control. In many cases I've already met this person. That makes for a much better relationship because the level of service is much higher than it is with a broker we don't know."

As WING continues to expand its worldwide network, it's certain that more and more carefully vetted brokers soon will be WINGing it. ■

For more information:

Worldwide Insurance Network Group

Website: www.winginsurance.com

"When we meet prospects or existing clients, it's nice to be able to say that we're connected to a worldwide network of partners who can help us find solutions."

*—Michel Drouin
President/CEO
Charlebois Trépanier*

The WING Promise

- The WING member will provide innovative and proactive service to support your international business.
- The WING member will guide you through the legislative and regulatory landscape to ensure that your insurance program is compliant.
- The WING member will work with you to understand how you wish to balance the "global vs. local" factors.
- The WING member will coordinate the placement of an insurance program maximizing the benefits of our strong relationships with the leading specialist global insurers.
- The WING member will provide local service to your global offices.
- The WING member will provide assistance and advice to ensure a rapid and coordinated response to claims.