

Brace for impact

Brace USA is a new player in the program market. It brings a fresh approach, working closely with MGAs to deliver long-term success. Its leaders Charlie Rawlins and Glenn Dorr explain what makes Brace so different.

Why did you set up Brace?

Charlie: Adam [Holberry, Brace's co-founder] and I could see that the insurance market is crying out for new ideas and a fresh perspective. We met at Hiscox, where we became good friends. We clicked because we have very similar outlooks. We're both entrepreneurs at heart, who'd become increasingly frustrated with the insurance business, which has become so risk averse at a time when we need to reward risk-takers. It's a fast-moving world, but traditional insurers struggle to embrace change. They turn away new opportunities because it's simpler to say "no" than to ask: "how can we help?"

We saw how brokers often struggle to get cover for their MGA clients and spotted a chance for us to use our talents and experience to help other entrepreneurs succeed. Adam and I have complementary skills. He has a great eye for spotting new ideas which don't easily fit into the traditional insurers' mould but that could work, with the right expertise and backing. I have experience in underwriting unusual risks, having run power and mining, terrorism and political violence, and upstream energy underwriting teams.

So, we set up Brace to address that gap in the market for emerging risk and new opportunities. We met John Cavanagh of Beat Capital, and everything quickly fell into place. Teaming up with them meant we could focus straight away on building the underwriting business, because there are lots of deals to be done, while Beat provides all the back-office services we need, like legal and HR, as well as the all-important risk capital.

How would you define what Brace does?

Charlie: We help create innovative solutions for MGAs. Often, they're turned away by other insurers because their needs don't



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Charlie Rawlins

fit neatly into carriers' off-the-shelf products. Insurers frequently don't spend the time to understand what MGAs need, or struggle to create a solution which would be too complex internally because large insurers operate in silos.

Glenn: Programs are all we do. We're not moonlighting from our day jobs. This is our day job. Some big insurers won't get out of bed for deals that are smaller than \$10 million. We're not like that.



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Glenn Dorr

What kinds of deals do you do and what track record does Brace already have?

Glenn: We’ll look at any program or binder that doesn’t include property natural catastrophe, cyber or long-tail general liability exposure.

Charlie: What we do isn’t just an interesting concept. It works. In 2022, Brace UK wrote around \$120 million in gross written premiums. It has 35 programs globally covering a wide variety of risks, such as residential builders’ risk excluding nat cat; contractors’ inland marine physical damage; surety and multiline packages comprising property, short-tail GL, and commercial auto. We have the appetite and underwriting expertise to write many different lines.

How does Brace add value?

Charlie: We stand shoulder to shoulder with MGAs that are run by real entrepreneurs. They see unusual risks as an opportunity, not as a problem. So do we.

We back MGAs that we believe have a compelling offering. They’re the experts at what they do, the people with a great reputation in their sector, who know their customers and understand their needs. We support them with our capacity and insurance knowledge.

Brace has experienced underwriters, actuaries, pricing, claims and wordings experts who can help an MGA to underwrite or price their product. We can even help write the policy for them as well as provide the paper on which it’s written. We can support them on one line of business or across multiple lines, property, or casualty. Whatever they need, we have it.

We develop deep relationships with MGAs that we believe will be winners, and we invest the time and effort to ensure that we are both successful by doing business with them across different lines which they underwrite.

Glenn: We don’t want to own a stake in the MGAs we do business with, unlike some of our rivals, or make them operate in a way that suits us, not them, by using our systems rather than those they’d prefer to have. We want to grow with our MGAs, not at their expense.

Why did you set up Brace USA?

Charlie: The US is by far the biggest program market in the world and so there’s an even bigger need here for what we offer.

Glenn: I knew and admired Charlie and Adam from Hiscox, so when they approached me with the idea of helping them set up Brace in the US, I jumped at the chance. I’ve seen for myself the problems brokers have with placing unconventional programs in the conventional insurance market, having worked for big insurers. My gut instinct was that there’s a gap in the US market for what Brace does and when I spoke to a lot of my industry contacts, they agreed. I was excited by the opportunity to build a business from scratch, and it’s been a whirlwind since I joined, talking to brokers and their MGA clients, explaining how Brace can help them.

Charlie: Right now, we offer Lloyd’s paper for the programs we insure, which is recognised in every state. Lloyd’s brokers do a great job in North America, covering such a huge market, but it’s not our style to wait for business to fall into our laps. Insurance is still a people business, and because we’re unique and so too are MGAs, it makes sense for me to be here with Glenn, to meet MGAs and their brokers. So, I’ve relocated with my family to the US, to focus on building Brace here. It’s an exciting time for us. Our ambition is to give clients the added option of using domestic A rated insurance paper too, so watch this space.

Glenn: With Charlie’s underwriting expertise and my knowledge and contacts in the US insurance industry, this really is 1+1=3. We’re spreading the word about Brace by visiting brokers across the country, as well as attending the big industry conferences throughout this year. We’ve already been busy, with dozens of meetings at the WSIA Meeting in Phoenix in March and at the TMPAA Mid-Year Meeting in Boston in May.

What’s the future for Brace?

Glenn: Bright. We offer a new alternative in the US program market. We welcome new ideas, however left field, and we have the expertise, technology and capital to make them work. We’re willing to look at any deal: property or casualty, big or small. We’ll give you a quick answer – something else you won’t necessarily get from other insurers. So, if you’re a broker handling program business or an MGA, speak to us. ■



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