

# Digital surge, new-age clients drive Middle East insurance

*Insurance giant sees surge in longer-term clients and inevitability of digital advances as beacon to growth as 'less crowded' market becomes inevitable, says Zurich's Walter Jopp.*

- *Despite the vast protection gap in the Middle East, in terms of life cover and business cover, success will come to those firms which are patient and well-prepared*
- *To harvest these new opportunities, insurance players must embrace new technology via digital tools and online capabilities as part of creating more efficiencies*
- *Zurich wants to focus further on the protection space, on products such as income protection – based on a future expected to be about personalisation of solutions*

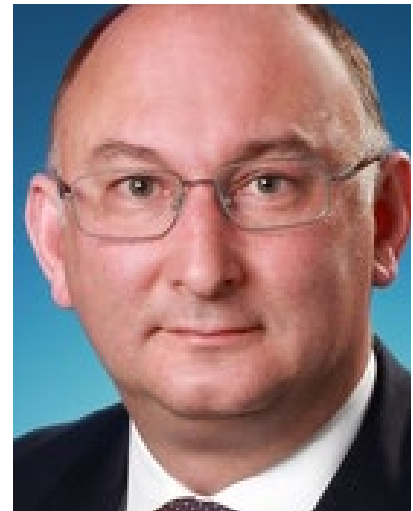
With the USD800 billion opportunity that many people believe the wealth management industry in the Middle East and North Africa represents, it is

no surprise to see so many financial institutions vying for their share.

On the insurance side, for example, Zurich International Life eyes these new challenges as heralding exciting times ahead, says Walter Jopp, the firm's chief executive officer for the Middle East.

"We are going through a very interesting time in this market. The regulatory activity has picked up... and the market will be going through a period of change over the next few years," he explains.

As is the case in so many developing markets, the protection gap is vast, in terms of life cover and business cover. But the pickings are not so easy to come by. Success will come to those firms which are patient and well-prepared. To harvest these new opportunities, insurance players like Zurich must embrace new technology.



**WALTER JOPP**  
Zurich International Life

## DEPENDING ON DIGITAL

In fact, says Jopp, the key component in the whole evolution process sits with digital offerings.

“Technology and the internet is not the future, it is the present, and we have invested USD20 million over the last five years to develop our digital capabilities,” he adds.

As a result of these efforts, any distributor of a Zurich product can use an iPad to provide a customer with a quotation and to prepare and apply for a product online. “We have also developed a customer-facing portal to offer them 24/7 access to their policies,” he adds. Further, Zurich customers can make changes to their policies online.

### CATERING TO NEW NEEDS

Change seems to be the norm for firms such as Zurich in markets like the Middle East.

“This is an environment with a large number of expats, but if the main breadwinner and visa-holder loses their job, then the family has to move on to another country – which is costly and needs protecting,” explains Jopp. “If customers are going to get this protection and achieve their financial goals in the long term, they need to plan ahead,” he adds.

digitalisation and an enhanced experience for both customers and distributors, this is part of his broader plans to develop what he calls a “future-proof proposition”.

“This will see us launch products and services that we believe are suited for the future types of customers,” he explains.

The firm has already worked tirelessly to develop its protection proposition over the past three years.

It now counts on its product shelf whole of life policies, various types of term solutions, and critical illness offerings.

“We would like to focus further on the protection space, so products with income protection and repatriation will be a focus,” predicts Jopp.

“The insurance industry has been very rigid in the past in saying that one size fits it all, whereby you can change the sum assured but not much else.”

But Jopp believes that the future is about personalisation of solutions to each customer’s needs. This is clearly a direction that Zurich is taking.

The partnerships that Zurich develops are and will be key to achieving these goals.

This might mean additional partnerships with banks and IFAs, or perhaps the firm will look at certain affiliations or other initiatives.

In all cases, the job for every stakeholder in the industry is to further educate customers as part of their contribution to developing the market. ■

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“These are the hygiene factors we need because we are no longer compared with other insurance companies,” explains Jopp.

“We are compared with the Amazons of this world, so the future is definitely towards more digitalisation.”

This also means there is little room or time to be complacent. “We have to find ways to create further efficiencies through the use of technology, to make sure that we improve the customer service experience and the ease of doing business with Zurich,” he adds.

Within this expat dynamic, there is also a trend where an increasing number of expats are staying in their role for more than the traditional two to three years before moving on.

Plus, more of them are now only on domestic packages.

This is influencing the types of products which are required as these customers seek better, or fuller, coverage.

### INKING A GROWTH STRATEGY

As Jopp continues to spearhead the insurance company’s drive towards