



Icon
Insurance

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Small is beautiful

The rise and rise of the Internet has brought about many changes - including dramatic growth in the numbers of people starting up small businesses and working from home, says Ian Jones, head of Business Development at Icon Insurance.

Icon is now one of the UK's leading specialist providers of tailor-made insurance for home-based office businesses, freelancers and "micro"-businesses. Ian Jones and his team have been at the forefront of this market since the mid-90s, having pioneered policies for the homemaker at brokers Tolson Messenger.

"We spotted a gap back then" explains Jones, "which we were able to exploit with the development of HomeOffice." The UK's first dedicated policy for the home-based office, it attracted clients like consultants, designers and accountants - and today is still going from strength to strength according to Jones.

"This continues to be an exciting and growing market to be in," he says. More and more people want to work for themselves; the Internet - and the massive growth of broadband in particular - makes it more possible than it's ever been. Add to that an ever-louder public debate about 'work-life balance' and the future looks assured for HomeOffice.

But Jones isn't content to stop there. The Icon range includes products for what he calls the 'micro-business'. "We designed SmallOffice essentially for businesses entering their next stage - outgrowing the kitchen table, taking on maybe a few staff and renting office premises". As with HomeOffice, Jones had discovered a sector that wasn't being properly catered for. "When people take about SMEs, they're often referring to companies that by anybody's normal standards are really rather big," he says, claiming that the area where there's real growth is at the micro-business end. "There's a real trend towards smaller, leaner businesses - technology means firms need fewer people to handle more work, so it's all perfectly logical."

He sees this trend as a real opportunity for brokers. "There's terrific potential out there. People running small businesses know they need expert advice and are happy to pay for it - brokers are really well-positioned to provide what the market wants." Which is of course why Icon is keen to do business with brokers. A former broker himself, Jones promises that Icon will deal with brokers "in the way they'd like to be dealt with" - no quibbling about commission, no poaching clients and no interminable waiting times. "It's just about good business really," says Jones, "Service is what makes the difference."

Today the Icon range includes not only HomeOffice and SmallOffice, but also Lawsuit, a legal expenses policy for the smaller business, ProIndemnity, affordable PI cover for the small player and SecurITy, PI designed especially for the IT market.

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