

# H3...

## RAPID GROWTH FOR HOME-GROWN HEALTH INSURER



Jim Livingstone (left) & Gavin Higgins, H3.

It must have been a daunting prospect. When H3 Insurance came into being just short of two years ago, the Belfast-based health insurance company was pitting itself into a marketplace dominated by some very big names, but are more than holding their own.

**B**ut the company has confounded the doubters and continues to win customers here thanks to its uniquely local approach and its link to the fast-growing 3FiveTwo Medical Group, the top private medical care provider in Northern Ireland.

H3 was set up in June 2010 as a joint venture between the former Higgins Insurance - headed by Gavin Higgins - and 3FiveTwo, the group led by doctors Suresh Tharma and Ashok Songra.

"Quite simply, it brought the insurance the medical areas of expertise together, and that's the perfect synergy for the marketplace we are operating in," says Gavin Higgins, H3's Managing Director, who is joined at the H3 top table by Jim Livingstone, the firm's Sales & Business Development Manager.

H3 offers a range of health insurance plans to its customers, most of whom are local businesses within the SME space, but varying in size from 3-4 employees up to considerably larger head counts.

It's USP is that all-important link to the 3Five Two Group. 3FiveTwo not only operates Northern Ireland's newest private hospital (Kingsbridge on the Lisburn Road) but also boasts a private casualty department and offers access to a wide range of leading consultants and specialists right across the medical spectrum.

#### Same day-referrals

"The fact that we're a Northern Ireland-based operation kicks in right at the start of the process for our customers," Jim Livingstone explains.

"Unlike with other insurers, they don't have to go through their GP to be referred to a consultant. And they can deal with one of our team of staff based here in Belfast....staff who know the lie of the land, and know most of the consultants as well.

"So it is a very personalised, very locally-based service and that's something that our customers very much appreciate. What's more, our customer care staff here at H3 will look after all aspects of each case from initial contact right through to sorting

out any final details once the customer has fully recovered. Customers aren't left to make their own arrangements."

#### Unique Casualty Cover

3FiveTwo's relatively new private casualty unit at Kingsbridge Private Hospital is also a major draw for potential H3 customers....providing them with access to minor injury treatment under their health insurance policies.

"We entered an intensely competitive marketplace with some very big insurance industry names," says Gavin Higgins. "But we came into the market with some very strong unique selling points. We also came in when the big insurers were starting to cut back on the cover they were providing on the back of the global recession.

"Our initial challenge was to test the market with our products and our premiums, and we moved from that into the insurance broker marketplace. We recognised from the outset that brokers were the best route to market for us. A lot of business customers do business through trusted insurance brokers, and those brokers were quick to see the benefits in what we were offering their clients."

It's a strategy which seems to have paid off. More than 90% of H3's business comes via that broker network....both the larger international brokerage firms based in Belfast city centre and much smaller operations around the country.

"We've managed to achieve very steady growth right from the start," adds Livingstone. "Health insurance can be a complex product and that's one clear reason why we work well through professional brokers who are on hand to advise their clients on the specifics."

"In essence, our products do everything that brokers and customers can expect from health insurance products, and they do it on a local level with local staff on hand all the time," he adds.

H3 is proud of the fact that it has managed to achieve an 89% retention rate on cases which it has managed over the past couple

of years....and that's much higher than the industry average.

#### Locally Tailored plans

"We work hard to tailor our plans and our service to the marketplace here in Northern Ireland, and that's important to our end customers," says Higgins. "We know the health service here, we know the private medical sector and we also know the business community locally."

From a standing start, H3 has grown to its current level of several thousand or so 'lives' insured, to quote the insurance industry's rather direct way of describing each person covered by its policies.

"That's quite an achievement for us, and one we're very proud of," says Jim Livingstone. "We're still very much in the business of growing the H3 brand here in Northern Ireland, and we're very aware that we're up against some very recognisable brand names indeed.

"But we're more than confident that we can continue to grow that customer base on the back of our strong local service and local medical connections.

"We're already a Top 3 player in the health insurance marketplace here in Northern Ireland, and we can continue to build on that. In the longer term, there is no reason why we can't look at markets outside of Northern Ireland....in the Republic and across the Irish Sea."

#### Upgraded products

H3 is currently working on some significant upgraded for its health insurance products and these will be announced once that process is complete. "It's important that we keep looking closely at the products we offer and at how they can be improved.

Specifically, H3 is looking in detail at the limited cover end of the marketplace, in other words the concept of bringing health insurance to a much wider customer base.

"We feel that the marketplace can be extended to people who would not normally consider health insurance because of its cost....but who would like to be able to have the reassurance of some form of cover and access to private medical treatment."

"There's no doubt" says Gavin Higgins. "that people like to buy local if they can do it. But they'll only buy local if the product, and the service, is good enough.

"That's the challenge that we've delivered on over the past couple of years."

#### CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

*"A&L Goodbody chose H3 as a local, high quality service provider and have found the access to doctors, speed and quality of service for our team to be first rate. It is great that as well as getting excellent service we are also able to support a local business."*

**Mr Mark Thompson, A&L Goodbody, Belfast who have been covered by H3 for 2 years**

*"As a company, we couldn't be happier with the excellent customer service we receive from H3. They always go out of their way to help us and nothing seems to be too much trouble."*

**Mr John Lunn, John H Lunn (Jewellers) Ltd who have been covered by H3 for 2 years**

*"We were impressed by the added value a local provider brought to the service. A major saving was the ability to get a referral on the same day without staff taking time off to see their GP. The feedback from our staff has been very positive highlighting the process as being quick, simple, efficient, and managed by local people who know the local medical specialists. Overall we are delighted with our choice of private healthcare provider and are proud to be supporting our local economy."*

**Mr Peter McMahon, NITEC Solutions Ltd who have been covered by H3 for 3 years**

*"We were initially very nervous about moving to a new local provider but, now in our second year of cover with H3, we have had no problems. Claims have been handled super quick and our employees are treated quickly, with minimal disruption to company operations. We are very happy with the move to H3."*

**Beth Robinson, Templeton Robinson who have been covered by H3 for 2 years**