



Aon scores with teamwork

How Philip Clement has taken Aon from mere logo to multinational brand

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Since joining Aon in 2005, global chief marketing and communications officer Philip Clement has been on a mission to do just that.

The risk management, reinsurance and HR outsourcing business has 500 offices in 120 countries and in January announced plans to relocate its corporate headquarters from Chicago to London.

Caught up in the move across the pond and recently arrived in England, Clement explains that part of the reason for the move was to ease coordination of Aon's global empire, and for greater proximity to the emerging markets central to its business strategy.

"It's not hard to be involved in the UK and continental Europe from a US base because the six-hour time difference is manageable," he says.

"But it's almost impossible to be involved in Asia and Africa – someone has to get up in the middle of the night just to have a phone conversation."

But when Clement first came on board at Aon the global scale of the business posed more sophisticated problems than how to get a good night's sleep.

The firm had grown off the back of 419 acquisitions, a number that has increased to 435 during the course of Clement's tenure. The challenge was to bring the company's international and regional offices together, creating a united global firm in the eyes of employees and clients.

Aon United

"When you grow through a massive acquisition trail there is always a gravitational pull back to the names and cultures of the companies bought," says Clement. "When I arrived only about half of the firm was using the Aon name."

This figure is now 95 per cent, but Clement concedes it wasn't as simple as a name change.

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☛ July 2001-April 2006: managing partner, The Clement Group

☛ April 1997-July 2001: executive vice-president global market development, Inforte

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United front

Aon is embracing teamwork on a global scale to deliver winning results for its clients

WORDS: JOHN MANNING
PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL STUART

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parts of the company could disagree over whether Aon was about teamwork or about doing everything you can as an individual to get a deal."

The business's sponsorship deal with Manchester United Football Club is central to how Aon defines its brand. "All over the world you can safely say Manchester United stands for teamwork, excellence and performance – except maybe with rival fans in the UK," says Clement.

"I can say 100 per cent it was not my decision," says Clement of Aon's investment in the sponsorship deal – widely reported to be a record breaking £80m. Rather it was a decision made by the executive committee – meaning about 70 people had to agree it was the right move to make.

"We knew we wanted to be global, and to have one message that would be as meaningful in Korea as it is in Brazil. That was agreed on, and then the possibility of the Manchester United sponsorship emerged," says Clement. "If someone had said 'I want to do this sponsorship programme and these are the benefits', before it had been agreed that those were benefits we wanted, there is no way it would have gone ahead."

At Aon the "united" theme goes beyond brand badges and mission statements. It is fundamental to the business offering. "Our value comes from working together," says Clement. "If we work for a client in London, and also in Chicago, Hong Kong and Australia, we can deliver tailored solutions in each of those geographies in an integrated way."

That's not to say brand assets are irrelevant. "It's really important that our messaging has a very similar theme, look and feel all around the globe," he says. "If a client walks into the Hong Kong office it offers a great deal of comfort that things are somewhat alike in the UK or US."

Getting offices and employees to embrace belonging to the Aon global brand is only half the battle. The rest is developing the systems and infrastructure to enable collaborative working on a global scale.

Risky business

Implementation of a global CRM (customer relationship management) system was the crucial step in creating this collaborative marketing organisation.

Clement speaks of his admiration for Aon chief executive Gregory Case for making the decision – a decision that



☒ didn't come without risk. "CRM implementations on a global scale don't always have a high success rate, in fact they have a pretty high failure rate," says Clement. "New chief executives are usually averse to that kind of risk, but Greg knew that to get what he wanted to get done around the globe, to unite the firm, we had to have it."

Clement explains that in addition to the sheer scale of the implementation, lack of employee buy-in was the main obstacle to overcome.

"The first priority of business development professionals is their clients and they'll take the documentation and use of a CRM tool as a very secondary part of their responsibilities," he says.

Clement credits a well balanced wielding of carrot and stick for Aon bucking this trend and achieving a successful implementation. "There was a huge amount of positive energy and we made sure people really understood they were helping their colleagues across the globe," he says. "But there were also some more Machiavellian techniques. In big markets, on big deals, if it

wasn't in the system people didn't get paid their commission."

Aon being a large global company where marketing is a relatively new discipline, it is important that faith in marketing programmes is based on hard evidence and data. This is what the CRM system brought to the firm. Clement uses the example of a client event. "I'll know exactly who attended, what they buy in the next six months, what we were talking about to them already and if there was any pending revenue," he says.

Events are an important ingredient in the marketing mix at Aon, for both internal and external marketing, and these often exploit the attention garnering effect of the Manchester United name.

Pass it on

The Pass It On programme is an employee and client engagement initiative based around the business's affiliation with Manchester United. "We started by having a football in Africa,



Catastrophe strikes

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Total insured losses for the global insurance industry from natural catastrophes and man made disasters hit \$116bn (£74.5bn) in 2011. This represents the second largest annual insured loss ever and is more than double losses of \$48bn (£30.8bn) in 2010.



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"It ranks the risks in every country around the world in a way that's accessible, visual and very interesting," he says. "But we also sell political risk insurance."

The subject matter makes it a great resource for getting the press, opinion leaders and clients engaged and involved. "It's an important issue and not just a commercial issue," he says. "It's about affairs of state, things that matter, so it ends up being pretty interesting."

While conceding that the political risk map may well be a fantastic piece of marketing, Clement insists that he would never want to position it that way.

"It's information that is important to our clients," he says. "It might not happen without the marketing support, but our job is to amplify its value as a tool to help staff talk to their clients and say 'hey you know, you might be interested in this'."

Alongside standalone resources like the political risk map, Aon publishes a client magazine, *One*. "It's extremely thoughtful and the content is very deep, to a point well beyond what would be necessary for a corporate newsletter," says Clement. "We want anyone that interacts with the magazine to fully understand the intellectual richness of our firm."

Clement acknowledges that monitoring return on investment can prove tricky when using implicit forms of marketing. "You have to make sure you have some sort of metric to tell you whether you are improving - even if it is only correlated and not evidence of cause," he says. "When you are doing really high-end thought pieces externally it can be really hard."

Business as usual

So will the relocation to London have an effect on the way Clement runs marketing at Aon? The answer is an emphatic no. "When I was based in the Chicago office I wasn't doing US marketing, I was as involved in marketing in the US as I was with marketing in the UK or Brazil or China," says Clement.

And it won't be any different now. "I would be a very dangerous guy marketing to the Brits," he says. "I don't have the skill set to deliver programmes that will be best responded to here."

"I will continue doing what I am doing, which is bringing a thread of an idea to be implemented in our different geographies by the folks that are best equipped to do so." **tm**

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Australia and South America that would be handed Aon employee to Aon Employee back to London," explains Clement.

The programme kicked-off in October at half time during a match between Manchester United and Manchester City and events were held in cities along the routes travelled by the footballs.

"The internal angle is that employees got together to celebrate being part of the same firm," says Clement. "But the events were also for clients and when you use Manchester United around the globe it provides a little extra attention."

To that end event cars were plastered with images of Manchester United players and in some locations legends of the game such as Dennis Irwin were flown in.

"For people outside the UK it's very exotic," says Clement. "They are very familiar with the game, but they never get to access it in that way."

Despite being a global initiative, Clement explains that he very much stuck to the policy of giving international offices control over implementation in their region.

"As a corporate marketer it would be very difficult for me to plan what would happen when the ball passes through Kenya," he says. "What we gave the office in Kenya was

a series of assets and ideas, what we call a 'playbook'. I would never have known how to translate that into something that would work in that geography."

Education

When not using the Manchester United brand to dazzle clients, the focus of Aon's marketing communications is education. Building deep relationships with clients by providing them with content that is timely, informative and relevant to their business needs. Clement says this is the reason for moving to the language of risk - to get away from the industry history of selling insurance.

"We will tell clients not to buy insurance as often as we'll tell them they should," he says. "It's our job to help clients make rational decisions, identify what is really important and invest appropriately." Aon is equally involved in risk management decisions that don't involve insurance, such as advising on the most appropriate footwear for oil rig workers.

Clement cites the Aon political risk map, produced annually, as one of his favourite examples of an education tool used to build a relationship with clients and prospects.