

BROKER PROFILE



Mr. Williams



Mr. Norris



Mr. Jablonowski

Fastest growing broker lets acquired firms be themselves

BY DONNA MAHONEY

Changes in company ownership can upset the apple cart in many businesses, but Acrisure L.L.C. makes its acquisitions as seamless as possible.

That strategy, say officials of the Caledonia, Michigan-based company, is the secret to Acrisure being the fastest growing broker in *Business Insurance's* survey.

With \$191.3 million in 2014 revenue, Acrisure posted a 147.1% increase over its 2013 numbers to be the fastest-growing broker of U.S. business, according to the annual survey.

CEO and co-founder Greg Williams started Acrisure in 2005, which private equity firm Genstar Capital L.L.C. purchased in early 2013. Since then, the retail brokerage has completed more than 75 acquisitions — all of which have been done with as little disruption to the acquired company as possible.

“We walk in, and we say, ‘Here are the things we can do to help you grow your business while not changing who you are or your relationship with your employees,’ ” Mr. Williams said. “These people all care about their businesses and they all care about their people, and that’s why we’ve been able to achieve this kind of growth. This is a different operating model than everyone else.

“We’re not looking to brand Acrisure; we don’t change producer compensation in the transactions that we do,” Mr. Williams said.

Brook Smith, president of Louisville, Kentucky-based surety bond broker Smith Manus and Acrisure agency partner, describes Acrisure’s methodology as “serious simplicity.”

“You feel like a partner when you join Acrisure. It’s not just a conversation across a table; it’s real. I’ve seen it amongst the group, and I’ve seen it in other Acrisure partners that are excited about what each and every one of us is doing. There’s a camaraderie; there is a sense of team, and that’s something that Greg and the other management has created. That’s the type of thing you see in other successful businesses in other industries, whether it’s Southwest Airlines or Chik-fil-A.”

Ricky L. Norris, executive vice president and co-founder of Acrisure, works on the sales and operations side of the business as well as integrating agency partners. Last year, the broker said its organic growth was 7.3% and so far this year it’s running at 5.5%, he said.

Mr. Williams and Mr. Norris met while attending their daughters’ sporting events.

“When I co-founded the company with Greg back in 2005, the two of us had a simple promise: it was to find great people running great agencies that were profitable that wanted to be part of something bigger, and that model hasn’t changed. We’ve run with that for 10 years,” Mr. Norris said.

Acrisure’s acquisitions keep their name, culture, compensation plan and way of doing business, Mr. Norris said. Acrisure focuses on helping the companies grow.

**ACRISURE
L.L.C.**

Caledonia, Michigan

2014 Brokerage
revenue
\$191.3 MILLION

Revenue
increase over 2013
147.1%

RESEARCH & DATA

FASTEST GROWING IN 2014

Ranked by rate of growth in 2014 brokerage revenue

| Rank | Company | 2014 revenue | Percent increase (decrease) |
|----------|---|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Acrisure L.L.C.¹ | \$191,273,467 | 147.1% |
| 2 | Jardine Lloyd Thompson Group P.L.C. ^{1,2} | \$354,796,431 | 122.5%** |
| 3 | Edgewood Partners Insurance Center, dba EPIC ¹ | \$151,724,409 | 108.4% |
| 4 | Risk Strategies Co. Inc. ¹ | \$97,756,644 | 67.5% |
| 5 | BroadStreet Partners Inc. ¹ | \$246,355,000 | 63.0% |
| 6 | Integro USA Inc. ¹ | \$169,901,600 | 51.6% |
| 7 | Associated Financial Group L.L.C. ¹ | \$75,433,260 | 45.2% |
| 8 | Digital Insurance Inc. ¹ | \$94,574,982 | 36.4% |
| 9 | Cross Financial Corp., dba Cross Insurance ¹ | \$106,079,000 | 34.4% |
| 10 | Houchens Insurance Group ³ | \$57,580,030 | 34.0% |
| 11 | AssuredPartners Inc. ¹ | \$449,110,764 | 29.9% |
| 12 | AHT Insurance dba Armfield, Harrison & Thomas Inc. | \$29,915,198 | 29.7% |
| 13 | ABD Insurance & Financial Services Inc. | \$36,900,000 | 29.5% |
| 14 | Cottingham & Butler Inc. | \$110,204,000 | 22.8% |
| 15 | Capacity Group of Cos. ¹ | \$93,364,781 | 22.2% |
| 16 | Bolton & Co. ¹ | \$36,321,250 | 21.3% |
| 17 | Insurors Group L.L.C. ¹ | \$76,911,296 | 20.0% |
| 18 | Towers Watson & Co. | \$444,640,300 | 19.1% |
| 19 | Hub International Ltd. ¹ | \$907,065,600 | 18.0% |
| 20 | MHBT Inc. ⁴ | \$73,900,000 | 17.8% |
| 21 | USI Holdings Corp. ¹ | \$912,890,811 | 16.7% |
| 22 | BancorpSouth Insurance Services Inc. ¹ | \$113,374,165 | 16.4% |
| 23 | Propel Insurance ¹ | \$53,757,000 | 16.3% |
| 24 | Insurance Office of America Inc. ¹ | \$128,868,289 | 16.0% |
| 25 | Brown & Brown Inc. ¹ | \$1,567,459,943 | 15.6% |

*Companies that derive more than 49% of their gross revenue from personal lines business are not ranked. **2013 restated. 1 Reported U.S. acquisitions in 2014. 2 British pound = \$1.5586. 3 Fiscal year ending Sept. 30. 4 Acquired in 2015 by Marsh & McLennan Agency L.L.C.

Source: BI survey

“It’s not top down or bottom up. We meet them in the middle,” he said.

Chief Operating Officer Stan Jablonowski, who’s been in the industry over 30 years, said the past year he’s spent at Acrisure is “probably one of the coolest things I have ever done.”

“If you look at our success and the new agency partners that are joining us, you’ll find people are really excited about being a part of this; it’s very infectious,” Mr. Jablonowski said. “Having lived through a lot of acquisitions and integrations, I look at our model that is focused on not changing anything when bringing someone on board. It’s really all about how our partners create what they do on a day-to-day basis and sharing best practices with all of our agency partners.”

When looking for additions, the broker looks for partners who are specialized with extensive experience.

“We bring our clients subject matter expertise and the ability to solve problems for our clients,” Mr. Jablonowski said. “The excitement of being focused on the client’s need instead of changing the dynamics of our partners really excites me. I thought I’d never find it again, but I’m real excited about what we’re building.”

In September, Acrisure partnered with The Signature Group L.L.C. and B&B Coverage L.L.C. while the two companies were merging.

Lew Bernstein, managing principal of merged The Signature B&B Cos., based in Garden City, New York, praised Acrisure for its patience during the complicated transaction. He said he was surprised that Acrisure wanted them to keep their names, but Mr. Williams said he knew both names had good brand exposure.

“They’ve allowed us to remain pretty much independent and continue business as usual. A real testimony to them is when they come in, you don’t have to change your name. There are no press releases. It’s the simplicity that is really their greatest strength. Their team really presents a compelling story; their integrity is beyond reproach,” Mr. Bernstein said.

“We’re soon to be \$400 million ... in revenue, but I view us as a \$400 million startup. We’re only in 23 states and there are 27 states we’re not even in,” Mr. Williams said of the acquisitive broker’s future plans.

