

TRIANGLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, February 5, 2010 | Modified: Tuesday, February 9, 2010

Unraveling the Complexities

TriSure maintains its customer base by building deep knowledge of insurance

Triangle Business Journal - by [Lee Weisbecker](#)

RALEIGH – The image of an insurance brokerage might be that of a bunch of staffers sitting around with headphone sets, hawking policies willy-nilly and counting up commissions.

That's not the reality at Raleigh-based TriSure Corp. Not even close.

John Cramer, one of the company's founding partners, likes to point out that selling insurance isn't rocket science. Maybe not, but over the past decade, it has gotten more complex.

Building a customer base and growing a firm organically – rather than by buying up and cobbling together a series of smaller companies – has meant keeping track of changing customer needs and expanding service offerings in kind.

For example, TriSure includes a group of utility and general contractors among its business clients – companies directly affected by changes in the workplace laws overseen by the **U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration**.

The TriSure response was to hire an **OSHA** expert, who on one recent Friday morning could be seen standing in front of a packed conference room in the firm's Lake Boone Trail headquarters, conducting a seminar on the topic.

Other popular seminars have dealt with such items as how businesses can set up their own wellness programs, changes in the Family Medical Leave Act, and even the business implications of federal recovery legislation.

"Clients are asking for more," says Wally Dawson, TriSure's managing partner on the employee benefits side. "And so, we have deepened our level of expertise to deliver (for) them."

Formed in 1999 by the coming together of two like-minded brokerages, **Triangle Insurance** and Cramer, Menard and Mathis LLC, TriSure nowadays comprises of a staff of 47 and books about \$100 million in annual billings.

Support staffers – claims managers, customer-outreach personnel, seminar presenters and related experts – outnumber salespeople – "producers" Cramer calls them – by 2 to 1.

Maintaining a staff with expertise creates an expense the company doesn't think it can do without, given the complexity of customers' requirements.

The four major policy lines are business insurance, still the largest section of the pie; individual lines – home and auto; employee benefits, including health-plan analysis, benchmarking and claims projection; and commercial bonding.

Customer retention throughout the industry is in the 80 percent-plus range, says Cramer. TriSure, in a recent satisfaction survey, pinned its retention rate at 98 percent.

"Once we begin with a client, they tend to stay," he says.

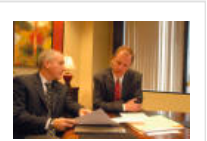
As the company has grown over the past decade, it has added partners and shareholders, who now number seven. TriSure bills itself as one of the largest, if not the largest, independent insurance brokerages in the region.

Cramer is proud of the fact that it all has come about through organic growth, one client at a time, rather than by acquisition. "We are one of the very few companies of our size that has grown that way," he explains.

What does the future look like?

Cramer says he wouldn't be surprised if the staff doubled during the next five to 10 years. The company, moreover, has no active acquisition or geographic expansion plans, though it does not rule out moves in either direction.

"We never expected to be the biggest," Cramer says. "What we wanted was to be the best in our business."



Steve Wilson

From left, TriSure's Wally Dawson and John Cramer help keep the firm in growth mode.

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