

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: Bordier (UK)'s Chief Executive Starts Fresh Chapter In New London Office

Tom Burroughes
Group Editor in London
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Today is the day that Bordier (UK) opens its doors to its clients in new offices in King Street, St James's, and this publication publishes a recent interview it had with the ebullient chief executive, Jamie MacLeod, who has been at the helm of the firm since before its rebranding.

MacLeod has an enviable track record under his belt – although he is not the kind of person to rest on his laurels. He played a major part in building the Scottish Widows investment management business. At the age of just 29, he was managing director at Scottish Widows Fund Management and head of global business and client services for Scottish Widows Investment Management. In 1999, at the height of the dotcom bull market, MacLeod joined Investec Asset Management where he was the head of UK and European retail business and managing director of Investec Fund Managers and Investec Management. In June 2002, he joined Skandia Group and founded Skandia Investment Management as CEO. In 2007 he went on to form Skandia Investment Group, which he led as CEO – and built with an initial seed investment of £700 million to £50 billion (\$88.6 billion).

Finally, MacLeod joined Berry Asset Management in September 2010 as CEO and became a member of the group executive team with Bordier & Cie. He completed the transition to Bordier (UK) in September last year.

In broad terms, what has been the purpose of the rebrand and how effective do you think it has been in pulling in new clients?

Our evolution as Bordier (UK) last September represents so much more than a rebrand. At a time when many institutions are scaling back we are growing - and we are growing because we have been successful for our clients. We are building an international desk to work with the growing numbers of resident non-domiciled and international clients, and we are making a material property investment in new offices, marking our commitment to London as a centre, and as a statement of our ambition.

In what way does the rebrand, with the use of a Swiss name, make a difference to the effectiveness of marketing, sales?

It makes little if any difference; it is the people in our business and the consistent outperformance of our investment strategies over the longer-term which make the real difference.

As a business - and we are today part of an international business with some £7 billion under management - we have never placed a great deal of emphasis on sales and marketing. Our energies have instead been directed at ensuring that our longstanding and loyal clients receive the best possible service.

What has been the response of intermediaries/clients? Has anyone been annoyed at the change or is the response favourable overall?

Their reaction has been absolutely outstanding, the transition as Bordier (UK) impacting not a single client, intermediary or introducer. However, that should not come as a great surprise as we have been partners with Bordier & Cie for 14 years, and there has been no change in our management team, our corporate governance or the way in which we manage money.

What, in broad terms, is the business strategy from here in terms of type of clients to serve, new markets, market positioning?

We maintain a high level of dialogue with our clients whilst searching for high-quality investment opportunities, overlaying an asset allocation approach which has served our clients well, not only over the last four or five years, but over the longer term.

Our business strategy has remained entirely consistent over the last four-to-five years, a period in which we have done an outstanding job for our clients and introducers. We have managed the wealth of UK domestic high net worth individuals, charities, livery companies and resident non-domiciled and international families for many years, and we are now looking to extend our proposition and to enter new markets. Our new international desk represents a significant investment in the business, and underlines the importance of London as the world's leading destination for wealthy individuals; we have made a number of significant hires of late.

Where would you like to be in terms of AuM, profitability/other measures in, say, five years' time?

We don't think like that. My corporate agenda is to do an outstanding job for the clients who have entrusted us to manage their money. If I get that right our AuM, profitability and other measures will take care of themselves.

We have no formal sales targets or formal profitability targets; what we do have is a very clear focus on doing the very best we can for our clients, ideally outperforming our competitors, matching and exceeding our clients' expectations, and delivering outstanding client service and consistent outperformance across our range of investment strategies over the longer term.

Has the rebrand gone according to schedule?

Yes, it has. In building the team we have met some outstanding individuals, but in recruiting for key positions we have found it more challenging than we had anticipated to identify the calibre of individuals we wish to have working with our clients.

How would you describe the UK wealth management market at the moment, given the flood of regulation, the economic climate and the amount of industry M&A and other changes going on?

We have welcomed all the regulatory changes made in recent times and believe vehemently that the changes will be good for the industry on a broader footing.

The economic climate, of course, remains as challenging as the vast majority of us have faced before. At Bordier (UK) we are therefore fortunate to have industry professionals in the firm with more than 25 years' experience, and whilst we do not subscribe to the thesis that "we've seen it all before", we do feel we have the experience to consider the macro events happening around us in a considered, professional and rational manner.

We do of course get surprised by market events, but with a tight group of investment professionals who have worked together for a long time, we focus quickly on breaking events and the impact of changes, regulatory or otherwise.

The significant volume of M&A activity we have seen over the course of the last two years has also brought a lot of change in our market. Some very well-known names are disappearing and the constant transitioning and merging of businesses is most certainly keeping the headhunters busy! We would expect to see further consolidation over the next year or so, but a lot of what was going to happen has already done so.

When did the senior managers decide initially that a rebrand was needed?

We have spoken about it on many occasions over the last four years. We didn't need to do anything with the brand, but our plans to evolve our UK proposition, to build an international desk, and the continuing success we have enjoyed with our clients made us think this was a good time to effect the change. Everything is very much as before, and clients will have seen no changes in the way we deliver our service.

In transitioning to Bordier (UK) I should add that we didn't use one branding consultant or any other external adviser. We simply wrote to our clients, to our introducers and to friends of the firm, in a clear, concise, and dare I say it old-fashioned way. As a firm that has always engaged in "fireside chat", that felt right. And for those who like to view their portfolio on a tablet...we did it that way too.

What sort of recruitment goals do you have?

Quite a few!

Who is in the senior management team now?

I have been very fortunate. I work with a tremendously capable and strong senior management team – and a board with a deep understanding of our clients' needs, the sector, and the challenges of running a business in the rapidly evolving world of wealth management.

I also have a tremendous chairman in Jamie Berry, who I have been fortunate to know professionally and socially for more than 20 years.

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