

INTERVIEW

Creating an ecosystem of engagement

Newly-minted **ReMark International** CEO **Na Jia** elaborates on the dominant challenge currently facing the life industry and shares how insurers need to adapt in order to thrive.

By Dawn Sit

The trust between life insurers and their customers is eroding and the fact that consumers are more reluctant to engage with them, is probably the toughest challenge now facing the industry.

Referring to ReMark's latest global consumer study, "Life is a Rollercoaster", Ms Na Jia noted that customers' beliefs and values are shifting and that traditional motivations for life insurance are outdated. And as the millennial generation transitions into the main tax-paying workforce, their rising expectations in terms of transparency – stemming from hardening attitudes toward financial institutions – and service standards among others, further compound the issue.

"Aside from many distractions, people are much more well-informed and they are comfortable conducting their own research before forming their decisions. So insurance is no longer a mystery."

Against this backdrop of seismic cultural change, the industry must learn to cater to a generation whose lifestyles are turning the traditional insurance proposition on its head. Insurers thus need to step up their outreach game by creating an ecosystem of engagement to coax customers out of their shells.

Health is the new wealth

A first and crucial step to approaching the challenge, she advocated, is via the health and wellness proposition. Health is effectively the new wealth, as indicated by ReMark's finding of the health preoccupation being shared across all generations.

Ms Jia noted the industry does not appear to be moving as fast as customers are changing, though insurers like AIA, through its Vitality programme,

have made efforts in the right direction. "I do think that the engagement issue will be a key ongoing trend, and the company that can master the right propositions will succeed and prevail. In the same vein, those who have lost engagement, will lose their customers."

But to sustain engagement, insurers need to be able to provide meaningful outcomes – meaning holistic and contextual insights distilled from their aggregated data. This ties in with the digital and data quest that the industry is on and must continue to pursue.

Transformation – start somewhere

Sharing ReMark's transformation journey, she said digital and data are "actually simple" ideas, but "so broad" in definition and tedious to execute. Nonetheless, one has to start somewhere.

"It doesn't matter how much you observe others, the only way to learn and change is by doing it. And you're going to make mistakes, but you learn a great deal. I'm a firm believer of learning by doing."

Thus in 2008, the then-chief marketing officer spearheaded initial efforts to establish an institutional memory and knowledge warehouse. The database provided the firm a foundation to then move into predictive modelling – which it initially partnered experts to build internal capability – and a natural extension into predictive lapse and risk modelling, enabling ReMark to improve accuracy and efficiency in its solutions.

Moving into digital, she noted, was not natural for ReMark (or any other organisations) that were entrenched in traditional modes of operation and legacy. That said, she also attributed their success in recent years in digital areas,



especially in China and Malaysia, to having good partners to collaborate with and a "can-do" spirited team.

Ongoing change

But ReMark is not quite done on its transformation. Among other tasks on her to-do list, the CEO noted an immediate priority is to "modernise" some of its operations in its developed markets, including Japan, France and the US. "We're still not in the mainstream of where society is headed as our channels are still rather traditional. Though mail-based [outreach] and call centre operations are steady channels, they are increasingly marginalised."

"Unlike in China, where we're in the WeChat space and are as active as other insurers, that gives me comfort – mainly because as WeChat evolves, we will evolve alongside it," she added.

Turning back to the insurers' hurdle, Ms Jia said where the industry is headed will prove more demanding than just data analytics and modelling – because comprehensive engagement entails touching on almost every element of customers' lives. This is why the health and wellness proposition is crucial, she said. While it is only one aspect in creating a dynamic ecosystem between insurers and customers, at least it is a step in the right direction. ■