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A rebrand, a marketing campaign and a story to tell, newly renamed Ignis Asset Management is looking to steal a march on a market reeling from the effects of recession, marketing director Jonathan Polin explains

**By David Burrows**

At the tail end of last year the Ignis Asset Management brand was born. Ignis is the Latin word for fire or burn. So the new name for Resolution Asset Management (following its takeover by the Pearl Group in late 2007) is intended to keep the existing business 'ignited' and according to marketing director Jonathan Polin does not signal a significant change of direction.

Polin insists the core strategy at the heart of Resolution, to provide best-in-breed investment management propositions, will continue under the new Ignis badge.

However, he stresses the company post takeover will be much stronger than before and in this economic climate financial strength is a far greater concern than ever.

"The group we are part of now manages around €70bn in assets and is close to being in the top 10 asset managers in the UK. The benefit to the IFA is we have a strong financial backer to deliver a new asset management business into their sector – robustness of ownership is very important."

As for the rebranding, Polin concedes it can sometimes be an impairment to progress but in the case of Ignis there was no option as, under the terms of the deal with Pearl, Clive Cowdery – the founder of Resolution back in 2003 – kept the Resolution name.

Cowdery, a former insurance salesman, set up Resolution with just £500,000 of his own money, and sold the business to Pearl for £5bn in a hotly contested auction. Cowdery is under investigation by the FSA for "certain actions" in the deal.

Polin believes the mindset for effective brand building is already in place as, by his own admission, Resolution itself was a relatively new kid on the block.

"I think you could say we are getting pretty good at rebranding now," he says. "With the Ignis brand, what we are trying to encapsulate is a highly commercial, vibrant, asset management business which is home to a number of highly talented but different fund managers."

## Brands within a brand

Polin is keen to point out the joint venture boutique businesses that exist under the Ignis umbrella – namely Argonaut, Cartesian, Hexam and Maia – have retained their own identities, the only difference is that the fund names are now pre-fixed with Ignis instead of Resolution.

In the same way as companies such as Legg Mason have done, in retaining brands within a brand, Polin takes the line if it ain't broke don't try to fix it.

"These boutique companies have their own brand and have 50% of the equity in that business. The managers are

committed to that business so there are no fund management merry-go-rounds. If you buy the Cartesian UK Opportunities fund you effectively know David Stevenson is going to be running that until he retires!"

Polin goes on to explain what the Pearl deal means for the boutique brands within

## Taking the bull by the horns

### CURRICULUM VITAE

Ignis. "Everyone loves the concept but people are wary of the financial strength of boutiques. What the Ignis group brings is deep pockets that provide reassurance."

## Growing the business further

While Ignis has a London base, its headquarters is in Scotland where there are 52 managers working out of the Glasgow office. Polin makes no secret of the fact that Ignis is looking to expand the business further either by recruitment, acquisition or joint venture deals.

"I am completely agnostic as to whether the next fund managers to come into Ignis are via a joint venture or come in as proprietary managers. Some managers want joint ventures, some don't want the hassle. We can accommodate both: the important thing is we get the right people."

In terms of current product offerings, Polin insists Ignis has a great UK small-cap proposition, a good Far East team, and he name-checks the appointment of Terry Ewing from Old Mutual to head up the US

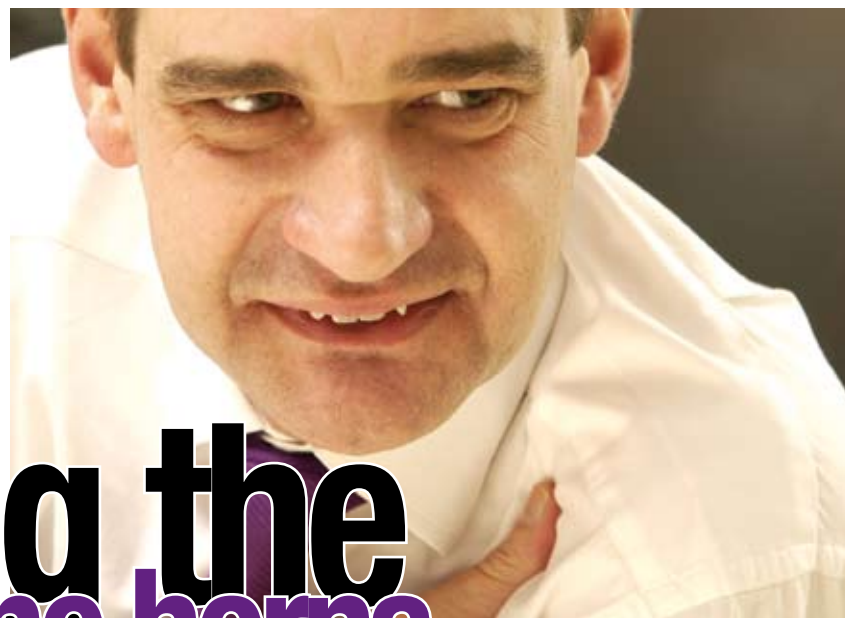
**"I think five years down the track there will be much more use of shorting tools, there will be far more funds in the absolute return space and I think it is fair to say how we manage some of our existing funds will change."**

team as a major coup for the company.

He is confident Ewing will attract interest from investors though he concedes that US is a hard market in which to build assets under management.

"People are traditionally static in their fund choice in US equities. Too often investors keep money in US funds that have been serial underperformers. We need to get the message across to IFAs that we offer a far better alternative."

Polin accepts that Maia, Ignis' specialist multi-manager boutique, has not so far



attracted as much money as envisaged. "Over the medium term Maia will do well. It is a hugely competitive market and we need to develop the Maia proposition a bit more and further differentiate ourselves. I certainly think the volatility of the market over the last 18 months will act as a catalyst for growth in the funds of funds area."

## Calling card

While every fund management company likes to tick most boxes when it comes to the range of funds it offers, there is usually a flagship fund that helps to boost the brand and profile of the company. Polin insists Ignis has the product and the manager to provide this profile.

"Every company needs a calling card; with Invesco Perpetual it is Neil Woodford and with M&G it is Richard Woolnough. We want to achieve the same with Olly Russ and the Ignis Argonaut European Equity Income fund. We will be pushing that fund hard, especially over the next 12 months as the focus is going to be on

income." (see page 30).

The target for Ignis is to be top five within the IFA community and this is something Polin believes is achievable. "One mistake you can make is to distance yourself from the IFA – platforms provide distribution but you also need direct contact with IFAs."

"It is not rocket science, it is about putting some wear on the shoe leather and listening to what IFAs want."

On products coming to market, Polin says: "I think the fund market will become much more transparent and vanilla on the

- Joined Ignis Asset Management (formerly Resolution Asset Management) in 2004 as sales and marketing director.
- Managing director of intermediary business, HSBC Asset Management between 2003-04
- Was managing director of UK, European and Middle Eastern sales for Aberdeen Asset Management from 1995-2003
- Head of business development for Taylor Young Investment Management from 1993-95.

one hand but we will see more merging of long-only and long/short strategies on the other – our Cartesian funds epitomise this.

"I think five years down the track there will be much more use of shorting tools, there will be far more in the absolute return space and I think it is fair to say how we manage some of our existing funds will change."

Polin adds: "You need to have the people to manage long/short funds and you need to make sure you test everything you bring to market – for instance we have our own money in an Asian 130/30 fund we are back-testing and that will not come to market for at least a year."

In terms of bringing in the people to manage these products, Polin believes now may not be a bad time to buy in expertise at a reasonable price.

"The hedge fund industry has been largely discredited but there are a huge number of hedge funds that have done very well. The question is where can we pick up intellectual capital cheaply to build for the future?"

This investment for the future is very much at the heart of the Ignis business model and the company has no intention of sitting tight and keeping a low profile until the current economic picture brightens.

"I would argue it is a good time to launch a brand." Polin concludes: "I believe you build a business in the bad times and reap the rewards in the good times."