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viewpoint

Taking MAXIS into the future: meet our new CEO, Mattieu Rouot

It's been an interesting few weeks for Mattieu Rouot, new CEO of MAXIS GBN. Having sat on the MAXIS board since 2016, Mattieu has spent the last couple of months transitioning to the role of CEO, taking over from Mauro Dugulin.

We caught up with Mattieu to chat about his vision for MAXIS, how his career has led him to this point, his first impressions of working 'inside' MAXIS full time and the experience of taking over the leadership of a business during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown.

Mattieu and MAXIS – a long history



Mattieu took over the role of CEO on 1 July

Mattieu is in a unique position taking over the role of CEO having been a long-time friend and supporter of the business. During his time at AXA, Mattieu was instrumental in the formation of the MAXIS joint venture (JV) in 2016 and, as a member of the board, has been involved in long-term strategic planning for the network.

As he explained, "I've been close to MAXIS for six years now but mainly working from the outside during the last four years. When I started my MAXIS journey, it was a much smaller business, with AXA and MetLife working together under the common brand of MAXIS but operating quite separately. I was the person on the AXA side responsible for the teams dedicated to the MAXIS activities and then involved in creating

the JV bringing the two operations together. I was always convinced that MAXIS was a great business and that we could do even better as a single joined-up operation and I'm very happy that Mauro and the team have been so successful in proving us right. The business is performing ahead of expectations at this point.

"There was some doubt five years ago that we could make it work. That we could bring AXA and MetLife – different companies, with different cultures, on different continents – together as one single entity with two parents and create a long-term, sustainable partnership. The success and positive feedback MAXIS receives shows that the partnership has and will continue to work."



Mattieu with Mauro and his fellow board members at the MAXIS office launch in 2017.

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His in-depth knowledge of and involvement in the business made Mattieu a natural successor after Mauro announced his intention to step down. “I saw this as an opportunity that was just too good to turn down, to lead a great company and move to London. I didn’t hesitate at all when I was approached about the position.”

Mattieu’s previous role at AXA, Senior Vice President of International Employee Benefits, meant he was heavily involved in life, disability and health insurance and reinsurance businesses around the world. “When I took over my previous role in 2014, I was looking after businesses with a €600m portfolio and by the time I left in May this figure was €2bn. I enjoyed creating businesses, and restructuring and growing others, it was a great journey, but it felt like the right time to move on to new challenges at MAXIS. For five years MAXIS has had the energy and agility of a start-up – my role is to take the business into a long-term strategy while keeping that energy and enthusiasm.”

Life on the inside...

And although he is familiar with MAXIS from his time at AXA and as a board member, Mattieu’s description of MAXIS as a “brand-new challenge” is apt. While he knew the business well before starting his new position, much of his first months at MAXIS has been spent getting to know the MAXIS team and understanding how things work on a day-to-day basis.

“More than 50% of my time so far has been spent in meetings with various members of the MAXIS team, the parent companies, clients, members, brokers and partners. I really wanted to consult as many people as possible to get a lot of new insights and useful feedback to complete the knowledge I already had of MAXIS, which I knew was, of course, only partial.

“I’m pleased to say there’s not been too many surprises – and no really nasty ones! It’s been more about confirming thoughts and impressions I already had. I’ve heard lots of positives from people outside of MAXIS about the business and the people. Our clients and network members have said that they couldn’t have performed as well without the support of MAXIS and that working with us has been a gamechanger for them – that’s great to hear.

“And it’s been great to witness the MAXIS culture first hand too. The staff at MAXIS are fully engaged and proud to be part of a close-knit but strong business that operates independently, but is backed by two very stable, very big, global multinationals. I’ve been impressed at the strong culture and sense of identity within the MAXIS team and I think that is reflected in the perception of MAXIS in the market.”

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Taking on a new role during a time called 'lockdown'

The last few months have been a strange and worrying time for almost everyone around the world with work routines displaced, the ability to meet in person taken away, and concerns over the fate of the global economy. Of course, you also can't forget everyone's concerns over the health of both themselves and their loved ones. In the midst of this, Mattieu has taken on what will be biggest role of his career to date and has been unable to meet the MAXIS team who are safely working from their homes on three different continents. We asked Mattieu how the transition has been for him.

"It's been strange and I definitely wasn't expecting this when I accepted the role. In my head I was going to spend the first two or three months travelling around to meet the team, clients, members, brokers and partners. I did wonder whether I'd really have the time to be able to connect with as many people as I wanted to, so in fact not travelling and instead having more time to meet via digital conferencing has been pretty efficient and effective... I feel I've made the connections I was keen to make and I'm glad that MAXIS acted quickly to keep our people safe, that's what's most important.

"Obviously, with face-to-face you can convey and understand a lot more about a person, but I think connecting digitally has worked well. I'm really looking forward to meeting people in person too though, once it is safe to do so."

Mattieu was based in Paris for his role in AXA and had planned to move to London to take on his new position at MAXIS. But since the COVID-19 pandemic has meant the entire organisation is working remotely, Mattieu is still in Paris for the time being.

"I'm at home in Paris right now and feel very lucky that I can work comfortably and securely but I'll be moving to London as soon as I can. My family and I (I have four kids) have found a great way to work around each other throughout the day during the lockdown, but when I took part in my first all-staff MAXIS Town Hall, I had to make very sure they knew not to come in and interrupt.

"I appreciate that working from home gives me a lot more flexibility and I can be efficient and productive wherever I am. I spend a lot of time in the mountains and I love to ski and do outdoor activities like mountaineering and hiking so have spent three years renovating an old barn in the Alps. I was thinking about spending some time there during the lockdown but it hasn't been possible yet.

"But, who knows what the future holds – I don't think we will ever go back to exactly the same way of working as before. I appreciate though that while working remotely gives me a good work-life balance, for some people it may be a negative experience and many feel overwhelmed and find it hard to switch off at the end of the day. I think, in the long run, this



Mattieu loves spending time in the mountains with his family

time of enforced change will create more possibilities for people to work in a way is best for them."

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Despite his plan to be in London by now being impossible, he has adapted accordingly. "The move to London is out of my control, so I have been trying to make the best of the situation. I feel like I've adapted quite well. I was surprised and happy that COVID has not seemed to impact how the MAXIS team works and we have proved we can service our clients during a period of massive disruption. The agility and flexibility of the staff has made this possible."

Looking back to how he got here

London left its mark on Mattieu and his family – its why he’s so keen to get back. He remembers his time at AXA UK – where he worked for three years from 2007 – with great warmth and as a transformative period for his children. These days his two daughters are at university in the UK – he jokes that one of his daughters “speaks better English than French.”

“Moving to London for the role at AXA UK was a big move for me and was an exciting time in my career. I moved from a role with a small team at AXA corporate headquarters to the UK to become an executive, responsible

for 100s of actuaries. It was not just a change in job role, but in company culture too – away from AXA headquarters and into a smaller self-contained entity. I enjoyed my time in the UK for so many reasons and so did my family – and I am really looking forward to returning.

“After I’d spent three very happy years in the UK, the CFO of the AXA group called me and asked me to move back to Paris to take on the role of Head of Investor Relations. The job took me all over the world, selling the AXA story and convincing people that AXA was a strong company to invest in.

“It was a big change for me professionally as I was seeing the perception of the AXA business from the outside, rather than internally and up close. It helped me to understand the big picture – the strategy and vision – as an actuary I’d always been much more involved in the detail. It was during this time I realised that I wanted to stay in broader roles, leading a business rather than moving into more senior but solely finance-related roles.”



London, home of the MAXIS head office. Mattieu looks forward to his return to the UK.

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Looking forward to the future – whatever that may bring

Mattieu becomes CEO at a time when the MAXIS business is on a high, having grown rapidly over the last five years. So, what are his ambitions for his time at MAXIS? “MAXIS has been very successful so far, so I see my role as being about maintaining that success and creating sustainability.

“The MAXIS network is a core part of both parent companies’ strategies and, quite rightly, they expect us to keep growing. My ambition is to take the business to the next level while keeping the positives of what we have now like the agility and time to market.”

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And the employee benefits industry is one which will only keep growing, according to Mattieu. He believes that the ever-increasing demand for benefits and the demand for employers to provide really comprehensive packages is an excellent opportunity for MAXIS.

“I am convinced that we’re in the right spot in the insurance industry. People need protection and employers are going to play an even bigger role in protecting their employees and keeping



Mattieu closing the MAXIS innovation event in London November 2019

them safe and healthy. MAXIS is ultimately in the business of helping people and you can see very easily the impact you are having on your clients and their employees. That’s very exciting and rewarding.

“The experiences of this year are already causing employers to want to do more – more than ever multinationals will want to offer value to their employees, while controlling their costs, and that is where MAXIS can really help.”

One of the key areas of MAXIS’ strategy is developing digital tools and offering innovative solutions that help clients and network members work more effectively and more efficiently. The MAXIS Data & Digital Innovation Lab was designed to find new tools, products and services that do just this and is something that Mattieu doesn’t expect to change.

“We are at the forefront of digital innovation in our industry and want to keep pushing this, to make it one of the key points of our value proposition for clients going forward. It’s exciting and there’s a lot to look forward to.”

We couldn’t have said it better ourselves. Thanks to Mattieu for taking the time to speak with us and share his thoughts and, of course, all the very best to him in his new role.

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