

# A Consultative Role

An Interview with James W. Crystal, Vice Chairman, Alliant Insurance Services

**EDITORS' NOTE** After joining his father, Frank Crystal, at Crystal & Company in 1961, James Crystal was named President in 1963. Crystal serves as Vice Chairman and Member of the Board of Alliant Insurance Services. He is also Vice Chairman, Trustee, and Member of the Executive and Finance Committees and Co-Chairman of the Audit Committee of Mount Sinai Health System, along with serving on the board of Congregation Emanuel.



James W. Crystal

**COMPANY BRIEF** Alliant Insurance Services ([alliant.com](http://alliant.com)) is one of the nation's leading distributors of diversified insurance products and services. Operating through a national network of offices, Alliant offers a comprehensive portfolio of services to clients.

## What are the most significant global trends currently shaping the insurance and risk management sectors?

The most significant global trends shaping insurance right now are tariffs and climate warming. Climate is currently undefined and people in the insurance industry are struggling to quantify how to deal with the whole subject. There is clearly a lack of available information on a historical basis and most major insurance companies are adapting to events as they occur and trying to see what patterns evolve.

With reference to tariffs, this is in unknown, uncharted water that has been created in 2025. Ultimately, tariffs will be borne by the retail customer, but in the meantime, the insurance industry has to deal with various value changes for both in transportation as well as origination. Costs for manufacturing will rise based on increase in their operating costs as well as raw materials and shippers will bear the cost of increased values of the cargo on board. In addition, due to the lack of previously recorded examples, there is no way to

determine whether shipments will increase or decrease." Ultimately, the value portion of the increase will have to be insured and how this reflects rates will ultimately be decided by locations, loss ratios, and other available information as the tariffs affect the business world.

## How do you see the role of the insurance broker evolving over the next decade?

The role of the insurance broker will evolve over the next decade into a more consultative role. The broker will no longer be exclusively a vendor of a product for either a commission or fee, but will be subject to much more analytics that possibly could be developed by AI. With all of this data available and more precise data evolving about natural disasters and the effect of such disasters on premiums, rates, and commissions, there will be a trend for larger accounts to create a much heavier fee-based income. To achieve higher income, brokers will have to

develop much higher sources of information, data, and experience in a larger pool of coverages. This may take a short period of time but will evolve quickly.

## What role does digital transformation play in Alliant's strategy?

Alliant believes the use of AI tools are key to improving internal efficiencies, creating and improving advantaged programs and products for our clients, and helping our employees work effectively in an AI-enabled world. Alliant also believes that the responsible use of data and data security must be a top priority across all our business functions and has, therefore, developed a disciplined and confidential approach to evaluating proposed AI tools that solve for business challenges through our Center of Excellence (CoE), while maintaining a responsible approach to using AI.

## How is Alliant helping clients better understand the emerging risks that businesses are facing today?

Alliant is trying to help people understand the larger emerging risk pool by providing better data, far more qualified employees other than just salespeople, as well as data preparation and analytics. Ultimately, analytics will be able to be a source of businesses estimating their emerging risks as well as redefining the existing risks. Alliant's database and vertical structure professionals work together with the sales staff to allow them to differentiate from the more traditional brokers.

## When you look to the future of business, what excites you the most?

What is most exciting to me about the future of business is the growth of data and the careful use of AI given the tremendous number of new business structures that are evolving. At almost any time, one reads or knows about a new business venture that is either trying to remake an existing generation of older businesses or creating a new business for the new business world. These facts together will change the corporate universe over a relatively short period of time and affect the sources of information which will help redefine the business world going forward. There will be many new types of businesses, many increased iterations of the existing businesses, as well as a structure that will globally change the economy. Some countries with larger global companies will benefit quickly as the entrepreneurship of global companies will expand from traditional roles. ●

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