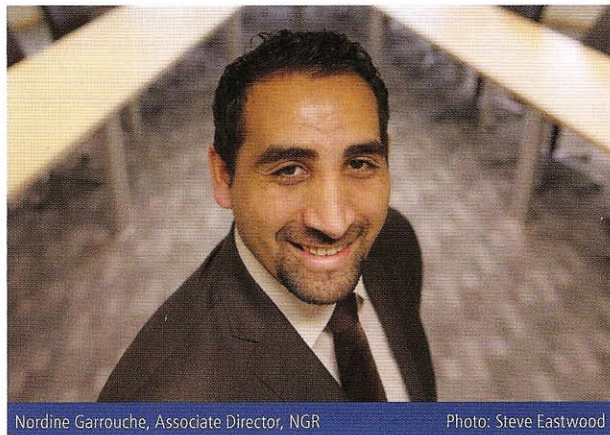


// Consulting firm gets into details

While many of the "Big Four" accounting firms have had a difficult year, boutique financial consultancy NGR has seen a 12% growth in turnover in 2009. To compete effectively with the consulting arms of these firms, NGR has sought to build a distinct alternative to the services of the Big Four, using a detail-oriented, niche approach. To find out more, Business Review talked to Nordine Garrouche, an Associate Director at the firm's Capellen office.



Nordine Garrouche, Associate Director, NGR

Photo: Steve Eastwood

The company was founded with a team that had formerly worked for Anderson consulting (now Accenture). "We saw an opportunity in trends in the market in 2004, when a lot of consulting companies decided to focus more on IT," Garrouche said. NGR was founded in Luxembourg in 2004, opening a Paris office in the same year.

NGR is considered a "big independent", if comparisons are made to the areas of activity in which NGR is active. The firm employs 60 people split into three offices in Brussels, Paris and Luxembourg. "You have to be expert in the sector you want to serve," said Garrouche, "to give your client the best independent advice." NGR has decided the best way to do this is not to be a generalist company but as a specialised consulting firm in financial services.

// Three business lines

Garrouche points to NGR's three business lines: 1) private banking and asset management, 2) fund services and 3) capital markets, which serves investment banking actors. NGR's Paris office deals more with the capital markets area, Garrouche said. Across these

business lines, Garrouche explained, the company has several service lines.

Garrouche said that NGR's private banking and asset management line, like the rest of the industry, is trying to stay ahead of the discussions over the state of banking secrecy. He said clients are already trying to convert their "grey money" to white given

the concerted attack on banking secrecy. "The key challenge is to invent a new business model, to be able to provide new services and new products so the fiscal aspect of Luxembourg is really interesting," said Garrouche. "The flexibility of product creation is really interesting [in Luxembourg]"

// Financial engineering

If banking secrecy were to fall, Garrouche said, companies like NGR will have to find other ways to attract clients to Luxembourg. "One of the services which will become important to attracting clients is financial engineering, to structure client assets to make them want to come to Luxembourg."

NGR's fund services line is focussing on UCITS IV implementation. "UCITS IV affects integration and the asset management model," Garrouche explained. "We assist the client in setting up a coherent business and operational models." Another area involves dealing with the after-effects of the Madoff scandal, he said. "One of the opportunities is to learn from this type of event and adapt the risk management models," he said.

In the capital markets line, Garrouche said, the current issue is risk management and capital adequacy. "We work with the banks in order to implement the newest regulations including the prospect of a new BASEL III accord."

// Delivering business solutions

One of the most important, he said, is the Strategy and Business Architecture line. "It tries to assist clients in starting new businesses, finding new revenue or shaping new operational models for cost-reductions," he said. With this service line, the firm distinguishes itself from its Big Four competitors by going beyond conceptual, high level solutions. "We have a link between strategy and the technical side, meaning we are delivering business solutions," he said. "This means we are able to go from strategy to the implementation of solutions."

"What makes us successful is our pragmatic approach," said Garrouche. He says NGR has a more holistic way of handling clients' needs. "When we see the organisation of the big consulting firms, they are segmented - an Accenture client in France deals with the Paris office." Garrouche maintains his company is an international company "not because we've set up different offices throughout Europe, but because we see the market as global."

By Mike Gordon