

# Beyond the Text Podcast

November 2024



TRANSCRIPT

## Target Markets Podcast

Beyond the Text is a Conning podcast that features insights from its Insurance Research Department. Hosted by Alyssa Gittleman, a Director and Head of Consulting and Customer Operations for Conning Insurance Research. Alyssa will invite analysts and guests to provide insights on recent publications and emerging industry trends.

Beyond the Text is intended to provide just that: going beyond Conning's typical research. Conning's analysts have deep industry knowledge and come from various backgrounds providing a greater level of context on industry trends for insurance professionals.

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[Opening Music]

## Opening

**[Alyssa Gittleman (AG)]**

Hello and welcome to Beyond the Text, a Conning podcast featuring insights from our Insurance Research department. I'm your host, Alyssa Gittleman, a Director and Head of Consulting and Customer Operations here at Conning.

Join me as I welcome analysts and guests to provide insights on recent publications and emerging industry trends. Today, I'm here with Lauryn Kothavale, a Vice President here at Conning and the author of our MGA report.

We just returned from Scottsdale where we attended the 24th annual Target Markets Conference with nearly 1700 industry professionals. This year marked Conning's seventh time at the conference, and I wanted to bring Lauryn here today to share some of our experiences and key takeaways.

For those who might not be familiar with Target Markets, it's hosted by the Target Markets Program Administrative Association, also known as TMPAA. This organization is focused on addressing the unique challenges faced by program specialists.

Program business involves insurance products designed for specific niche markets or classes.

The TMPAA was established in 2001, initially as a summit to connect specialist and program business, and it has grown significantly. Today, it has nearly 700 members, including 400 program administrators, 95 carriers and close to 200 service providers.

Each year, the annual conference brings together TMPAA members for three days packed with deal making, networking, education, and even charitable initiatives. In addition to the annual conference, there is also a mid-year [gathering] that happens in the spring which we also attend.

Today, Lauryn and I will discuss what makes this year's event unique and what insights we are excited to bring back and I guess with that, Lauryn, could we go into why we here at Conning attend Target Markets?

**[Lauryn Kothavale (LK)] (2:07)**

Sure Alyssa. Well, first of all, thanks so much for having me here today with you. I'm excited to talk about Target Markets. Our main goal there is really to shape our MGA report by gathering qualitative insights. It's also really important for us to build connections for the future report and to get to talk to people about being involved in our interviews and participating in our survey. And it's also important to meet with the key stakeholders to get their feedback and learn what they really want us to cover, and Target Markets just offers a unique opportunity to make sure that we're aligned with what's top of mind in the industry.

So, in order to attend the conference, Alyssa, you either need to be a member or a speaker. I know that Conning is a member. Could you provide some more insight into that?

**[AG] (3:01)**

Yeah, absolutely. So, we actually are a service provider membership, and we joined in 2019 and there was actually an application process for this where you need, I think, three references to even be considered a service provider, so I know they have a careful process to accept service provider members and here at Conning we're a service member and we choose to do this because of the exposure that we get at this conference.

Insurance research and Conning spends a lot of time in the program space with that annual report on the MGA space. We've been doing it for 11 years, and at this conference we chose to have a booth. We chose to have a booth at both the annual and the mid-year conference and it really is a great place to expand our brand exposure. We get a lot of traction at the booth with clients coming over to introduce themselves and ask questions about the report. It's also a great chance for people who have heard of our report to come over and actually look at it and just to decide if they want to buy it or not, so it's a great place for us to be. It's also great we have our logo there and we have cute little owls that people came over to see and it's just a great conversational place to go and we're able to actually tell people to come meet us at our booth, which at the conference it's very busy, so it's great to have a meeting spot there.

So, we're able to connect with clients and potential readers. That's really the biggest take away I'd say for having that booth. But another thing is, we do consulting and so these connections we're making at this conference and having the brand and knowing that we're in the MGA space - these connections are able to hear that we do consulting and so when they have projects arise throughout the year, they know to come to us for those and we'll review them.

So yeah, we're a service provider and it's been a great experience.

Shifting gears a little bit, Lauryn, I feel like Target Markets just has a different feel than other conferences I've attended and I was hoping you could talk a little bit about the experience there.

**[LK] (05:14)**

Sure, unlike other conferences where you're attending back-to-back sessions, at Target Markets there's just a handful of sessions that are really focused on topics that are top of mind and relevant to the program space.

I would say Target Markets kind of fosters a genuine sense of community where you feel connected and purposeful

within the industry. This year, Alyssa and I decided to participate in the golf outing on Sunday and we were able to connect with people that we wouldn't have normally cross paths with, that we don't normally see in the booth area.

The women's lunch is another great avenue to connect with people that you necessarily wouldn't have interacted with and just it's a great opportunity to meet people. The conference is heavily meeting-spaced. It's almost like speed dating. The meetings are fast paced.

And so much networking is happening in a short amount of time. I think we met with 20 contacts. It's an incredible way to connect with the right people and dive into what is really relevant within the industry right now.

**[AG] (6:29)**

Thank you. Yes, it was a really busy conference and there was a lot of people. I know earlier you mentioned that this conference and the conversations really help shape your report. And I was wondering if you could share any of the themes you walked away with from this conference.

**[LK]**

Sure, well, the program market is not going anywhere.

It's bigger than ever. It's bigger than we estimate. We do have a good handle on the number, but I think there is a lot of premium under the reporting threshold that we're unable to capture.

Our trends and trackings give a good view into the sector and a focus of mine during this conference was to dive deeper into the E&S market. Insurance cycles tend to be cyclical and that may be the case. Some premiums may go back to the mid-market, but with all the specialization, advanced technology and rate flexibility that the E&S market offers, the E&S market may be better equipped than previous cycles. I think with the right strategies, the E&S market can forge a new path of sustainable growth and resilience.

**[AG] (7:40)**

Great, and I think one thing that I found pretty interesting was just the conversations around technology. So, technology is an area that everyone has been focused on in all industries for so long. And we're really hearing about the advancements now, especially in insurance.

What I found interesting, especially with some of like, maybe like the earlier or newer MGAs, is that they almost formed with the idea of being technology first. They had their objective for their business plan and they knew what they wanted to accomplish with their business, but they really focused on hiring the right technology employees to build that back end, to support their goals. And it was just really interesting and cool to hear. And I think that it's different than what you've really heard in like those legacy systems and the carriers that have been in this space for so long. So, a really exciting place to be with technology in this space.

And I do have to say just a really cool spot to be where I am, of selling the reports and working with our clients, is at this conference. It really iterated how important this report is, the MGA report, is to the industry. We heard from multiple people that they actually call our MGA report their "bible."

It's just that we put so much time and effort, especially Lauryn, put so much time and effort and months into creating this and to hear how it's received in the industry is just, it's great. It definitely highlights the fact that it's important and we need to continue our work in the program market space. So, I just find that as a valuable takeaway there.

So, to close this out, I was thinking we could touch on maybe some final thoughts from this conference. I know for me this is my first time coming back since before the pandemic. I attended in 2019 and attendance seems to have grown tremendously. For me, it just seemed like a really exciting place to be; that excitement buzz throughout the whole conference.

And it was just a great experience. I'm looking forward to getting back. Lauryn, I know you've attended not only like I think it was three annuals, and you've attended the mid years too. So could you share some of the key takeaways that you're leaving with?

**[LK] (10:05)**

Sure, it's such an exciting conference to attend. You get to see the latest startups, hear about M&A transactions in the pipeline and get a glimpse of where the industry is heading next year. There has also been so much consolidation within this space, but yet we're still seeing new players enter the market and others launching innovative MGAs.

Alyssa, you mentioned that this was your first time attending since 2019. Since you've been here last, the MGA space has grown 81% since 2019. I don't see that program space slowing down anytime soon. And if you're at Target Markets mid-year, be sure to stop by our booth and pick up Connie the Conning owl.

**[AG]**

Thank you so much Lauryn for joining me to talk about our experience at Target Markets. If you have any questions, please e-mail [insuranceresearch@conning.com](mailto:insuranceresearch@conning.com). We hope you will subscribe to this podcast and join us for our next episode as we stay up to date on industry trends. Thank you.

**[FADE TO MUSIC]**

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