

Private equity

Software and data group Ion buys Acuris in £1.35bn deal

Private equity group BC Partners agrees to sell the owner of financial information service Mergermarket

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Private equity group BC Partners has agreed to sell the owner of financial information service Mergermarket to Ion Group in a £1.35bn deal, three people with direct knowledge of the transaction said.

BC Partners bought Mergermarket for £382m in 2013 from Pearson, then owner of the Financial Times.

The sale of Acuris, as the business is now known, will extend the expansion of Ion, a financial software and data business, into trading and cash management tools, data and analytics for capital markets.

Acuris has grown partly through a series of acquisitions. Companies House filings show Acuris's pre-tax profit was £23m in 2017, up from £22m a year earlier and £15.8m in 2015.

Ion emerged as the successful bidder last week, ahead of competing interest from trade buyers, including Fitch Ratings and Moody's, and other private equity groups, including Advent International and EQT.

The Dublin-based group is looking to offer trading and back office processing systems to banks and fund managers, who often spend millions updating their in-house IT every year, to little competitive advantage.

Ion has grown through acquisitions since 2005, buying 20 companies with an enterprise value of about £7bn. Among the deals, were a stake in data provider Dealogic, while the £1.5bn purchase of Fidessa last year pushed it into equities and derivatives markets.

As part of the Acuris deal, BC Partners will retain a minority stake of 25 per cent while Singapore's GIC, which bought 30 per cent in 2017 is selling out, people with knowledge of the transaction said.

Nikos Stathopoulos, the BC Partners executive behind the original purchase, is expected to remain on the board of Acuris, these people added.

BC Partners is set to generate around five times the return on its original investment, a person with direct knowledge of the matter said.

The deal will help boost BC Partners' returns as it sets to raise a new flagship fund following troubled investments. BC Partners have also had successful deals recently, including the sale of animal health firm Antelliq to Merck in December.

BC Partners declined to comment. Ion could not be reached for comment. The company declined to comment last week on reports a deal for Acuris was near.