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Action! Magazine

A MAGAZINE FOR
PEOPLE WHO GSD
IN WEALTH MGMT

The \$1 billion
inflection point
for financial
advisors

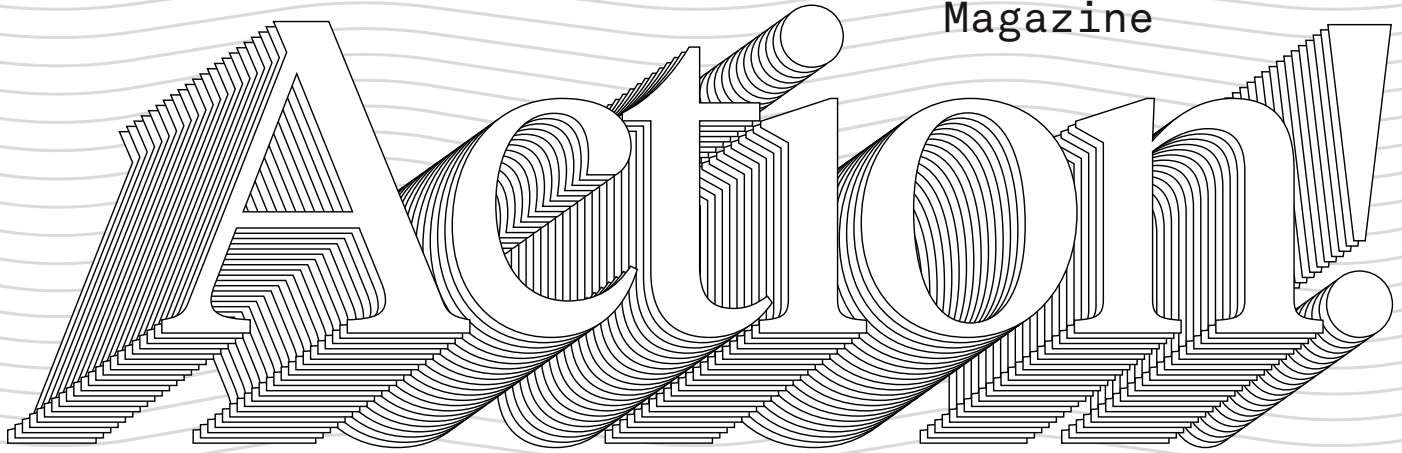
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Are you
winning as
a financial
advisor – or
just busy?

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Growth doesn't have to be a burden.



SULEMAN DIN

Advisor surveys from Schwab have found repeatedly that firms investing and embracing technology are outperforming their peers who are slower to adopt.

With the spread of artificial intelligence-powered tools within wealth management, there's new opportunity for tech savvy firms, but the line between staying busy and achieving meaningful growth has never been sharper.

In a short span of time, AI has become a key component to embed into an RIA's operational standard. This issue serves as a practical roadmap to help you navigate AI, operational scaling, and shifting client dynamics.

Schwab's Alison Dooher discusses how firms can integrate AI into daily workflows while keeping human judgment at the center. Additionally, AdvisorEngine compliance expert Beth Haddock outlines a practical framework for adopting generative AI without incurring unnecessary regulatory or privacy risks.

Scaling brings distinct operational strains. In this issue, we examine the \$1 billion inflection point, the pivotal threshold where informal systems must yield to functional departments, specialized roles, and operational discipline.

AdvisorEngine CEO Rich Cancro challenges firms to evaluate their true trajectory: whether they are building long-term enterprise value or simply managing calendar congestion.

Additionally, we break down key insights from the 2026 Schwab RIA Benchmarking Study, analyzing data from over 1,200 firms to reveal how top performers drive organic growth and leverage AI for efficiency.

Client expectations and demographics are also transforming rapidly. We explore multi-generational wealth management, providing strategies to engage Next Gen clients long before wealth transfers occur.

On client longevity, we share framework guidance on preparing clients for multi-phase retirements that stretch decades beyond traditional planning. We also examine philanthropic trends with Fred Kaynor to see how donor-advised funds are reshaping giving, and detail modern SEO strategies to help your firm enhance web search rankings and attract qualified prospects.

Every article in this edition delivers practical clarity to help you build a durable, scalable, and relationship-focused practice. Dig into what matters most to your firm, execute on these insights, and let's keep moving wealth management forward.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suleman Din'.

Suleman Din

Editor In Chief, Action! magazine

AI in wealth management: Schwab's Alison Dooher on advisor adoption and governance



Artificial intelligence in wealth management didn't just evolve over the past year – it accelerated. Alison Dooher of Schwab Advisor Services discusses what's changing, what advisors should be cautious about, and how large institutions are thinking strategically about AI's next phase.

WHAT WAS ONCE EXPERIMENTAL IS NOW EMBEDDED IN DAILY WORKFLOWS. HERE'S AN EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF OUR DISCUSSION:



SULEMAN DIN: Over the past year, AI tools have flooded the wealth management space. From your vantage point, what stands out most?

ALISON DOOHER: I've never seen something go from new to norm so fast. In about 12 months, we went from advisors asking what AI is and whether they should use it to the vast majority using it regularly in their practices. That speed has been remarkable – and I don't think it's slowing down.

What's also interesting is how AI changes the data conversation. Advisors have long been told to structure and clean their data. AI now enables the extraction of value from data without extensive structuring. That unlock could be incredibly powerful.

At Schwab, we've initially focused on applying AI to our own knowledge content – essentially, organizing and delivering answers more intelligently. Instead of advisors searching through multiple links and platforms, we want them to ask a question and get a specific, relevant response quickly. We're actively testing that model with strong confidence thresholds before broader rollout.

DIN: Every technology cycle has a push-pull between innovation and caution. Where should advisors slow down?

DOOHER: Governance and data protection come first. We take a “measure twice, cut once” approach. Firms need clear internal AI policies – what's permitted, what's not and how client data is handled.

Advisors also need to scrutinize vendors. If you're using third-party tools, you must understand how they handle your data. Is it still solely your data? Is it being used to train other models? What are the breach risks?

There's also a legislative layer. Right now, states are introducing their own AI rules. Ideally, we'd see clearer federal guidance focused on outcomes rather than tool restrictions. Let innovation happen – but define responsible boundaries.

DIN: There's also the issue of hallucinations and liability. How should advisors think about that risk?

DOOHER: The “human in the loop” concept is real – and essential.

AI should augment, not replace, especially in client engagements. Take meeting note-takers. A simple but powerful policy is to require someone to attest that the summary is accurate and that the next steps are correct.

That human confirmation protects clients and firms. It also preserves the advisor's role as the expert. Automation can't replace judgment.

DIN: We're already seeing advisors send AI note-takers into meetings – sometimes without even attending themselves.

DOOHER: I don't love that.

Beyond compliance risk, it changes culture and etiquette. If you're recording or summarizing with AI, you should seek permission. Clients deserve transparency.

And advisors should expect the reverse – clients may bring their own AI devices into meetings. We've seen this trend in healthcare. That introduces another voice into the room. It may offer "second opinions" in real time.

But just like self-diagnosing on search engines, AI-generated feedback can be incomplete or wrong. Advisors must be prepared to contextualize and educate.

DIN: What are you learning internally as you deploy these tools?

DOOHER: Two major themes.

First, AI-driven knowledge delivery. Advisors typically don't call us for simple questions – they call for nuanced ones. AI helps surface the right content in a digestible, quick-to-access form.

Second, integrations matter more than ever. Note-takers evolved from summaries to next-best-action prompts. But that only works if the ecosystem has access – with permission – to the right data.

What's old is new again: integrations, data hygiene and connected systems are foundational. The magic doesn't work without them.

DIN: What vendor innovations have impressed you most?

DOOHER: Workflow intelligence is compelling – especially tools that structure unstructured data to trigger action.

Equally interesting is insight generation. Some platforms analyze meetings to identify patterns that predict attrition risk or life events. Others evaluate whether key topics were addressed in prospect meetings and help firms refine the quality of their engagement.

It's almost like a dynamic performance script running in the background – highlighting gaps in real time. That's powerful for continuous improvement.

DIN: Schwab serves both large and small RIAs. How does that shape your AI strategy?

DOOHER: We operate on two ends of a barbell.

On the one hand, we build proprietary tools that drive scale and efficiency within our custodial platform. On the other hand, we lean heavily into integrations and partnerships across the broader tech ecosystem.

“AI augments human relationships. It doesn’t replace them.”

We’re intentional about APIs, data delivery, and strategic partnerships. Advisors operate within rich tech stacks. Our role is to help solve the integration challenge – not replace the ecosystem.

DIN: AI demands infrastructure investment. How does that affect long-term technology strategy?

DOOHER: Modernization is constant. The key decision is whether you bolt AI features onto existing systems or build them into next-generation architecture.

Sometimes choosing the long-term build means a slower time to market – but it prevents building twice. That’s a strategic call every large institution must weigh.

DIN: Big tech firms are pushing aggressively into AI. Could they disrupt established financial institutions?

DOOHER: Our principle is clear: AI augments human relationships – it doesn’t replace them.

Schwab has thrived for decades because of people. The commitment to advisors and clients is the differentiator. Technology enhances that – it doesn’t substitute for it.

We’ve always balanced build-and-partner strategies. That won’t change. Innovation requires ecosystem collaboration. But the core value remains human expertise and trust.

THE BOTTOM LINE FOR ADVISORS

AI in wealth management has moved beyond curiosity. It’s operational. It’s client-facing. And it’s shaping workflows in real time. But as Alison Dooher emphasizes, the winning firms won’t be those that automate the fastest – they’ll be the ones that:

- Protect data rigorously
- Keep humans in the loop
- Build strong integrations
- And use AI to enhance – not erode – client relationships

Editor’s note: After this Q&A was conducted, Schwab announced it is working with Anthropic to bring Claude for Financial Advisors, Anthropic’s new offering, directly to the 16,000-plus independent RIAs Schwab serves.

RICH CANCRO

Are you winning as a financial advisor – or just busy?

If your personal definition of winning is deeper client impact, stronger relationships or impactful firm growth, why does so much of your time go elsewhere? If winning, for you, means more capacity for strategic thinking, is your calendar designed to support that?



“Ask ten financial advisors what “winning” looks like, and you’ll get ten different answers.

For some, winning means building a multi-billion-dollar enterprise with national reach. For others, it means serving 50 clients exceptionally well while coaching their kids’ soccer team on Wednesdays and golfing on Friday afternoons. Some want

aggressive organic growth. Others want predictability, profitability and peace of mind.

There is no universal definition of success in this profession. But there is one universal risk: mistaking busyness for winning.

Advisors in growth mode are among the busiest professionals in financial services. Calendars are packed. Teams are stretched. Clients are calling. Markets are moving. Technology is evolving. AI is everywhere.

It feels like momentum. But motion and progress are not the same thing.

THE BUSYNESS ILLUSION

Across the RIA landscape, firms confidently say:

- “We’re growing and sustainable.”
- “We’re well-positioned for the future.”
- “We’re ready for the AI era.”
- “We drive innovation.”

The conviction is real. The language is strong. The operational reality is more nuanced.

A significant portion of an advisor’s week is consumed by administration, compliance and other non-client-facing work. Many employees at the firm spend hours manually correcting errors and managing fragmented systems. Advisors often average barely half their working time on direct prospect or client engagement.

That should prompt reflection.

If your personal definition of winning is deeper client impact, stronger relationships or impactful firm growth, why does so much of your time go elsewhere? If winning, for you, means **more capacity for strategic thinking**, is your calendar designed to support that?

Being busy feels productive. But if most of that activity is not aligned with your version of success, it is simply noise.

THE GROWTH REALITY

Many firms describe themselves as experiencing ongoing rapid growth. Yet net organic growth across RIAs often remains in the low single digits. Assets come in – and assets go out through clients in their decumulation period, death, asset purchases and renovating their new homes. New relationships frequently originate from referrals, while proactive business development and marketing represent a smaller share of growth.

There is nothing wrong with referrals. For many advisors, a referral-driven practice is exactly the lifestyle they want.

But if your definition of winning includes durable growth, enterprise value or succession optionality, relying exclusively on referrals will not be enough in most cases.

The real question is not “Are you growing?” It is: “Are you growing in a way that supports the future you want?”

If growth slowed tomorrow, would you know precisely why – and how to influence it? Or would you simply work harder?

THE \$84 TRILLION QUESTION

Over the next two decades, an estimated \$84 trillion will transfer between generations. For some advisors, winning means capturing a meaningful share of that transition. For others, it simply means protecting the relationships they already have.

Yet many high-net-worth practices have had limited meaningful interaction with their clients’ children. Meanwhile, a large percentage of next-generation investors indicate they are likely to change advisors after inheriting wealth.

If multi-generational continuity is part of your definition of success, deep engagement must begin before assets are transferred.

Serving current clients exceptionally well is necessary. It is not sufficient to retain the transferring assets. You must make the next generation your clients NOW. Equally important, winning in the next decade requires having meaningful relationships with both spouses.

THE AI READINESS GAP

Artificial intelligence has quickly become part of every strategic conversation in wealth management. Tools promise efficiency, insight and differentiation.

But adoption is not integration.

Only a minority of firms have embedded AI into a cohesive business strategy. Data remains siloed. Processes are inconsistent – compliance and security monitoring present ongoing challenges.

AI does not fix broken systems. It amplifies them.

If your definition of winning includes operational leverage or enterprise scalability, foundational discipline matters. Clean data, documented workflows and integrated workflows are not glamorous – but they are decisive.

If your definition of winning is maintaining a boutique, high-touch experience, AI may play a more limited role in the near term. That is fine as long as the choice is intentional.

Winning is not about using the most tools. It is about using the right tools and platform for your strategy.

“There is one universal risk: mistaking busyness for winning.”

THE INNOVATION ILLUSION

Advisors often say:

- “Being a fiduciary is our competitive advantage.”
- “We built our firm around what our clients need.”
- “We drive our own innovation.”

The fiduciary commitment is real. The client focus is admirable. But innovation does not require you to personally architect every technology decision.

It is not the advisor’s role to be a chief technology officer – unless that is explicitly the business you want to build.

When firms attempt to build, integrate and manage technology solutions internally, leadership attention can drift. Security risks may increase. Costs compound. Most critically, time is pulled away from client relationships and growth.

If winning for you means impact, lifestyle balance or enterprise clarity, scattered innovation works against that goal.

THE PLATFORM QUESTION

Many firms gaining traction today operate with a platform mentality. They recognize that their core business is advice, relationships and strategy – not infrastructure engineering.

A true platform partner should do more than provide software. It should:

- Free up time.
- Improve profitability.
- Enhance the client experience.
- Support scalable growth.
- Absorb the heavy burden of continuous innovation.

For advisors who want to build large, durable businesses, platform leverage can accelerate scale. For those who want a focused, lifestyle-oriented practice, it can reduce operational strain.

Independence remains powerful. But independence without leverage can become exhausting – especially if your version of winning includes freedom.

WINNING IS PERSONAL – BUT ALIGNMENT IS UNIVERSAL

Winning has no single definition in wealth management.

- For some, it is revenue and asset growth
- For others, it is high margins with fewer clients

- For others, it is time autonomy and reduced stress
- For many, it is legacy – building a firm that outlives them

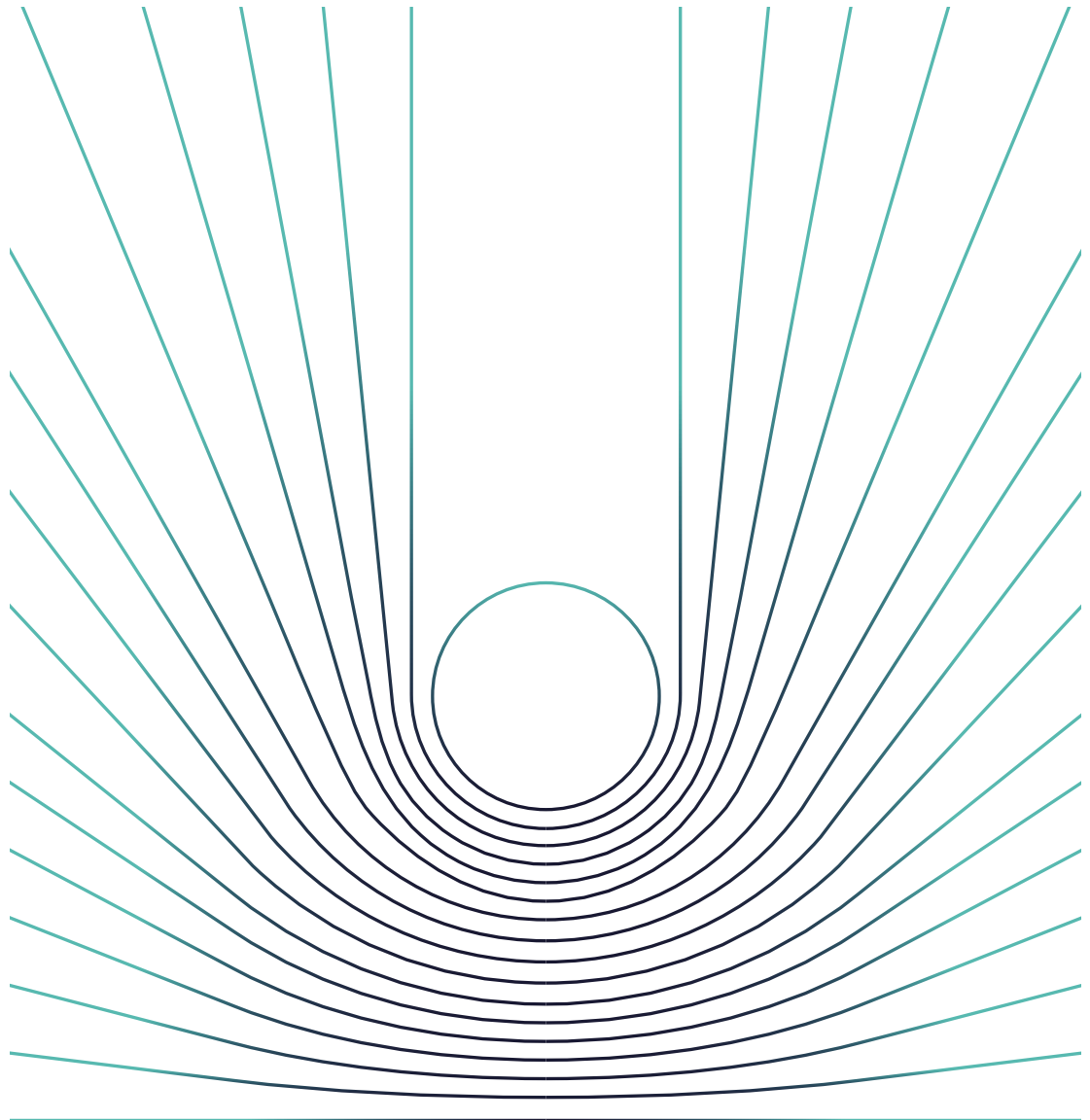
Whatever your definition, alignment is non-negotiable.

Are you spending the majority of your time on the activities that set you apart? Are your systems structured to support the future you actually want? Are you building relationships that match your long-term vision? Is your technology enabling your strategy – or quietly dictating it?

The advisory firms that thrive over the next decade will not simply be the busiest.

They will be the most intentional. They will define winning clearly for themselves. They will design infrastructure and processes around that definition. They will deploy technology thoughtfully. They will protect their time for what matters most.

So the question is not just: “Are you winning?” It is: “Have you defined what winning means for you – or are you just busy?”



SULEMAN DIN

The \$1 billion inflection point for financial advisors

For many financial advisors, \$1 billion in assets under management isn't just a milestone. It's an inflection point. On paper, it represents scale, credibility and sustained growth. In reality, it often exposes structural cracks in a firm's operating model – especially around client experience, team capacity and wealth management delivery. The path from \$300 million to \$800 million AUM can feel like momentum. Referrals compound. Markets cooperate. The team works harder. Processes stretch but hold. Then, somewhere between \$800 million and \$1 billion AUM, growth stops feeling linear. It starts feeling heavy.



THE HIDDEN STRAIN OF SCALE

Many advisory firms approaching \$1 billion are still operating on systems, staffing models and service frameworks built for a much smaller practice.



As assets grow, so do client expectations. What once felt like a manageable book of relationships begins to test the limits of time, energy and operational structure.

The tension doesn't show up overnight. It builds gradually – in fuller calendars, compressed prep time and reactive workflows.

That's where the real inflection begins.

“Even at the billion-dollar stage, offering services scalably and making sure that you're not spending too much time on the less productive parts of the practice can be challenging,” says Stephen Caruso, associate director of wealth management at Cerulli Associates. “It becomes a push-and-pull between bringing in new clients to the business, but also supporting the growth of the practice and the resourcing there... The new \$1 billion RIAs or more need to prepare for that growth.”

THE CAPACITY REALITY BEHIND \$1 BILLION

A Cerulli Associates-based industry survey found that wealth management practices serve an average of about 142 clients per producing advisor – a figure often referenced in advisor productivity discussions. That number declines further in firms serving ultra-high-net-worth families, where planning complexity, multi-generational structures and advanced tax and estate strategies demand significantly more time per relationship. Senior advisors at firms with \$500 million or more in assets served an average of 132 clients, according to the firm's 2025 Advisor Metrics Report.

In other words, client capacity is not just about volume – it's about complexity.

“As they scale some firms will look to grow their client number a lot faster,” says Caruso. “Others will look to move into higher AUM segments for the markets, and with that, they have to apply a lot more support and more service offerings.”

“If you're going to go for those wealthier clients, you really have to have a well-thought-out plan, which means offering some different services they might not usually have, such as private banking and concierge services and so on,” says Mike Byrnes, founder and president of Byrnes Consulting.

Indeed, many firms approaching \$1 billion AUM find themselves in transition. Practices that grew organically from a successful solo-advisor model often carry higher client loads than their evolving service model can comfortably support. It's not uncommon to see one or two senior advisors still responsible for 175, 200 or



more relationships – especially in firms serving a mix of mass affluent and high-net-worth households. At that stage, the strain is subtle at first.

Response times stretch. Meeting prep becomes compressed. Strategic conversations give way to tactical updates. The firm is still delivering value – but the margin for excellence narrows.

That tension – not a specific client number – is the true inflection point

THE MATH STILL MATTERS

Even at what consultants consider a reasonable benchmark – say 125 to 150 households – the capacity math is revealing. If a financial advisor commits to two meaningful review meetings per year per client, that’s 250–300 substantive meetings annually.

Assume each review cycle includes:

- 1 hour of preparation
- 1 hour in meeting
- 30 minutes of follow-up and documentation

That’s roughly 2.5 hours per client, per meeting cycle. At 300 meetings, that equals 750 hours annually – dedicated solely to review conversations.

That figure does not include:

- Prospect meetings
- Market volatility calls
- Advanced planning coordination with CPAs and attorneys
- Investment committee participation
- Team leadership
- Business development

“About 83% of billion-dollar RIAs considered the advisor’s time constraints to be a challenge for their organic growth,” says Caruso, referring to Cerulli’s U.S. Advisor Metrics 2025 report.

The point isn’t that 150 clients are “too many.” In the right team-based wealth management model, it can be entirely sustainable. The issue is whether the firm’s structure has evolved alongside its asset growth.

Because when advisor capacity becomes tight, client experience is usually the first place the strain appears.

THE CLIENT EXPERIENCE GAP

In wealth management, growth is built on trust, responsiveness and proactive advice.

But as firms approach \$1 billion AUM, many financial advisors unknowingly shift from proactive to reactive service.

Instead of anticipating planning opportunities, they’re responding to inbound requests. Instead of deep strategy conversations, they’re covering surface-level updates. Instead of

thoughtful relationship building, they're racing from one calendar block to the next. Clients may not complain immediately. But they feel it.

Longer response times. Shorter meetings. Less customization. More templated communication.

And in today's competitive financial advisor landscape, client experience is the differentiator. The firms that successfully cross the \$1 billion threshold don't just grow assets. They redesign how they serve.

WHY STRUCTURE – NOT JUST SCALE – DETERMINES SUCCESS

Crossing \$1 billion AUM does not automatically create operational maturity. In fact, many firms hit this milestone before fully redesigning how they deliver financial advice.

The difference between firms that stall and firms that accelerate beyond \$1 billion often comes down to three structural shifts:



1. From advisor-centric to team-based service: Clients must experience the strength of the firm, not dependency on one senior advisor. Associate advisors, planners and client service professionals need defined ownership within each relationship.

"Clients genuinely value the team-based approach when it's structured properly," says James Malatos, a founding partner of Harbor View Private Wealth in Atlanta, Georgia. When he and his partners broke away from a large brokerage to found the firm earlier this year, they engaged a practice management coach to help design an "ensemble structure built for long-term growth," says Malatos, delineating roles across wealth planning, client engagement and operational execution.

"Clients benefit from specialized expertise in each area while still having a lead advisor who oversees their full financial picture," explains Malatos. "They appreciate having dedicated experts who go deeper in their respective disciplines rather than relying on a single generalist."

From a firm's perspective, "the senior advisor isn't overtaxed because they can spread the work and responsibilities among junior staff and client services," says Caruso at Cerulli. In addition, there's a greater opportunity for organic growth. According to Cerulli research, the average AUM for team-based practices is more than three times higher than solo practices and annual organic growth is more than double.

2. From informal systems to operational discipline: At scale, workflow consistency, CRM rigor, meeting preparation standards and defined service calendars become essential. Personality-driven service does not scale indefinitely.

“If you’re a financial advisor or an owner, you’re doing everything,” says John Furey, founder and managing partner at consulting firm Advisor Growth Strategies. “You’re doing the sales, you’re doing the marketing, the financial planning, the investments, everything. But once you get to a billion dollars and beyond, then you can start thinking about building more functional expertise. That’s where you see these big firms having a financial planning team, an investment team, a tax team.”



Billion-dollar-plus firms also need to start thinking about professional management, including career development and retirement plans for their team members, says Furey. “You’re growing up as a company.”

And the founders who “can still be out there bringing in new revenue, which is their strength, need to get away from sitting in the client meetings, so delegation becomes a big thing,” says Byrnes.

3. From producer to enterprise leader: Founders and senior financial advisors must increasingly lead the business, not just manage client relationships. That includes hiring ahead of strain, building management depth, and sometimes transitioning select relationships to rising advisors.



“You establish the systems and processes so that you can go from say \$500 million to a billion,” says Daniel Lash, a partner of VLP Financial Advisors, an independent firm in Vienna, Virginia, affiliated with Cetera Wealth Services, its broker-dealer. Lash recommends that firms ask “where do we want to go and what are the things that we need to do in order to get there?”

None of these shifts is dramatic in isolation. But collectively, they redefine the client experience at scale. The firms that navigate this inflection point successfully don’t simply grow assets. They redesign capacity before service erosion forces the issue.

And that is what truly determines whether \$1 billion AUM becomes a ceiling – or a launchpad for the next stage of wealth management growth.

THE REAL OPPORTUNITY

Here’s the encouraging part. The \$1 billion inflection point isn’t just a stress test. It’s an opportunity. An opportunity to:

- Elevate the client experience
- Build enterprise value beyond the founder
- Create leadership depth
- Increase profitability through smarter segmentation
- Attract larger, more complex relationships

Done well, this stage transforms a successful financial advisor practice into a durable wealth management firm. When done poorly, it leads to burnout, service drift, and stalled growth.

THE QUESTION EVERY GROWING FIRM MUST ANSWER

As you approach \$1 billion AUM, ask yourself:

- Is our client capacity aligned with complexity?
- Is our client experience scalable – or personality-dependent?
- Is our technology fully utilized – or partially adopted?
- Is the founder still the bottleneck?

“One of the things we talk to practices about is doing a kind of deep dive on your business and understanding of your existing clients, existing client journeys and existing internal workflows,” says Cerulli’s Caruso. “As you document and understand those, you set yourself up really well to start bringing in new team members because your processes are already there, and it lets you know where the inefficiencies are in the practice and how you can improve business workflows.”

“Envision what the firm is going to be at a billion-dollar AUM, then reverse engineer it to build a sequence of the right investments,” advises Furey. “If you haven’t sketched out what the future will be it’s really hard to do any planning or even know if what you’re doing is the right kind of investment.”

Furey recommends that advisory firms targeting \$1 billion or more in AUM begin developing their strategic growth plan when assets are several hundred million dollars shy of a billion.

All these exercises will determine whether \$1 billion becomes a ceiling or a launchpad. Because at this level, growth isn’t about adding more clients. It’s about building an operating model that serves them exceptionally well.

And that’s the true inflection point.

Schwab Advisor Services

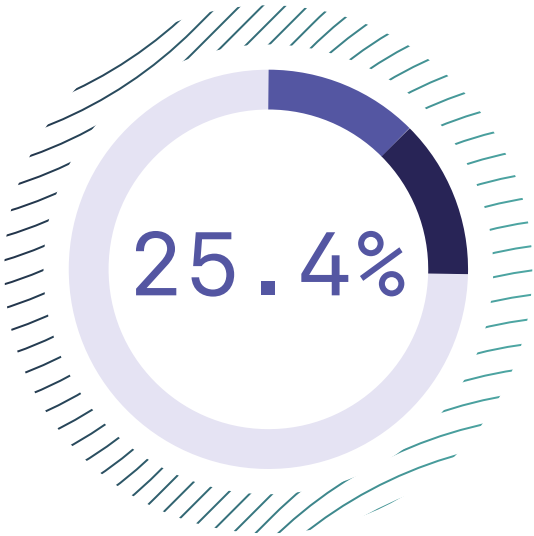


2026 Schwab RIA Benchmarking Study: How RIA firms are growing

What this year's benchmarking study tells
us about how firms pursue growth.



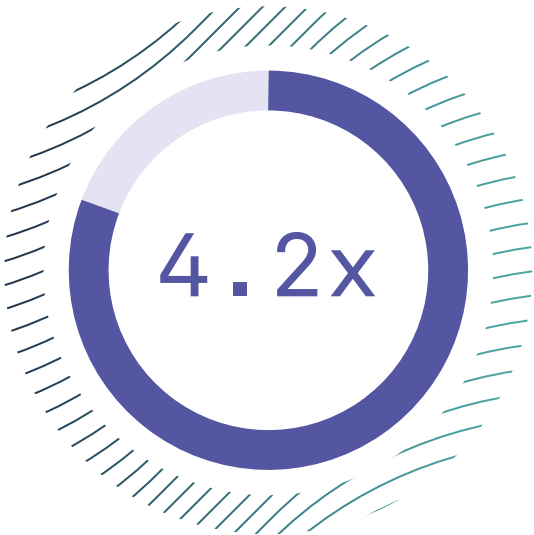
firms participating in the study's 20th year,
representing over \$2.5 trillion in AUM



2025 asset growth of Top Performing Firms –
with 12.9% from net new asset flows



more assets captured from new clients than
all other firms



more assets from existing client relationships
than all other firms

Source: 2026 RIA Benchmarking Study, Charles Schwab. 1,236 firms, fielded January–March 2026.

KEY POINTS

- Schwab's 2026 RIA Benchmarking Study shows that (once again) Top Performing Firms demonstrate a repeatable path to organic growth.
 - Across firms of all sizes, stronger organic growth is associated with clear processes and consistent execution.
 - The study suggests that firms that plan and document processes more consistently tend to see higher rates of growth.
-

Schwab's 2026 RIA Benchmarking Study shows that RIA firms with stronger organic growth tend to pair clear strategy with disciplined execution. In fact, Top Performing Firms¹ stand out not just for their growth strategies, but for how they operate: they are more likely to document referral plans and goals for both clients and business partners, as well as have a documented ideal client persona, client value proposition and marketing plan.

Now in its 20th year, our RIA Benchmarking Study includes insights from 1,236 firms. What two decades of data have shown is there are clear lessons that firms can implement right now. This year's study reinforces that firm fundamentals are a difference-maker, contributing significantly to organic growth and greater growth potential.

“Twenty years of benchmarking data point to a clear conclusion,” says Lisa Salvi, managing director of Business Consulting and Education at Schwab Advisor Services. “Firms that pair strategic clarity with disciplined execution are better positioned to achieve stronger organic growth.”

“The firms that take the time to put core growth strategies in place create a compounding effect over time, building momentum that can accelerate growth year after year,” says Lisa Salvi, managing director of Business Consulting and Education at Schwab Advisor Services. Let's look at what the data shows and a few practical lessons that can help your firm build momentum for the years ahead.

GROWTH STRATEGIES OF TOP PERFORMING FIRMS

Organic growth remains a major driver of firm performance, and the strongest firms appear to pursue it more intentionally. In 2025, firms under \$250 million AUM grew their assets by 19.6%

and larger firms by 16.6%. Investment performance was certainly a factor in this remarkable growth, but net asset flows also were major contributors. In fact, net asset flows accounted for 7.2% of AUM growth among smaller firms and 4.8% among larger firms.

The difference is clearer among Top Performing Firms. In 2025, these firms grew 25.4%, with 12.9% in net new asset flows. Top Performing Firms captured 2.8 times more assets from new clients and 4.2 times more from existing relationships compared with all other firms.

What's one factor that helps Top Performing Firms' organic growth standouts? Business discipline.

Top Performing Firms are more likely to have developed an ideal client persona, a client value proposition, and a marketing plan compared to all other firms.

They also track and manage client acquisition. More than 70% of Top Performing Firms track general inquiries from prospects compared with 58% of all other firms, and 85% track the source of inquiries (compared with 71% of all other firms), allowing them to understand where high-quality referrals are coming from and adjust their referral strategy to maximize the value of those sources.

This combination of planning and tracking helps Top Performing Firms more efficiently target prospects and increases their odds of converting those prospects into clients.

Top Performing Firms selected metrics

Top Performing Firms vs. all other firms

METRIC	TOP PERFORMING FIRMS	ALL OTHER FIRMS	MULTIPLE
5-year revenue CAGR	21.3%	11.3%	1.9x
5-year client CAGR	12.4%	4.6%	2.7x
5-year net asset flows CAGR	15.3%	4.7%	3.2x
Assets from existing clients in 2025	\$19.0M	\$4.5M	4.2x
Assets from new clients in 2025	\$57.7M	\$20.8M	2.8x
Firms with a written strategic plan	84%	60%	1.4x
Firms with a documented ideal client persona	87%	68%	1.3x
Firms with a documented client value proposition	87%	64%	1.4x
Staff attrition rate	4.2%	5.4%	0.8x

Source: 2026 RIA Benchmarking Study

HOW FIRMS ARE USING AI TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

A majority of RIA firms already use artificial intelligence (AI) for everyday administrative tasks and more firms are testing strategic uses.

AI is increasingly used for generating marketing content, drafting client communications, sourcing images and supporting administrative work like note taking. These low-barrier approaches are common at both Top Performing Firms and other firms.

Percent of firms using AI by activity

Top Performing Firms vs. all other firms

ACTIVITY	TOP PERFORMING FIRMS	ALL OTHER FIRMS
EXPERIMENTAL		
Administrative support (note taking, summarizing, meeting creation, drafting emails)	70%	61%
Generating marketing content (newsletters, blogs, social media, podcasts)	52%	45%
Developing client correspondence (drafting emails, letters)	52%	48%
Answering client questions/chats (basic or supervised use)	29%	25%
Sourcing/creating images	29%	24%
STRATEGIC		
Automating current processes and workflows, especially time consuming/manual tasks	31%	19%
Analyzing client data to segment clients and identify trends	11%	8%
Analyzing portfolios	23%	17%
Developing financial advice for clients	23%	19%
Creating compliance policies	22%	17%

Source: 2026 RIA Benchmarking Study

However, Top Performing Firms are more likely to use AI for more strategic efforts to improve efficiency, consistency, and scalability. Top Performing Firms use AI to automate time-consuming and manual workflows 31% of the time, versus 19% of all other firms, signaling a possible shift toward AI that reduces friction in essential systems.

Recruiting is another emerging use case for AI. Firms report that they’ve used AI for writing job descriptions (47%), developing interview questions (35%), sourcing candidates (12%), and screening résumés (12%). Early signs point to significant time savings, allowing firms to more actively recruit future leaders and the next generation of RIA talent.

HOW RIAS ADD CAPABILITIES AT SCALE

As client needs grow more complex, many RIA firms are expanding their capabilities, but adding more products and services does not guarantee growth.

Pledged asset lines (PALs) are now offered by 67% of firms and 61% offer alternative investments. Concentrated stock position solutions (49%) and options trading (35%) also have emerged as common strategies for advisors. Many of these firms are taking advantage of the wealth services Schwab offers right in the platforms and workflows advisors already use.

This expansion of wealth services beyond traditional portfolio management can help firms differentiate in a crowded marketplace but these solutions also require additional oversight, specialized expertise, and more complex compliance and risk management processes. Firms that operate efficiently will be more likely to use new capabilities to help them grow and scale.

WHY DOCUMENTATION SUPPORTS GROWTH, SUCCESSION AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

Whether a firm is planning for succession, evaluating strategic partnerships, considering an acquisition, or preparing for leadership changes, strong documentation can help firms move from reactive decision-making to a more intentional transition strategy. Clear processes make it easier to understand how a firm operates, where responsibilities sit, and what needs to be aligned before ownership, or team changes take place.

As planning shifts to transition, documentation makes integrating a new team or joining an existing firm much easier. When both sides of the deal can see how the other firm works, it can help each firm evaluate whether the other is a good fit and gives everyone involved time to sort out differences before a deal is final.

That same need for clarity extends to talent management. The presence of documented processes within a firm's talent strategy is one of the clearest signals that the firm is managing growth with intention rather than improvisation. Whether a firm is integrating teams, preparing future leaders, or scaling day-to-day operations, documented talent processes help turn individual knowledge into repeatable practices. Top Performing Firms are ahead of the pack in all areas of documentation with 63% reporting a documented training and development process (versus 48% for other firms), 74% indicating a documented process for compensation, incentives, and benefits (versus 59%) and 70% documenting performance management, including employee reviews (versus 56%).

Bottom line: Documentation is about more than getting plans on paper. It creates a foundation for discipline and consistency that can help firms scale, navigate transitions and develop people.

DIG INTO WHAT MATTERS TO YOU

The 2026 RIA Benchmarking Study offers more than just headlines. It provides a wealth of data, especially for participants. Every participating firm receives an interactive dashboard that shows the firm's results and offers comparisons with similar firms. Participants can also sort findings across multiple comparison groups to better understand current performance and future opportunities.

Even if you didn't participate this year, you can still explore more key findings from the RIA Benchmarking Study to see how firms are approaching growth, efficiency and scale.

1 Top Performing Firms are those that rank in the top 20% of the Firm Performance Index. The index evaluates all firms in the study according to 15 metrics to arrive at a holistic assessment of each firm's performance across key business areas.

About the 2026 RIA Benchmarking Study from Charles Schwab: Schwab designed the RIA Benchmarking Study to capture insights in the RIA industry based on survey responses from individual firms. The 2026 study provides information on topics such as asset and revenue growth, sources of new clients, products and pricing, staffing, compensation, marketing, technology, and financial performance. Fielded from January to March 2026, the study contains self-reported data from 1,236 firms that custody their assets with Schwab and represents over \$2.5 trillion in assets under management, making this the leading study in the RIA industry. Schwab did not independently verify or validate the self-reported information. Participant firms represent various sizes and business models. The study is part of Schwab Business Consulting and Education, a practice management offering for RIAs. Grounded in the best practices of leading independent advisory firms, Business Consulting and Education provides insight, guidance, tools, and resources to help RIAs strategically manage and grow their firms.

Past performance is not an indicator of future results.

The Firm Performance Index evaluates firms in the study according to 15 metrics that align with the Guiding Principles for Advisory Firm Success, to arrive at a holistic assessment of each firm's performance across key business areas. It provides comprehensive comparisons for all firms participating in the study, not just within a peer group. The metrics in the Firm Performance Index measure growth in clients, assets and revenue; client attrition; staff attrition; operating margin; time spent on client service; time spent on operations; standardized workflows; written strategic plan and succession plan; and ideal client persona and client value proposition. The Firm Performance Index is calculated among all firms in the study without regard to assets under management or firm type. Firms that rank in the top 20% of the index are included in the Top Performing Firms. (0726-ACCK)

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SULEMAN DIN & BERNICE NAPACH

Multi-generational wealth management: Rethinking how advisors serve the modern family

Serving multiple generations requires more than investment management. Financial advisors must design client experiences that engage the entire family and drive long-term retention.

For many advisors, the definition of a “client” is changing. It’s no longer just an individual or a couple; it’s an entire family ecosystem spanning generations, each with different needs, expectations and priorities. And yet, most service models haven’t caught up.

Firms are still largely designed around portfolios, performance and periodic reviews. But for many high-net-worth clients, especially older ones, the focus has shifted. Conversations increasingly center on family, legacy and personal connections rather than investment details.

“It’s one thing to make a gift to a family member or leave assets after passing; it’s another thing entirely to connect them with a trusted partner who can help be a resource and guide the recipient of those assets,” says Matthew Hartnett, partner and senior wealth advisor at OpenArc Corporate Advisory in Atlanta, Georgia.

THE SHIFT FROM PORTFOLIO-CENTRIC TO RELATIONSHIP-CENTRIC

Traditionally, wealth management has centered on financial outcomes:

- Investment performance
- Asset allocation
- Risk management

These still matter, but they're no longer enough to sustain deep, lasting relationships across generations.

Today's clients are thinking about:

- Legacy and values
- Family dynamics
- Education and preparedness of heirs
- The emotional side of wealth

In other words, the conversation has expanded, but many service models haven't. "For the families we serve, the question isn't whether wealth will transfer. It's whether the next generation will be ready to receive it with purpose," says James Malatos, founder of Harbor View Private Wealth in Alpharetta, Georgia. "Our job is to start that conversation twenty years before the inheritance arrives, not twenty days after."

Advisors can do much better planning when they know what's going on across generations, according to Lisa Kirchenbauer, founding partner and senior advisor at Omega Wealth Management in Arlington, Virginia.

That conversation requires more than the typical two-party exchange between a financial advisor and his or her client, because multiple individuals are involved and it can be very emotional.

"There are very few things in life that are as sensitive as one's finances," says Hartnett. "And that can be emotional and challenging at times because what's fair may not be equal from, say, one child or grandchild to the next. Having us in a conversation like that provides a third-party buffer for those dialogues."

Designing for one client is straightforward. Designing for a family is not. Each generation brings its own expectations:

- **Older clients (often wealth creators):** Value trust, relationships and legacy. Conversations may shift away from performance and toward family, purpose and continuity.
- **Next-generation clients:** Expect digital access, transparency and more frequent communication. They want to understand, not just inherit, wealth.





- Emerging generations (Gen Z and younger): Are shaped by technology, values-driven decision-making and a desire for personalization.

Most firms deliver a single service model to all of them. The challenge is how to change that model to appeal to different generations. It's "thinking across the generations as opposed to treating them as silos," says Kirchenbauer.

WHERE TRADITIONAL SERVICE MODELS BREAK DOWN

When firms apply a one-size-fits-all approach, gaps begin to emerge:

- Heirs feel disconnected or unengaged
- Communication doesn't match expectations across age groups
- Advisors risk losing assets during generational transfer
- Opportunities for deeper relationships go unrealized

The irony is that firms often excel at managing wealth, but struggle to manage the relationships that sustain it.

They "need to be sensitive to and trained in family dynamics and the human side of transition and money," says Kirchenbauer.

WHAT MULTI-GENERATIONAL SERVICE DESIGN LOOKS LIKE

Firms that succeed in this area take a more intentional, structured approach to serving the entire family, not just the primary client.

Here's how they do it:

1. Expanding the definition of "client"

They treat the family, not just the asset holder, as the client.

That means proactively engaging spouses, children and even grandchildren early, not waiting for a wealth transfer event.

"Wealth management is not just about asset management; it's about tying in all the other pieces for clients – tax efficiency, estate planning, philanthropy – and, most importantly, their family," says Hartnett...It feels like this is an industry shift."

2. Segmenting by needs, not just assets

Traditional A/B/C segmentation falls short in a multi-generational context. Instead, leading firms segment based on:

- Life stage
- Financial literacy
- Role within the family

“We segment all of our clients by their needs so we can provide the best, most optimal service for them,” says Matthew Liebman, founder, partner and CEO of Amplius Wealth Advisors in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania.

“A young family just starting to save and participate in a retirement plan, has a mortgage on a home and maybe has little kids, is starting to think about education, whereas their parents or grandparents may not have to worry about any of those things, though sometimes they do get involved, helping out. They may have an estate tax issue that the younger person does not have.”

But “the goals of one generation get translated directly to the next generation,” says Edward Karan, founder of Aspire Wealth Advisory Group in New York City. Advising the older generation on how to minimize taxes for their estate, for example, can directly help the next generation avoid a tax bill, says Karan. “You’re understanding each party’s desire and goals and how they interrelate.”

3. Creating multiple communication tracks

A single annual review doesn’t meet everyone’s needs. Firms are building layered communication strategies:

- High-level strategy conversations for senior clients
- Educational sessions for next-gen family members
- Digital updates and on-demand access for younger clients

Each audience receives value in a way that resonates with them.

“Older generations are fairly used to just picking up the phone and calling us and/or vice versa, but if the younger generation receives a phone call out of the blue, they either won’t answer or they think something is wrong,” says Liebman. “Why don’t you just shoot me a text to set up a meeting?”

Liebman adds that, post-COVID, many people are now used to Zoom and various electronic messages rather than the old-fashioned phone call.



4. Facilitating Family Conversations

Advisors play a critical role as facilitators, not just financial experts. This can include:

- Family meetings
- Legacy planning discussions
- Education around wealth stewardship

These moments build trust across generations and position the advisor at the center of the family relationship.

Family meetings can be “super helpful because they let different generations discuss their wealth and management of that wealth from a holistic perspective instead of each family just thinking in isolation,” says Mark Weiskind, president and partner at Fairway Wealth Management in Independence, Ohio. “But not everyone wants to do that.”



Such meetings are especially important, says Weiskind, when trusts and family partnerships are involved because of their complications. They can help “next generations understand what these vehicles are, why they were set up and how they work,” explains Weiskind.

Perhaps the most important aspect of these meetings is the product they produce: the family values statement.

“A balance sheet tells you what a family has. A values meeting tells you what a family is for,” says Malatos. “The estate plan only works when both are written down.”

Kirchenbauer likens the values statement to an “instruction manual for the wealth being passed on.”

“Hard work is often cited as a value that’s a cornerstone to wealth creation, but how do you instill that concept into future generations that may have had a lot of opportunities because of the family wealth and may never know what the journey looked like for that patriarch or matriarch?” asks Hartnett. “It’s the values process that can bridge the gap between legal documents like wills and trusts, and all that great AI-backed technology, and the successful passing of wealth from generation to generation.”

5. Designing for Continuity

Ultimately, multi-generational service design is about retention. Firms that build relationships with the next generation before wealth transfers occur are far more likely to retain those assets, and deepen those relationships over time.

“Serving families by definition is highly scalable if you can serve multiple generations,” says Karan. “People are living longer, so it’s not uncommon that a grandparent, a child and the next generation are all being served by one advisor.”

Amplius Wealth takes a slightly different approach to multi-generational services, “making sure each individual in a family has an advisor that they can connect to,” which often, but not always, means matching advisors of the same generation to a particular family member, says Liebman.

“We recognize that while people are related, they’re not always in lockstep with one another across generations, continuity is best achieved when you have strong individual relationships across multiple generations.”

Failing to serve multiple generations of clients can have serious consequences.

“If you’re not working with that next generation, then when parents die, the money disappears and the revenue disappears,” says Weiskind. “We want to introduce our next generation of advisors to our clients’ next generation. That’s important to us as a business because it also makes the relationship really sticky.”



THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY (AND ITS LIMITS)

Technology can support multi-generational engagement, but it can't replace it.

Client portals, reporting tools and communication platforms make it easier to deliver information across generations. But the real differentiator is still human:

- Understanding family dynamics
- Asking better questions
- Creating meaningful, personal connections

In fact, the earlier insight holds: sometimes the most valuable conversation isn't about markets or portfolios, it's about family.

"Software can show three generations the same balance sheet," says Malatos. "It can't make them agree on what to do with it. That's still our work, and there's no app for it."

But often "the kids want the same thing the parents want, which is to have a relationship with someone they trust, who they deem to be competent," says Liebman. "That hasn't changed regardless of whether the person is 90 or 20."

DESIGNING FOR WHAT MATTERS MOST

The future of wealth management isn't just about managing money, it's about managing relationships across time. That requires a shift:

- From transactions → to connection
- From individuals → to families
- From performance → to purpose

Advisors who embrace this evolution will not only strengthen client relationships, they'll build firms designed to last across generations. Because in the end, the question isn't just how well you manage wealth.

It's how well you understand the people behind it.

"The most successful multi-generational service model combines planning expertise with patience and emotional awareness," says Mitchell Kraus, principal at Capital Intelligence Associates in Santa Monica, California and the fourth generation of his family to work in financial services. It's also important to know when other professionals should be involved, which may include estate planning attorneys, CPAs, mediators, trustees, family counselors or other specialists," adds Kraus, whose firm is affiliated with LPL Financial. "A good advisor should recognize when the issue is not just financial, but relational."



RETHINKING HOW TO SERVE THE MODERN FAMILY

Serving multiple generations requires moving beyond traditional asset management to design family-centric client experiences.

Because a large percentage of next-generation investors switch advisors after inheriting wealth, multi-generational continuity requires engaging children and grandchildren long before a wealth transfer event occurs.

Objective: Use this worksheet to evaluate your practice’s multi-generational engagement, refine your client segmentation and build layered communication tracks.

① DIAGNOSTIC AUDIT: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT HEALTH CHECK

Evaluate your firm’s current reach across your top 20 client households:

DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION	CURRENT PRACTICE BASELINE	TARGET MULTI-GEN BENCHMARK	GAP ANALYSIS
Spouse Engagement: What percentage of primary client meetings include both spouses?	_____ % of households	100% of households	☐ On Track ☐ Priority Focus
Next-Gen Connection: What percentage of primary client children (ages 18+) have had at least one direct contact or educational session with your firm?	_____ % of children	> 75% of children	☐ On Track ☐ Priority Focus
Estate & Tax Coordination: Are the goals of the senior generation mapped directly to the tax/estate impact on the next generation?	_____ % of estates	100% of estates	☐ On Track ☐ Priority Focus

② NEEDS-BASED & LIFE-STAGE SEGMENTATION MATRIX

Traditional A/B/C asset-based segmentation fails in a multi-generational context. Complete this matrix to segment your client families by life stage, financial literacy and communication needs.

GENERATION 1: WEALTH FOUNDERS (ACCUMULATION / LEGACY STAGE)	GENERATIONS 2 & 3: NEXT-GEN (BUILDING / TRANSITION STAGE)
Core focus: • Estate tax minimization • Philanthropic legacy • Inter-family wealth transfer	Core focus: • Debt management & mortgages • 401(k) / retirement plans • Education funding (529s)
Action step: Map how G1 estate decisions directly protect G2 from future tax liabilities.	Action step: Offer family financial literacy sessions focused on immediate life stages.

③ MULTI-TRACK COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Different generations absorb value through different channels. Audit your communication touchpoints to ensure you are meeting each family member where they are.

COMMUNICATION TRACK	PREFERRED CHANNELS	PRIMARY MEETING FORMAT	KEY VALUE DRIVER
Senior Generation (G1)	Phone calls, structured emails, physical mail	In-person or formal phone reviews	High-level strategy & wealth preservation
Next Generation (G2/G3)	Texting, instant messaging, digital portals	On-demand Zoom calls or quick video updates	Financial coaching & digital accessibility

Diagnostic question: If you call a next-gen client unexpectedly, do they assume something is wrong? (Leading practices adopt text-based scheduling and on-demand digital updates for younger family members).

Notes & next steps: _____

④ 90-DAY MULTI-GENERATIONAL EXECUTION ROADMAP

Commit to three actionable initiatives to expand your definition of “client” from an individual asset holder to the broader family unit:

- ☐ **Month 1 (Family Discovery):** Add a mandatory “Family Tree & Beneficiary Alignment” review step to all annual client reviews.
- ☐ **Month 2 (Communication Channels):** Implement text-based appointment scheduling and digital portal access tailored for next-gen family members.
- ☐ **Month 3 (Family Educational Workshops):** Host a dedicated financial literacy or estate-planning workshop for the children and grandchildren of your top 20 client households.

Longevity planning: How RIA firms can help clients prepare for a longer life

Planning with longevity in mind helps clients be ready for times when they need to revisit priorities, spending and health assumptions. Rather than viewing adjustments as negatives, they're more likely to see them as a normal part of ongoing planning.

KEY POINTS

- Retirement planning is getting trickier as people live longer than ever and spend more years in retirement.
 - Retirement tends to fall into four broad phases, but it's not a straight line. Clients may move back and forth (or repeat phases) over time.
 - Longevity planning is an opportunity for advisors to start the right conversations and build plans that help clients age the way they want.
-

Americans are living longer than ever. Today, the average 65-year-old in the U.S. can expect to live an additional 20 years. If trends continue, the average millennial could live well past 90. While living longer is good news for all of us, it also introduces challenges.

+20 years of life expectancy at 65 today **90+** millennials could live well past 90

Long(er) life means needing more retirement savings to live how you want and keep up with medical expenses. It also means more time for needs and goals to change.

Enter longevity planning (and a trusted financial advisor). Money + time is an interesting equation; one many clients aren't prepared to calculate. That's why Joseph F. Coughlin, founder and director of the MIT AgeLab, has created a framework for how to approach conversations about aging with your clients. As their advisor, you can help them build a responsive and resilient financial future across many decades of life in retirement.

FROM RETIREMENT PLANNING TO LONGEVITY PLANNING

35

Coughlin's point is simple: as lifespans stretch, retirement planning can't be a date and a number – it requires an entirely different approach.

When retirement lasts 20–30+ years, your clients' goals can change – and their plan should, too. As an advisor, you can build a plan that's flexible so clients trust that you (and their plan) can respond to life's twists and turns.

“Asking a 45-year-old what they're going to be doing in retirement is like asking an 18-year-old what they're going to do in their midlife crisis.”

They need you to help them envision their best life in retirement, not just at age 65 or 70, but for decades, says Coughlin. He thinks about retirement as a series of phases. This is a practical way to help clients get specific about what they want (and when). The MIT AgeLab outlines four retirement phases you can use to guide longevity planning: the honeymoon, the big decision, navigating later years and the possibility of living alone.

THE FOUR PHASES OF RETIREMENT

MIT AgeLab's four phases aren't a tidy progression. Many people bounce between phases over time. The key is understanding how well-being, physical health, and social connections change in each phase and how a client's financial plan can help them make the most of different periods of life.

 **The honeymoon:** For a lot of people, retirement isn't a clean "before" and "after." They might step away from work, come back to their career, find a sideline gig, or skip the label altogether. Early on, people often want to stay active and connected. It's common for clients to work part-time or even launch a new business after "retiring." However they kick off retirement, you can help them see how continuing to work affects their savings, how much to withdraw from their accounts and what it means for Social Security benefits.

 **The big decisions:** Earlier in life, people make decisions based on commutes and nearby schools. But once the kids have moved out and there's no office to go to, many people rethink where and how they want to live. This is a phase when they may need you to ask the big questions and help them design their best life in retirement. With your help, they can turn hopes into a real plan that works financially.

 **Navigating longevity:** Health can be unpredictable. Most people don't expect to get sick or to have to deal with long-term health issues. Yet, for many, health problems dominate their later years of retirement. As health questions emerge, you can help clients plan for medical expenses and check in on their goals. They may have to adjust their expectations, but your steady guidance can help them face uncertain times with confidence.

 **The solo journey:** One of the hardest parts of aging is losing friends and loved ones. Life can get lonely. Boring, even. Your clients may feel like they don't have many places to go or people to see. This is a time to help them refocus on what brings them joy. Talk about the people, places, and activities that make them happy and encourage practical steps, like reconnecting with friends and family, signing up for classes or events or taking a trip they'd enjoy. Remind them that their plan and hard-earned savings give them options.

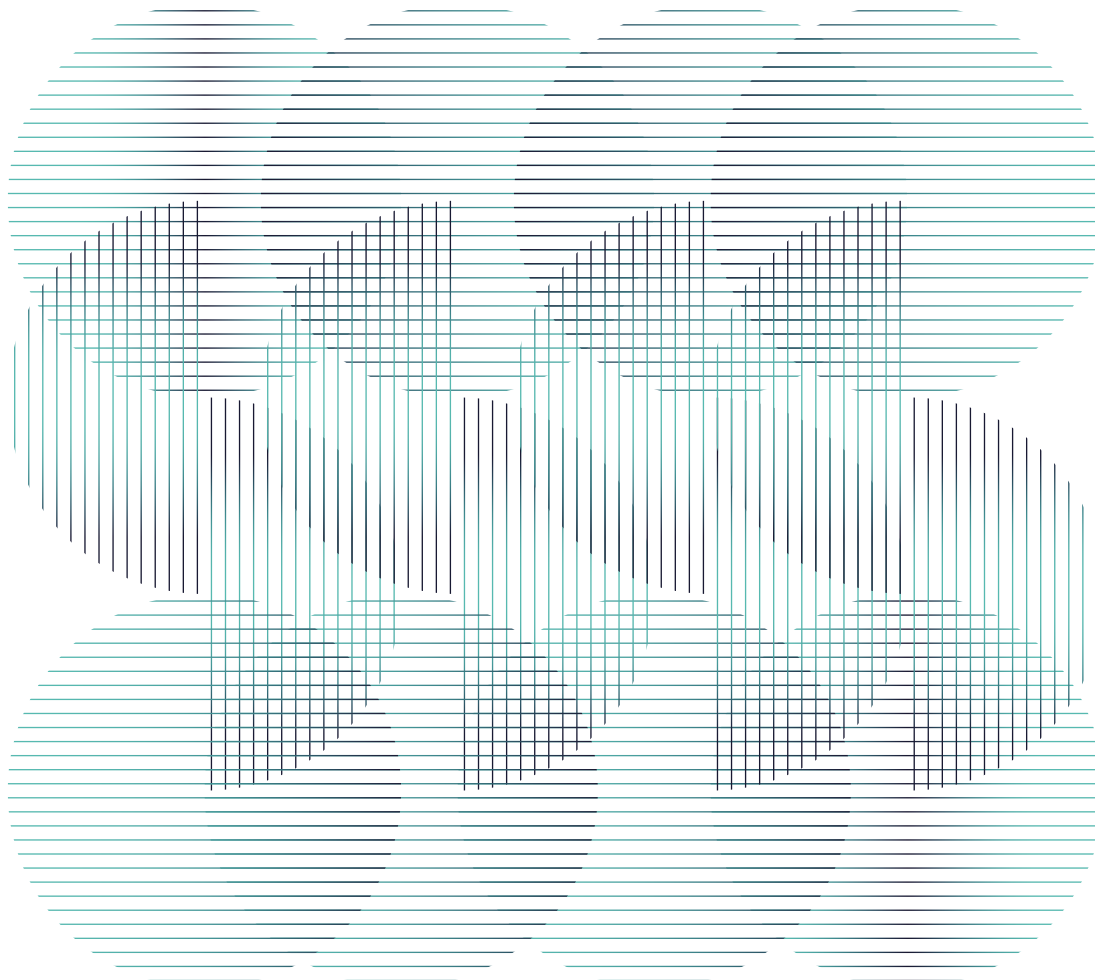
LIFE IS A LONG, INTERESTING CONVERSATION

When you bring longevity into your thinking and planning, ask your clients a simple question: What phase do you feel like you're in right now? You'll have your own observations, but if a client sees things differently, they may not be responsive to your advice.

Next, walk through what each phase might look like. Post-retirement work, classes and training, new living arrangements, health risks, bucket-list goals – there’s a lot to consider. Have them put it all out there, then position it as a starting point that you’ll revisit often.

Longevity conversations also mean getting comfortable with change. Maybe they can’t do a favorite activity anymore, or life doesn’t unfold the way they pictured (even something like not having grandchildren). While this can be disappointing, it also means that the money or time they’d set aside can now be used for something else that matters.

Money, health, and relationships are very personal and sometimes clients are uncomfortable going there. Longevity planning gives you a way to normalize the conversation and remind them that they have choices in how they respond to whatever life brings. None of us are getting any younger, but with your help, your clients can use their savings to create options and keep building a life of fulfillment and meaning.





SULEMAN DIN

Philanthropy in transition: How donor-advised funds are reshaping giving

Philanthropy in America is undergoing a profound shift.

SULEMAN DIN: Fred, let's start with the big picture – what's happening in philanthropy right now?

FRED KAYNOR: Philanthropy in the U.S. is going through a period of remarkable change. Individuals and families remain deeply committed to giving, but the landscape itself is shifting. Many nonprofits have lost what used to be reliable, institutional funding sources – especially government-related support – so there's increased pressure to find new ways to close those gaps.

What we're seeing is donors stepping up. They're becoming more thoughtful, more strategic, and more focused on maximizing the impact of every dollar. The need has never been greater, and donors are responding accordingly.

DIN: How is that changing the role of financial advisors?

KAYNOR: Advisors are increasingly being asked to help clients with philanthropy in the same way they help with investments or retirement planning. In fact, Schwab's latest RIA Benchmarking Study found that 86% of advisors see charitable planning as a way to differentiate their practice.¹

That's a big shift. High-net-worth and ultra-high-net-worth clients want structured, tax-efficient ways to give – and they want guidance. That's where solutions like DAFs come in.

DIN: For those unfamiliar, what exactly is a donor-advised fund – and why is it gaining traction?

KAYNOR: At its core, a donor-advised fund is a charitable giving account that is simple, flexible, and highly tax-efficient. It operates in three key steps. First, donors contribute assets such as cash, appreciated stock, real estate or even private business interests, receiving a fair-market-value tax deduction while avoiding capital gains tax. Next, those assets can be invested for potential growth, increasing the amount available for future giving. Finally, donors recommend grants to charities whenever they choose – whether immediately, over time or as part of a long-term legacy plan. Overall, it's an efficient, low-cost solution that can be adapted to a wide range of philanthropic goals.

DIN: How flexible is that structure in practice?

KAYNOR: Extremely flexible. Donors can set up recurring grants – essentially a “set it and forget it” approach – while also retaining the ability to respond quickly to crises such as natural disasters or humanitarian needs. They can build long-term legacy strategies that involve family

“As traditional funding sources tighten and demand for charitable support rises, Fred Kaynor of DAFgiving360™, one of the largest providers of donor-advised funds, sits down with Action! magazine to unpack how DAFs are helping families and advisors respond to this moment.”

members and support multiple charities over time. That level of flexibility is one of the biggest reasons adoption is growing so quickly.

DIN: Are you seeing any notable trends in where or how people are giving?

KAYNOR: Yes, a few important trends are emerging. Giving is increasing significantly – we’ve seen a 34% year-over-year rise in grantmaking, with \$8.9 billion distributed, including \$6 billion through advisor-managed accounts. At the same time, donations are being spread more broadly, reaching over 155,000 charities across sectors such as education, healthcare, humanitarian aid and the arts. Another key shift is that donors are placing fewer restrictions on their gifts, opting instead for unrestricted funding that allows nonprofits to direct resources where they’re needed most. That last point is especially impactful, as it gives organizations much greater agility.

34% year-over-year rise in DAF grantmaking – \$8.9 billion distributed

DIN: How are donor-advised funds helping address funding gaps left by government cuts?

KAYNOR: They’re becoming a critical bridge. As traditional funding sources decline, nonprofits are turning more to private philanthropy – and DAFs provide a highly efficient vehicle for channeling those funds. At the same time, awareness is growing. Both donors and nonprofits are recognizing DAFs as a powerful way to mobilize capital quickly and effectively.

DIN: What about due diligence? How do you ensure funds go to legitimate causes?

KAYNOR: We start with the IRS – organizations must be verified 501(c)(3)s in good standing. On top of that, we conduct our own due diligence, monitoring for investigations or compliance issues. If there’s any concern about misuse of funds, we can pause grantmaking until issues are resolved. There’s a real responsibility to ensure funds are used for true charitable purposes.

DIN: What advice would you give to an advisor just starting the philanthropy conversation with clients?

KAYNOR: Start simple by asking thoughtful, open-ended questions such as whether the client is facing a significant tax event, whether they’ve considered more efficient ways to give and what causes matter most to them. From there, the goal is to build a structured plan. We provide tools – like our Giving Guide – that help advisors and clients think through key decisions, including what to give, when to give, how much to give, and which vehicles to use. Ultimately, it transforms philanthropy into a strategic, repeatable process.

DIN: There's growing competition from digital-first platforms. How do you view that?

KAYNOR: Any platform that raises awareness of donor-advised funds is a positive. More awareness means more giving.

Different platforms may specialize in niches – like impact investing – but our focus is on delivering a low-cost, highly efficient, and scalable solution for both advisors and clients. And we're continuously evolving to meet modern expectations.

DIN: Final question, how is the next generation changing philanthropy?

KAYNOR: They're redefining it. Younger donors are more engaged, more intentional and more focused on impact throughout the entire giving lifecycle. They care not just about where money goes, but also how it's invested before being granted, whether it aligns with their values and what measurable outcomes it produces. They're also embracing innovative tools like impact investing and even recoverable grants – essentially philanthropic loans to early-stage nonprofits. It's a much more hands-on, outcome-driven approach and it's shaping the future of philanthropy.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

As philanthropy adapts to a world of shrinking institutional support and rising global need, donor-advised funds are emerging as a powerful connector – linking wealth, strategy and purpose. For advisors and families alike, the opportunity is no longer just to give – but to give smarter, faster and with greater impact than ever before.

SEO strategies for RIAs: How to improve your website's ranking

In the early days, SEO was mostly a keyword game. Today, search engines are much smarter. Keywords still matter, but quality of content matters more.

KEY POINTS

- Search engines crawl websites to judge quality and relevance. Keep pages accurate, easy to navigate and quick to load to rate higher.
 - Keywords still matter. Think about the words prospects type in search and what sets your firm apart, then work those words into your website in a natural way.
 - Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing search quickly. Create plain-speak FAQs to help your page get included in AI summaries.
-

According to the search marketing agency Reboot, there are more than 1.1 billion websites in the world.¹ For registered independent advisor (RIA) firms, getting found online can feel like a “one in a billion” chance. That’s where search engine optimization (SEO) comes in.

SEO is how you improve the chances your website shows up when a prospect searches online for a financial advisor like you. By carefully choosing the words you use, organizing pages and information clearly, and building credibility, you can move your site higher in search rankings.

SEO is about progress, not perfection. The sooner you start, the sooner your website can rise in the ranks. So, let’s kick off by looking at how search works.

GETTING TO KNOW SEO

Search engines use automated “crawlers” to scan and index your website. Think of a crawler like a stand-in for a real visitor. It looks for keywords and other indicators of content quality like:

- Simple navigation
- Well-organized webpages
- Clear communication
- Easy-to-follow, conversational tone
- Accurate and useful information

In the early days, SEO was mostly a keyword game. Keywords are words or phrases that people frequently use in a search. Earlier versions of search engines simply scoured websites looking for exact matches.

Today, search engines are much smarter. Keywords still matter, but quality of content matters more. Google’s SEO fundamentals tutorial suggests that pages be “designed to prioritize helpful, reliable information that’s created to benefit people, and not content that’s created to manipulate search engine rankings.”²

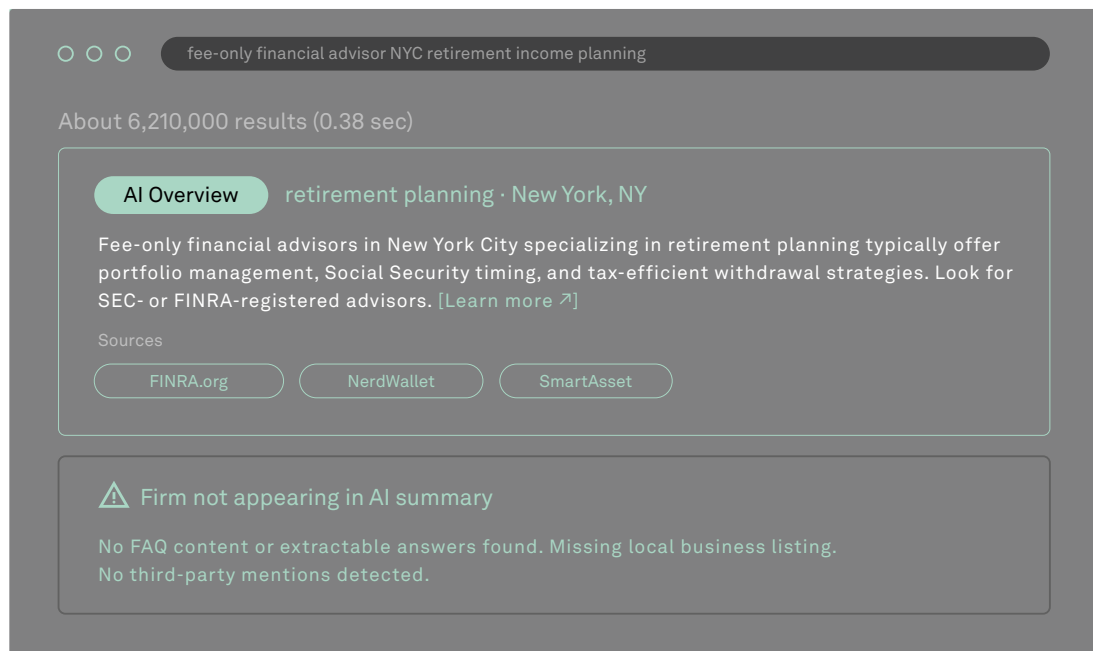
Search engines also pay attention to your reputation beyond your website. They look at how often other high-ranking sites link to yours and track credible mentions of your firm in videos, news stories, and other online content.

All of this info is used by search engines to rank sites and display them in a specific order when a person types in search terms. This is why the quality of the keywords, links to your website, and firm mentions matter so much. It’s also why you want to make sure not to get

on the wrong side of a search engine. SEO fails that can significantly damage your search rankings include:

- **Keyword stuffing:** Unnaturally and unhelpfully cramming popular words or phrases onto a page.
- **Link spam:** Plastering pages with links, whether they are useful or not.
- **Manufactured mentions:** Creating dummy websites to increase their mentions.

What search sees



All names and market data shown are for illustrative purposes only and are not a recommendation, offer to sell, or a solicitation of an offer to buy any security.

SEO STARTERS: TACKLING THE LOW-HANGING FRUIT

The strategy for search engine success is simple: Create a site with genuinely useful content for the people you (want to) work with. You don't need a full website overhaul to start. Here are a few moves you can make right now.

Master keywords: The words on your site still matter – a lot. Prioritize keywords that your ideal client uses when searching for an advisor. Start with basic terms (“financial advisor,” “wealth management,” and “investment advice”), then get specific with what makes your firm the right fit (e.g., “tax-aware investing” or “financial planning for executives”). The goal is to “match” what your ideal client is searching for. But remember, forcing keywords does more harm than good, so make sure keywords read naturally and make sense within the context of the page.

Focus on your industry and expertise: Ask yourself: What do we do best and who do we do it for? Answering these questions can lead you to your strongest search terms. An easy way

to start brainstorming is to ask your clients what they'd search to find you. You can also use online keyword research tools such as Google Keyword Planner or Moz Keyword Explorer to see common search terms.

Develop longer keyword phrases: Compare “Financial advisor” with something more specific, like “Personalized retirement advice for Houston business owners.” The broader term gets more searches, but you're competing against every site using the exact same keywords. The more specific keyword phrase gets fewer searches, but you're more likely to rank higher in those searches and attract more qualified prospects.

Selectively add keywords: Be choosy: Use words and phrases that reflect the page content and fit in naturally. High-impact spots for keywords include the page title, description, page headlines, first 150 words of content, and link text because this is what crawlers focus on most. And don't forget the meta title and meta description, which show up on a search results page.

Think local: Most prospects want to work with financial advisors in their community. That's one reason it's important to show up in searches that include your city or state. On desktop and mobile, local searches often show a map with nearby businesses, phone numbers, and websites. Make sure these contact details are easy to find on your website to put your firm on the map (literally).

Sign up for local business listings: Many search engines offer free local business listings, such as Google Business Profile and Bing Places for Business. In Google, completing your business listing and keeping it accurate, detailed and up to date can land your business in the coveted “Places” directory that appears at the top of local search results.

Describe your firm: Make it clear who you are, what you do, and where you do it. Your “home” or “about” pages are great places for this. A simple, direct description makes it easy for prospects and search engines to understand what your firm is about. Just make sure you don't repeat the same copy on multiple pages.

NEXT-LEVEL SEO

Once you've tackled the low-hanging fruit, it's time to improve the overall experience. How can you make your site more interesting and useful to your audience?

Simplify navigation: Strong sites have a naturally flowing structure with broad, high-level pages (like “Services”) that link to more specific pages (like “Retirement Planning”). Ask yourself: Can new visitors find information easily? Do the link labels make sense? Confusing navigation is worth fixing and likely won't require rebuilding your website. Relabeling and reorganizing often does the trick.

Optimize for mobile: A big share of searches happen on phones. Search engines reward sites that load fast, display well on smartphones and tablets and make it easy to find key information. Use tools like Google Search Console and PageSpeed Insights to see how your site is doing on mobile.

Advertise: Visibility doesn't only come from your website. Credibility is built when your firm shows up in trusted advertising, news articles, videos or interviews. This credibility feeds into brand authority rankings which help support SEO.

Submit your sitemap: After you’ve updated your site, ask your developer to submit a sitemap to Google. A sitemap is a map of your website that helps crawlers find and index your pages.

Keep your site fresh: Your site probably has “evergreen” pages that don’t change often, such as your investment philosophy, team bios and “contact us” pages. To keep building SEO, add fresh content that answers specific questions prospects ask. Search is designed to answer

What strong optimization looks like

fee-only financial advisor NYC retirement income planning

About 5,890,000 results (0.38 sec)

AI Overview

fee-only financial advisor NYC retirement income planning

Summit Ridge Wealth, a Manhattan-based fee-only RIA, specializes in retirement income planning for executives and business owners. Their site details tax-efficient withdrawal sequencing and Social Security optimization strategies. Fee-only advisors are compensated directly by clients — no commissions. [\[See more ↗\]](#)

Sources

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FINRA.org

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Summit Ridge Wealth

Hudson Wealth Advisors

Midtown Advisory Group

① Summit Ridge Wealth

★★★★★ 4.9 · Fee-only · Open now

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② Hudson Wealth Advisors

★★★★★ 4.2 · Fee-based

340 Madison Ave, New York

③ Midtown Advisory Group

★★★★★ 4.0 · Fee-based

About 5,890,000 results (0.38 sec)

Retirement income planning for NYC executives — Summit Ridge Wealth

Fee-only fiduciary advisors helping New York executives and business owners build retirement income they won't outlive. Social Security, RMDs, and tax-efficient withdrawals.

Our fee structure

FAQ: retirement planning

Meet the team

Schedule a call

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questions, so if your site includes relevant questions and answers, it's more likely to rank higher in search results. In fact, FAQs can significantly boost the effectiveness of your site's search.

- Write what you know. Your expertise is what clients and prospects need. Turn real questions into clear answers to become a go-to place for information.
- Start small. You can't do it all – and that's okay. Maintaining an active website communicates that real people who care are behind this firm.
- Share on social media. Building a presence on LinkedIn and Facebook can help you establish loyal followers who look forward to your content.
- Remove or update outdated material. Blog posts like "Tax Tips for 2023" are no longer relevant for users and could damage your search rankings.

HOW IS AI CHANGING SEARCH?

Search is changing fast. Nearly every search engine now includes artificial intelligence (AI) summaries at the top of search results, often merging content from multiple sources. Links to the source pages are included, so while many searchers may stop at the AI summary, serious prospects are likely to click through to your site.

Many firms are now also optimizing their website for AI search. At a basic level, Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) is a lot like SEO but the goal is slightly different; you're formatting your content so an AI tool can pull a short, accurate answer from your page. Here are a few AEO tips:

- Provide extractable answers. AI wants clean, direct answers it can pull and reproduce for searchers. If a paragraph clearly answers a real question, your answer (and website) is likely to appear when that question is searched.
- Get mentioned by credible sources. AI wants to serve up answers from the most trusted sources. If your firm can get mentioned in news reports, on TV shows and by well-known financial figures, your odds of showing up in an AI answer increases.
- Show the depth of your expertise. Publishing content isn't enough anymore. AI search is looking for specific, useful guidance that shows real experience.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR SEO EFFORTS

SEO is a long game. It could take months or even years for your efforts to make a major difference. Search engines don't see changes instantly and need time to trust new or improved content. You're also competing with other financial advisors online, some of whom are likely investing in SEO too.

Don't let any of that get you down. What matters is progress. Pick a couple of improvements to try this month, then build from there. Over time, small moves can make a big difference.

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2 "Creating helpful, reliable, people-first content," Google Search Central. developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/creating-helpful-content (0526-EA8C)

This article was previously published by Charles Schwab. Source: advisorservices.schwab.com/insights-hub/perspectives/seo-for-financial-advisors



A compliance framework for adopting AI without unnecessary risk

BETH HADDOCK

AI adoption in financial services is accelerating.

Firms are deploying generative AI for research, compliance monitoring, client communications, and portfolio analysis. The tools are impressive. The productivity gains are real. And the risks are accumulating faster than most governance frameworks can address them.

The problem is not whether to use AI. That question is settled. The potential issue is when firms treat AI governance as an IT procurement issue: approve the tool, configure the settings, move on. That approach misses the regulatory, fiduciary and operational dimensions that make AI different from other enterprise technologies.

This article outlines a governance framework grounded in existing regulatory obligations, practical risk assessment, and the kind of vendor scrutiny that compliance professionals already know how to do. None of this requires reinventing the wheel. It requires applying the wheel to a new road.

WHAT AI GOVERNANCE ACTUALLY MEANS

AI governance is the set of policies, controls, and accountability structures that ensure a firm's use of AI is informed, accurate and consistent with its legal and fiduciary obligations. That definition matters because it excludes several things commonly confused with governance.

Governance is not IT approval alone. IT security reviews are necessary but insufficient. They confirm that a tool meets technical standards for encryption, access control and data residency. They do not evaluate whether the use case itself introduces regulatory risk, whether the AI's outputs require human review before reaching a client, or whether the vendor's data practices are consistent with the firm's obligations.

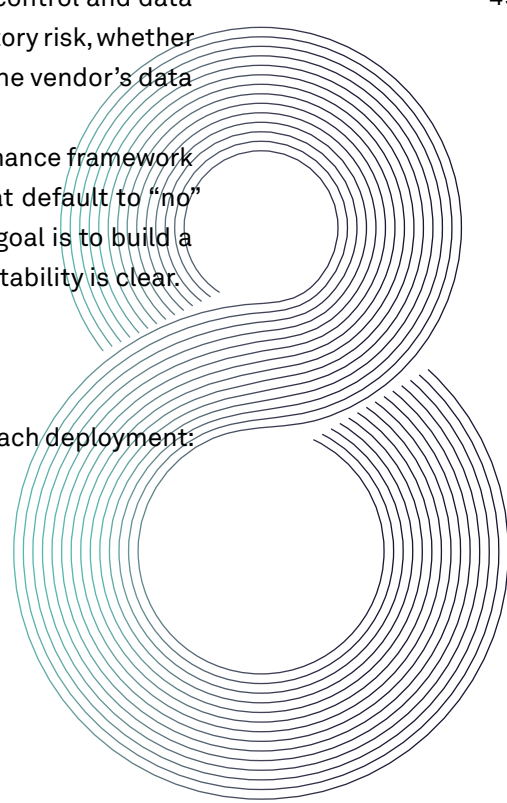
Governance does not connote a blanket prohibition. The purpose of a governance framework is to enable AI adoption by making it informed and accountable. Firms that default to "no" on AI will fall behind operationally and will not serve their clients well. The goal is to build a structure where use cases are evaluated, risks are documented and accountability is clear.

START WITH EIGHT QUESTIONS

Any AI governance framework should be able to answer these questions for each deployment:

1. What uses are approved?
2. Who owns each use case?
3. What data is permitted?
4. What testing was performed?

“Firms are deploying generative AI for research, compliance monitoring, client communications, and portfolio analysis. The tools are impressive. The productivity gains are real. And the risks are accumulating faster than most governance frameworks can address them.”



5. What human review is required?
6. What records are retained?
7. What vendor commitments exist?
8. How does the firm detect errors, drift, or misuse?

If you cannot answer all eight, your framework most likely has gaps. This is not a theoretical exercise. SEC examiners are already asking about AI in examinations as indicated in the 2025 and 2026 SEC examination priorities. FINRA has issued guidance on supervision of AI at both the enterprise and individual levels. The regulatory expectation is that firms know what AI they are using, how it is being used and who is responsible for it.

RISK ASSESSMENT: MATCH CONTROLS TO USE CASES

Not all AI use cases carry the same risk. A firm using AI to summarize internal meeting notes has a different risk profile than a firm using AI to generate investment recommendations. Governance frameworks need to reflect that distinction and apply to both use cases on a risk-adjusted basis.

A practical approach divides use cases into three tiers.

- High-risk use cases involve delivery of advice, fiduciary duties or direct effects on investment decisions or financial interests. These include AI generated investment recommendations, portfolio rebalancing logic, and client-facing advice.
- Medium risk use cases involve client data, confidential information, or regulated communications, but do not determine advice. Examples include AI meeting note-takers, CRM data processing, and marketing content generation.
- Low-risk use cases involve minimal direct regulatory obligation or client data, such as internal document summarization, code assistance or research on public information.

The key principle is that inherent risk can be reduced to acceptable residual risk through governance, verification and validation controls. A high-risk use case is not automatically prohibited. It requires more rigorous testing, more frequent review and clearer accountability.

VENDOR DUE DILIGENCE IS NOT OPTIONAL

One of the most common governance failures is insufficient scrutiny of AI vendors. Firms that would never onboard a sub-adviser without extensive due diligence sometimes deploy AI tools with click-through terms of service and no meaningful assessment of data practices.

Three areas require particular attention. First, data handling: does the vendor or its foundational large language model (LLM) retain inputs? Does it train on outputs? Does it share data with any sub-processors? These are not hypothetical concerns. Recent litigation, including *Brewer v. Otter.ai* and *Cruz v. Fireflies.AI*, has targeted AI meeting note-takers that captured biometric data without participant consent. If your AI tool is recording client meetings, you

need to know exactly what happens to that data and confirm whether you need client consent to record and/or share the data.

Second, training practices: many AI tools are designed to improve over time by learning from user inputs. For a firm operating under fiduciary duties or handling material nonpublic information, this creates a direct conflict. Governance requires understanding whether the vendor's training pipeline touches your data and, if so, whether that can be disabled.

Third, sub-processing: AI vendors frequently rely on infrastructure providers, model hosts, and data enrichment services. Your vendor agreement may prohibit data sharing, but if the vendor's sub-processor agreement does not, the protection is not complete. Diligence on relevant sub-processors is prudent.

THE REGULATORY LANDSCAPE IS NOT WAITING

Firms sometimes delay governance work on the theory that the regulatory framework is still developing. This understates how much guidance already exists.

The SEC's anti-fraud provisions under Advisers Act Sections 206(1) and (2) apply to AI generated advice the same way they apply to advice delivered by a human. Rule 206(4)-7 requires compliance programs that are reasonably designed to prevent violations, which now includes violations arising from AI tools. As mentioned above, the SEC's 2025 and 2026 examination priorities explicitly reference AI. The Commission has already brought enforcement actions for "AI washing": firms that overstated the role of AI in their investment processes faced fines and settlements.

Beyond the SEC, the OCC and Federal Reserve's SR 11-7 guidance requires that vendor models be validated with the same rigor as in-house models. FINRA's Regulatory Notice 24-09 and its 2026 report address supervision of AI at both the enterprise and individual levels. New York's RAISE Act, effective January 2027, introduces transparency and incident reporting requirements for frontier AI. Most importantly, the NIST AI Risk Management Framework provides a voluntary but increasingly referenced standard for cybersecurity and risk management in AI deployments.

None of this is speculative. These are existing obligations and near-term requirements. We expect continued development at the state level and via litigation. Firms that wait for a single comprehensive AI regulation before acting are misreading the landscape.

THREE LINES OF DEFENSE

AI governance maps naturally onto the three-lines-of-defense model that regulated firms already use.

- **The first line is used:** front-line business users follow approved use policies, input restrictions and escalation procedures.
- **The second line is supervision:** compliance and management review use cases, monitor outputs, enforce policies and conduct training.
- **The third line is validation:** independent review tests accuracy, detects drift, assesses vendor controls, and challenges assumptions.

This structure works because it distributes accountability without creating bottlenecks. Business users do not need to wait for compliance approval on every prompt. But compliance needs to know what tools are in use, what data they touch, and whether the outputs are being reviewed before they reach clients or inform decisions.

AI VERIFICATION: TEST WHAT YOU DEPLOY

Governance on paper is not governance in practice. Most importantly, firms should be actively testing their AI deployments, not just reviewing policies and verifying use cases and results. For example, this could mean red-teaming: asking your enterprise AI to return data it should not have access to, prompting it to breach confidentiality boundaries, and testing whether role-based access controls actually work at the application layer.

It also means a pattern and practice of verifying AI results. For instance, users could rely on two generative AI tools to reality-check results in a practical way to catch hallucinations and errors. This is not a substitute for human review and verification on high-risk outputs, but it is a useful screen that costs very little to implement.

The firms that will manage AI risk well are the ones that treat verification as a priority and an ongoing operational function, not a one-time project at the point of deployment.

FIVE DOCUMENTS FIRMS NEED

A governance framework is only as strong as its documentation and implementation. At a minimum, firms should consider five categories of AI governance documents.

1. An AI use policy sets out approved and prohibited uses, escalation triggers, data restrictions and training requirements. It should designate an AI Officer or AI Governance Committee with clear authority and reporting lines.
2. A use-case inventory catalogs each AI deployment with its owner, purpose, users, data categories, decision impact, vendor and review status. This is the document that answers the eight questions above.
3. Vendor due diligence documentation covers security assessments, data rights, subcontracting arrangements, training use, retention settings and incident notification procedures for each AI vendor.
4. A recordkeeping policy addresses retention schedules, access controls, deletion rules, and retrieval capability for AI-generated business records. SEC Rule 204-2 and Regulation S-P both apply here.
5. Finally, firms developing proprietary AI should maintain an AI constitution: a set of principles for development that instruct the AI to follow the firm's values and comply with applicable law.

THE UPSKILLING IMPERATIVE

AI governance is not solely a policy exercise. It requires that legal and compliance professionals understand the technology well enough to evaluate it. This does not mean becoming a data scientist. It means knowing the difference between a large language model and a retrieval-augmented generation system, understanding what a hallucination is and why it happens and being able to read a vendor's technical documentation with enough fluency to ask the right questions.

The ABA's Formal Opinion 512 and NYSBA Opinion 2024-5 both address the duty of competence in the context of AI. The message is clear: lawyers who use AI tools without understanding their limitations are not meeting their professional obligations. The same principle applies to compliance officers advising on AI governance.

Sign up for the tools. Practice with them. Use them to check your own work. The fastest way to understand AI risk is to use AI regularly and pay attention to where it fails.

CONCLUSION

AI is not going away, and the firms that govern it well will have a competitive advantage over those that either avoid it or adopt it without adequate controls. The framework outlined here is not complex. It asks firms to do what they already do for other regulated activities: identify the risks, match controls to those risks, document everything and hold people accountable.

The difference with AI is speed. The technology is evolving faster than traditional governance cycles. Firms that treat AI governance as a quarterly review item will always be behind. The ones that build it into their operating model, the way they have built in trade surveillance and communications monitoring, will manage the risk and capture the value.

NAVIGATING THE \$1 BILLION INFLECTION POINT

For many financial advisors, \$1 billion in assets under management isn't just a milestone – it's an inflection point. On paper, it represents scale and credibility. On the ground, it tests the limits of time, energy, and operational structure.

This practice exercise is designed for RIA founders, managing partners, and operations leaders who are approaching or scaling past \$1B in AUM.

Objective: Use this worksheet to audit operational drag, evaluate structural readiness, and transition from an advisor-led practice to a scalable enterprise.

① THE INFLECTION POINT HEALTH CHECK

As assets grow, client expectations increase and operational strain builds gradually. Rate your firm's current operational status across these core indicators:

OPERATIONAL INDICATOR	SYMPTOM OF STRAIN	HEALTHY / SCALED STATE	CURRENT STATUS & NOTES
Calendar & Prep Time	Fuller calendars, compressed meeting prep, reactive workflows	Structured prep standards, automated workflows, clear daily blocks	☐ Critical Drag ☐ Moderate Friction ☐ Optimized
Communication Cadence	Longer response times, templated or impersonal outreach	Strict 24-hour response SLAs, systematic client service calendars	☐ Critical Drag ☐ Moderate Friction ☐ Optimized
Meeting Structure	Shorter, rushed client reviews; founder present in every meeting	Tiered meeting ownership led by junior/associate advisors	☐ Critical Drag ☐ Moderate Friction ☐ Optimized
Client Experience (CX)	Declining customization; service relies on individual memory	Standardized, repeatable CX delivered seamlessly across teams	☐ Critical Drag ☐ Moderate Friction ☐ Optimized

② EVALUATING THE 3 STRUCTURAL SHIFTS

Accelerating beyond \$1 billion requires three critical organizational shifts. Evaluate where your firm stands on each transformation:

1. Shift from Advisor-Centric to Team-Based Service

The Goal: Clients experience the strength of the firm rather than dependency on a single senior advisor. Specialized roles (wealth planning, engagement, operations) replace generalist roles.

Cerulli Research Benchmark: Team-based practices generate >3x higher average AUM and >2x annual organic growth compared to solo practices.

☐ **Action Step:** Map your lead relationships. Identify which clients can be transitioned

to associate advisors or specialized functional leads.

2. Shift from Informal Systems to Operational Discipline

The Goal: Transition from “doing everything” to establishing dedicated functional departments (e.g., central planning, investment, tax) and firm-wide CRM discipline.

☐ **Action Step:** Audit your CRM rigor, meeting preparation standards, and defined service calendars. Replace personality-driven service with documented workflows.

3. Shift from Producer to Enterprise Leader

The Goal: Founders step back from sitting in every client meeting to lead the business, hire ahead of strain, and build management depth.

☐ **Action Step:** Establish formal career development pathways, succession plans, and professional leadership roles within the firm.

③ THE 4 CORE DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

Gather your executive team and answer these foundational questions derived from industry leaders:

1. **Client Capacity vs. Complexity:** Is our client capacity properly aligned with relationship complexity, or are senior advisors overtaxed by mass-affluent accounts?

Notes & next steps: _____

2. **Scalable vs. Personality-Dependent CX:** Is our client experience repeatable through technology and team roles, or does it depend on the personality and memory of key individuals?

Notes & next steps: _____

3. **Technology Utilization:** Is our technology platform fully embedded into daily operations, or is it only partially adopted across the team?

Notes & next steps: _____

4. **The Founder Bottleneck:** Is the founder/senior partner still acting as the primary bottleneck for client meetings, operational approvals, and business development?

Notes & next steps: _____

④ 90-DAY EXECUTION COMMITMENT

Identify the top three structural initiatives your firm will implement over the next 90 days to unlock scalable capacity:

☐ **Milestone 1:** _____

☐ **Milestone 2:** _____

☐ **Milestone 3:** _____



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Portfolio
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