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Tech employed as client service

Sep 14, 2014 @ 12:01 am

By **Liz Skinner**

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From left to right: Financial Plan Inc.'s chief investment officer Devin Wolf, David Dick, an adviser and partner, and Nathan Twining, co-chief technology officer.

Technology innovation often is driven by efficiency goals, but **Financial Plan Inc.'s** focus on improving its tech has always been about client service.

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When the Bellingham, Wash.-based registered investment adviser left LPL in March 2012, its leaders decided to pull together the best technologies in a way that would benefit clients.

“We wanted to pick and choose what we knew worked best and what we knew would serve clients best,” said David Dick, an adviser and partner.

Unsatisfied with what could be bought, the firm switched its customer relationship management system and even built its own financial planning software. It took more time and money to create the software, but Financial Plan's leaders couldn't find one that would be as good as what they had in mind.

“We're not looking to put our financial plans on autopilot,” said Nathan Twining, who shares the chief technology role with Mr. Dick. “We wanted technology to enhance our ability



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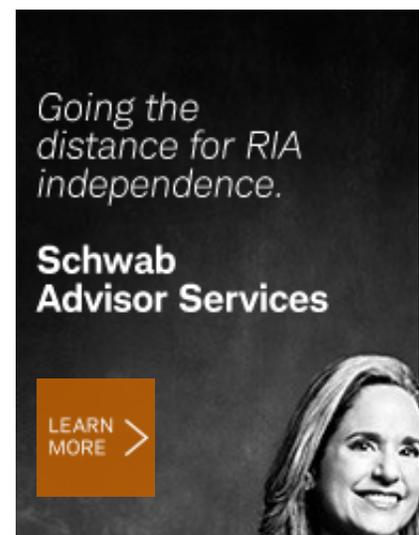
For its efforts, Financial Plan won an *InvestmentNews* Best Practices award as a technology “innovator” last year. It ranked among the best of 317 advisory firms examined in the 2013 *InvestmentNews* Adviser Technology Study.

The firm, started by Nathan Twining's father, James, in 1996, prides itself on its custom-developed financial plans based on an investment philosophy that controls for risk, keeps taxes in mind and doesn't pay for active investment management.

In its quest to pick the best systems for its customers, the firm has integrated into its operations the TD enterprise version of Salesforce as its CRM and **Morningstar Office** for portfolio management tasks. It uses the VEO trading platform of TD Ameritrade, where it holds assets in custody, Mr. Dick said.

Integration of the systems is challenging, but vendors are increasingly working to make this happen, Nathan Twining said.

“For us, efficiency is extremely important, but what's good for the client has always been the top motivator,” said chief investment officer



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Devin Wolf.

The firm also uses video conferencing to talk with many clients, some of whom never meet with their advisers face-to-face. Financial Plan's four advisers work with about 400 households in 19 states.

Since 2012, Financial Plan also has made a client portal available that shows holdings and performance reports, and has a vault function that allows clients to securely store documents, such as a will and other estate planning information, copies of insurance policies and passports, etc.

“The portal has become a huge success with the clients,” Mr. Dick said.

In one case, a client's passport was stolen while she was in Paris. From the client portal, she was able to print a copy of it to bring to the authorities as documentation.

“That's what I mean about technology that helps clients,” Mr. Dick said.

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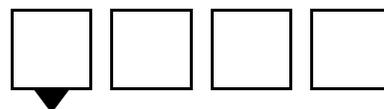


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