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VIEWPOINTS

National Financial Offers Advisers New Business-Building Service

By JOHN HINTZE

Seeking to bolster its correspondents' asset-increasing efforts, Fidelity Investments' National Financial subsidiary today announced the launch of a business-building and training portal that not only shows representatives how to use products and services, but also how they benefit both the investor and rep.

The new tool--the National Financial Broker & Advisor Center--is available through the Streetscape broker and advisory workstation. It has been under construction for a year and was pilot-tested by 13 correspondent firms from November through February. "The Broker & Advisor Center consolidates numerous high-quality resources that help brokers and advisers better service their investors and ultimately drive top-line growth," said Sandy Metraux, EVP of marketing at National Financial, in a statement.

Metraux described the center as "a giant step forward," noting that rather than just supporting representatives' day-to-day business it teaches them about products, which customers they're most appropriate for, and how to cross-sell them, as well as providing new sales ideas.

In a recent study from Boston-based Aite Group, analyst Adam Honoré said that the largest clearers have each sought to differentiate themselves from the competition through service offerings. Honoré called National Financial the choice for brokerages and advisers seeking a business partner to help grow their businesses. Such an approach is reflected in Streetscape

services such as account aggregation, which helps reps capture more of a client's assets, and its extensive managed account program. The Broker & Advisor Center also follows that path.

"Everybody has the training tools: the short cards on how to create an account, trade a mutual fund, etc.," explained Honoré. "National Financial walks you through how to do it, and then how it applies to your specific practice."

The new National Financial tool is "really aimed at helping our advisers grow their practices and improve their professional knowledge," said Corey Pugh, AVP of transition and training at Norcross, Ga.-based Triad Advisors, a 380-rep independent brokerage that has been testing the portal.

The multimedia system, which allows reps to receive information in written form, via podcasts and through online tutorials, is split into four main areas. A products-and-services section helps reps identify the proper target customers for specific products, the benefits to investors, and how those offerings can solidify a relationship with the client.

The business-building area "gives us the opportunity to showcase the heft of resources that Fidelity brings to bear, by leveraging the tools and resources from a variety of our sister organizations," said Karen Wallace, VP of broker marketing at National Financial. For example, she said, there's a regular one-page report on timely topics generated by Fidelity analysts. A recent podcast, meanwhile, dis-

cussed how the upcoming elections could affect the market. Pugh said notable reports during the pilot period included advice on how to approach millionaires and 2008 IRA rollover ideas.

In addition, reps can directly order investor materials--previously only available through the home office--and take advantage of National Financial's discount program for services, publications and office supplies.

The training-and-knowledge section focuses on how to use Streetscape. Pugh said he was particularly attuned to the area, given that he's responsible for transitioning new reps to the ten-year-old Triad Advisors and bolstering existing reps' use of resources. The section includes a continuing-education area that offers 40 online topic modules as well as online exams--it automatically passes results to the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards for approval.

A notices-and-news area updates advisers on pertinent changes to National Financial's platform and regulatory changes, organizing the items by topic and date. "The worst thing to have happen is for a customer to call up and ask for an explanation about a recent change and the adviser has no idea what it's about," Wallace said.

Aite's Honoré noted that surveyed advisers routinely cite ease-of-use as the most important feature and that the Broker & Advisor Center encapsulates that idea. "I think Fidelity took that concept and ran with it," he said.

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