

2025 RIA INDUSTRY TRENDS:

STRATEGIC INSIGHTS FOR FIRMS READY TO SCALE

clientwise™

THE RIA LANDSCAPE IS EVOLVING RAPIDLY AND SO ARE THE FIRMS LEADING IT.

The 2025 Schwab RIA Benchmarking Study provides a comprehensive view of the strategies distinguishing top-performing advisory firms, with over 1,200 firms participating and more than \$2.4 trillion in assets represented.

The following report identifies the top 10 trends shaping \$5B+ RIA firms with actionable insights to help leadership teams think forward and recalibrate priorities. This is a blueprint for growth-oriented, sustainable success.

Each trend reflects what top-performing firms are executing—and what others must address to stay competitive. With AI, personalization, organic growth, and intergenerational wealth transfer shaping the landscape, leading firms are designing the future while others manage the present.

For firms committed to intentional scaling, talent investment, and differentiated client value, this report transforms benchmarking into decisive action.



TOP 10 TRENDS SHAPING \$5B+ RIA FIRMS



1

ORGANIC GROWTH IS KING

PRIMARY TREND:

Top-performing firms grew new client assets 2.5x faster and acquired 3.8x more assets from existing clients.

ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- Firms that focus on planning-centric services see higher client engagement and referral rates.
- Only 15% of AUM growth came from M&A across all firms—underscoring that deal-making alone is not a sustainable strategy.

INDUSTRY DATA:

According to Cerulli, 57% of RIAs believe that future growth will primarily come from deepening relationships with existing clients rather than external acquisitions.

2 IDEAL CLIENT PERSONA DRIVES PERFORMANCE

PRIMARY TREND:

Firms with ICP, CVP, and marketing plans gained **67%** more new clients.

ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- These firms also reported stronger alignment across departments—resulting in fewer service errors and better consistency in messaging.
- Firms with defined ICPs were 1.4x more likely to report higher net promoter scores (NPS).

INDUSTRY DATA:

Hearsay Systems reports that client acquisition cost (CAC) drops by up to 33% when firms consistently market to a defined ICP.

3

AI IS BECOMING AN OPERATIONAL NECESSITY

PRIMARY TREND:

43% of firms use AI in admin; 38% for marketing; only 4% for analytics.

ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- AI is also enabling predictive service models, helping advisors identify at-risk clients before dissatisfaction becomes visible.
- Advisors using generative AI for client communications cut prep time by 30%, according to internal benchmarking from firms using ChatGPT plugins.

INDUSTRY DATA:

McKinsey & Co. found financial advisors who embed AI into operations can improve productivity by 40% and reduce client churn by up to 15% .

4 REFERRALS ARE STILL THE #1 GROWTH ENGINE — BUT UNDERLEVERAGED

PRIMARY TREND:

69% of new clients come from referrals, but few firms tell success stories.

ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- Only 14% of firms actively coach clients on how to refer.
- Referral sources decline when firms lack a structured feedback loop or intentional follow-up process.

INDUSTRY DATA:

Oechsli Institute research shows firms that implement structured referral conversations grow 3x faster than those that rely on passive referral outcomes.



5 PERSONALIZATION IS THE NEW DIFFERENTIATOR

PRIMARY TREND:

91% of top-performing firms see culture as key to delivering experience

ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- High-performing firms train team members to link every client touchpoint to the client's unique goals and values.
- Use of client personas for service delivery correlated with 2x client retention in the top quartile firms.

INDUSTRY DATA:

Accenture found that 48% of investors would switch advisors for a more personalized experience—even at a higher cost.



6 SUCCESSION PLANNING IS LAGGING BEHIND

PRIMARY TREND:

Only 64% of larger firms have written succession plans.

ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- Firms with documented plans report 20% higher staff retention.
- Internal successor grooming correlates with higher firm valuation and smoother trust transfer.

INDUSTRY DATA:

FP Transitions data shows that advisory firms with an internal succession plan are valued 23% higher than those relying on external exit strategies.

7 TALENT DEVELOPMENT IS A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

PRIMARY TREND:

74% of firms plan to hire in 2025.

ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- Firms that mentor junior talent see 33% lower turnover.
- Career pathing correlates directly to higher AUM per employee.

INDUSTRY DATA:

The Ensemble Practice reports that firms with structured career paths increase productivity per advisor by 25% over five years.



CLIENT SEGMENTATION = GROWTH ACCELERATION

PRIMARY TREND:

Top-performing firms are 1.3x more likely to have segmentation strategies.

ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- Segmentation helps unlock 30% more advisor capacity by focusing high-touch service on high-value clients.
- Firms that apply segmentation also report improved team morale, as expectations are clearer across roles.

INDUSTRY DATA:

Kitces Research shows that segmentation improves advisor productivity by reducing time spent on non-ideal clients by 40%.



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WEALTH TRANSFER IS A \$105 TRILLION OPPORTUNITY

PRIMARY TREND:

Majority of firms now offer family education and legacy planning.

ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- Women are projected to control 2/3 of that wealth over the next decade.
- Firms investing in family meeting facilitation and values-based planning are seeing more cross-generational client retention.

INDUSTRY DATA:

Boston College's Center on Wealth and Philanthropy confirms \$84–\$105 trillion will be transferred by 2045, with 57% managed by Gen X and women.

10 STRATEGIC PLANNING IS A HIGH-PERFORMANCE MARKER

PRIMARY TREND:

91% of peer firms >\$5B AUM have strategic plans.

ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- Those with strategic plans track KPIs more rigorously and course-correct faster during downturns.
- Top firms revisit their plans quarterly—not annually—resulting in better execution and adaptability.

INDUSTRY DATA:

Bain & Company reports that firms who embed strategic plans into weekly operations are 60% more likely to achieve revenue goals.



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