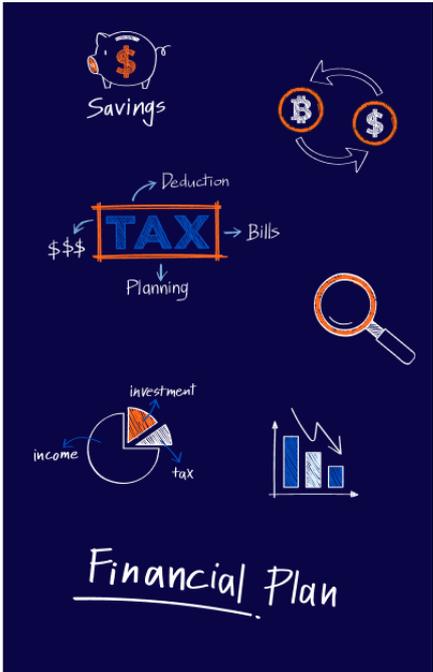


Advicent: Financial Planning to Improve Conversation between Advisors and their Clients



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- Site: www.advicentsolutions.com
- Key dates: Founded in 1969, acquired by Vista Equity Partners and rebranded in 2011
- Clients: Financial planners, RIAs, banks, financial institutions
- Value proposition: A SaaS platform for financial advice and planning
- The executive team: [Angela Pecoraro](#), CEO
[Anthony Stich](#), COO
[John Heinen](#), CTO
[Cory Woolf](#), CFO

Advicent provides a SaaS platform that helps advisors deliver their client experience strategies within financial planning services, including marketing communications and needs assessments. The company serves large enterprise institutions in Canada, the US, and the Netherlands. Advicent helps deliver millions of financial plans every year through its base of over 140,000 unique end users.

I spoke to Angela Pecoraro, CEO, and John Heinen, CTO, and learned some interesting insights about the company, its product, and the financial planning business.

Angela Pecoraro has been in the FinTech industry for over seventeen years. She started at a small startup business that provided software to large independent insurance brokers across the US. Later, Angela moved to the financial planning software sector and joined Advicent in 2011.

John Heinen used to work in the health care software space. His responsibilities included leading technology strategy, product management, product development, and business leadership. John has wide experience in software product transformations including evolving architecture, driving new capabilities into products, and setting up market strategy. He became the CTO of Advicent in January 2018.

The core of wealth management

For a long time, financial planning was a niche service provided by financial advisors to their high- and ultra-high-net-worth clients. However, financial planning services recently moved into the mass market and became an important part of the overall ecosystem.

“Financial planning definitely sits at the core within the wealth management space driving growth and differentiation for the [advisory] firms and helping them to create value across the markets that they serve.” –Angela

Angela is confident that financial planning solutions similar to that which Advicent offers have become a key part of the advisor toolbox. To ensure that advisors’ work is efficient, Advicent integrates with all the services their customers need:

“We can integrate with everything, from CRM systems in the front end, to the portfolio management, procurement, or fulfillment strategies on the back end. And those are the areas that we are continuing to build out in our catalog of those core integrations that we support.” –John

Today, Advicent is integrated with **Morningstar**, **Pershing**, **Albridge**, **Orion**, **Envestnet**, **Quovo**, and many more FinTech companies.

What makes Advicent stand out

Advicent’s customers are mostly enterprise institutions. For each customer, it’s important that all the services they use represent their brand, strategy, and workflow. John highlights that Advicent ensures their services fit every aspect of the business process utilized by every client institution.

Advicent provides enterprises with an API platform that enables them to leverage their financial planning tools while creating personalized front-end experiences.

Another value that Advicent brings to their customers is the robustness and sophistication of financial planning in terms of representing a detailed client’s financial situation, modelling the decision, and working out the strategy.

“We’ve got the depth of calculations, the depth of data representation—whether that’s bringing in third-party data and representing that information within a plan, or going deep in terms of tax considerations, asset allocation considerations, and other business or personal scenarios that they’re going to face as they’re thinking about their financial planning.” –John

Advisory firms and institutions might import unique data sets into the Advicent solution to leverage the calculation engine and create a unique perspective for that client’s financial plan. Angela adds that Advicent aims to be “the most accurate and reliable cash flow based solution and the most trusted financial planning provider.”

Product management

To create a product management strategy, Advicent has a special department that explores the market in the following areas:

- Understanding the current customers, their goals and objectives
- Learning industry trends and the role of financial planning within the ecosystem
- Looking for new tools and capabilities from a technology perspective such as data analytics, AI, and new technologies

“From there, we build a roadmap that looks forward in terms of the capability that we assess and create a regular cadence of software releases.” –John

John says that one of the most significant projects that Advicent is working on today is empowering advisors to better understand the impact of health care costs and factor it into the conversation between an advisor and their client.

“Another area where benchmarking is going to be very important is helping our enterprise customers understand how their advisors are performing to ensure that they can help their advisors achieve financial planning goals to the best of their ability, and presenting that information for the home office to understand.” –John

Software development

The software development team uses **Scrum** methodology. Every two weeks, they do retrospectives where they look at what is done, what isn't done, and how the work can be improved.

The QA team provides both automated and manual testing to ensure the high quality of pre-release software. Advicent releases beta software to monitor how real users understand new functionality:

“We look at a number of different measurements around our product roadmap delivery. How we keep ourselves accountable to the roadmaps that we set and how we accomplish that over time. We look at overall organization and team efficiency.” –John

Mission embedded in the corporate culture

Advicent's mission is to enable everyone to understand and impact their financial future. Angela points out that this mission is marked on every step from recruiting and hiring to onboarding and creating great team experience.

Every new employee goes through a weeklong training program where they learn all aspects of the company business and the work of each department.

“Coming out of that session, they have a full understanding of everything from finance, to sales, to product development, to support. They meet the organization, meet the leaders of each of those areas, [and] understand how they work.” –John

Advicent has a teaching strategy to enable the team to gain knowledge of both the financial and technology domains. This includes group presentations made by subject-

matter experts, discussions with industry experts, and customer panels. Employees also attend trade shows, technology summits, and other events where they can broaden their knowledge.

“Each year, we refine our rally cry to drive the direction of where we’re headed over the short term with that long term vision as our tailwind.” –Angela

During the “rally cry,” the team identifies three initiatives:

- What will improve the customer experience?
- What will improve the platform?
- What will drive the team experience?

According to Angela, the team is highly collaborative and passionate about the results they achieve. She is proud of their financial planning technologists. John mentions that the strong team of software architects ensures that the software architecture is relevant, and that they identify what technologies the company might take advantage of.

Angela is confident that every person in the team is a star who works hard to make sure that the whole team is performing well.

“The team dynamic is paramount, and we believe that no individual is more important than that team. Together, it’s the team that drives us for, and it’s the team that can deliver the financial plans all across the world.” –Angela

Challenges and future perspectives

Talking about the challenges that Advicent is expecting in the future evolution of its product, Angela mentions the three waves of financial planning:

1. At the first wave, the software was cash flow based and served mostly affluent clients.
2. The second wave was driven by goal-based financial planning technology. It focused on the goals of the investor, but the analysis, speed, and accuracy of the financial plans was limited.
3. Today, in the third wave of financial planning, there is a synthesis of the goal and cash flow based models; this approach spans the needs of the mass market.

Angela believes that the third wave makes financial planning a more collaborative process and improves conversation between the advisor and the client. This shift causes an intense competition among service providers that try to deliver better financial planning solutions aimed to help everyone.

“As we look forward to evolving our business and our platform, it will definitely involve a very strong analytic strategy that will allow us to arm the firms and advisors with information ahead of time to predict things that might come in order to put solutions in place more proactively for their clients.” –Angela

The bottom line

Advicent doesn't try to be another all-in-one solution. Instead, the company is heavily focused on one service—financial planning—and aims to refine it, make it competitive, and retain its value for financial advisors and their clients.



Written by *Vasyl Soloshchuk*, CEO and co-owner at [INSART](#), FinTech engineering company. Vasyl is also the author of [WealthTech Club](#), which conducts research into Fortune and Startup Robo-advisor and Wealth Management companies in terms of the technology ecosystem.