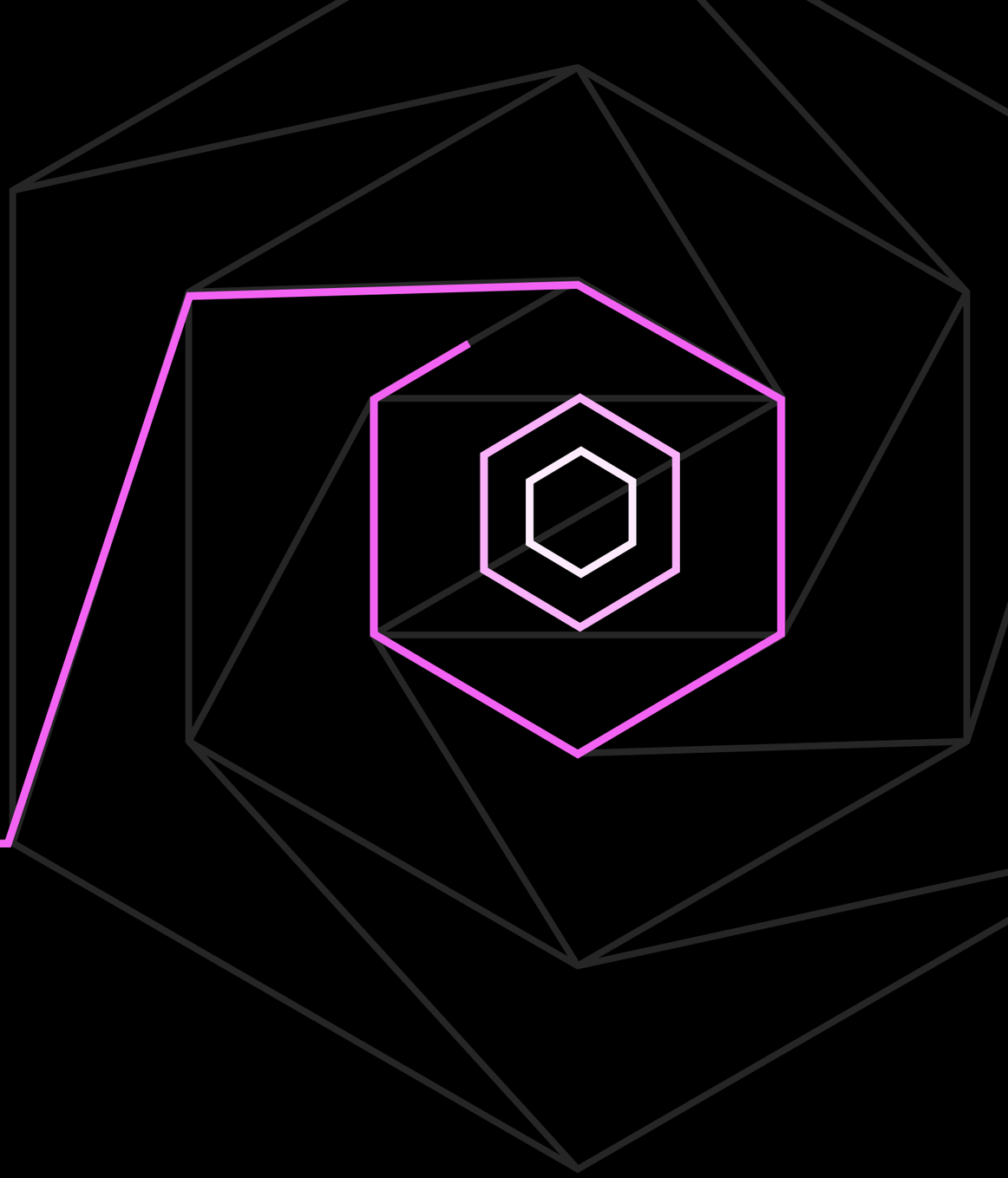
The M&A Positioning Playbook for RIAs

Position Your Firm for Premium Outcomes

Designed for RIAs under 2B AUM



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Acquirers Buy Signals, Not Just AUM

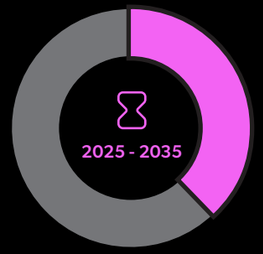
Acquirers evaluate far more than the assets on your balance sheet, they're assessing the strength, stability, and scalability of your entire enterprise. With RIA M&A activity hitting record highs, 148 transactions in just the first half of 2025, a 17% YoY increase—buyers are reviewing more firms than ever and moving quickly toward those that present a clear, low risk story.

A well-positioned RIA provides the signals buyers prioritize:

- Succession readiness, driven by demographic pressures as 38% of advisors approach retirement within the next decade.
- Institutional-level professionalism, matching the standards of strategic acquirers who executed 87% of all transactions in 2025.
- Operational clarity and marketing discipline, features common among top-performing RIAs who drive significantly stronger growth outcomes.

Strong positioning reduces the back-and-forth of diligence, lowers perceived integration risk, and elevates your firm into the group of targets buyers prioritize.

COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE TIMING

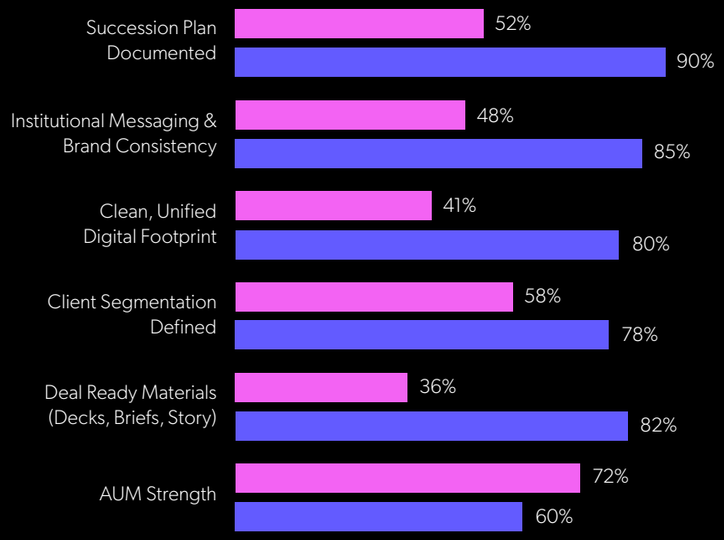


38%

of financial advisors plan to **retire within the next decade**, creating urgency around continuity and succession readiness

Data from sganalytics.com

SELLER READINESS GAPS



Seller Readiness
how many RIAs typically have each item documented, mature, or fully built

Buyer Expectation
the threshold most acquirers consider acceptable or ideal

Data DeVoe & Company — RIA M&A Outlook & Deal Book

> “Sellers taking a leisurely approach can leave a lot on the table… securing a premium valuation requires building real, transferable value.”

Brandon Kawal, Partner, Advisor Growth Strategies
(from the RIA Deal Room 2025 release)

Turn Your Firm's Strengths Into a Clear, Deal Ready Narrative

Great deals start long before diligence

Positioning defines how buyers perceive your firm, its purpose, its people, its future, and its strategic fit. A strong positioning and deal optics strategy turns your strengths into a compelling narrative that lowers perceived risk, boosts buyer confidence, and moves your firm to the top of the consideration list.

Why we exist

Buyers want to understand the purpose behind your firm—not just what you do, but why you do it. A clear origin and mission immediately establishes authenticity, cultural fit, and long-term vision.

When your mission is clearly articulated and visible across your website and other client facing materials, it clarifies the heart of your firm—helping buyers connect with your purpose and see the long term vision behind the business.

Niche authority

A defined niche signals focus, expertise, and predictable growth. Buyers favor firms with a target market they understand deeply and serve consistently, because it increases client loyalty and reduces integration risk.

Succession & continuity story

A strong succession and continuity story demonstrates that your firm is built for stability beyond any one individual. By showing how leadership transitions, client coverage, and service responsibilities are planned and supported, you signal long term security to both clients and acquirers. This clarity reduces perceived transition risk and reassures buyers that relationships and revenue will remain durable through the transaction.

Messaging architecture

A structured message framework sharpens how you communicate value across your website, decks, diligence conversations, and buyer meetings. When your messaging is aligned and intentional, it accelerates understanding and reduces friction in early-stage discussions.

Competitive positioning

Competitive clarity helps buyers quickly assess where you sit in the market, how you differentiate, and why you win. It frames your strengths in context, locally, regionally, and nationally—so buyers can easily see your fit within their platform or strategy.

Top-performing firms have an ideal client persona, a clear value proposition, and structured marketing and referral plans. These firms saw **85%** more new clients than others.

Schwab Benchmarking Study 2025

Institutional-Grade First Impressions

Your deck and website serve as the “front door” to your firm for buyers. The RIAs attracting the strongest interest are those that present a clear value story, a cohesive team narrative, and a professional digital experience comparable to established platforms.

What buyers look for:

- Visual clarity of your approach and service model
- Succession and continuity confidence
- Team maturity and specialization
- Consistent messaging across all digital surfaces

Strategic buyers gravitate toward firms that feel “integration ready.” With RIAs projecting **470+ total deals in 2026** surpassing all previous records, firms that can communicate value quickly stand out first.

WEAK VS STRONG POSITIONING

Weak	Strong
Buyer Response Rate: 24%	Buyer Response Rate: 57%
Time to LOI: 6.5 months	Time to LOI: 3.8 months
Valuation Range: 5.2X	Valuation Range: 6.8X

Better positioning can pay off...big

1.6X more

J.D. Power 2025 U.S. Wealth Management Digital Experience Study

Thought Leadership: Proof of Expertise & Market Fluency

Market commentary, investment philosophy materials, and category-specific insights help buyers evaluate your intellectual framework.

Growth-focused firms that demonstrate clear client segmentation, strong positioning, and structured plans saw twice the revenue growth and attracted 85% more new clients compared to other RIAs.

This type of clarity reinforces discipline and predictability, two top buyer priorities.

Digital Clean-Up: Reducing Friction in Diligence

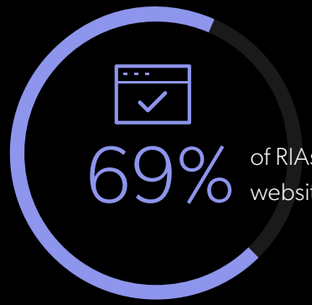
Buyers expect a firm's online footprint to reflect real operational maturity. Succession planning is at a breaking point, with two-thirds of RIA leaders citing it as a major issue and only 22% believing a successor could afford to buy them out. A modern and accurate digital presence helps remove uncertainty and speeds buyer confidence.

A clean footprint shows:

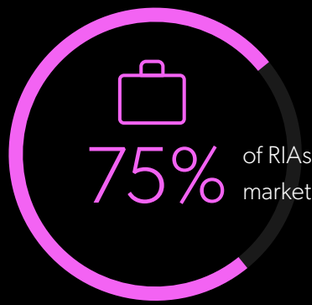
- Up-to-date leadership and bios with professional photos
- Accurate firm details across online directories
- De-cluttered search results
- Aligned messaging across platforms

These factors support smoother initial screens and evaluation stages.

DIGITAL CLEAN-UP IS HAPPENING



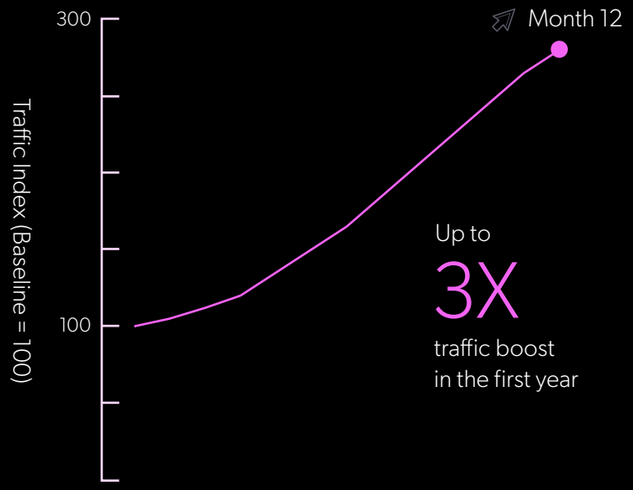
69% of RIAs updated their website in the past 2 years



75% of RIAs use digital marketing strategies

Data from gitnux market research

RE-LAUNCHED MODERN WEBSITE SEO IMPACT



Up to **3X** traffic boost in the first year

Based on aggregated industry benchmarks from: Ahrefs and HubSpot

Strong Positioning Isn't a Luxury, It's Leverage

Buyers move faster when your story is sharp, your materials are aligned, and your digital presence reflects the firm you truly are. Get an M&A Positioning Package and be deal-ready in as little as 3 months.

Schedule a 30-minute intro call

About the Author & Designer

Brian Burger has spent more than two decades helping financial and technology firms clarify their message, elevate their brand, and compete at the highest level. Fifteen years ago, he reshaped the marketing strategy of an RIA that ultimately positioned the firm for a successful sale, an experience that informs his modern approach to M&A-ready positioning for advisors today. Since then, Brian has worked with some of the top 300 investment firms in the United States as well as the top trust administration companies in the world, guiding them through branding, digital transformation, and growth-oriented communication. Brian and his wife, Kate, run their boutique consultancy together, supporting financial professionals with the brand clarity and marketing maturity they need to thrive. When he's not collaborating with clients, Brian can usually be found on the golf course with his family—trying to keep up with his kids' ever-improving swings.

PUSHINGINK

Pushingink is a two-person creative marketing agency built for fintech, SaaS, finance, and service-based brands that are tired of paying for layers they don't need. Strategy, brand, design, digital — they do it all, and you'll actually talk to the people doing the work.

www.pushingink.com

Sources:

J.D. Power (2025) — Investor digital experience expectations and UX factors | DeVoe & Company (2025–2026) — RIA succession gaps and M&A readiness insights | Schwab Advisor Services (2025) — Strategic planning, segmentation, and growth drivers among RIAs | Fidelity Investments (2024) — Operational and marketing gaps affecting RIA growth | Pew Research Center (2025) — U.S. smartphone ownership and mobile-dependence | StatCounter Global Stats (2026) — Global mobile share of web traffic | Shopify / Google (2024) — Page load time impact on bounce and abandonment | Google Search Central (2025) — Core Web Vitals performance thresholds