



## The rise of the investment counsellor

By John Koh

The private banker has always been the centre of attraction in the wealth management industry. Commonly-touted as their client's "trusted adviser", private bankers – and especially the highly-skilled and experienced ones – are in extremely short supply and courted by every major private bank and serious headhunter.

However, the recent trend in the industry seems to point to another group of professionals who are increasingly scrutinised under the radar screens of private banks and headhunters – investment counsellors (or investment advisers).

Banks are realising that their next-best bet in getting close to and engaging wealthy clients is through investment counsellors who wield considerable influence over the investment decisions of their clients. These professionals are likely to be highly-experienced investment analysts who are knowledgeable in the wide gamut of products and solutions.

Besides having the hard-core knowledge of investments and the markets, they also possess superb communications skills and the ability to give tip-top advice to their clients – resulting in extremely well-entrenched relationships with them.

So while the private banker might own the client relationships, it is really the investment counsellor who gets to drive the economic value of those relationships.

Not only do private bankers have sales targets, investment counsellors are increasingly given revenue targets on the products they advise.

Part of this new emphasis on the investment counsellor stems from the clients themselves. High net worth clients are known to be highly-sophisticated investors and many of them are naturally drawn to professionals whom they can look up to for investment advice.

This is even more so with the emergence of the ultra high net worth client segment, which is leading many major private banks to put together a separate core team of professionals to give focused attention to the needs of such key clients. Experienced investment counsellors with strong client advisory skills within the core team play a major role in listening to these clients, and then structuring innovative investment solutions to meet their needs.

Given such closely-linked relationships between the private banker and the investment counsellor with their clients, it is not surprising that the two roles sometimes overlap. Private bankers with strong investment skills and tired of chasing numbers are known to migrate to an investment counselling role, while the reverse could also happen with the sales-savvy investment counsellor progressing to become a private banker with high accountability on attracting new assets and revenue generation.

One thing's for sure – the role of the investment counsellor has definitely come of age and is blending beautifully within the wealth management industry. In a way, this phenomenon is a positive boost to an industry which has been pre-occupied for so long with private bankers. The rise of the investment counsellor has definitely provided an additional pool of credible talent to meet the sophisticated needs of clients.

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