

Broker/Dealers on Recruiting in a Virtual World

After the crisis abates, a lingering reluctance to travel, combined with better meeting technology, may forever alter the broker/dealer recruiting process.

As we continue to navigate our way through the COVID-19 pandemic, airline travel is increasingly being viewed as flying in an aluminum petri dish.

Broker/dealers still wanting to recruit financial advisors are learning to adapt by evolving the home office visit—an almost mandatory step in the recruiting process, where face-to-face meetings and a fair amount of socializing help “humanize” the potential professional home for prospects—to a virtual experience.

Our firm has always encouraged advisors to do home office visits as part of their due diligence. Meeting face to face and having a meal with those you will be partnering up with gives you a more intimate perspective than what you get over the phone or on a computer. This experience won't go away, but when the lights come back on in a post-pandemic world, we may see a lasting uptick of those choosing to save the time and exposure by opting for a virtual experience.

We asked some of our broker/dealer contacts, representing various sizes and types, what they thought of the new virtual home office visit option. Here's a summary of their feedback:

- “We have already done several Zoom ‘virtual’ visits. They are very helpful in conveying content and subject matter expertise but less so in giving a prospective advisor a sense of culture or pulse that comes from visiting our home office. When and if the virus situation stabilizes to where we can have home office visits again, we will suggest to prospective advisors that this is the clearest way to truly get a sense of our firm, tools and humanity. For now, we are also smart enough to leverage elements of a new normal to share our firm in a world where folks may be less inclined to do business travel if they don't have to.”
- “We are doing home office visits via Zoom for now and are having good success. While meeting in person is best, in some ways, the virtual visit is better because it means less time out of the office and you can still connect and see each other and have all the conversations you would otherwise have in person. Our home office visits have typically been set up so that each department head has an opportunity to go over all the specific details pertinent to that department with the recruit (i.e. operations, investments, practice management, sales, marketing, transition, compliance, etc.), and they would all get done in one day.

With the virtual visits, we're doing one to two departments per day, spread out over seven to 10 days, which is actually good as it gives the recruit the time to reflect and take in the information at a deeper level. Going forward, we see the virtual home office visit as a viable option, although, obviously, we would want to have face-to-face, but we're finding that it's not necessary to actually get the deal done.”

- “No formal plans as of yet, but we would certainly be open to virtual home office visits. We have been utilizing Zoom for our technology demos, and we would assume that would grow into potential virtual meetings in lieu of a home office visit. We would see this as a temporary fill-in for home office visits.”
- “We've always been able to host virtual home office visits and we do think that recent events will make these more popular. However, there is no substitute for face-to-face meetings, where advisors and home office associates can get a better ‘feel’ for each other and the potential relationship.”
- “I think it is too early to tell if this is going to change the home-office-visit process. Obviously, if someone wanted to do a Zoom meeting, we would accommodate them. However, nothing beats a face-to-face meeting, going to dinner and breaking bread with a prospect and having that prospect see the building and experience the culture of our home office.”

In his April 2, 2020, *Forbes* article, “**When Will Aviation Return to Pre-Coronavirus Levels?**” author James Asquith wrote, “The quick answer to this question is, unfortunately, not for a very long time. The recovery in demand will be long and slow.”

Asquith also notes, “Some analysts are predicting and even hoping that aviation and travel will bounce back stronger than ever once travel restrictions ease. The major concern is that the economy has been so badly impacted that demand simply will not be at the level it previously was, for the foreseeable future.”

Today, we have technology tools like Zoom, which we didn't have back in the Great Recession of 2008. However, we are dealing with something much different in the current crisis: Crowds and confined spaces—such as airplanes and cruise ships—are now taboo. The changes will have a lasting impact.

Our “normalcy bias” has tended to favor a V-shaped recovery in anticipation of a day, coming soon, when everything—the economy, our habits and routines—return to their pre-crisis state, as if the coronavirus-inspired “pause” never happened. But faith in that belief is beginning to feel a lot more fragile.

Recruiting and the war for talent will continue, but the way it is done may be forever altered.