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CANADA'S NEWSPAPER FOR FINANCIAL ADVISORS

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PAUL LAWRENCE

Ed Rempel, an advisor with Armstrong & Quaille Associates Inc. in Brampton, Ont., is committed to financial education. Six years ago, the avid Toronto Argonauts fan had noticed that most financial blogs revealed lack of expertise. So, he launched a blog of his own, with the aim of promoting financial literacy among his clients and the blog's online audience. "I've always been a finance guy," Rempel says, "not a sales guy." See page B16.

REGULATION

Building stronger relationships

Implementation of the just approved CRM will take several years

BY JAMES LANGTON

WITH THE APPROVAL OF A new set of rules designed to transform the client/financial advisor relationship, an important regulatory reform marathon is near an end.

Now, the hard work begins.

More than 10 years in the making, the so-called "client relation-

ship model" for investment dealers has finally been given the green light by the **Canadian Securities Administrators**. In late March, the CSA granted approval for the **Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada's** version of the CRM rules, which will be implemented over the next couple of years. (The mutual fund dealer version was approved in December 2010.)

The CRM initiative, which has its roots in the development of the fair-dealing model of the **Ontario Securities Commission** (a pro-

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ACCOUNTING

Standing united?

BY RUDY MEZZETTA

THE NATIONAL BODIES GOVERNING Canada's three major accounting designations are getting closer to merging, determined to unite the country's accountants and eliminate the confusion clients have about the profession.

A unified industry, national accounting leaders argue, will create a stronger, more transparent profession that will provide greater value to businesses and better serve the public interest.

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FIERA SCEPTRE

Ambition writ large

BY CATHERINE HARRIS

WITH THE RECENT ACQUISITION of **Natcan Investment Management Inc.**, National Bank of Canada's asset-management subsidiary, Montreal-based **Fiera Sceptre Inc.**, is more than halfway toward reaching its goal of more than \$100 billion in assets under management in five years.

In fact, the \$309.5-million acquisition of Montreal-based Natcan, which closes April 1, almost doubles Fiera's AUM to \$54

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HORIZONS
EXCHANGE TRADED FUNDS

Financial literacy, the web way

Ed Rempel started blogging as a way to increase financial literacy. That's still his main purpose, but his large online following also has expanded his financial planning practice and reduced time spent on conventional marketing strategies

BY MEGAN HARMAN

WHEN ED REMPEL BECAME A FINANCIAL planner, he embraced the opportunity to help his clients with their finances. But he wanted to help more people — many more. A few years ago, Rempel decided to harness the potential of the blogosphere; sure enough, he found thousands of people looking for just the kind of financial education that Rempel was keen to provide.

Since then, Rempel — a financial planner in Brampton, Ont., with **Armstrong & Quaille Associates Inc.** — has built a reputation as a financial blogger. And more recently, he has begun producing video blog posts as another medium for communicating with his online audience.

These pursuits began as an activity Rempel had enjoyed in his spare time, when the passionate football fan wasn't cheering on the Toronto Argonauts of the Canadian Football League. But blogging has become a business-building strategy that has paid off. In the past, most of Rempel's new clients came from local seminars and referrals. Now, almost all of his new clients are generated from his widely read, in-depth, online articles.

"Initially, it was just kind of fun," says Rempel, 53. "But now, we actually find we get quite a few clients from [the blog]. People are coming to us, and they're from right across Canada. So, we actually rarely do a seminar anymore."

After about 20 years working as an accountant, Rempel, a certified management accountant, decided to make a career change and began pursuing his certified financial planner designation. He launched a financial planning practice under the banner of Ed Rempel & Associates in 1994, shortly after moving to the Toronto area from his hometown of Winnipeg.

Although the sales aspect of Rempel's new business didn't particularly appeal to him, he thoroughly enjoyed the planning side. He quickly found a niche producing comprehensive written financial plans for clients. "People are used to financial planners being salespeople," he says. "I've always been a finance guy; not a sales guy. So, when I got into planning, that was always the focus for me — comprehensive planning, as opposed to investment sales."

Since Rempel began his financial planning practice, he has built up a roster of more than 600 clients and roughly \$55 million in assets under management. And blogging has been a key contributor to that growth.

Rempel first became aware of the blogging world about six years ago, when he began reading financial blogs. Discovering a lack of financial expertise among many bloggers and their audiences, Rempel began actively posting comments and answering questions. Notes Rempel: "I noticed a lot of the knowledge level was actually very low."

Rempel's comments were well received by blog readers and posters. Before long, he was approached by the operator of a popular Canadian finance blog called *Million Dollar Journey*, who asked him to become a regular contributor. Ever since, Rempel has been contributing articles to the blog, which has about 14,000 subscribers.

The goal of Rempel's articles is to educate



PHOTO: PAUL LAWRENCE

Ed Rempel, a financial advisor with Armstrong & Quaille Associates Inc., is now using videos to spread financial literacy to a broad audience via the web. Rempel, an avid Toronto Argonauts fan, says his focus has always been on "comprehensive planning, as opposed to investment sales."

readers on investing strategies. However, Rempel also often includes controversial elements — he says he likes to spark debate among readers. "Most of what I write about is what I believe actually works," Rempel explains. "But usually it's different from the conventional wisdom of what most people actually believe. Being deliberately somewhat controversial helps."

One of the main reasons Rempel's arti-

“With a lot of things on the Internet, you have to try them for a while, and then give them some time”

cles have been popular, he says, is that they're purely educational, not sales-oriented. In order to build credibility in the blog world, Rempel adds, it's critical to avoid giving the impression that you're trying to sell a product or service. "The blog community is hypersensitive to people trying to sell to them," he says. "As soon as you have even a hint of sales, they will block you out."

Even though the blog's articles don't sell

Rempel's services directly, they've prompted many people to contact Rempel about his services. But it took a couple years for that to start to happen. "It takes quite a commitment and a while to get known," Rempel says. "You have to go [online] and make that time commitment, and let [readers] get to know you and trust you."

Since Rempel's articles tend to be lengthy and technical, they typically appeal to readers with some foundation of financial knowledge. For instance, Rempel has blogged about such topics as the relationship between economic growth and stock markets, as well as asset-allocation strategies such as life-cycle investing.

Rempel's foray into video earlier this year is an attempt to appeal to an even broader online audience looking for financial material that is more accessible. "A lot of the feedback that I get on my articles," he says, "is that they're way too long and too technical. So, I thought, 'Let's try something to reach less technical people.' A lot of people would watch a three- or four-minute video who wouldn't read a 2,000-word financial article."

Rempel also hopes that the videos will help build further trust among his existing followers: "Because this whole business is all based on trust, people have to get to know you. And, if they can see you, then there's a different level of trust, as opposed to just reading an article by someone."

Producing videos is much more costly than writing articles, especially as Rempel has hired someone to produce the videos professionally. Rempel has recorded six videos, and plans to run one per month over the next six months. He will then evaluate how well the videos have been received, then decide whether to continue with them. "With a lot of things on the Internet, you have to try them for a while, and then give them some time," Rempel says. "What we're doing is a lot of trial and error."

Rempel hopes the videos will generate some new leads. But, based on his experience with blogging, he expects that will take time: "You can't expect instant results."

Blogging is a time-consuming pursuit. In addition to the time spent writing articles, producing videos and following the necessary compliance procedures, Rempel says, it's important to monitor and respond to questions and comments in the weeks after he posts new blog content.

Rempel has built a team of six who work with him at his practice — including two other financial planners — so he is able to focus more of his own time on his online pursuits. Among the members of Rempel's team is his wife, Ann Hetram, a life coach who sits in on client meetings to help build rapport. Other team members include a mortgage specialist and administrator, a marketing director and an insurance expert.

When Rempel is not reading or writing about finance, he spends his spare time singing in a tenor group, travelling, exercising and of course — watching football. **IE**