

CASE STUDY

How Plan First Wealth Moved \$39M and 90% of its US Client Base to Betterment in 30 Days

Frustrated by their custodian's clunky user experience and lack of tax optimization tools, Plan First Wealth moved nearly its entire US book to Betterment Advisor Solutions. With support from our Advisor Implementation Team, they transitioned all clients in just two months—seamlessly and without any disruption to their business.

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QUICK FACTS



Founded
2018

Headquarters
Greenwich, CT

About the company

Plan First Wealth is a US/UK wealth management firm helping successful Americans and British expats make the most of their opportunity.



Pain Points

Poor client experience

Clients complained about difficulty logging in with their old custodian and found that the user experience was outdated

Difficult account opening

It was a “heavy lift” to get clients onboarded, with a lot of information needing to be collected by the advisor, outside of the digital user experience.

Automated tax tooling

While tax-loss harvesting was technically possible with their custodian, it required an excessive amount of spreadsheets and manual effort.

Challenge

Plan First Wealth held a few clients’ assets with Betterment Advisor Solutions, but the majority of their clients were with another custodian. Clients, however, found their experience to be cumbersome to use and outdated. Similarly, onboarding new clients proved time consuming for both the advisor and the client.

Service with this custodian was often slow and there were many tools that they felt like they didn’t have. Things like tax-loss harvesting were labor-intensive. “We didn’t have the manpower to do something like that ourselves,” said Martha Kern, Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) & Chief Operations Officer (COO).

She said that being able to automate things like rebalancing, tax-loss harvesting, and asset allocation would be a major uplevel to their operations. “If we

could hand that off to somebody else and know that it was happening,” and “after 30 or 40 years, it can provide a difference in that rate of return for our clients,” said Martha.

So, Plan First Wealth made the choice to move the rest of their US client base’s assets over to Betterment Advisor Solutions, who had the features, service, and user experience they were looking for. But the team was concerned about the work it would take to move clients over, and the potentially negative client response to that change.

“The idea of repapering nearly an entire book of business from one custodian to another seemed a bit overwhelming,” said Martha.

Solution

Our Transition Services Team connected Martha with two specialists to ensure a seamless move, assisting with everything from client communications to establishing an implementation strategy. Together with our Advisor Implementation Manager and Head of Advisor Implementation, Martha developed a clear, actionable plan to guide every step of the transition.

“We spent a lot of time upfront coming up with the plan, timeline, and communication,” said Martha. “I was convinced we were going to have to meet with every client, but it was way easier than I thought.”

Building trust with the Betterment Advisor Solutions Team

Once Plan First Wealth made the decision to make the full transition, Betterment Advisor Solutions assembled a team to work as a dedicated extension of their firm. John Wittig, Head of Advisor Implementation, served as Martha’s account manager, and Andy Nottingham, Advisor Implementation Manager, serviced the more technical side of the transition.

“I felt like we were aligned in terms of the way we approach process, data, and when urgency was required or when it was not. I’d be thrilled to be in a workplace with John and Andy, which is kind of like what we were doing during those six months,” said

Martha. “You don’t always know what you’re going to get when you make a transition or a migration with a vendor and I was not expecting it to be this good.”

Martha praised the proactive approach the Betterment Advisor Solutions Team took in ensuring that every detail was addressed throughout the process.

“I was never worried that a question wasn’t going to get answered, or that I wasn’t going to get some sort of timely response,” she said. “This only worked because of the advisor support that was committed to getting us through it.”

Establishing an implementation plan

Building a well-crafted plan was key to the successful transition. For example, gathering client data and getting it all into the best format is typically one of the bigger challenges, but together, the Betterment Advisor Solutions and Plan First Wealth Teams put together a plan to ensure that it wouldn’t be a stumbling block.


Martha gathered what they had in spreadsheets or what they could access via their previous custodian. Then, she and the Betterment Team coordinated through shared spreadsheets and a hands-on, iterative process.


“Our clients on Betterment are now getting more and better investment management than we were able to provide by ourselves.”


Martha Kern
Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) &
Chief Operations Officer (COO)





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FIRST WEALTH


Summary

401(k)s

Portfolios

Clients

Co-pilot

Reports

Clients

ClientsActivityDraft invitations

All clientsPrimary clientsSecondary clients

Date range

Past month

Clients

All clients

Account type

All accounts

Transactions

All transactions

[Export CSV](#)

Date	Client	Account	Description	
Jan 23, 2023	Angel Herwitz	General Investing Individual taxable	Deposit	+\$

Certain edge cases were also discussed during the planning phase in order to anticipate any challenges before they became too disruptive. "I don't think it could have been better," said Martha. "The Betterment team proposed and implemented the best solutions for the weirdness that we were dealing with."

What started as a daunting project quickly felt doable with a collaborative, well-thought-out plan.

"It wasn't overwhelming," she continued. "And if there was any confusion, you cleared it up."

Collaborating on a communication plan

One notable benefit that Martha felt Betterment Advisor Solutions brought to the table was expertise on how to communicate the transition to clients. She was worried about getting pushback, such as questions about the decision, or clients feeling uneasy about what this change could mean for their money.

"The biggest lesson through this entire transition was when Andy said, *don't make it look like a problem if it's not a problem*. He reminded me that if someone has a question or issue, they'll bring it up. And when you approach your communications plan like that, it's going to be a lot smoother than you expect it to be."

With that in mind, they put together a communications plan to inform clients about the switch that was direct and easy-to-understand. They started with Betterment's existing, tested client announcement

template and worked together to adjust the language to meet Plan First Wealth's individual needs.

"The emails said, this is what we're doing. This is what your fee is. This is what's changing. This is what's not changing," said Martha. "In the end, everything Andy said was absolutely true. It was just a matter of communicating directly."

And when issues did arise, Martha felt fully supported.

"The time that we spent upfront getting ready, like gathering data, talking about the communication plan meant that when something did surprise...I was completely comfortable being like, *hey, guys, we've got a client question and I need your help on this*. I trusted the team and we built that upfront so that when things got slightly sticky, it was really easy to come to them for help."

Ensuring efficient investment transfers

Martha and team needed to reassure clients—some of whom had been burned by ACATs that realized major tax implications in the past with previous advisors—that asset transfers with Betterment Advisor Solutions would be as tax-efficient as possible. Plus, they wanted to ensure that clients wouldn't feel the burden of the firm's transition. With Betterment, the process was "fairly seamless," she said.

The team used data gathered in the implementation plan to kick off the 120+ account invitations and corresponding transfer requests. These invitations

were pre-filled with all client information and allowed clients to open their accounts and authorize transfers through an entirely digital and paperless experience. Clients then authorized the moving of the assets via ACAT transfers using the same digital authorization experience. All along the way, Martha was kept up to date on her clients' activities using a mutual project tracker, and Betterment sent nudges to any clients who stalled in the process to keep them on track.

Once moved, Plan First Wealth advisors could begin managing their clients utilizing the tax-smart transition functionality.

"The idea of tax transitioning accounts was really attractive because we didn't have a good system on our old custodian," said Martha. "We even brought over clients that still had unrealized gains from when they ACAT-ed to us five years ago because we didn't have a good way to systematically get them moved over."

"With Betterment Advisor Solutions," she continued, "I can start the workflow and get the tax quote. I click rebalance now. I can get long-term and short-term and say, alright, if we turned it on, these are the long-term gains that would be realized instantly."

The Impact

Gained a trusted partner

Following the transition, Martha now feels that she has an extension of her team at Betterment to ensure Plan First Wealth's long-term success.

Removal of onboarding barriers

Martha says she can get clients fully set up in as little as 20 minutes. "It's remarkably less of a lift."

Automated tax efficiency

With Betterment Advisor Solutions, Martha can offer automated tax benefits to her clients for the first time.

20 minutes

Time that Plan First Wealth says it takes to get a client fully set up on the Betterment Advisor Solutions platform

60 days

Time spent transitioning and repapering nearly 120 accounts

90%

Client accounts opened in the first 30 days

\$39M

Assets transferred in the first 30 days



Ready to take the next step? [Learn more.](#)

Betterment LLC
450 W 33rd, Floor 11 New York, NY 10001
transitions@bettermentadvisorsolutions.com

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