

2006 Best-in-Business Award Winner

Plante Moran Financial Advisors Michigan, Illinois, Ohio

Plante Moran Financial Advisors is an independent wealth management firm and affiliate of Plante & Moran, PLLC, one of the nation's largest accounting and business advisory firms. The firm's Wheel of Progress, a philosophy created by Plante & Moran founder Frank Moran in the 1950s, represents a continuous focus on developing high-quality staff, who effectively serves clients, who make possible growth and reinvestment in the firm.

"Our foundation is serving clients well and developing high-quality staff," says Plante Moran Financial Advisors president Bob Palmer. This commitment to staff development is a significant reason why Plante & Moran has been named to *Fortune* Magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work for in America" for the past eight consecutive years.

The wheel started turning for Plante Moran Financial Advisors 30 years ago, when Plante & Moran recognized a need to help its business owner clients with their personal financial planning needs. Today, its advisors have a presence in 12 of Plante & Moran's 18 offices, which boast 1,500 professionals throughout Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois as well as in Nashville, Tenn. and Shanghai, China.

"Clients think of us as one firm, and that has been a major reason for our success," Palmer says. "We are able to address a variety of client needs with customized solutions. Plante Moran Financial Advisors was born out of our parent firm's desire to serve the holistic needs of their clients beyond audit and tax."

Plante Moran Financial Advisors serves as an advisor to high-net-worth individuals, family business owners and corporate retirement plans. With assets under supervision exceeding \$4 billion, Plante Moran Financial Advisors has more than 100 staff members serving more than 1,100 individuals and organizations. The firm's success has centered on three key areas: the relentless pursuit of exceptional client service, a sophisticated approach to staff development, and carefully managed growth.

More than an Advisor

"We want our clients to think of us as their personal CFO," says Palmer. "We understand their long-term goals and objectives and build a comprehensive plan to achieve them rather than merely executing investment decisions."

With a holistic suite of services that goes beyond merely gathering assets and managing money, the firm customizes its offering to each client's needs and goals, bringing resources such as a 10-person, in-house research team and best-in-class technology.

Every client relationship begins with a five-step process that includes understanding client goals and analyzing their current situation, asset allocation, the creation of a formalized investment policy, implementation, and ongoing advice and monitoring, all designed to focus on a long-term approach and remove the potential emotional distractions of investment decision-making.

Tuned in to Client Needs

Plante Moran Financial Advisors has proven its commitment to client advocacy through innovative core service offerings. Both Plante Moran Trust and Plante Moran Insurance Agency were developed after clients expressed a need for these additional services. Plante Moran Trust began in 2002 and Plante Moran Insurance Agency in 2003.

The firm also offers 100 percent cost disclosure and allows clients to maintain relationships with other investment advisors.

“When we focus on clients’ interests first, they see that, and they want our help when other advisors are involved,” Palmer says. “We do not want to be an asset gatherer – if our clients’ goals can be achieved with other managers or brokers involved, that’s fine with us.”

Commitment to Staff Development

Five years ago, Plante Moran Financial Advisors had a team of 40, long-standing professionals. The pace of growth was manageable and it was easy to provide one-on-one training. “As we started to add staff at a more rapid pace and convert to a specialist model for operations, research, client service, compliance and marketing, we wanted to ensure we provided high-quality, consistent training across the board,” Palmer said.

Developing a formalized training program became a priority. Today, Plante Moran Financial Advisors Boot Camp, a week-long program, familiarizes new staff with the firm and its capabilities. Later they participate in Planner Academy, a two-year program with quarterly sessions that take staff through eight levels of technical and non-technical training.

“In the early levels, the staff learns the fundamentals of investment management, estate planning and our investment philosophy,” Palmer says. “Later on, we train in areas such as client service, communications, staff development, and, ultimately, how to manage a practice. Every professional has their own Planner Academy advisor within the firm who leads them through the training process.”

New professionals to Plante Moran Financial Advisors are also assigned to a team and have a non-Partner buddy who helps them learn their way around and manage day-to-day work.

Working Towards a Common Goal

Plante Moran Financial Advisors maintains a true “all hands on deck” philosophy; staff is rewarded for helping the group achieve its goals, as opposed to tying compensation directly to revenue-generation. The firm has also made a commitment to business continuity, with 12 partners, averaging more than 15 years at the firm; eight were made partners in the last 10 years.

“We are a large group of very caring individuals aligned toward one goal,” Palmer adds. “We have formed very personal relationships with our clients, and this is supported by a non-competitive environment where we do everything we can to serve our clients to the best of the firm’s ability.”

Managing for the Future

In the last five years, Plante Moran Financial Advisors’ average revenue growth has been more than 30 percent. This has been very deliberate and controlled, because the firm is committed to growing only as fast as its ability to continuously serve its clients at the highest level. The result is extremely low client turnover – less than one percent over the last five years.

From the capabilities it brings to clients, to the team it has developed and retained, Plante Moran Financial Advisors has positioned itself as a true standout in business management and client services.

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