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RiA Match

By David Drucker

Are you contemplating selling your firm? Or maybe you want to buy a firm, merge a firm, or simply add employees? There's an app for that!

RIA Match (www.riamatch.com) was developed to assist you in these endeavors by RIA Match founder and CEO Mary Ann Buchanan (<http://www.linkedin.com/in/maryannbuchanan>). Buchanan has over 25 years in the financial services industry working as a business development executive and recruiter, as well as growing a national presence for an independent broker dealer and RIA.

RIA Match isn't a brokerage solution but, as the name suggests, a matching service. Advisors anonymously advertise their desire to buy, sell, merge or add employees to their firm on RIA Match. They can then trade information until they are certain they have a good match, at which point they can divulge their identities and carry on with negotiations.

Let's walk through the RIA Match setup and implementation processes to give you a better idea of how it works. The first thing the user does is set up a profile. This involves answering questions about search objectives (buy, sell, merge, add), personal information, practice information, client composition, services offered, custodians and technology, philosophy and culture, and match objectives. All together, it might take you 15-30 minutes to complete all of the questions.

As a test case, I created a profile representing myself as I was (and as my practice was) ten years ago right before I sold the practice, and indicated I was looking for a buyer for my practice. At that point, it's a matter of following the tabs in RIA Match to find what you're looking for.



The first tab is My Dashboard and it's purpose is to consolidate in one place many of the features of RIA Match, including "My Library," a section of articles on succession planning; "New Additions," a section of news about RIA Match; "Recommended Insights," which offers a couple of articles on Breakaway Brokers and on Valuation; "In the RiA Match Store,"



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a section of tools like a self-assessment checklist for expanding one's practice, and booster packs for contacting more RIA Match members than one's subscription plan normally allows. Also on the Dashboard are links to one's match profile for purposes of editing or previewing the profile and making changes as necessary. Also there is a listing of recent activity in your account. And, finally, the Dashboard contains a "Ask Our Panel" section in which the user can ask questions of experts like Mary Ann Buchanan herself, or David Devoe (Schwab's ex-Managing Director of Strategic Business Development) or Beverly Flaxington (founder of Advisors Trust Advisor offering practice management resources to advisors) or Corey Kupfer (a member of the Hamburger Law Firm and Chief Strategist at MarketCounsel, a compliance consulting firm).

The Knowledge & Insight tab in RIA Match leads the user to all the articles referenced on the Dashboard, new blog posts, new reviews of books on subjects pertinent to users of RIA Match, and Recent Q&A Topics.

The My Match tab is where it all comes together. RIA Match takes all of the user's responses to profile questions and creates a table of potential matches:

▼ Date Added	Profile #	Description	Location	Distance	Match Quality	My Ranking	Status
11/23/2012	713386	Early Ensemble Firm	Metropolitan San Francisco, CA	869	●●●●●		
11/20/2012	377315	Mature Solo Practitioner	Baltimore, MD-Metropolitan DC	1639	●●●●●		
11/18/2012	546309	Early Ensemble Firm	Nashville, TN	1112	●●●●●	★★★★★	
11/16/2012	614120	Mature Solo Practitioner	Metropolitan Chicago, IL	1091	●●●●●		
11/15/2012	528657	Mature Solo Practitioner	Connecticut	1844	●●●●●		
11/15/2012	855873	Mature Solo Practitioner	Western Connecticut	1837	●●●●●		
11/07/2012	217960	Mature Solo Practitioner	Orange County, CA	646	●●●●●		
11/06/2012	285607	Mature Solo Practitioner	Baltimore, MD-Metropolitan DC	1665	●●●●●	★★★★★	
10/31/2012	233404	Early Solo Practitioner	Albany, NY	1820	●●●●●		
10/30/2012	777288	Early Ensemble Firm	Cincinnati, OH	1254	●●●●●		

Other RIA Match users are ranked as to the quality of the their match with you using a star system. Unfortunately, in the example above, most of the matches are rated with five stars and, while they may be good matches from many standpoints, this list of firms doesn't include anyone closer to me than 646 miles (Orange County, CA). If I want to see five-star firms that are closer to me geographically, I click on the "Distance" tab at the top of the match list and reorder all 61 of my potential matches in order of proximity. Then I get this list:

Date Added	Profile #	Description	Location	Distance	Match Quality	My Ranking	Status
10/05/2012	924966	Early Ensemble Firm	Denver, CO	325	●●●●●		
10/29/2012	830567	Early Ensemble Firm	Denver, CO	326	●●●●●		
09/22/2012	192565	Early Ensemble Firm	Denver, CO	329	●●●●●		
10/24/2012	184857	Mature Solo Practitioner	Nashville, TN	544	●●●●		
10/06/2012	908875	Early Solo Practitioner	Dallas-Fort Worth, TX	581	●●●		
09/23/2012	800381	Mature Solo Practitioner	San Antonio, TX	602	●●●●		
11/07/2012	217960	Mature Solo Practitioner	Orange County, CA	646	●●●●●		
09/27/2012	607711	Early Solo Practitioner	Metropolitan Los Angeles, CA	690	●●●		
09/21/2012	373558	Early Solo Practitioner	Metropolitan Los Angeles, CA	707	●●●●●		
09/27/2012	815520	Early Ensemble Firm	Houston, TX	745	●●●●●		

In the list above, we get the top ten firms in order of proximity. Since the desire to sell the firm to another RIA in the same geographic vicinity is paramount, the user can then look at the other criteria in the list and determine where to start.

In this list, we see that the first three matches are all in Denver, CO which is not too far from Albuquerque, NM (325 miles) and all three are classified as "Early Ensemble Firms." These may or may not be good matches; a lot depends on the level of experience these firm owners have and whether they are looking to buy a firm.

Clicking the profile number for the first Early Ensemble Firm, we learn that its own search objectives include "I want to join an existing RIA" and "I want to form my own RIA." The advisor has 5-9 years of experience, which is possibly adequate to take over my business, but the objectives don't match up well. I would ideally like to sell my practice to an advisor who already has his own RIA.

Looking at the second profile (also Early Ensemble Firm), we find a better match. This profile indicates one of the objectives as "I want to buy a practice," in addition to "I want to merge our practice" and "I want to add advisors to our existing practice." This profile indicates the advisor is looking to grow his practice a number of ways, including a possible purchase of my firm.

Going down the list of this profile's attributes, I see that his firm is fee-only like mine -- another sign of compatibility. However, when we look at Personal Information, we see the advisor has only 1-4 years of experience... not enough for my taste.

Looking at the third profile, we see the same set of attributes. In other words, the advisor has the right type of firm and wants to buy a practice, but doesn't have the experience.

Within each of these profiles is a "My Rating" section where I can indicate that I looked at the profile and determined it to be suitable or not. I can then apply my own rating (different from the RIA Match star rating) by clicking on the number of stars I want to award to the profile.

It's not until we get to profile # 800381 in San Antonio, TX that we find an

ideal match. This advisor is mature (age range 31-40 with 10+ years in the business), he or she has a fee-only firm in an adjoining state, and has indicated he wants to buy a practice. Of course, we want to check out the other sections of his profile, as well. Client Composition, Services Offered, Custodians and Technology and Philosophy and Culture must all match up or at least indicate the possibility of success if the sale were to proceed.

Now, how do I begin a negotiation with him? There are two ways to go about it: showing an "Indication of Interest" or sending a message to the person/profile of interest. On each profile's attributes listing is a box offering these two opportunities:

Mature Solo Practitioner, San Antonio, TX Area

Profile #: 800381
 Membership Level: Personal
 Last Login : 11/16/12, 06:22 AM

Quality of Match

Search Objectives

- I want to buy a practice.
- I want to merge our practice.
- I want to add advisors to our existing practice.

Profile Contents

- Search Objectives
- Personal Information
- Practice Information
- Client Composition
- Services
- Custodians & Technology
- Philosophy & Culture

my rating

★★★★★

toolbox

- Respond to an Indication of Interest
- Send a Message
- Add to Match List
- View/Edit Notes
- Print Profile
- Share Profile

You'll see on the right panel of the exhibit above the "Toolbox" which offers "Respond to an Indication of Interest" and "Send a Message." That means this profile/advisor has already seen my listing on RIA Match and is interested in speaking with me. If there has been no contact between me and him thus far, the Toolbox would read "Send an Indication of Interest."

My Messages

Members Contacted: 1 | Contacts Remaining: 34 (5 from BP)
 What counts as a contact? | Purchase additional contacts
 Your subscription will automatically renew on 12/03/2012

INBOX			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profile #830567	You have received an indication of interest from this profile. Send them one back if you like their profile.	November 12
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profile #497459	developers test	November 9
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profile #411310	You have received an indication of interest from this profile. Send them one back if you like their profile.	November 5
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profile #109992	This profile responded to your indication of interest with one of their own. They like your profile! Send them an email to start a dialogue!	October 26
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profile #472121	You have received an indication of interest from this profile. Send them one back if you like their profile.	October 24
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profile #415775	You have received an indication of interest from this profile. Send them one back if you like their profile.	October 4
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profile #800381	You have received an indication of interest from this profile. Send them one back if you like their profile.	September 30
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profile #502827	You have received an indication of interest from this profile. Send them one back if you like their profile.	September 29
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profile #456960	You have received an indication of interest from this profile. Send them one back if you like their profile.	September 25
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profile #831003	You have received an indication of interest from this profile. Send them one back if you like their profile.	September 21

Bottom line... an Indication of Interest is analogous to "poking" someone on Facebook. It's simply to get the attention of the other party and have them look at what you posted. If two parties share an Indication of

Interest, then they can begin messaging each other to start negotiations or explore further the possible union between the parties. Notice that neither firm divulges its identity until they are ready to.

For an overall look at all your communications, we go to the "My Messages" tab where we find a setup much like your email inbox where we also have sent messages, deleted messages, drafts, etc.:

Interestingly, the first item on the list of messages is an Indication of Interest from one of the profiles I rejected upon further examination. He/she saw my posting while I was writing this article and sent an Indication of Interest to my demo account.

According to Buchanan, there are 246 profiles on the site now, after just having been in business a short while. What will it cost you to use RIA Match and access this group of advisory firms? There are three plans to get you going: Basic, Personal and Premium. The Basic plan is free and allows you to create a profile page, view Basic member profiles, send Indications of Interest, receive alerts when a profile matches your search criteria and create and manage your own match list.

The Personal plan gets you, in addition to the features of the Basic plan, an opportunity to view "enhanced" member profiles and to save notes in your Match list. The Personal plan costs \$29.95 a month. The Premium plan also allows you to see which other members have viewed your profile, and it costs \$49.95 a month.

Buchanan suggests a new user take the Basic (free) plan and upgrade when he starts receiving Indications of Interest that he wants to delve into in greater detail.

The pricing plans look like this:

Plans and Pricing

RIA Match offers three different levels of plans tailored to varying levels of need. Select the one that best fits your current requirements. You can always change your package at a later date.

	BASIC	PERSONAL	PREMIUM
Create your own profile page	●	●	●
View basic member profiles	●	●	●
Send indications of interest to other members	●	●	●
Receive alerts when a profile matches your search criteria	●	●	●
Explore our Knowledge and Insight section	●	●	●
Create and manage your own Match List	●	●	●
Save favorite articles to your own personal library	●	●	●
Purchase solutions in the RIA Match Store	●	●	●
View enhanced member profiles		●	●
Save personal notes in your Match List		●	●
See which other members have viewed your profile			●
Number of members you can contact each month *	0	5	10
Cost (monthly)	FREE	\$29.95/mo.	\$49.95/mo.

[Downgrade](#) [Downgrade](#) Your Current Plan

Despite the plan you choose, you have the flexibility of upgrading or downgrading whenever you want.

If you are in transition and looking for a solution to help you add employees, merge your firm, buy a practice or sell a practice, RIA Match is an ideal tool to help you. Check it out at www.riamatch.com.