

MASTHEAD MEMBERSHIP ENHANCES PLANNING

Ian Middleton | Managing Director, Masthead



By applying a SWOT analysis as a strategic planning method to evaluate a practice, independent financial advisers can use their findings to plot a path to reach their goal. However, by leveraging your membership of a professional broker network, you can take the SWOT-based plan to a higher level, said Ian Middleton, Masthead managing director.

"The SWOT analysis refers to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats pertaining to a business," said Middleton. "You should take these factors into account when creating a strategy robust enough for you to thrive during 2011 and beyond."

"Starting with the 'S', take your strengths and that of your business into account. You may have many more than you realise when you add in experience, education, technical knowledge, 'soft' skills such as competence in communication and teamwork, contacts, networking skills and membership of a professional organisation."

As strengths relate to unique customer benefits, identify what you have and do better than anyone else, said Middleton. "This may include client relationship management, the trust your clients show in you, passion for your career, dedication to the industry despite the difficulties, and your ability to change and adapt to circumstances. You really want to focus on how you can use these strengths to your benefit."

Moving to the 'O', identify your

opportunities. "Being aware of market conditions, trends and how the competitive landscape affects how you do business, you should note the numerous opportunities available for advisers."

The growing population, volatile markets, current low interest, low inflation environment, more product options, product complexity and potential for change due to the looming National Health Insurance Scheme and National Savings Fund, for instance, point toward an increasing need for advice.

"Furthermore, there is the ongoing opportunity to develop your business into a valuable asset that will benefit you and provide continuity for your clients when you retire," said Middleton. Succession planning has many advantages, especially if it attracts younger people into the industry, supports the industry and encourages the passing on of knowledge and experience via mentorship.

"When you have listed your strengths and opportunities, focus on the 'W' for weaknesses," continued Middleton. "These are the areas where you and your practice fall short in serving customers or delivering what you want."

According to Middleton, weaknesses are likely to relate to lack of process, inefficient application of IT systems, poor time management, operating non-cost effectively or compliance difficulties. Masthead has identified these as some of the challenges that independent advisers face, and has provided practical solutions over the past six

years to help advisers overcome these.

Sometimes one needs an external voice to help you face these weaknesses and, as one of its key solutions, Masthead's practice management service offers an objective view into a business. This identifies and helps to address the weaknesses in a practice, leading to greater efficiency and increased profits.

Another popular service, Masthead's compliance offering helps advisers to meet the terms of the FAIS Act.

"Masthead also addresses the 'T's – the threats that affect how independent advisers do business now and in the future. We help brokers identify the main threats," said Middleton. Ranging from legislation to market conditions and trends, threats are generally beyond an individual's control.

"As an organisation representing the interests of independent advisers, we are able to accomplish more than advisers can on an individual level," said Middleton.

"With Masthead helping members address weaknesses and threats, independent advisers are able to focus on their strengths and opportunities," added Middleton. "We encourage members to transform their SWOT analysis to the remarkable strategy: 'So... go and grow, succeed and thrive'."

To enjoy the support of a professional broker organisation, please speak to your regional Masthead consultant or visit www.masthead.co.za

