

INSIGHTS

Tomorrow's Tech Today:

# HOW CLIENT EXPECTATIONS ARE DRIVING INNOVATION



For billion-dollar RIAs and enterprise wealth management firms, the digital imperative is no longer about staying competitive—it's about remaining relevant. Modern clients, regardless of age or net worth, are digital-first by default. They bring expectations shaped by frictionless ecommerce, instant travel bookings, and AI-powered recommendations. Today, wealth managers are being measured against the best digital experiences across every industry.

Industry leaders offered a clear takeaway: this shift in client expectations isn't a momentary trend. It's a realignment of how value is perceived and delivered. And for firms looking to grow, scale, and deepen relationships, the only path forward is a thoughtful, integrated approach to technology.

## Modern Engagement: When All Clients Are Digital-first Clients

Across the wealth spectrum, clients now expect their financial relationships to mirror the digital ease they experience elsewhere. This shift is not simply generational—it's behavioral.

As Nader Souri, Head of Digital and Corporate Banking at BNY, put it: "Digital first is a bit of a misnomer. Everyone is a person who uses technology, and it should be a pleasure to use."

Clients expect personalized, well-designed digital experiences that enhance—not replace—their relationship with their advisor. This includes seamless onboarding, real-time insights, and intuitive ways to engage with portfolios, documents, and new investment opportunities.

Successful firms are weaving digital touchpoints into advisor-led relationships, creating intuitive, integrated service models that elevate—rather than replace—the human connection. And with a growing number of clients demanding exposure to private markets, alternatives, and digital assets, firms must be prepared to deliver digital access to a more diverse investment universe.

## The Role of AI in Engagement

At many firms, AI already powers background functions like data processing and meeting prep. But the next wave of innovation will push AI to the frontlines of client interaction, supporting everything from personalized portfolio modeling to real-time service.

Success depends on disciplined implementation. For firms with a billion dollars or more in assets under management, the opportunity lies in building AI capabilities from the inside out, first deploying AI to streamline internal processes, improve advisor efficiency, and organize data, and then rolling it out client-facing interactions.

Through it all, human oversight is essential. Empathy, transparency, and trust remain cornerstones of the advisor-client relationship, and firms that deploy AI as an advisor's copilot—not as a replacement—will be better positioned to create differentiated value.

## Integration Is the True Differentiator

A key challenge for RIAs and enterprise firms isn't lack of innovation, it's the complexity of integration. Many firms have amassed a patchwork of tools that don't talk to each other, resulting in fragmented workflows and underutilized systems.

Firms must adopt a strategic approach to integration, one that considers not just which technologies to adopt, but how deeply each should connect with the broader ecosystem. Integration is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Lighter connections may be more practical in some regulatory contexts, while deeper integrations can unlock significant efficiency and enhance advisor and client experiences. What matters most is that every integration decision aligns with a firm's broader business objectives and differentiators. Technology must serve the strategy—not the other way around.

## The Importance of Data Readiness

None of this works without strong data infrastructure. Scattered, unstructured data undermines even the best tools. Firms looking to maximize the ROI of their tech investments must start by structuring their data in ways that make it portable, accessible, and actionable across systems.

This type of structured data enables everything from personalized recommendations to firm-wide reporting—and it's the single biggest factor that determines how far and how fast a firm can scale its digital capabilities. Smart firms are narrowing their focus to the most actionable data points tied directly to client outcomes and business objectives.

## Adoption Is the Ultimate Metric

No technology delivers value unless people use it. That's why adoption—by both advisors and clients—has become a more critical success metric than tool acquisition. Even best-in-class platforms fail if users aren't trained, empowered, and incentivized to use them.

For advisors, the most valuable solutions are those that reduce prep time, simplify workflows, and create more capacity to serve clients. For clients, the best tools are intuitive, accessible, and clearly tied to the value of the advisor relationship.

Successful firms are aligning their innovation strategy with advisor workflows, client needs, and measurable business goals, while investing in change management, UX design, and continuous iteration.

## The Future Is Already Here

Digital transformation is no longer a differentiator, it's table stakes. For RIAs, success will come from integrating technology, data, and people into a single cohesive ecosystem.

The firms that thrive will be those with the most intentional strategies. In a world where everyone is digital, experience is everything—and the time to deliver is now.

*This article is based on the panel discussions from INSITE 2025, entitled “Tech Forward Advice: How Digital-First Clients are Redefining Engagement” and “Innovate to Differentiate: How Tech Integration Changes the Game”. Visit <https://www.bny.com/pershing/us/en/about/events.html> to visit the INSITE25 session replays.*

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