

FinSec Partners

FinSec Partners is an Adelaide-based boutique financial advisory and wealth management firm with a history spanning more than 30 years. Wholly privately-owned and operated with 25 full-time staff, the firm was formed with a view to helping clients better understand money in order to build, protect and distribute their wealth. Managing director Andrew Creaser here elaborates.

Our clients come from a broad range of backgrounds including medical professionals, senior level executives, business owners and not-for-profits. While our business provides a range of advisory services, we are best known for our work in the areas of self-managed super funds, investment management and UK pension transfers to Australia. Over the past three decades, we have undertaken six mergers and acquisitions, growing from a one-man band to a full-service financial advice firm.

Regaining control

The evolution of our business and the decisions we have made along the way are all underpinned by our value system. Ultimately it was these values that guided our decision to become self-licensed in late 2014; it had, at this point, become evident that having an institutional licensee was at odds with our client-centric approach.

This choice has allowed us to regain control of our business model and operating systems, thus affording us the flexibility to work with any provider or institution in the market. We achieve this with a governance structure that is overseen by a formal board, headed by an independent chairman, ensuring we are accountable to all stakeholder obligations.

A central understanding

Money is one of the most intimate factors of any given individual's life. It can be a complex and emotive issue, and many Australians are vulnerable to aggressive sales tactics and poor advice. Our approach is rooted in education and clarity, thus ensuring our clients are making informed decisions with their money. Our clients' trust in us is built on a foundation of professionalism, empathy, candour, transparency and accessibility.

In our world, efficiency is imperative. In early 2017, we partnered with software giants RICOH and Laserfiche to introduce a fully digital content management system. Today we have a business process design and automation system with better reporting capabilities, reduced paper and printing costs, greater database controls and enhanced security and audit trails.

Past, present and ongoing challenges

Our vocation involves the profound privilege of overseeing people's life goals; for most of these scenarios, money becomes a means to an end. This comes with huge responsibility and is why our industry is so highly regulated. Managing the economics of this rapidly evolving industry, particularly providing ongoing services to customers in a cost-effective manner, is a constant challenge.



Andrew Creaser, managing director

AT A GLANCE FINSEC PARTNERS

- » Managing director: Andrew Creaser
- » Established in 1984
- » Based in Wayville, South Australia
- » Services: Financial planning
- » 25 employees
- » 100 per cent privately owned and operated by the people who work at FinSec, self-licensed since 2015
- » www.finsecpartners.com.au

Some of the challenges our business has encountered along the way include:

- » Having to rise above the less than exemplary behaviour of a small minority, which has resulted in negative public perception of our industry
- » The move from one licensing regime to another
- » Constant and increasing industry regulation
- » Improving business efficiency without compromising the need for customised service
- » Attracting the right people

“Our clients’ trust in us is built on a foundation of professionalism, empathy, candour and accessibility”



Grenfell Street,
Adelaide city centre

We have recognised that retaining a strong sense of both who we are and what we stand for is central to overcoming these challenges. In recent years, we have worked extremely hard to ensure our value system and philosophies are embedded in everything we do. They line our office corridors, are printed on our coffee mugs and emblazoned on our website and remain front and centre in our financial services guide. As a team, we revisit them both on and off-site through monthly training days and our “value and recognition” awards program. Social responsibility is also important to us; each month, we help serve breakfast to disadvantaged school children through the Kick Start 4 Kids program.

A working group headed by an employee with a passion for behavioural science undertook the huge project of effectively unpacking “a week in the life” of our three core business units: client service officers (CSOs), para-planning and advisers. This research has provided us with significant insight into both the capacity of our resources and the problematic areas in our workflow. We soon realised that a lack of process continuity was a major problem. As a result, the last 12 months has seen us rebuild the CSO operating model, design a new para-planning process and introduce a number of new business rules to address disruptors negatively affecting productivity.

Essentially, our values system is both our internal and external brand. In our experience, it is important that clients know that our core values are compatible with theirs. We believe this will become increasingly important for our industry, particularly in lieu of the current royal commission and as younger generations begin to engage with advice through a different lens. This paradigm shift will be difficult for traditional businesses to grasp; those who are unfamiliar with these conversations or unwilling to grasp its importance going forward will soon find themselves on the back foot.

Industry view

The “fee for no service” concern, which has been highlighted by the financial services royal commission, is one that addresses directly advice accessibility and price transparency in this country.

As the royal commission concludes towards the end of the year, it is widely expected that recommendations will challenge vertical integration models and asset-based income. The separation of advice from product sales is the first step in the creation of a true profession.

Australians are working longer, living longer and are active for longer; they require a different approach to retirement. This means more financial decisions than ever before in an increasingly complex legislative and economic environment.

Looking ahead

Over the next 12 months, we aim to improve efficiencies by a further 20 per cent. To reach this goal we have appointed a head of innovation and implementation to our organisational chart. We see 2018/19 as a year of transformation, which will inform us with regards to how we can better integrate digital tools, new technologies and how we can develop innovative and more efficient mechanisms for delivering our advice and service to more people. This work will result in an improved client segmentation model and associated value proposition.

In spirit, we embrace the idea of fintech; we do, however, believe it requires broader industry collaboration to ensure that innovation remains in line with accessibility. This will allow any systematic consequences to be identified along with the obvious challenges it poses for regulators. We believe that fintech will enhance existing relationships – not replace them.

Going forwards, we will continue to focus on deconstructing the traditional value chain, seeking to separate advice and service from manufacturing and distribution.