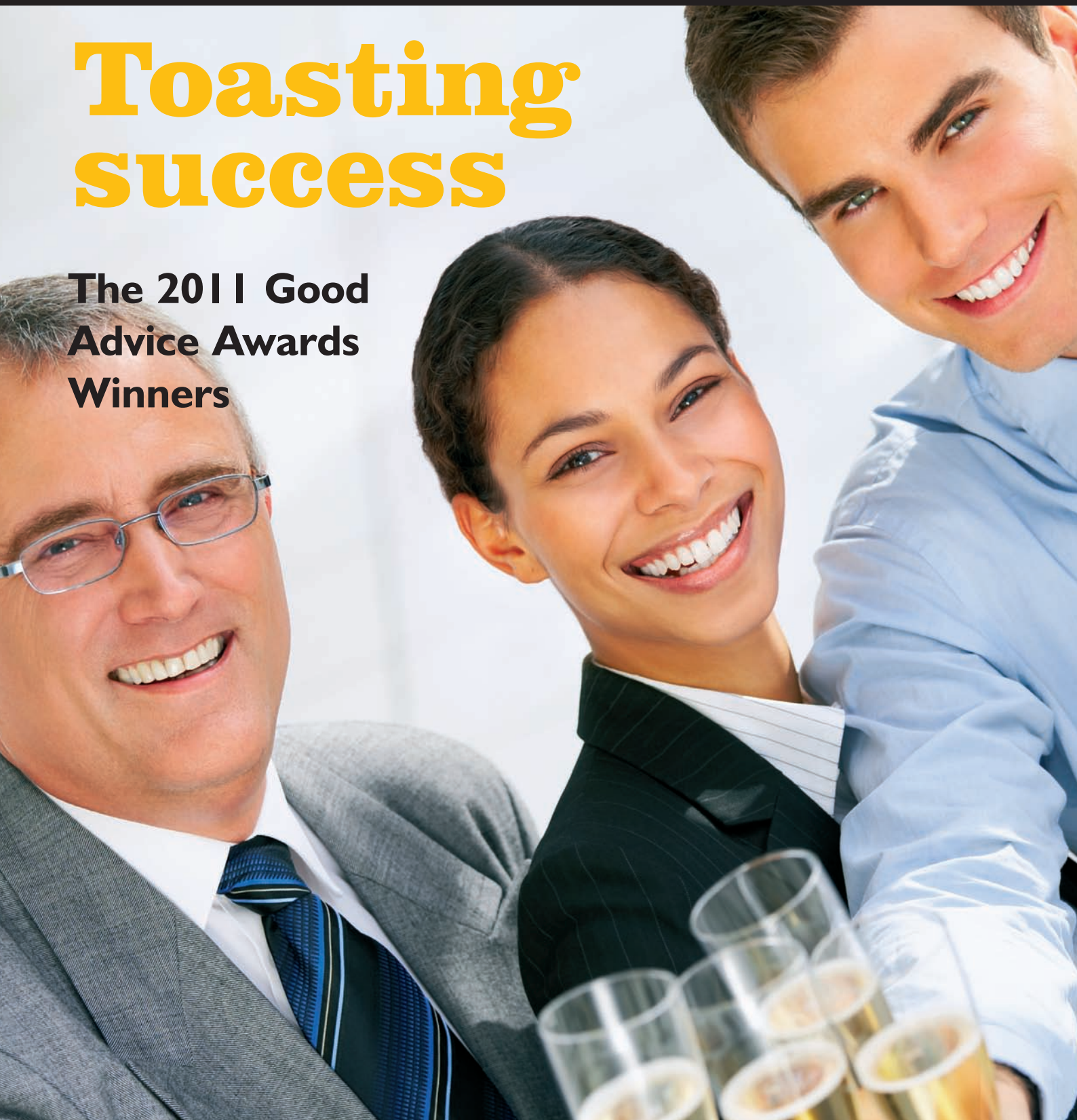


Investment Life & Pensions
Moneyfacts
Good Advice
Awards 2011

Encouraging excellence in financial advice

Toasting success

**The 2011 Good
Advice Awards
Winners**



Sponsors



mgmadvantage
DESIGNS FOR RETIREMENT



Celebrating the industry's finest

The high quality of the entrants to the 2011 Good Advice Awards shows that there is much for the financial adviser community to be proud of. We toast this year's victorious IFA firms offering the very best client experience

With the Retail Distribution Review (RDR) fast approaching, new technology to embrace and a plethora of pension legislation to get to grips with, it is fair to say that the financial services industry is going through a period of unparalleled change. However, one important aspect remains a constant theme: there is no shortage of individuals crying out for good quality independent financial advice from organisations that they can trust.

Indeed, if anything, the need for expert financial guidance has never been greater. Consumer finances are coming under enormous pressure as a result of rising inflation and low savings rates, with recent research from unbiased.co.uk suggesting that more than 35 million UK adults are currently worried about their financial situation. In many cases, individuals are unsure of where to turn for help, and with thousands of financial advisers to choose from, this sense of confusion often leads to apathy.

Our Good Advice Awards, now in their third year, are designed to reward the very best adviser organisations and promote excellence in financial advice. We hope that they will provide a useful gauge for consumers when seeking out those IFA firms capable of delivering a professional, client-centric service that will ultimately improve their long-term financial situation.

The process

This year's Good Advice Awards covered three main areas of advice:

- Best Investment Adviser
- Best Retirement Adviser
- Best Tax and Estate Planner.

Entries were invited from the adviser community throughout spring 2011. Advisers were asked to complete a questionnaire providing us with details of their organisation, their level of expertise and why they felt they should win the category entered. We also asked them to support their nomination with client testimonials and evidence of their ability to deliver award winning service. From the initial entries, a shortlist was drawn up, based on the quality of the submissions. Those shortlisted companies were then judged by a panel of industry experts.

Judging criteria

Each of the shortlisted entries was assessed against four areas which are regarded as integral to delivering quality financial advice:

1. Understanding client needs

This is arguably the most important criteria and will usually form the backbone of any financial-orientated relationship. Without a clear understanding of a client's goals, the advice that follows could be wholly inappropriate. Consequently, the judges were looking for evidence that the adviser firms displayed a commitment to getting to know their client and a desire to establish a long-term relationship. Judges were also looking for a strong focus on research when making recommendations and for any signs of innovative problem solving for the benefit of their clients.

2. Customer service

In many respects, client service is just as important as financial expertise. Once a client has adopted a recommended plan, it is vital that they are kept fully informed of any actions and the performance of their policies in relation to their agreed goals. Here judges were looking for evidence of client satisfaction and a commitment to treating clients fairly at every opportunity.

3. Commitment to professionalism

The Retail Distribution Review promises to bring a new level of professionalism to the financial advice sector when it is implemented by the end of 2012. In the meantime, it is important that adviser firms demonstrate continued growth in their knowledge and skills base, particularly as the financial environment in which they operate is constantly changing. Judges were asked to assess the extent to which the firms displayed a commitment towards professionalism and raising standards, either through implementing training programmes or gaining higher qualifications.

4. Client communication

Understandable, jargon-free literature, clear informative newsletters and educational seminars all add to the overall client experience. Judges were required to assess the quality of the organisation's literature and client correspondence, and consider its overall willingness to communicate with clients on an ongoing basis.

This year's winners

The winners of the 2011 Good Advice Awards were announced at the Investment Life and Pensions Moneyfacts Awards luncheon on 23 September 2011 at the Marriott Hotel, Grosvenor Square, London, in front of over 400 industry professionals. As well as walking away with a fantastic trophy, the winners are able to use the Good Advice Awards logo on their website and business literature - a clear message to potential clients that they have come to the right adviser.

Over the next few pages we showcase those IFA firms which emerged as winners at this year's awards. Congratulations to all of the winners and finalists, you have set an exemplary standard for the rest of your peers to follow.



Best Investment Adviser

sponsored by:



Winner: Whitechurch Securities Ltd

Highly Commended: Atkinson Bolton Consulting

Commended: The Investment Coach



Gavin Haynes, Managing Director of Whitechurch Securities Ltd (centre), collects the Best Investment Adviser award from Hugi Clarke, Head of Third Party Sales at Octopus Investments, and Sylvia Waycot, Publishing Director at Moneyfacts Group

The winner

Formed in 1982, Whitechurch Securities Ltd has developed into one of the most highly respected small investment advisory firms in the country. Currently employing 30 staff based at its head office in Bristol, Whitechurch Securities serves private clients throughout the country and offers a choice of both advisory and discretionary management services.

The judges' verdict

The judges felt that Whitechurch Securities was the standout company in the Best Investment Adviser category largely due to the depth of its investment knowledge and the thorough fund research it undertakes. Whitechurch Securities employs a dedicated investment team which carries out more than 200 hand-picked fund manager meetings annually and operates an in-house quantitative screening process to assess the performance and risk profile of each fund. This is filtered to a core recommended list known as the "Whitechurch 100".

Clients can choose to invest via a discretionary management service with as little as £3K or have their investments managed on an advisory basis. The judges praised the company's transparent fees and the fact that it has an investment solution which is focused towards a post-RDR environment.

"All advice and recommendations are totally independent; Whitechurch Securities has no ties or bias towards any individual product provider and no in-house funds," explains *Gavin Haynes, Managing Director of Whitechurch Securities Ltd*. "This means selection is from the full range of financial products on the market, ensuring the right advice is provided at all times."

Best Retirement Adviser

sponsored by:



Winner: Lowes Financial Management

Highly Commended: Concept Financial Planning

Commended: Braemar Wealth Management



Barry O'Sullivan, Senior Technician at Lowes Financial Management (centre), collects the Best Retirement Adviser award from Brian Hunter, National Account Manager at MGM Advantage, and Sylvia Waycot, Publishing Director at Moneyfacts Group

The winner

Established in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1971, Lowes Financial Management is one of a select group of financial advisers to be accredited as Chartered Financial Planners. It predominantly serves clients who are retired or are approaching retirement, and as such require holistic financial advice. With a team of 36 staff and 11 financial consultants, Lowes is one of the largest privately owned independent financial advisers in the UK managing in excess of £420 million for its clients.

The judges' verdict

The judges were particularly impressed with the high levels of experience and industry knowledge displayed by Lowes, and its ability to tailor this to meet the personal needs of its clients. Boasting some of the most technically qualified advisers in the country, the judges felt confident that Lowes was well placed to help most retired or retiring clients.

"We are aware that retirement is not just about pensions, and that everyone's retirement is not the same, so we do not use a 'one-size fits all' approach," explains *Ian Lowes, Managing Director of Lowes Financial Management*. "Non-pension assets can be just as important as pensions in a client's retirement plan, so they are always reviewed simultaneously, both pre- and post-retirement."

The judges also praised Lowes for its commitment to ensuring appropriate ongoing client contact. It makes a concerted effort to regularly write to clients in response to important, and often confusing, mailings from product providers, and to reassure clients during periods of market turbulence.

Best Tax and Estate Planner

sponsored by:



Winner: Almary Green Investments

Highly Commended: IFS (Professional Connections)

Commended: Wingate Financial Planning



Carl Lamb, Managing Director of Almary Green Investments (centre), collects the Best Tax and Estate Planner award from Tracy Woodward, Head of Marketing, Individual Business at Canada Life, and Sylvia Waycot, Publishing Director at Moneyfacts Group

The winner

Created in April 2001, Almary Green Investments has grown steadily in recent years and serves around 7,500 clients with £250 million of funds under management. The company has advisers based in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, supporting both business and individuals throughout East Anglia and beyond. Almary Green currently employs a team of 27, which is made up of 13 registered advisers and 14 support staff.

The judges' verdict

The judges were in agreement that Almary Green excelled in building long-term client relationships and offering client-centric financial solutions. The company demonstrated a strong desire to getting to know its clients and assessing their individual needs through its thorough four-stage process. This includes a combination of fact-finding, completing a client knowledge and experience form, risk profiling and qualitative data collection. The company also provides access to a unique risk-graded portfolio service which ensures that clients' portfolios are actively rebalanced every quarter within the agreed risk parameters so that any weak funds are discarded.

"Clients enjoy continuity of meeting the same adviser who takes ownership of their affairs, allowing long and trusting professional relationships to be established, but other specialists within the firm may offer supplementary advice if the need arises," comments *Carl Lamb, Managing Director of Almary Green Investments*. "Trust products, such as Gift & Loan and Discounted Gift Trusts, often provide useful "off the shelf" solutions for clients, but we liaise with solicitors if more bespoke trusts are required such as spousal by-pass trusts for pension death benefits."