

FIC Advisors, Revisited by Charles Wendel

It seems that every few weeks we get an email or a call asking what it is that FIC does, beyond produce a newsletter. Initially, that question surprised me. I knew what we did and what we have been doing for 20+ years. But I have realized that, understandably, others have no idea; bankers and other business leaders focus on their own businesses and not FIC's.

Plus, it is my failure not to have done an effective job in explaining what FIC is about and how we work with clients. That is in spite of all my writing about the need for targeted marketing and follow-up. It may be yet another modern example of the old phrase, "the cobbler's children have no shoes."

Recent projects. We have worked with banks, nonbank financial services companies, vendors, and industry associations. Over the recent years we have been involved in the a myriad of project work, including the following:

- New business entry strategy for a non-bank investment group with a focus on deciding between a build versus buy approach and how best to in corporate digital-based approaches.
- Analysis of Fintech providers in the small business space for a regional bank.
- Growth strategies in multiple areas, including Private Banking and Business Banking, and SBA lending.
- Assessment of current approach to capture deposits and recommended growth strategy, utilizing both current and digital channels.
- For a Fintech, bank sales channel development.
- Research report for the Equipment Leasing and Finance Foundation on Independent leasing companies and their future role in the financing space. In years past for the ELFF we wrote reports on Banks in the equipment finance space and the impact of Fintechs on the industry. Beyond leasing, FIC has conducted projects in all aspects of commercial finance.
- Competitive assessment for a software company considering entering a finance segment with specific go/no go recommendations.

In short, banks continue to struggle with what to do with small businesses and some execs not believing they are worth the effort. However, the deposits and fees they provide belie this view. Nonbanks, whether FinTech or Independent leasing

companies, continue to find and exploit niches; “pivoting” is part of their second nature.

Approach. We always start by developing a fact base of the current situation and evaluate relevant economics. The teams we assign are small in number and expert in what they bring to the project. Banks have often told me about the “wet behind the ears” MBAs that large firm assign to projects. These consultants often make up for in self-confidence what they lack in practical experience or street smarts. Beware firms with big professional staffs that they need to bill out no matter what.

How We Work with Clients. Over the years FIC’s projects have ranged from one-day to several months to more than a year. Some are intense full time efforts while others are part time. The time required to complete an engagement depends on the project scope and the extent of our hands-on involvement. While we always provide a list of project deliverables or end points and their related cost and time required to complete, once underway projects change, usually due to client requests.

Recently, we were approached by a smaller financial services company that had neither the appetite nor the dollars for the multi-month million dollar plus project favored by the big firms. We decided to create a brief project concept, “Fast Track Strategy” for those types of companies. (www.ficinc.com) Some new clients have found it to be a way to get value quickly without a major upfront commitment. Topics can range from reviewing current strategy, to evaluating digital options and potential Fintech partners. Worth considering, we think.