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YOUR FINANCES

Make a Financial Match Online

by [Erin Burt](#)

Whether you're looking for a long- or short-term relationship, you might find your perfect match online.

It may not be as fun as Internet dating, but just like the increasingly popular matchmaking sites, more and more financial advisers are putting their faces and fees online hoping to connect with the right someone.

Once a privilege reserved for those of sizable wealth, personalized money advice is increasingly available to people of more modest means.

More advisers are scrapping the traditional commission-based model or the practice of charging clients based on the size of their assets. The new vogue is fee-based advice, for which you pay about \$100 to \$150 an hour for the services rendered. So even if you don't have a lot of money, you can get the personal advice you need, whether you just have a quick question about your 401(k) or you want a comprehensive financial consultation.

And the Web has simplified the task of finding an expert next door or in the next state.

You can learn more about what to look for in a financial adviser by reading "Finding the Right Pro" in the January issue of *Kiplinger's Personal Finance*. When you're ready to start your search, check out these online adviser networks to make your match.

Pre-screened referrals

GETTING STARTED

- [Pocket the Best Plastic](#)
- [How to Fix a Credit Report Error](#)
- [How to Adjust Your Withholding](#)
- [Life Insurance Made Simple](#)
- [Smart Shopper's Guide to Auto Insurance](#)
- [Fill the Holes in Your Homeowners Insurance](#)
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TOOLS

- [Search for the best credit card](#)
- [Should I pay off debt or invest in savings?](#)
- [How much life insurance do I need?](#)
- [2004 survey of state tax burdens](#)
- [The true cost of paying the minimum](#)
- [Research your bank](#)

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HOW THEY COMPARE

The star ratings below are based on each site's ease of use, features and thoroughness. We did not rate the quality of the advice given. (And we docked Paladin a half-star because it was the only site that charged for its services.)

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With thousands of financial advisers to choose from, it could take an eternity to narrow the field to a handful of candidates worthy of your consideration. The Internet can help you vet advisers based on their regulatory record, years of experience, and areas of expertise. In order to be listed with some online networks, advisers must meet certain standards. But no matter how rigorous the site's screening process, you should **do your own homework** to make sure the adviser lives up to *your* standards.

Take **The Alliance of Cambridge Advisors**, for example. This network of about 75 advisers in 25 states requires members to meet rigorous requirements. These include passing a peer review, completing a six to 12 month proprietary training course and updating their skills through regular industry conferences.

The search is basic and straight forward -- you simply plug in where you live and a list of advisers in your state pops up. Some of the recommendations our searches yielded simply listed the planners' contact info and certification with no mention of their areas of expertise, investment philosophy or fee structure. Others included a sentence or two about their specialties, but not much else. We would have liked more information to compare the advisers.

The **Garrett Planning Network** is a similar site, listing about 200 fee-only advisers by their location or expertise.

To find an expert, you simply click on your state, or enter your zip code, and a list of GPN-approved experts pops up. You can limit your search to planners within a specific distance from your home. This feature worked well for our searches in Dallas (eight hits) and Philadelphia (five), but it didn't work well on others. When we looked for advisers within 25 miles of Salt Lake City, we got five results -- four of which were at least 420 miles away and out-of-state. For Miami, two of the five recommendations were 280 miles away in Tampa -- another was more than 650 miles up the coast in the panhandle. This wouldn't matter if you are interested in having a long-distance relationship with your financial adviser, though.

The GPN results are more complete, with bios, a photo, contact information, educational background and credentials. When you find a GPN planner you like, give him or her a call or send an e-mail. We found most got back to us the same day, offering to set up a free initial consultation either in person or over the phone and giving more detail about their fee structure.

Both Cambridge and GPN offer online resources to help you narrow in on a financial adviser that's right for you. Cambridge has a nifty "**financial fitness wheel**" that asks you 12 questions to help you identify which areas of your finances you might want to discuss with an expert, including tax matters, savings, record keeping and real estate.

The Alliance of Cambridge Advisors



Garrett Planning Network



Myfinancialadvice.com



Wiseradvisor.com



TheRightAdvisor.com



Paladin Investor Resources



Also...

Be sure to check the member lists of the [National Association of Personal Financial Advisors](#) and the [Financial Planners Association](#).

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