

App Aims to Get You Going in Direction of Financial Goals

TECH: Developer Seeks to License It to Banks, Others
By **MIKE ALLEN**

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These days there seems to be an app for everything, including one developed locally that can provide a personal financial plan in a matter of minutes.

“The Personal Financial Plan Wiz is the first mobile app designed to generate a comprehensive, do-it-yourself personal financial plan through age 95 with minimal user input,” says Larry Gitman, owner of PF Wiz LLC and a retired San Diego State University finance professor.

After 32 years of teaching at the college level, Gitman continued his side avocation of writing and revising college textbooks on finance. Meanwhile, he also worked on other ways of helping people plan their financial futures.

“I like to make stuff,” said the spry, 67-year-old, who is an avid long-distance bicyclist.

His first venture into bringing financial planning to the masses was a software-as-service website that he and a partner Mike Trevino created called MapMyWealth.com. The website enables users to plug in pertinent financial data to create a detailed personal plan for achieving future financial goals.

After the website was completed, the designers tried to sell it to some banks but got nowhere. The problem was it took a long time to input all the necessary data, maybe as much as four hours, Gitman said.

“There’s probably 200 to 300 data items that are required of a user,” he said. For things like the balance on a mortgage or the average checking account balance, users had to fetch their records and figure it out.

From there, Gitman decided to create an application aimed at smartphone users, both for the Apple and Android camps.

Focus on a Simple App

The original concept was to create a brand name that had a family of apps geared toward various ages and planning issues such as figuring a retirement goal or buying a house. With the help of outside software programmers, Gitman developed three basic apps, two aimed at children and one at parents saving for their children’s college education.

Out of that process, Gitman decided to focus on an overall simple app called the Personal Financial Plan Wiz.

Gitman supplied his expertise on what data points were needed, and hired consultants to work on developing the infrastructure or “wireframes” for the app, along with a designer for the artwork.

He also needed programmers to do the computer coding that entailed separate coding directives for Apple iOS and Android devices.

After getting quotes from locally based programmers ranging from \$150,000 — for the iOS version alone — to \$200,000, he contracted with some India-based programmers who did the project for less than \$50,000, he said. All told, Gitman invested about \$100,000, not counting his personal time spent, he said.

Evolution of a Business Model

Instead of charging for each download as he initially envisioned, Gitman said the new business model is to license the app to financial institutions, especially banks and money-management firms that are trying to reach younger people in their prime earning years and seeking professional advice on financial matters.

At some point while inputting data to the app, which he said takes about five minutes, users see a pop-up window asking whether they would like a professional adviser to help them. If so, they provide a contact number or email, Gitman said.

That request could provide a lucrative lead to the bank, giving it a chance to cross-sell its services or acquire a new customer, he said.

Since the app's release in December through the end of May, Gitman's free app has been downloaded about 3,200 times, without any marketing, he said.

Although he's got a long list of prospective clients and some good prospects, he hasn't yet signed up any institutions.

Gordon Tudor, a certified financial planner with Wealth Analytics in Carmel Valley, reviewed the financial plan wiz app, and said that while it seemed like a basic tool to gain some insight into a person's finances, he cautioned it may not be reliable because there are so many unknown variables that change financial projections, such as having to take care of an elderly parent or a medical emergency.

Gitman said his app isn't meant to be the equivalent of a fully researched financial plan provided by a personal adviser.

"It wasn't intended to replace financial advisers but to show people whether they can get to where they want to be; and if they want to do that, then they should find a financial adviser to help them."

PF WIZ LLC

Owner: Larry Gitman

Revenue: Pre-revenue

Investors: Larry Gitman

Headquarters: San Diego

Year founded: 2013

Website: www.pfwiz.com.

What makes the company innovative: Said to be the first mobile app to create a personal financial plan with minimal data input

Key factors for success: Convincing financial institutions to license the app