THE M&A LANDSCAPE:

# INTEGRATORS, AGGREGATORS, AND ROLL-UPS EXPLAINED.

*Strategic Options for Financial Advisors*

BRIDGEMARK STRATEGIES

# Let’s Talk Integrators: Full Integration in Advisor M&A

## Executive Summary

Integrators are reshaping the financial advisor M&A landscape. Backed largely by private equity, these strategic buyers acquire 100% of an advisor’s practice and fully integrate it into their centralized model—unifying brand, leadership, technology, and operations.

For advisors, integrators offer certainty, liquidity at strong multiples, and relief from the burdens of business management. However, they also may mean the loss of independence and identity. In this paper, we explore the integrator model in contrast to aggregators and roll-ups, helping advisors evaluate whether full integration aligns with their goals.

## Introduction: Consolidation Accelerates

Advisor M&A activity is at record levels, driven by high valuations, private equity funding, and an aging advisor base. Historically, many assumed that only advisors approaching retirement would pursue M&A deals. Today, that assumption is outdated. Increasingly, advisors in their 40s are exploring strategic combinations—seeking partners to handle the operational complexity of scaling while they focus on client relationships and growth.

Against this backdrop, three distinct buyer models dominate: **Integrators, Aggregators, and Roll-Ups**. Each presents unique opportunities and trade-offs.

## What is an Integrator?

Integrators are **strategic buyers**, almost always private equity-backed (or other institutional investor), who acquire and fully absorb advisory businesses. Key characteristics include:

- **Common brand** – All acquired firms operate under a single, unified name.
- **Centralized leadership** – Local leadership is replaced or consolidated into a parent team.
- **Shared infrastructure** – Advisors adopt the integrator's technology stack, compliance systems, and operational processes.
- **Standardized investment approach** – Portfolio management strategies are aligned across the platform.
- **Comprehensive services** – Many integrators provide tax, estate planning, and other advanced resources.

Because of their scalability and operational consistency, integrators typically **command higher valuation multiples** than aggregators.

## Why Consider Integration?

For many advisors, integrators offer:

- **Full Liquidity at Strong Multiples** – Unlike minority or roll-up transactions, integrator deals almost always involve 100% sale of the business, often at valuations of 5–6× recurring revenue for profitable, growing firms.
- **Freedom from Management** – Allows advisors to focus exclusively on client relationships.
- **Access to Advanced Resources** – Centralized infrastructure provides tax, estate, and investment expertise often unavailable to stand-alone practices.
- **Succession Planning Certainty** – With ownership transferred, client and staff continuity is institutionalized.

## Benefits for Advisors

The integrator model is particularly compelling for advisors who:

- Seek a **clean exit** with full monetization of their life's work.
- Want to **step away from business ownership responsibilities** while continuing to serve clients.
- Desire **certainty and stability**, knowing their clients and staff are supported by a well-capitalized parent organization.
- Prefer to avoid the risks of delayed liquidity (as in roll-ups) or shared control (as in aggregators).

## Risks and Trade-Offs

Of course, integrators aren't for everyone. Key considerations include:

- **Loss of Independence** – Advisors give up brand, culture, and operational control.
- **Identity Shift** – Long-standing firm names disappear into a larger enterprise.
- **Cultural Fit** – Misalignment with the integrator's philosophy or investment approach can create tension.

## Partial vs. Full-Book Sales

- **Integrators** nearly always require 100% acquisition of the advisor's book.
- **Aggregators** are more flexible, buying minority, majority, or entire stakes.
- **Roll-Ups** involve selling only a small percentage upfront with options later.

Importantly, **multiples are highest in full-control sales**. Minority stakes and roll-ups typically trade at **lower multiples** because the buyer lacks control.

## Is an Integrator Right for You?

Advisors should ask themselves:

- Am I ready to exit ownership fully, or do I want to retain independence?
- Do I value certainty of liquidity over potential upside in a future deal?
- Would I thrive within a larger, centralized organization?
- Is my firm best positioned to maximize value today, given current market multiples?

For many late-career advisors, or mid-career advisors eager to shed management burdens, integrators present the most **clear-cut, high-liquidity path.**

## The Bottom Line

Integrators represent the most structured and definitive option in today's M&A landscape. They provide full monetization, professionalized infrastructure, and client continuity—but at the cost of independence.

For advisors who want certainty, stability, and strong valuations, integrators may be the ideal path. For those seeking growth capital, partial liquidity, or long-term entrepreneurial upside, aggregators or roll-ups may be a better fit.

# Let’s Talk Aggregators: Scale Without Losing Your Identity

## Executive Summary

Aggregators have become one of the most influential forces in advisor M&A. Backed by private equity and strategic capital, aggregators acquire firms but allow them to retain their identity, leadership team, and culture. Unlike integrators, they don’t fully absorb firms into a centralized brand, and unlike roll-ups, they typically buy majority or entire stakes—though they may also structure minority deals.

For advisors, aggregators provide liquidity, growth capital, and professionalized support, while still offering operational independence. This paper explores what aggregators are, how they differ from integrators and roll-ups, and how to decide if this model fits your firm.

## Introduction: Aggregators on the Rise

In today’s record-breaking M&A environment, aggregators account for a significant percentage of transactions. Recent data shows that **aggregator-backed buyers drive up to 80% of deal flow in some quarters**, as private equity sponsors seek scalable platforms in the wealth management space.

Advisors increasingly see aggregators as a middle ground: a way to monetize their practice and gain resources without giving up their firm’s culture, brand, or local presence.

## What is an Aggreggrator?

Aggregators are **strategic buyers** that acquire advisory firms while preserving their independence. Key characteristics include:

- **Brand flexibility** – Firms may retain their local identity and client-facing name.
- **Leadership continuity** – Existing firm leaders often remain in place.
- **Operational independence** – Advisors keep decision-making authority on client service and culture.
- **Growth support** – Aggregators provide recruiting, M&A capital, and shared resources.
- **Flexible structures** – Deals may involve minority, majority, or full book sales.

This model blends scale and resources with local autonomy, attracting both growth-minded advisors and those seeking liquidity with flexibility.

## Aggregators vs. Integrators vs. Roll-Ups

Understanding where aggregators fit requires comparison:

- **Integrators:** Full acquisitions, rebranding, centralized operations, and full liquidity.
- **Aggregators:** Majority or full acquisitions, but allow firms to maintain brand, leadership, and culture.
- **Roll-Ups:** Small minority stake sales (often 10–20%) with the chance of a future liquidity event.

Aggregators sit in the middle—offering scale and capital while preserving identity.

## Why Consider an Aggregator?

For advisors, the aggregator model presents several attractive opportunities:

- **Liquidity Today** – Majority or full sales provide immediate monetization, often at strong multiples.
- **Retained Independence** – Unlike integrators, aggregators allow you to keep your culture, client approach, and often your brand.
- **Growth Support** – Access to recruiting, M&A capital, and infrastructure to help accelerate expansion.
- **Operational Resources** – Compliance, technology, and investment platform support or scalability without full centralization.
- **Rollover Equity Potential** – In many cases, sellers take partial cash and partial equity in the aggregator's parent company, creating a "second bite at the apple."

## Benefits for Advisors

- **Best of Both Worlds** – Liquidity plus independence.
- **Scalability** – The backing of a larger enterprise can fuel growth beyond what's possible independently.
- **Professionalization** – Enhanced processes and infrastructure strengthen client service.
- **Flexibility** – Structuring options from minority stakes to full exits.

This combination appeals not only to older advisors considering succession but also to **younger advisors in their 40s**, who recognize the rising costs and risks of scaling.

## Risks and Trade-Offs

- **Shared Control** – While more independent than integrators, advisors still answer to a parent company.
- **Investor Influence** – PE backing may create pressure for growth and eventual liquidity events.
- **Deal Structure Variability** – Multiples for minority stakes are typically lower than full acquisitions, reflecting lack of control.
- **Exit Dependence** – Future monetization may rely on the aggregator's eventual sale or recapitalization.

## Is an Aggregator Right for You?

Key questions to ask:

- Do I want to **monetize today** while retaining brand and culture?
- Am I seeking **growth resources** without ceding all independence?
- Would I benefit from having a **capitalized partner** for recruiting, acquisitions, or tech?
- Am I comfortable with some **loss of ownership** in exchange for scale?

For growth-oriented firms, aggregators often provide the best balance between liquidity, independence, and expansion potential.

## The Bottom Line

Aggregators are the **middle ground** of today's M&A landscape. They provide liquidity and resources while allowing firms to maintain identity and culture. For advisors who want scale without surrendering their firm's DNA, aggregators may be the right choice.

By contrast, integrators offer certainty and full liquidity but at the cost of independence, while roll-ups offer partial liquidity and upside potential with higher risk.

# Let's Talk Roll-Ups: A Unique Solution

## Executive Summary

The M&A ecosystem for financial advisors is more active than ever. In the first half of 2025 alone, the registered investment advisor (RIA) space saw 148 transactions—surpassing the previous first-half record of 135 and gearing up to eclipse 2024's full-year high of 272 deals. Roll-ups—where advisors sell a minority stake in exchange for equity in a larger consolidator—offer a unique pathway: partial liquidity now, with the possibility of enhanced upside at a future, high-multiple exit.

However, this approach carries uncertainty around exit timing, valuation multiples, and cultural fit. This white paper guides advisors through what roll-ups are, their appeal, and how to assess readiness in today's deal-rich environment.

## Introduction: The Evolving M&A Landscape

Deal volume is surging. The RIA sector kicked off 2025 with 75 M&A transactions in Q1, a 15% increase over the same quarter in 2024—a record pace. In Q2, 102 transactions set a new benchmark, driven largely by private equity-backed aggregators, with seven mega-deals (>$20B AUM) closing.

Across broader financial services, global M&A remains robust. In H1 2025, there were 1,125 disclosed deals (up from 1,106 in H1 2024), with total value climbing from $137B to $161B. The wealth management segment is clearly muzzling forward.

## Benefits for Advisors

Roll-ups offer:

- **Immediate liquidity** — a partial payout now, maintaining ownership continuity.
- **Future upside** — shared in when the platform exits.
- **Operational scale** — access to advanced infrastructure, tech, and compliance systems.
- **Strategic community** — being part of a collective with resources and collaboration.

In an industry where buyers, especially serial aggregators, are actively deploying capital (accounting for up to **82% of Q2 deals**)—roll-ups combine independence with scale.

## Risks and Considerations

Potential drawbacks to weigh:

- **Exit timing uncertainty** — roll-up platforms may take years before achieving a full liquidity event.
- **Valuation variability** — market shifts could diminish multiples.
- **Reduced autonomy** — agreements often entail strategic alignment and governance trade-offs.
- **No assured premium upon sale** — market volatility can cap expected returns.

Due diligence is crucial—especially evaluating the acquiring firm's track record, culture, and long-term strategy.

## Is a Roll-Up Right for You?

Reflect on:

- Your liquidity timeline—retirement horizon or multi-year commitment?
- Your preference for independence vs. scale alignment.
- Confidence in the roll-up firm's growth trajectory and platform strength.
- Market visibility and competitive trending—consider: 148 RIA transactions in Q1, well above prior records.

For some, roll-ups offer the best of both worlds; for others, they might not align with long-term independence goals, or about the uncertainty of the future value.

## The Bottom Line

Roll-ups are a compelling addition to the monetization toolkit amid record RIA M&A and elevated market valuations. When structured thoughtfully, they offer paid-today access and post-exit upside, but they require alignment on strategy, culture, and timing.

Advisors must weigh these options alongside outright sales, internal succession, or merger alternatives.

## About Bridgemark Strategies

Bridgemark Strategies helps financial advisors navigate business transitions with clarity and confidence. We deliver independent, highly experienced guidance on broker-dealers, RIAs, custodians, and platforms. The Bridgemark team has hundreds of years of collective experience and have helped thousands of advisors. Whether you are looking to change firms, start your own firm or sell or merge your business, Bridgemark has the experience you need to make your transition a success.