

HOW DIVERSIFY IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By Nick Hansen

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“WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH one of the most difficult economic times that many of us will ever experience,” says Ryan Smith from his office in South Jordan, Utah. “It’s hard to believe that Diversify has been around for 10 years. We’ve been through a lot, but we have so much more that we need to accomplish.”

In 2004, Dan Luke and Ryan Smith co-founded Diversify, Inc. (formerly known as Diversified Financial Planning, Inc.). Amidst one of the most difficult decades in our country’s economic history, Diversify has quickly become a leader in the financial services industry in Utah.

Smith and Luke have agreed to memorialize their firm’s 10-year anniversary by taking a few photos and letting me interview them. I ask them, “How has Diversify been able to make such a name for itself during such a difficult economic environment?”

The story unfolded from there.

“Ten years ago, Ryan and I broke away from a Wall Street-based investment firm to become independent and escape the pressure of selling one type of product. [At that firm] we were incentivized to sell, sell, sell; regardless of the client’s circumstances,” says Luke. “Too many financial advisors operate under a captive and high pressure sales model and we don’t believe it is always the most honest or ethical way to make a living.”

When Luke talks about investing and personal finance, you can detect traces of his own history on the subject. When he was in his teens, Luke’s parents were forced to declare bankruptcy and lost their home, and things were never quite the same.

“That was a lot for me to handle at the time,” reflects Luke. “But it truly changed my life. I became dedicated to helping others avoid that kind of experience. I’m sure that all of this played a role in breaking away [from the other firm] and creating Diversify.”

CREATING DIVERSIFY

“Investors give us their trust and they give us their money,” Smith explains. “And those are two of the most important items that anybody could give. We take that seriously and have built our entire company with that understanding in mind.”

Luke shares a story of a relationship that developed in the early years of Diversify. He teamed up with a little known radio personality who hosted a show about personal finance. That radio personality was Dave Ramsey, who at the time was only airing on one AM station in northern Utah. Luke was one of the first financial professionals in the country to begin working with Ramsey as an Endorsed Local Provider.

Luke says, “We like the relationship [with Ramsey] because his philosophies and approach to personal finance match our own. Dave is on a mission to improve the financial wellness of individuals, families, and businesses and we have been fortunate to play a small role in his incredible mission.”

Diversify had some well-timed introductions within the industry that led to a strong presence in alternative investments and securitized commercial real estate offerings. “We have an expertise in certain types of alternative investments that many individuals simply don’t find elsewhere,” says Smith. “Alternative investments, such as real estate, are not right for everybody and they do involve risk, but for certain investors they can play an important role.”

Smith states that these early experiences helped Diversify establish itself during those crucial early years. “I feel like mine and Dan’s beginnings led us towards creating something that was different from our competitors. We used these experiences to form a different approach.”

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

I ask Smith and Luke about *The Diversify Difference*. It’s a term everyone in the Diversify office uses. Smith and Luke talk about it frequently during their finance talk radio show on KNRS (*Diversify Radio with Dan & Ryan*).

Smith says, “*The Diversify Difference* is how we answer the most common question we get asked. Without fail, people always want to know how Diversify is different. *The Diversify Difference* is how we’ve chosen to set ourselves apart from the competition.”

There is a list of things that form *The Diversify Difference*. For instance, the firm is passionately committed to education. Diversify hosts quarterly educational events, open to clients as well as the public. Smith shared the exciting news that Diversify is hosting a personal finance and economic event in January at Abravanel Hall with a keynote presentation from Mitt Romney.

Luke points out, “Ten years ago, I think our first educational event had an attendance of ten people at some restaurant in Sandy [Utah]. We anticipate nearly 3,000 people for our January event, with a keynote address from Mitt Romney. That’s big, and it is a realization of what we set out to accomplish from the beginning.”

In addition to the education, Diversify has developed their *10 Keys* program, which is a system that helps investors craft a comprehensive and diversified financial plan. “Too many people think they have a financial plan, but you’d be surprised at how many gaps we find,” says Smith. “We developed the *10 Keys* program as a way to address this problem. There are certain keys to a financial plan that cannot be missed and we want to make sure everybody knows what those are.”

Before I leave the subject, I ask Luke to capture the essence behind *The Diversify Difference* in one sentence. He says, “We believe in long-term planning, creating a truly diversified investment portfolio, and consistent investor education.” I pose the same challenge to Smith, to which he adds,

“*We are very direct in our approach, and we refuse to push clients into decisions that aren’t right for them.*”

DIVERSIFY TODAY

Over the course of 10 years, Diversify has become an award-winning investment and wealth management firm, with thousands of clients throughout the United States. For five consecutive years, they have been awarded the MWCN Utah 100 Award for being one of the fastest growing companies in Utah. They have also been featured multiple years in *Utah Business Magazine* as NABCAP Premier Advisors, which recognizes leading investment firms in Utah.

In 2014, Smith was recognized as one of the top investment professionals in America under the age of forty by *Investment News*, a highly esteemed national industry publication for financial professionals. This national honor came months after Smith was recognized by *Utah Business Magazine* as one of the top executives in Utah under the age of forty.

Smith and Luke co-host a popular weekly radio show on KNRS, airing Saturdays at 1 PM. When I ask Luke why they ventured into radio, he says, “[Ryan and I] have been very fortunate with Diversify’s growth.” He continues, “We see our radio show as a platform by which we can bring our experience and insights to a large audience of people and hopefully help them avoid so many of the mistakes that we see come through our offices.”

When I ask Smith what Diversify will look like 10 years from now, there is no hesitation. He flatly says, “The same.” He continues, “We’ll have more clients and more staff, but the experiences that brought us here are a defining part of who we’ve become. And you can never change that.”

Learn more about *The Diversify Difference* at www.diversify.com.

