

## BlackRock Skyrockets in Web Rankings

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Dramatic changes to **BlackRock's** advisor portal have nabbed the attention of a pair of consultants that released periodic rankings of the advisor websites this week.

**OppenheimerFunds, MainStay Investments, Lincoln Financial, Putnam Investments** and **Thrivent Financial** all scored well in **Dalbar's** quarterly Mutual Fund Web Monitor rankings.

**American Funds, Franklin Templeton Investments, MFS Investment Management, Putnam** and **OppenheimerFunds** topped **kasina's** list.

While the consultants may not agree on which shops earn the top spots, when it comes to the best websites, Dalbar and kasina agree that tools and timeliness are what helps win market share.

Dalbar's [list](#) looks at both sites geared toward consumers and those aimed at advisors over the third quarter of 2007. The kasina list rates the top 10 intermediary sites for the year.

### Top 10 Advisor Sites

A Tale Of Two Rankings

Dalbar	kasina
1. OppenheimerFunds	American Funds (tied) Franklin Templeton (tied)
2. MainStay Investments	
3. Lincoln Financial	MFS (tied) Putnam (tied)
4. Putnam	
5. Thrivent Financial	OppenheimerFunds
6. AIM Investments	John Hancock Funds
7. American Funds	Fidelity Investments Institutional Services
8. MFS	BlackRock (tied) Wells Fargo Advantage Funds (tied)
9. Franklin Templeton	
10. BlackRock	AIM Investments

Source: Dalbar Mutual Fund Monitor, Third Quarter 2007; kasina 2007 Top 10 Financial Intermediary Web Sites

Although the lineup of top shops varies slightly by list, both consulting groups agree that robust websites are increasingly important regardless of which channel a shop sells its funds through. "If you know nothing about a firm, the Web is the first place you go," says Conrad Bakker, a consultant at kasina.

Smart companies capitalize on that Web presence by making sure that when visitors come to the site — whether they are retail investors or advisors who cater to the high-net-worth clients — what they find is useful information and helpful tools. "The ultimate objective of any of these sites is to make it easy to do business with them," says Kathleen Whalen, managing director at Dalbar.

### Dalbar's Top 5 Sites For Consumers

Third Quarter, 2007

1. Wells Fargo
2. T. Rowe Price
3. Fidelity
4. OppenheimerFunds
5. USAA

Source: Dalbar Mutual Fund Web Monitor, Third Quarter 2007

Providing the right content takes constant attention, says Brian Melter, who heads e-business and marketing technology at **Wells Fargo Advantage Funds**. Wells Fargo topped Dalbar's consumer rankings and placed 14th for its advisor page. It tied with BlackRock for eighth place on kasina's list.

Melter declined to provide specifics on the cost of developing Wells Fargo's site, but says his 12-person team constantly solicits feedback through online interactive polls on the page. The key is to be nimble enough to add small enhancements quickly, he says.

This quarter, the company added a feature to its consumer site called Fund Mixer that allows retail investors to pick up to 10 funds and gives them a visual side-by-side representation of the potential risk and reward over a one-, three-, five- and 10-year horizon.

Likewise, Wells Fargo revised the online forms so that investors' personal information automatically appears once they log in. Investors like it because it saves time and operations staff appreciate it because it's tied directly to back-end recordkeeping systems, Melter says.

For its part, BlackRock made big changes and moved up on both the kasina and Dalbar lists. This marked the first year kasina evaluated BlackRock's advisor site, which was launched after the company's acquisition of what used to be the Merrill Lynch lineup. In the last quarter, BlackRock climbed 34 spots on Dalbar's advisor site rankings.

Bakker says that kasina's annual evaluation of sites ended in mid-October, but BlackRock has even continued to make significant improvements since then.

BlackRock's "user-centric" design and easy-to-read font, along with tie-ins to ratings from Morningstar and Lipper, contributed to its favorable ranking, the Dalbar report notes. So did its tips for advisors on building better client relationships.

One client-relationship-building feature on the BlackRock site is a tool that allows advisors to produce client reports using data from both BlackRock and external sources.

BlackRock's timing is perfect, says Chip Roame, managing director at **Tiburon Strategic Advisors**. The credit crisis that swept the markets this summer played right into BlackRock's expertise as a historically fixed-income shop, he says.

"At certain times, financial advisors flock to websites," Roame says. "Financial advisors who wanted to get smarter about the mortgage crisis had to find places to go. The logical place to go is BlackRock," he says.

Shops including Wells Fargo, Evergreen Investments Fidelity and OppenheimerFunds all ask visitors to their retail sites to participate in surveys, Dalbar notes. Surveys should be short, carefully scripted and not interfere with what the investor came to the site to do, Whalen says.

Fidelity, for example, offers a survey only on the first visit. This helps prevent customers from feeling like they are being haggled, she notes.

While customer surveys may help connect people to a brand, shops should measure Web traffic by tracking what people click on most, says Lisa Cohen, president of marketing consulting firm **Momentum Partners**. Such statistics are far more telling than a sample of customers who answer specific questions.

However, executing such strategies effectively requires good planning and cooperation between marketing and information technology teams, Cohen says.

More sophisticated doesn't necessarily mean more expensive or flashy. However, site feature should be relevant and useful to users. "The online channel is only going to become more important," Bakker says.