



SIDEDRAWER™

Case Study

# Meet Mackenzie & Jeff from We Listen Financial

Empowering Seniors to Age in Place

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***We Listen***  
Financial Planning Solutions Inc.



Document management infrastructure is absolutely vital for today's business. For We Listen Financial, a financial planning firm, document management infrastructure was a missing component in order to protect the sensitive data of their clients and to provide a much-needed alternative to email collaboration.

In this case study, we had the pleasure of interviewing We Listen Financial's President Jeff Stuart and Managing Director Mackenzie Stuart to discuss their unique use cases for SideDrawer.

## What is We Listen Financial?

Based in the Durham Region, We Listen Financial is a full-service financial planning business that works with clients all throughout Ontario. This company develops tailored financial plans for its clients after which it offers insurance and investment solutions to address any gaps revealed by those plans. We Listen Financial operates as a client's guide by assisting them in navigating their money and achieving financial independence, no matter what their destination may be.



Jeff originally conceived the idea of 'We Listen Financial' as a response to the increasing concern that financial service professionals were more focused on pushing product, versus identifying the needs of clients first.

**As is typical with any interaction, the starting point is understanding clients' needs and wants, which begins with listening.**

There are several different services offered by We Listen Financial. The business offers customized financial plans, continuing customer meetings and conversations, introductions to other service providers, and comprehensive financial guidance. We Listen Financial also offers a variety of accounts and investments, such as mutual and segregated funds, corporate accounts, group retirement plans, tax-free savings accounts, education and disability savings plans, and registered retirement savings plans. Various insurance programs, annuities, and mortgage references are all available. Both Jeff and Mackenzie work for We Listen Financial as RIA-certified Responsible Investing Specialists.

## **Mackenzie Stuart**

Since 2010, Mackenzie has largely served in an administrative and compliance capacity at We Listen Financial. She began working as a financial advisor with Freedom 55 Financial in 2019, and in 2021, she formally joined We Listen Financial as Managing Director. Mackenzie holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Laurentian University and an Advanced Diploma in Business Administration in Financial Planning from Seneca College. She is pursuing her Certified Financial Planner credential while holding the RIS designation, which gives her the title of Responsible Investment Specialist. Mackenzie enjoys traveling, going on hikes, and experiencing new things.

## Jeff Stuart

In 1988, Jeff started his consulting profession, and in 2007, he founded We Listen Financial Planning Solutions. His main area of concentration in his profession is creating financial strategies for his clients. He is thus sought after by other advisers and offices to give presentations on the value of financial planning for Canadians. With a concentration on dealing with seniors, Jeff graduated from Seneca College's Financial Planning program and possesses the Elder Planning Counselor accreditation. Additionally, he is a Registered Health Underwriter, which concentrates on the insurance component of living benefits. He is referred to as a Responsible Investment Specialist since he has the RIS credential. Jeff likes to travel, play basketball, practice, and spend time with his family in his spare time.

## We Listen Financial – The Challenge

We Listen Financial's focus was on building deeper relationships with its clientele.

**Our ideal client is not a person, our ideal clients have a common personality – centered around a desire to communicate with us.**

“Our ideal client is somebody who is willing to put their full trust into us and wants to work with us for their insurance, their investments, their financial planning needs for absolutely everything, but importantly, actually reaches out to us,” said Mackenzie, “And when we reach out to them, they respond—it’s just constant communication. As a result, our ideal client can be someone in their 20’s, a couple in their 40’s with children, a retired widower, or a senior couple enjoying their best life. It’s really just somebody who is going to communicate with us, who is going to be open and share with us and actually go through the whole process.”



"We tend to have far deeper relationships [at We Listen Financial]," Jeff told us during our interview, "You get to know the clients so well, and as a consequence, they trust you. So building their financial plans engenders even more trust."

Jeff noted that the firm will typically review plans with their clients at least once a year, but make it possible to review their plans at any time.

"If you have lost your job, if you've gotten a promotion, the first thing that you should do after you celebrate or you cry about it is you reach out to us and ask how does this affect your plan," said Mackenzie, "We recently had somebody who got a promotion and he came right to us and said 'I'm making \$15,000 more per year. What is this going to do to my plan? And how is this going to affect my future?'"

Clearly, We Listen Financial is in the business of regularly communicating with their clients - as any good financial firm should. We Listen Financial is very planning-centered and there is a lot involved in terms of educating the clients on the products that they'll need in the future, but ensuring that there is a buffer created for within the plans now.

### **For Jeff and Mackenzie, it came down to a need for a tech stack that would align with their communication needs as We Listen Financial continued to scale.**

With communication in mind, it's fairly clear why We Listen Financial decided to seek out SideDrawer. For Jeff and Mackenzie, it came down to a need for a tech stack that would align with their communication needs as We Listen Financial continued to scale. At the beginning of the journey, Mackenzie looked into several alternative solutions before discovering SideDrawer.

"We knew we needed to make the next step, we were just trying to figure out how and what it was going to look like, we also knew we were going to bring on a full-time client service manager," said Jeff, "This was before Mackenzie joined the firm. So a lot of things all started to happen. We looked at three or four different types of secure document sharing platforms. SideDrawer seemed by far like the best for what we needed it to do. But of course, we had to clarify it with our sponsor company, just to make sure from a compliance standpoint that it was fine. After they gave us the thumbs up, we have never looked back."

They team explained that they were using OneDrive for a short while as a potential solution, but found that it wasn't ideal for their use case.

"We would send out the document via a link but then the clients would lose it in their email, which was just a frustrating experience." said Mackenzie, "You'd have to know how to get back to that link, whether it had expired, and it was not an ideal client experience. SideDrawer is an actual branded platform that you can access online or from your phone."

**For a vast number of clients, they appreciate that we've proactively taken security into consideration, and we know immediately it's going to resonate well**

In addition to wanting better work product sharing technology in general, We Listen Financial was in need of a document exchange platform to handle the company's affairs and communications in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Mackenzie.

"We were realizing just how quickly things were changing after COVID, and that we're probably not going to go back to what was normal before," Mackenzie continued, "And sharing documents online is a lot more normalized. Before we were doing most meetings in person where if we needed paperwork signed, we would go to the client's house or office, and sit down and sign it or we would mail things out for them. In realizing that we needed to move forward with the way that things were going, we knew that we needed a secure way to be able to share documents with clients and have them share documents with us."





## SideDrawer – The Solution

Jeff noted that SideDrawer was a particularly good solution for financial planning in general, citing that as the reason why they became interested in the product as a potential solution to We Listen Financial's document management and collaboration issues.

### SideDrawer and financial planning work well together

"SideDrawer and financial planning work well together," said Jeff, "Because there's a lot of things that I want [in order] to build a financial plan that I'm not comfortable with somebody emailing me directly. Frankly, I'm not comfortable with somebody mailing it to me either. If you want to send your paperwork by courier that's fine, but if your tax returns get lost in the mail, that's a lot of personal information in there that you don't necessarily want just floating around out there in the wrong person's hands."

Mackenzie noted that the goal was to find a product that was easy to use and as convenient as possible – for internal users and the clients as a whole.

"Personally speaking, I like to use something that is convenient, attractive, and very easy to use," said Mackenzie, "We wouldn't want our clients using something that is difficult, and we're always trying to take steps out for the clients and make it easier for them to work with us. We don't want it to feel like a hassle to work with us, we want it to feel like a great experience where they really enjoy using the tools that we provide to them."

Jeff expressed some hesitations before implementing SideDrawer as their document management and collaboration platform, mainly when it came to the demographic of We Listen Financial's client base. This is a very common issue that financial planning firms and advisors face-- many of their clients are older, and thus might be more resistant to adapt to new technology. However, nine months later, We Listen Financial now uses SideDrawer full-time. So what changed?

**The majority of our clients have adapted to using SideDrawer, we think it's close to 60% to 70%**

"I would say the majority of our clients have adapted to using SideDrawer, I think it's close to 60 to 70%," said Mackenzie.

"I still think there's a certain amount of resistance out there, but that's a reflection of either age, their educational or career background," said Jeff, " But then we also have clients that once they get comfortable with [SideDrawer], it's just natural that they're going to use it. I think we constantly love reinforcing the idea. We don't just talk about this. I use it personally, and we use it corporately.

**Everything that we do goes through SideDrawer because we see the value in it. Once the clients start using it, they go, 'Hey, this works!'**

Everything that we do goes through SideDrawer because we see the value in it. Once the clients start using it, they go, 'Hey, this works!' Then they get more comfortable with it, then they start playing with it. I think quite often, it's just a matter of getting people to play around with it."

## **Tangible value add**

Mackenzie noted that the platform is tangible in a way that can really help financial advisors that provide relatively intangible services remotely.

"Something that I really like about SideDrawer is that it's something tangible," said Mackenzie, "Because what we do [financial planning] is very intangible. Any insurance policy is provided by a third party insurance provider, and the investments are managed by an asset manager. While we speak to some clients through the year and have various conversations, there's nothing that they can hold in their hand to as a tangible product. SideDrawer is an app that they can have on their phone, it's like a product that they can actually use for their own personal lives. So when they decide to work with us, not only do they get the service, not only do they get to set up the different plans with us, but they also have that tangible product that they wouldn't have anywhere else."







As a tangible document management platform, SideDrawer provided an immense amount of value to We Listen Financial in the context of financial planning. We Listen Financial's clients can now set up one virtual account where all of their sensitive financial documents can be stored and even shared safely with their lawyers and other relevant parties.

## **Greater business flexibility**

Mackenzie noted that using SideDrawer has helped the firm with its internal process and become more operational. Jeff went on to note that SideDrawer is used for almost every corner of We Listen Financial's daily operations, from client collaboration to accounting. "We use the platform within our business - with our own accountant and staff. All of our pay statements, all of our accounting stuff goes into SideDrawer," said Jeff.

**Pretty much all of our processes are now centered around SideDrawer. Everything that we do, we incorporate SideDrawer and we make sure that that's front and center, not just an afterthought.**

"We really wanted to make sure that we were using it," said Mackenzie, "And pretty much all of our processes are now centered around SideDrawer. Everything that we do, we incorporate SideDrawer and we make sure that that's front and center, not just an afterthought."

## **Excellent support**

And in addition to being a more functional tool for document management, SideDrawer has also provided Jeff and Mackenzie with top-notch technical support that can be difficult to find from other vendors.

One selling point, Jeff noted, was being able to tell his clients that if they had an issue, they could communicate with SideDrawer's support and find a solution quickly - simply because the support team actually listened to them.



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## What is SideDrawer?

SideDrawer is a cloud platform that provides financial advisors and individuals services to ensure online document sharing security. It is designed as a physical filing cabinet but with amplified safety. As a result, it benefits organizations and their clients by reducing expenses, time, and resources.

SideDrawer is the perfect solution for organizations dealing with confidential information through email. Financial advisors can send and receive sensitive documents without the risk of forwarding them to the wrong person. Additionally, SideDrawer is protected with several firewalls to secure clients' data completely. Therefore, it is an excellent alternative for financial advisors and their clientele.

In a nutshell, SideDrawer is the solution to all documentation problems. It presents a unique opportunity to increase work efficiency using better workflow, all-in-one-place digital document storage, and virtual problem solving faced by financial advisors. This helps promote a better user experience.

Excited to know what SideDrawer can do for your business?

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