Borromean Consulting

DIGITAL ADVICE MARKET SCAN | CEO BRIEFING

Beyond the Algorithm

2026 Digital Advice Market Scan

CEO Briefing: What it means for your fund

THE SHORT VERSION

Most of what members bring to their fund is a question, not a request for advice. The opportunity is to help them move from that question to a decision they can act on with well-founded confidence. Providers are building for this, with AI helping them move faster and at lower cost, and members now have more places to take their questions, including general-purpose AI. What will separate funds is the role they choose in their members' financial lives, how well they carry what members tell them from one interaction to the next, and whether they can show members are better off for it.

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PREPARED BY
Borromean Consulting
Duncan McPherson, Principal

FOR
Fund CEOs and executives,
trustees and boards

BASIS
Beyond the Algorithm 2026,
Parts A and B

Independent. Insight-led. Pragmatic.

Digital advice is entering its next phase. Faster innovation is turning it from an advice tool into a capability for member engagement, guidance and decision support, and that opens new ways for funds to help their members. That is the central finding of *Beyond the Algorithm 2026*, Borromean Consulting's second Digital Advice Market Scan. This briefing distils its two parts into a ten-minute read: what has changed, why it matters to a fund's members and strategy, and the decisions it puts in front of leadership.

Part A: From Advice Delivery to Member Engagement examines the direction of the market. *Part B: From Provider Selection to Strategic Alignment* profiles the ten providers and sets out how a fund can move from understanding the market to choosing a partner.

The market has grown, and more of it is now in use

The 2026 scan covers ten providers, up from six in 2025. All ten took part in structured interviews between July and September 2026, four for the first time, and each verified its own record. More of their capability is now live inside funds: advice for members over sixty, Age Pension entitlements built into the core retirement calculation, adviser teams working from the same platform as members, guidance on fund homepages, and the first conversational services that let members start with a question in their own words.

The 2025 report anticipated much of this. The 2026 research shows those expectations being realised, but unevenly.

	2025	2026
Provider proposition	Digital advice, with engagement a benefit of good integration	Engagement and decision support, with regulated advice one part
Innovation and capability	Integrated, configurable platforms able to scale advice, with retirement the main anchor	Capability broadening fastest at retirement and the member interface: advice for over-sixties, Age Pension in the core calculation, conversational entry points
Role of AI	An enabler still to come	In use to build faster and at lower cost; the recommendation stays rules-based
Where the hard work sits	Recognising what the capability can do	Putting capability to work: decisions, governance, procurement and integration
The competitive question	Which specialist provider fits	What role the fund wants, as AI and other institutions compete for where questions begin

Source: Part A, Exhibit 1. The 2026 column reflects provider accounts, not any single provider or fund.

Five things a CEO should know

1. Digital advice is becoming an engagement proposition

Members come to their fund with questions, and few of them are asking for advice. One provider estimates personal advice is around one in ten of all member interactions, and designed its tool to answer the other nine. Providers are building around that reality: tools that start from the member's question, sit on the homepage rather than behind an advice gateway, and serve the member, the phone adviser and the planner from one engine. Inside funds the shift is at an earlier stage: most deployments are still organised around delivering advice, which leaves room to put existing capability to wider use.

The idea that makes this workable is the difference between a fund's **scope of usefulness** (the questions it can help a member think through) and its **scope of personal advice** (where it will make a recommendation). A fund can widen the first without widening the second.

> **WHY IT MATTERS**
> Counting statements of advice says little about whether members were helped.

2. As innovation accelerates, putting capability to work becomes the focus

Building advice capability is becoming dramatically faster and less costly. Providers describe work that once took months and a large team moving towards weeks and a small one, at a fraction of the cost. Throughout, the advice recommendation itself stays rules-based and auditable; AI works around it, making help more personal by letting members start a conversation in their own words rather than work through menus of tools and topics.

Funds have moved materially in the past year: more digital advice is live, and more funds can describe what happened after they switched it on. What providers describe as largely unchanged is how funds decide, govern and buy. That reflects a real tension. Funds are responding to members who increasingly look for help in new places, including general-purpose AI, while meeting trustee and regulatory obligations that rightly make them careful, because advice at scale carries risk at scale. The result is that funds often move more deliberately than members and providers. Borromean's reading is that selection and contracting models built for static technology solutions fit less well in a dynamic environment, where capability can change materially before it goes live.

> **WHY IT MATTERS**
> How a fund selects, contracts for and governs technology will increasingly decide how much of what is being built reaches its members.

3. The contest for the member relationship starts with the first question

General-purpose AI tools, the consumer chat services that sit outside regulated financial advice, are becoming a place where financial questions begin. Research for AustralianSuper found 17% of Australians use AI to inform financial decisions, rising to 28% of 18 to 29 year olds. Banks, insurers and technology companies are positioning too. Funds hold a real trust advantage, but it is conditional: internationally, McKinsey found 57% of consumers would consider a third-party AI agent if their bank did not offer one.

> **WHY IT MATTERS**
> A fund that makes no choice still makes one. By default it becomes the product provider behind someone else's interface.

4. Context, continuity and trust are the fund's advantage, and they are still to be connected

What a fund can offer that a general-purpose AI tool, operating outside regulated financial advice, cannot is help grounded in the member's circumstances, connected to accountable advice and to a person when it matters. Behind it sits a regulated advice engine, bounded by Australian regulation and licensing. That matters because fluent AI tends to be agreeable, while regulated advice can say "you could do this, but we don't recommend it yet, and here is why". Part A gives an example: a conversation explained a spouse contribution strategy, and the advice engine then recommended against it because the household lacked three months of liquid savings.

Experience persistence, the principle that a member's next interaction should be better because the last one happened, is what turns that into a relationship. Carrying a member's context across digital, phone and adviser channels is the next opportunity: much of the capability exists, and funds that connect it will hold a real advantage.

Funds with direct control of their member data start from a strong position. Where data sits with third parties such as administrators, the task is harder, and progress depends on working with those partners to make data more mobile and usable. Either way, mobilising member data is becoming a competitive advantage: funds that do it well will be better placed to serve their members and to compete for new ones.

> **WHY IT MATTERS**
> Member context is infrastructure, not a feature, and it needs funding as such.

5. Capability is moving faster than the visible evidence of outcomes

The evidence is strong on what providers have built, growing on what funds have implemented and members use, and much less visible on whether members decide better. Funds with live digital advice are gathering rich insight into what members do, but in Borromean's experience most hold it closely, and that keeps questions about the value of digital advice open. Anecdotally, digital is doing what it was designed to do: activating engagement, drawing members into other services (particularly human support) and improving member outcomes. The FSC research found one in four digital tool users felt confident acting on a digital recommendation, yet among people concerned about retirement adequacy, digital tool users were far more likely to intend to seek financial advice within 12 months (28% against 11% of non-users).

> **WHY IT MATTERS**
> The goal is not more engagement or more advice. It is **well-founded confidence to act**, and that needs measuring from the start.

Retirement is where it all comes together. Its decisions are consequential, often irreversible and connected. Providers can demonstrate most of the components of a connected retirement experience; none showed them working as one experience from first question to life in retirement. That makes retirement the natural place to start.

The first decision is the role your fund wants in the member relationship

The question for leadership is not whether to invest in digital advice. It is what relationship the fund wants with members when their financial questions arise. Part A sets out four roles. They are choices, not a maturity ladder, and for some funds doing the first two very well is the right answer.

Role	What members get	What it asks of the fund
Product provider	Clear answers about the fund's own products and services	Accurate content that AI tools represent well; a clear path when a question goes further
Source of financial help	Help with wider financial questions, within a defined scope of personal advice	A settled boundary between usefulness and advice; regulated advice capability; pathways to people
Financial interface	A regular starting point for financial questions, with pathways into advice and human support	Member context retained with consent; conversational capability across channels; experience persistence
Orchestrator	Connections to the information, advice, products and people members need, including beyond the fund	Partnerships and referral arrangements; shared context; a commercial model for who pays

Source: Part A, Table 1, drawing on AI, Advice and Confidence to Act (Borromean Consulting, 2026).

The choice of role then shapes six further decisions, each examined in Part A:

- **What digital advice is for:** a destination members must find, or a capability behind many interactions
- **How broad the scope of usefulness should be,** settled with compliance and legal advisers before members find the boundary
- **What to own and what to partner for:** the interface, the conversation layer, the advice engine and the member's context
- **Member context as infrastructure,** funded as shared infrastructure across administration, CRM, advice and contact centre, and built with administrators and other data partners, rather than project by project

- **Digital and human support as one operating model,** with capacity planned for the demand good digital creates
- **Governance and measurement built for continuing change,** tracking understanding, confidence and action, not only usage

Choosing a partner starts with the fund, not the market

The ten providers share a market, but they are not interchangeable versions of one product. Part B finds four pathways into digital advice: **adviser technology**, **member engagement and administration**, **advice operations and licensing**, and **purpose-built digital advice**. Each pathway is extending towards the others, so feature lists increasingly look alike. Borromean's view is that this makes heritage matter more, not less: it shapes what a provider treats as its core, who it designs for first and how it works with a fund.

Three further points from Part B deserve leadership attention.

- **A market scan is a map, not a decision.** It shows the shape of the field. It cannot tell a fund which provider is right, because that depends on the fund's role, members and operating model.
- **Feature-led tenders can obscure fit.** Long-form responses flatten real differences, AI now makes polished responses easy to produce but less revealing of real fit, and a specification written months before go-live may describe capability that has already moved on.
- **Vendor relationships are often created inside the fund.** Where internal teams are not engaged early, such as technology, member engagement or marketing when a project is led by the advice team, their first contact is often a tactical task: a tile on the website or a data file to transfer. That tends to create tension over implementation constraints, rather than shared ownership of delivery across the business, and the relationship stays transactional. Whether a provider becomes a partner is shaped as much by how widely the fund engaged its own people early as by the contract.

Borromean's strategy-led approach runs from the inside out: the fund's role and intended member outcomes define the operating model, the operating model defines the capabilities needed, and those define the partner to look for. Only then is the market engaged, on the fund's terms and using real member scenarios rather than a long question set. Formal procurement remains essential; it works best once the strategic need is defined, and the documented rationale supports the fund's obligations under CPS 230. A fund part-way through a selection need not start again: the same logic can be applied to the shortlist and demonstrations it already has.

The ten providers in the 2026 scan

Each provider is profiled in Part B on its own terms, and each vignette has been signed off by the provider. The strategic identities in the table are Borromean's own. They are listed alphabetically; the scan does not rank, score or recommend.

Provider	Strategic identity
Bravura (Midwinter)	The Enterprise Advice Core
DASH	The Practitioner-Built Advice Engine
Gallagher	The Activation Partner
GBST	The Engagement Architect
Guideway	The Question-First Advice Operator
Ignition	The Institutional Advice Infrastructure Provider
InvestStream	The Conversational Advice Utility
moneyGPS	The Licensed Advice Operator
Otivo	The Digital-First Adviser
SuperEd	The Retirement Advice Practitioner

Seven questions for your executive team and board

1. Where do our members take their financial questions today, and where would we want them to take them?
2. Which role in the member relationship have we chosen, and is it a decision we made or a position we drifted into?
3. What should a member never have to tell us twice, and can our systems and partners carry it?
4. What sits behind any conversation a member has with us, and could we explain it to a member and a regulator with equal confidence?
5. Are our selection, contracting and governance processes built for technology that will change before it goes live?
6. Before we next approach the market, have we defined the primary job we need a provider to do, and has every part of the business that will live with it helped shape it?
7. How will we know whether our digital advice improves members' understanding, confidence and decisions, not only whether it is used?

Where to go from here

If you want to…	Read	Worth tasking to
Test your fund's strategy against where the market is heading	**Part A**, Sections 1, 3 and 7	Strategy, member experience and advice leads
Understand what AI is changing, and what it isn't	**Part A**, Section 2	Technology, risk and advice leads
Build the case for member context and continuity	**Part A**, Sections 4 to 6	Data, member services and retirement leads
Prepare for a provider review or selection	**Part B**, Sections 3 and 4	Procurement, advice and technology leads
Understand individual providers	**Part B**, Section 6 (the vignettes)	Whoever owns the advice or engagement roadmap

A practical next step is to ask one executive to brief the leadership team on which of the four roles the fund is playing today, and which it intends to play.

About the research. *Beyond the Algorithm 2026* is a provider-side scan, independently researched and written by Borromean Consulting. It draws on verified interviews with ten digital advice providers, the 2025 baseline and Borromean's published research with the Financial Services Council and CoreData. It does not interview funds. Figures reported by providers are their own and have not been independently audited. No provider paid to take part. Borromean also advises funds and, from time to time, undertakes scoped projects for digital advice providers; those engagements do not influence the scan.

About Borromean Consulting. Borromean is an independent advisory practice working with superannuation funds, advice organisations and industry participants on advice strategy, member engagement, retirement, operating models and provider selection. It is not a technology vendor or implementation provider. Duncan McPherson, Principal, has more than 30 years in financial advice and superannuation, including almost a decade as CEO of Link Advice.

I'd welcome the chance to explore what this means for your fund with you and your team.

Regards,

Duncan McPherson · duncan@borromeanconsulting.com.au · www.borromeanconsulting.com.au

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