

## Business

# Value Partners cracks \$1-B mark in assets

## Firm's investments double in difficult time for market

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Posted: **05/24/2013 1:00 AM** | Last Modified: 05/24/2013 7:45 AM | [Updates](#) |

Value Partners Investments has hit the big time.

The Winnipeg-based mutual fund company hit \$1 billion in assets under management last week, and while such a threshold won't send the banks or insurance giants running for cover, it's a significant milestone for any firm that doesn't call Bay Street home.



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Value Partners Investments' leadership includes (from left) COO Paul Lawton, president Gregg Filmon and Steve Norton, the director of research. [Photo Store](#)

The seven-and-a-half-year-old firm has seen its assets double in slightly more than three years in a market that has been far from smooth. It also has 115 advisers across the country, up from 50 six years ago.

VPI believes it can build on its Winnipeg success, too. Steve Norton, its director of research, said the company is looking at acquiring some property out East and hiring some talent to spread the good word.

"We're not flashy and we're not complicated. We're looking to expand and take the Winnipeg spirit further east," he said.

Value Partners has a different model and approach than most firms. The owners, who are

a combination of advisers and employees, invest their own money alongside that of VPI's clients.

And that's one of the key success drivers, according to president Gregg Filmon.

"(Our advisers) were tired of being sold products and not being inside the tent for the decision-making process on how their clients were going to be treated," he said.

Filmon is optimistic VPI's assets will continue to grow, as it has a credible investment track record.

"We invest in businesses that are tough to compete with, tough to copy and that pay a growing stream of profits out to their owners," Filmon said.

In a highly consolidated industry, there will always be opportunities for smaller companies to provide a higher level of service and differentiate themselves from the giants, he said.

"I think we have a tremendous opportunity to provide a different experience," he said.

Norton is quick to note VPI's executive team measures itself by more important metrics than assets under management.

"We're more concerned with how much money have our clients made. You can have a \$20-billion firm but if you haven't made anybody any money, none of it matters," he said.

Norton said in addition to being a coming-of-age number, \$1 billion is also when you start to attract attention from potential suitors. VPI has had its tires kicked by a number of would-be buyers but when they asked if the company is for sale, they have been quickly rebuffed.

### AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB

If you've hit the billion-dollar mark in financial services in Winnipeg, you've gained membership in a pretty exclusive club.

The number of local firms that have hit 10 figures in assets includes Value Partners Investments, Cardinal Capital Management and Pavilion Financial Corp. Previously, companies such as Wellington West Capital and Assante Corp. far surpassed \$1 billion before being sold to National Bank Financial and CI Financial, respectively.

Of course, two of the industry's heavyweights, Great-West Lifeco and IGM Financial, have hundreds of billions of dollars in assets.

"No," Norton said firmly.

Charlie Spiring, vice-chairman of National Bank Financial, said he sees some of the same spunk at VPI his team at Wellington West Capital had for nearly two decades until it was sold to NBF two years ago. In particular, he likes the company's share-ownership model.

"I'm a big fan. They've done well and when you consider the market environment they've been up against the last couple of years, they've done very well," he said.

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Republished from the Winnipeg Free Press print edition May 24, 2013 0

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