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REFLECTS ON HIS FIRST YEAR



Sincerely Yours

What's in a Name?
Plenty, if you're the
new Cerity Partners.

By TERRY TROY

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Robert C. Smith

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but a single word can be even more powerful if you choose the right one. That's what the new Cerity Partners did when it rebranded itself earlier this year.

"We recognized an opportunity to better communicate the character of our people, advice and service to clients and business partners," explains Kurt Miscinski, president and CEO, Cerity Partners. "Our new name is a modification of the word sincerity, which encapsulates our firm's character and the experience our clients receive."

A leading, national registered investment advisory firm, Cerity Partners provides comprehensive objective financial advice to high-net-worth individuals and their families, businesses and employees, as well as nonprofit organizations, from its offices across the country.

So why the name change and why now? It turns out, it could be a case of simply aligning the company's name with its culture.

"That might be a fair assessment," says Robert C. Smith, a partner in Cerity Partners who is also the market leader

of its Cleveland office. "Our clients think we are unique. The firm wants its brand name and identity to express its powerful, contemporary and distinctive manner."

Last year, the company embarked on a journey to find a new name that better defined its culture and objectives. In this era of more precise marketing and branding, the former HPM Partners hired a firm to help it identify specific traits it had to offer. Perhaps more importantly, as part of its branding efforts, Cerity Partners listened directly to its clients to see what they had to say.

"It was very exciting for our firm to have the opportunity," says Smith.

But a little scary as well. It always is when you look in the mirror, seriously examine what you see and make a more precise definition of who you are.

"I think a lot of businesses are afraid to define themselves more precisely because they think they might miss an opportunity as opposed to appreciating that they will have even more opportunities by providing a more precise definition of who they are," says Smith, who is certainly no stranger to the Cleveland business community.



As Smith had hoped, the process of selecting a new name was informative and inclusive.

“We started by having a lot of internal dialogue with colleagues about their clients and where they felt they had made a difference,” says Smith. “We began to discover that there were some common themes. Then we reached out to clients about their experiences.”

It turns out, the primary differentiator for the firm is its holistic and collaborative approach to wealth and investment management: gaining a complete understanding of a client’s financial needs, goals, concerns and priorities and gathering detailed information on assets and liabilities before making any

kind of analysis. Then, after thoroughly analyzing the information, recommending and working with clients to implement effective solutions — almost as if they were close family members.

“Many of Certy Partner’s clients are people who have achieved success financially, and many have achieved financial goals,” says Smith.

“And some may have even surpassed those goals,” Smith adds. “These are people who have worked hard, saved well, gotten into positions of leadership and made some good decisions.”

But with success also comes responsibility. The burden of wealth sets in, which means taxes and revenue streams from transactions clients may

have been a part of — whether its private equity, leaving a business and getting bought out or business owners selling or merging their businesses.

Smith has firsthand experience with the latter, his former firm of Spero Smith Investment Advisors was merged into the former HPM Partners in October 2016.

“Early in my career, I did some acquisition work on behalf of a large corporation,” says Smith. “When it is your business, you start to ask where the handbooks are that tell you exactly how to do it. It’s not just the technical aspects, but the nuanced parts. You need to have good people around you that are advising you and know what to do.”

That’s where an objective and

comprehensive financial advisory firm like Certy Partners comes in. But there’s a lot more to the name change than the financial advice the firm offers its clients. The name is also very descriptive of the company’s culture of giving back to the communities it serves.

In the case of our community, it’s Smith who is making an impact and leading by example. Smith and Certy Partners are deeply committed to numerous philanthropic and civic organizations. Smith serves on numerous boards and investment committees of major local corporations and nonprofit entities, including University Hospitals and Team NEO, where he is the current chair. Smith is chair emeritus of his alma mater, Ohio Northern University; has been named by several elected officials to

boards of public entities; and serves on the transition team for recently elected Governor DeWine.

Like any true community leader, Smith downplays his personal efforts, stressing instead the need for any organization, and especially Certy Partners, to be active in the community, as well as local and national philanthropic efforts.

“That piece of their culture, of giving back to the community, was something that was very attractive when HPM came knocking on my door two years ago,” says Smith. “They were very interested in our community, about where the people in their organization live and work and trying to make the community better. That’s all a part of what we are as an organization.” ■



Kurt Miscinski

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