



# How Hill Investment Group transformed 401(k) guidance into a high-value service

## HILL INVESTMENT GROUP

## CASE STUDY

### Background

Retirement security is on your clients' minds. In fact, over 60% of investors are looking for more help with their retirement accounts.<sup>1</sup>

In this case study, see how fast-growing RIA firm Hill Investment Group uses Pontera to:

- Improve performance of, and satisfaction with, clients' retirement plans.
- Turn a common weakness (managing held-away accounts) into a point of strength and differentiation.
- Provide clients with a holistic portfolio management experience that takes all their assets into account.
- Implement a process-driven transition, leading to an adoption rate of ~90% among clients invited to the platform.
- Meaningfully grow the firm's assets under management in a short amount of time.



### Meet Hill Investment Group

Hill Investment Group is a full-service wealth manager headquartered in St. Louis. With ~\$905 million under management as of April 2023, they have found success in serving high-net-worth individuals and families with evidence-based investment management and financial planning.

The firm focuses on high hospitality-driven relationships and strives for a very high level of service. Hill currently integrates with Orion and Redtail for technology and is a Focus Financial network partner firm.

## Meet Nell Schiffer, Chief Operating Officer



Nell Schiffer started her career as a petroleum engineer, wearing a hard hat, steel-toed boots, and a fire-retardant jumpsuit to work. In oil and gas she learned process and was

ferocious about creating repeatable systems in her field.

In 2018, Schiffer joined Hill as Chief Operating Officer. Initially, she started as an operations

manager and compliance officer. As her role evolved, she took on more strategic projects.

Schiffer now leads several important initiatives for Hill including integrating acquisitions, key hiring, and improving operational efficiency.

Her ability to design and roll out rules-driven frameworks aiming towards operational excellence garnered her the nickname “Sheriff Schiffer” within Hill.

## 401(k) management challenges

Of Hill’s operational challenges, 401(k) management was especially onerous. Historically, Hill’s advisors devoted significant time to helping clients with their 401(k) accounts. “We provided sort of arm’s length advice on 401(k)’s. We were not billing on that service mainly because we didn’t feel the level of service matched our standards,” says Schiffer.

To ensure client 401(k) allocations stayed in sync with the rest of their portfolios, Hill had used an

aggregation platform for held-away accounts, but frustrations mounted. “Our client service team was complaining about the aggregation service. They had to reach out to clients and felt embarrassed by how often the links would break and how bad the data connection was. We wondered if there was a better solution for our client service team, and if it was a high enough level of service that we could feel comfortable charging our full fee schedule since we were now providing real value to the client.”

## Transforming Hill’s retirement account capabilities with Pontera

Schiffer saw the Pontera platform as an ideal way to address operational challenges, deliver the insightful and consistent management their clients expect, and help Hill pursue its ambition to grow to over \$5 billion in AUM by 2030.

Through her due diligence process, Schiffer was impressed with Pontera’s approach to security and compliance. The company is SOC 2 certified and uses bank-level security architecture to ensure that client data is protected.

The platform enables secure, client-permissioned account management without ever providing client credentials to the advisor. Advisors can compare fees and historical returns, define target

portfolios, and set alerts for when those allocations drift outside customized boundaries.

SYMBOL	NAME	EXP. RATIO	HISTORICAL RETURNS			RETURNS DATE	CATEGORY	CURRENT PORTFOLIO Allocation	TARGET PORTFOLIO Allocation
			1YR	3YR	10YR				Allocation
Benchmark									
FDIXX	Fidelity Diversified International Fund K Lipper Global	0.91%	-30.90%	0.40%	4.77%	Sep 30, 2022	Equity Global ex US	32.24%	20% <a href="#">X Remove</a>
PDGIX	T Rowe Price Dividend Growth Fund I Lipper Global	0.49%	-9.63%	9.95%	--	Sep 30, 2022	Equity US	9.27%	32% <a href="#">X Remove</a>
LSSCX	Loomis Sayles Small Cap Value Fund Inst Lipper Global	0.90%	-16.38%	2.31%	8.13%	Sep 30, 2022	Equity US Sm&Mid Cap	25.35%	14% <a href="#">X Remove</a>
LCEFX	Invesco Diversified Dividend Fund Re Lipper Global	0.43%	-6.13%	4.84%	8.82%	Sep 30, 2022	Equity US Income	3.94%	10% <a href="#">X Remove</a>
BGRIX	Baron Growth Fund Institutional Lipper Global	1.03%	-24.12%	9.81%	11.31%	Sep 30, 2022	Equity US Sm&Mid Cap	29.20%	24% <a href="#">X Remove</a>

## Perceived concerns are a non-issue

Prior to launch, Schiffer prepared for the objections and concerns she was convinced she would hear from clients.

"Our client service team felt like the client was going to say 'now you're charging me for something that you're already doing.'" explains Schiffer.

“ In hindsight, clients were so appreciative that they didn't have to worry about this thing anymore that was in the back of their minds.

## An easy transition to Pontera

Hill advisors introduced clients to Pontera through an email explaining the benefits of the new 401(k) management service:

- True holistic management of the client's entire financial situation.
- Better ability to combat volatility with timely rebalancing.
- Flexible asset allocation adjustments for more tax efficiency and growth.
- Full fiduciary responsibility for these accounts.
- Timely services provided on the same fee schedule as other accounts.

The email invited the client to a quick 20-minute call during which the Hill advisor gets the client's buy-in and begins setting them up to make the onboarding process as seamless as possible. The advisor also informs the client that the investment team is assessing the accounts and investment options and will implement recommendations.

After the call, advisors followed up with an email letting them know next steps and sharing the Pontera Privacy Policy and User Agreement. Once the accounts were updated, Hill sent a final email to the client summarizing how the changes made can improve their chances of better investment performance over time.

## Pontera helps drive client satisfaction

Hill has decided to fold in held-away account management as part of its standard offering. This decision ultimately enabled them to bring on more assets, provide a higher level of service, and make client relationships "stickier." Schiffer adds, "It leads to a better client and team experience."

The conversations with clients about Pontera went very well. "It was really easy to say, 'Hey, now we can rebalance your account quarterly and there's nothing for you to worry about,'" says Schiffer. "Most of the people that I spoke with signed up right away."

So far, an estimated ~90% of clients invited to the platform have signed on for Hill advisors to manage their 401(k) accounts and other



retirement assets using Pontera. In less than three months, Hill Investment Group onboarded \$18M to the Pontera platform.

## The missing piece of a client's full financial picture

One Hill client is a medical professional in his fifties who was looking to start planning for retirement with Hill but his taxable accounts were below the threshold to receive a higher level of service. Using

Pontera, his advisor was able to pull in his \$2.5 million 401(k) account for management, enabling the client to receive a higher tier of service and make the most out of his entire portfolio.

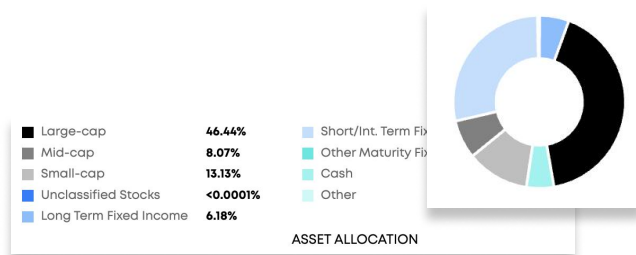
“ Giving him the planning that he needs before he retires was hugely important,” explains Schiffer.

## 401(k) management gives Hill a competitive edge

In addition to performance, Schiffer is certain Hill now provides a more holistic experience to all clients without expending additional resources. Pontera's team offers all the support needed, making the process easy for Hill's advisors to execute.

"Traditionally, 401(k)'s are a significant part of people's assets and they deserve the same level of integration as their other account types. Now they're treated with the same level of respect as clients' other investments," says Schiffer. "Clients don't have to worry about what's going on in their 401(k), and they appreciate that."

Overseeing retirement accounts, a previously low-value, operationally taxing part of Hill's business, has transformed into a high-value driver of



organic growth that is helping Hill reach its \$5 billion AUM goal with more holistic portfolio management. Providing complete workplace retirement account management is a clear differentiator that helps the firm stand out from peers. "We plan to roll out Pontera with every client that we bring on that has outside retirement assets," says Schiffer.

## Best practices to ensure a good outcome

Schiffer's steady guidance during the launch of Pontera within the firm resulted in successful platform implementation. She sought to provide a "white glove" service to clients so they wouldn't have to figure everything out on their own.

Here are her best practices to drive adoption of the Pontera platform:

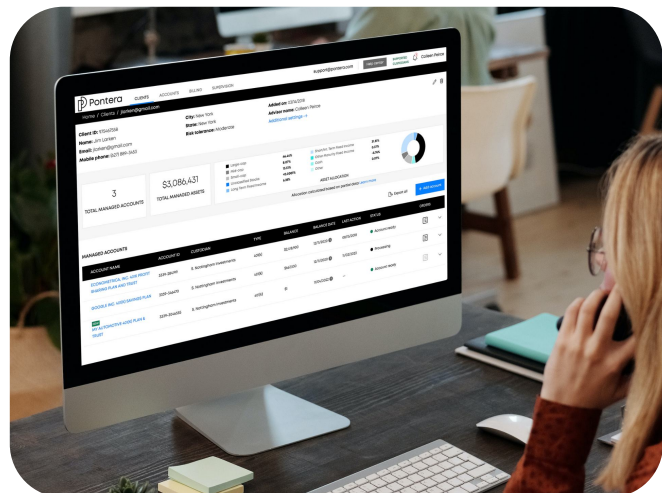
- Before onboarding clients, ensure they can access their accounts. People often don't have their credentials which slows down the process.

- To make account setup seamless, create the client's profile on Pontera before calling them. Then, share your screen and guide the client through the steps to connect their account.
- Explain to clients that account connection may involve two-factor authentication, which is sometimes required by the financial institution and recommended by Pontera. This underscores the commitment to security and prepares clients for what to expect.

## Getting started with Pontera

Hill's experience with Pontera illustrates the power of providing holistic 401(k) management to drive increased value for clients. "Pontera easily dovetails into all of our goals," says Schiffer. "Depending on what the advisor comes in with, no matter how they manage 401(k)s, my bet is that Pontera is a better solution than whatever they are currently doing."

With the median American family holding more than half of their assets in retirement funds<sup>2</sup>, it's critical that advisors can effectively include these investments in comprehensive financial planning. By partnering with Pontera, Hill can now take a client's full financial life into account to help them retire better and with more confidence.



Pontera is a fintech company on a mission to help millions of Americans retire better by enabling financial advisors to analyze, rebalance, and report on workplace retirement account assets, including 401(k)s, 403(b)s and more.

The platform is designed to work across the vast majority of retirement plans and seamlessly integrate with existing portfolio management tools to help advisors improve their clients' financial outcomes.

Founded in 2012, Pontera is headquartered in New York City.

## Interested in learning more?

Visit our website [pontera.com](https://pontera.com) to request a demo

<sup>1</sup> J.P. Morgan Asset Management, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Federal Reserve's Survey of Consumer Finances, 2019