When a product makes sense internally but stalls with advisers

For product and distribution directors at insurers, asset managers and platforms: why a proposition that cleared every internal test can still struggle to win adviser recommendations, and how to find the cause.

IN BRIEF

The problem

Take-up is slow and adviser feedback mentions charges, complexity or fit, so the usual response is more marketing or a price cut.

Why it happens

In my experience, stalls trace back to one of four points in the adviser's own process: research, the suitability report, the charges comparison or administration.

What to do

Work through real cases with a handful of advisers to find the failing point, and fix it before spending more or cutting the price.

01

What a stall looks like

The new adviser proposition has cleared pricing committee, product governance and Consumer Duty sign-off. The launch went to plan. Business development managers report positive meetings, and advisers say they like it. Illustrations are being run, but applications are not following.

When you ask why, the feedback is vague: charges, complexity, or a sense that the product doesn't fit how the adviser works. The usual responses are more adviser events, a bigger marketing budget or a price review.

Those responses assume the problem is awareness or price. In my experience the cause is more often in the adviser's own process. An adviser can only recommend a product they can defend in a suitability report and service for years afterwards. A product has to get through the adviser's process as well as your own, and the two processes ask different questions.

02

Where products usually stall

Advisers rarely reject a product outright. It drops out at one of four points in their process, and each point needs a different fix.

Research and due diligence. Many advice firms work from a centralised investment or retirement proposition: a set of products, platforms and providers they research

once and use across many clients. A product that isn't on the platforms they use, or doesn't fit a segment of that proposition, is unlikely to be considered case by case. A due diligence pack written for your own committee seldom answers the questions their investment committee asks.

The suitability report. The adviser has to explain in writing why the recommendation suits this client, in terms the client understands, and in practice that means showing why it beats the obvious alternative. If a feature takes a page to explain, or its value depends on assumptions the adviser can't evidence, they will usually recommend something simpler. That is a reasonable response to their own regulatory risk, not a lack of interest.

The charges comparison. For investment and pension products, advisers have been paid since December 2012 through charges agreed with their clients rather than commission from providers. Your pricing can't buy a recommendation. It has to stand up when the adviser sets the total cost of product, funds, platform and advice beside the obvious alternative. Tiered charges, multi-part charges and exit charges all make that comparison harder, and harder comparisons get avoided.

Administration after the sale. Paper forms, re-keyed data, slow transfers, statements the client can't follow and servicing queries all land on the adviser's team, for as long as the client holds the product. Advice firms remember which providers create work.

The Consumer Duty adds a fifth test. The adviser firm has to be satisfied that your product suits the clients it recommends it to, and that its own charges don't stop the product giving fair value. That needs usable information from you: a target market it can map to its own clients, and a value assessment it can rely on. The FCA consulted in June 2026 on how these duties are shared along a distribution chain (CP26/23), and final rules are expected in the first quarter of 2027.

> FROM EXPERIENCE
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> For 15 years I built and priced products: annuities, equity release, bulk pension buyouts and investment bonds, at Aviva, Prudential, Partnership and St. James's Place. At St. James's Place I led an initiative to remove penal exit charges and sponsored the Retirement Planner cashflow tool.
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> Then I spent more than seven years founding and running advice firms, and at the last one I was principal adviser for over 400 clients. Sitting on that side of the table showed me, case by case, that the questions that decide a recommendation are seldom the ones a pricing committee asks. They are whether I could explain the product in a suitability report, justify its cost against the alternative, and live with its administration for the next 10 years.

03

How to find out which point is failing

Business development feedback is a starting point, not evidence. Advisers tend to be polite in meetings, and few will volunteer that a product would create work for their administrators.

Three checks usually find the cause within a few weeks:

- **Sit with advisers on real cases.** Choose five or six who know the product but haven't used it. Watch them research, recommend and set up a case, and note where they hesitate.
- **Read the suitability reports.** Ask for anonymised reports where the adviser considered your product, including those where they chose something else. The reasons they give the client are the reasons that matter.
- **Track each stage separately.** Count firms met, firms with platform access, illustrations run, applications and repeat use. The stage where the numbers fall away is where to look.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

A launch pipeline, stage by stage

Stage	Adviser firms	Conversion
Met by the business development team	240	–
Product available on a platform they use	150	63%
Ran at least one illustration	90	60%
Submitted at least one application	22	24%
Recommended it more than once	9	41%

Illustrative numbers. Here the sharpest fall comes between illustration and application, which points to the suitability report or the charges comparison. A marketing campaign would add firms to the top row and leave that drop where it is.

04

What to change, and what to leave alone

Fix the stage that is failing, and leave the rest of the proposition alone until you have evidence about it.

- **Research and due diligence.** Get onto the platforms your target advisers use, and write the due diligence pack around their questions.
- **The suitability report.** Simplify the feature or remove it. A feature advisers won't explain adds cost to the product and little to sales.
- **The charges comparison.** Look at the shape of the charge before its level. A single, clear charge can be easier to recommend than a cheaper one in three parts.
- **Administration.** Fix the process before adding distribution effort, or more business will simply mean more of the problem.
- **Distributor information.** Give advice firms a target market they can map to their own clients and a value assessment they can rely on.

Be careful with price cuts. Cutting an annual charge from 0.50% to 0.40% means the product needs 25% more assets just to earn the same revenue. If price wasn't the reason for the stall, that is an expensive way to find out.

For the next launch, put the pricing actuary in the room with two advisers and a real client case before the product is signed off. An hour of that can save months of business development effort later.

Questions for the board

01 At which stage of the adviser's process is the product failing, and what evidence do we have beyond business development feedback?

02 How many advisers who know the product have recommended it more than once, and what did the others recommend instead?

03 Could an adviser explain each feature, and why it suits a client better than the obvious alternative, in a few sentences of a suitability report?

04 How does the total cost to the client compare with the alternatives an adviser will put beside it, and which part of our charge is hardest to justify?

05 What does the product cost an adviser firm to administer over its life, compared with the products it competes with?

06 Before we cut the price, what evidence do we have that price is the reason, and how much extra business would we need just to stand still?

In my experience a stall comes down to one point in the adviser's process, and a few weeks of working through real cases is usually enough to find it. Finding it first means the money goes on the fix, not on more effort at the wrong stage.

If this is on your table, a 30-minute conversation is usually enough to tell whether I can help.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Woodruff is a Chartered Actuary (FIA) and Chartered Financial Planner (FPFS). He spent 15 years pricing and building products at Aviva, Prudential, Partnership and St. James's Place, then more than seven years founding and running advice firms through to a substantial sale. Through Mark Woodruff Consultancy he works with financial services firms on product, pricing, distribution and governance.

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