LPL Investment Holdings Inc. Form 10-Q October 29, 2010

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# UNITED STATES SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION Washington, D.C. 20549 Form 10-Q

(Mark One)

# bQUARTERLY REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES<br/>EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934

# For the quarterly period ended September 30, 2010

or

# • TRANSITION REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934

For the transition period from to

# Commission File Number: 000-52609

LPL Investment Holdings Inc.

(Exact name of registrant as specified in its charter)

Delaware

(State or other jurisdiction of incorporation or organization)

20-3717839 (I.R.S. Employer Identification No.)

One Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108

(Address of Principal Executive Offices) (Zip Code)

# (617) 423-3644

# (Registrant s telephone number, including area code)

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant (1) has filed all reports required to be filed by Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to file such reports), and (2) has been subject to such filing requirements for the past 90 days. b Yes o No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant has submitted electronically and posted on its corporate Web site, if any, every Interactive Data File required to be submitted and posted pursuant to Rule 405 of Regulation S-T (§ 232.405 of this chapter) during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to submit and post such files). o Yes o No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a large accelerated filer, an accelerated filer, a non-accelerated filer, or a smaller reporting company. See the definitions of large accelerated filer, accelerated filer and smaller reporting company in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act. (Check one):

| Large accelerated filer o | Accelerated filer o | Non-accelerated filer þ | Smaller reporting |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
|                           | _                   |                         | company o         |

(Do not check if a smaller reporting company)

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a shell company (as defined in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act). o Yes b No

The number of shares of Common Stock, par value \$0.001 per share, outstanding as of October 20, 2010 was 94,249,753.90.

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#### WHERE YOU CAN FIND MORE INFORMATION

We are required to file annual, quarterly and current reports and other information required by the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended, with the Securities and Exchange Commission, or SEC. You may read and copy any document we file with the SEC at the SEC s public reference room located at 100 F Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20549, U.S.A. Please call the SEC at 1-800-SEC-0330 for further information on the public reference room. Our SEC filings are also available to the public from the SEC s internet site at *http://www.sec.gov.* When we use the terms LPLIH , we , us , our , and the Company we mean LPL Investment Holdings Inc., a Delawa corporation, and its consolidated subsidiaries, taken as a whole, unless the context otherwise indicates.

# SPECIAL NOTE REGARDING FORWARD-LOOKING STATEMENTS

This Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q in Item 2 Management s Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations and in other sections includes forward-looking statements (regarding the Company s future financial condition, results of operations, business strategy, financial needs and other similar matters) that involve risks and uncertainties. Forward-looking statements can be identified by words such as anticipates , expects , believes ,

plans , predicts , and similar terms. Forward-looking statements are not guarantees of future performance and our actual results may differ significantly from the results discussed in the forward-looking statements. There are important factors that could cause our actual results, level of activity, performance or achievements to differ materially from the results, level of activity, performance or achievements expressed or implied by the forward-looking statements including, but not limited to, changes in general economic and financial market conditions, fluctuations in the value of advisory and brokerage assets, effects of competition in the financial services industry, changes in the number of our financial advisors and institutions and their ability to effectively market financial products and services, the effect of current, pending and future legislation and regulation and regulatory actions. In particular, you should consider the numerous risks outlined in Risk Factors in the Company s Registration Statement on Form S-1, filed on June 4, 2010, as amended.

Although we believe the expectations reflected in the forward-looking statements are reasonable, we cannot guarantee future results, level of activity, performance or achievements. You should not rely upon forward-looking statements as predictions of future events. We will not undertake and we specifically disclaim any obligation to release publicly the result of any revisions which may be made to any forward-looking statements to reflect events or circumstances after the date of such statements or to reflect the occurrence of events, whether or not anticipated. In that respect, we wish to caution readers not to place undue reliance on any such forward-looking statements, which speak only as of the date made.

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## PART I FINANCIAL INFORMATION Item 1. Financial Statements LPL INVESTMENT HOLDINGS INC. AND SUBSIDIARIES Condensed Consolidated Statements of Income

(Unaudited)

# (Dollars in thousands, except per share data)

|   | Three Months Ended<br>September 30, |            | Nine Mon<br>Septem |              |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------|--------------------|--------------|
|   | 2010                                | 2009       | 2010               | 2009         |
| REVENUES:   |                                     |            |                    |              |
| Commissions   | \$385,273                           | \$370,249  | \$1,194,414        | \$ 1,084,900 |
| Advisory fees   | 212,344                             | 182,141    | 633,820            | 507,509      |
| Asset-based fees  | 81,599                              | 70,894     | 230,485            | 201,287      |
| Transaction and other fees  | 70,243                              | 68,764     | 205,738            | 191,711      |
| Interest income, net of operating interest expense                | 5,105                               | 4,992      | 14,882             | 15,379       |
| Other   | 5,400                               | 5,286      | 14,192             | 13,835       |
| Net revenues  | 759,964                             | 702,326    | 2,293,531          | 2,014,621    |
| EXPENSES:   |                                     |            |                    |              |
| Commissions and advisory fees                                     | 517,266                             | 472,960    | 1,569,424          | 1,363,583    |
| Compensation and benefits   | 74,627                              | 66,337     | 223,024            | 198,156      |
| Depreciation and amortization                                     | 19,772                              | 26,924     | 67,472             | 81,596       |
| Promotional   | 23,497                              | 24,492     | 49,141             | 50,108       |
| Professional services   | 14,683                              | 10,002     | 37,950             | 26,939       |
| Occupancy and equipment   | 12,979                              | 13,207     | 36,742             | 37,469       |
| Brokerage, clearing and exchange                                  | 8,362                               | 8,222      | 25,944             | 24,118       |
| Communications and data processing                                | 7,693                               | 8,809      | 24,509             | 26,352       |
| Regulatory fees and expenses                                      | 6,038                               | 7,106      | 18,715             | 18,022       |
| Restructuring charges   | 1,863                               | 42,219     | 10,434             | 41,695       |
| Travel and entertainment  | 3,908                               | 2,171      | 9,528              | 6,269        |
| Other   | 3,750                               | 1,640      | 11,801             | 11,003       |
| Total operating expenses  | 694,438                             | 684,089    | 2,084,684          | 1,885,310    |
| Non-operating interest expense                                    | 19,511                              | 24,626     | 71,530             | 76,599       |
| Loss on extinguishment of debt                                    |                                     |            | 37,979             |              |
| Loss (gain) on equity method investment                           | 3                                   | 96         | (18)               | 264          |
| Total expenses  | 713,952                             | 708,811    | 2,194,175          | 1,962,173    |
| INCOME (LOSS) BEFORE PROVISION FOR<br>(BENEFIT FROM) INCOME TAXES | 46,012                              | (6,485)    | 99,356             | 52,448       |
| PROVISION FOR (BENEFIT FROM) INCOME TAXES                         | 19,868                              | (5,029)    | 39,658             | 23,526       |
| NET INCOME (LOSS)   | \$ 26,144                           | \$ (1,456) | \$ 59,698          | \$ 28,922    |
| FARNINGS (LOSS) PER SHARE (Note 12)                               |                                     |            |                    |              |

EARNINGS (LOSS) PER SHARE (Note 12):

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| Edgar Filing: LPL Investment Holdings Inc Form 10-Q                 |    |      |    |        |    |      |    |      |
|---|----|------|----|--------|----|------|----|------|
| Basic   | \$ | 0.30 | \$ | (0.02) | \$ | 0.68 | \$ | 0.33 |
| Diluted   | \$ | 0.26 | \$ | (0.02) | \$ | 0.59 | \$ | 0.29 |
| See notes to unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements. |    |      |    |        |    |      |    |      |

# LPL INVESTMENT HOLDINGS INC. AND SUBSIDIARIES Condensed Consolidated Statements of Financial Condition (Unaudited) (Dollars in thousands, except par value)

|   | S  | eptember<br>30,<br>2010 | Ι  | December<br>31,<br>2009 |
|---|----|-------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| ASSETS  | ¢  | 440 547                 | ¢  | 270 504                 |
| Cash and cash equivalents   | \$ | 442,547                 | \$ | 378,594                 |
| Cash and securities segregated under federal and other regulations          |    | 243,949                 |    | 288,608                 |
| Receivables from:   |    |                         |    |                         |
| Clients, net of allowance of \$1,474 at September 30, 2010 and \$792 at     |    |                         |    |                         |
| December 31, 2009   |    | 274,598                 |    | 257,529                 |
| Product sponsors, broker-dealers and clearing organizations                 |    | 184,352                 |    | 171,900                 |
| Others, net of allowances of \$8,652 at September 30, 2010 and \$6,159 at   |    |                         |    |                         |
| December 31, 2009   |    | 159,128                 |    | 139,317                 |
| Securities owned:   |    |                         |    |                         |
| Trading(1)  |    | 18,561                  |    | 15,361                  |
| Held-to-maturity  |    | 10,582                  |    | 10,454                  |
| Securities borrowed   |    | 5,732                   |    | 4,950                   |
| Fixed assets, net of accumulated depreciation and amortization of \$267,831 |    |                         |    |                         |
| at September 30, 2010 and \$239,868 at December 31, 2009                    |    | 74,273                  |    | 101,584                 |
| Goodwill  |    | 1,293,366               |    | 1,293,366               |
| Intangible assets, net of accumulated amortization of \$163,499 at          |    |                         |    |                         |
| September 30, 2010 and \$136,177 at December 31, 2009                       |    | 569,303                 |    | 597,083                 |
| Debt issuance costs, net of accumulated amortization of \$12,833 at         |    |                         |    |                         |
| September 30, 2010 and \$15,724 at December 31, 2009                        |    | 24,984                  |    | 16,542                  |
| Other assets  |    | 63,521                  |    | 61,648                  |
|   |    |                         |    | - ,                     |
| Total assets  | \$ | 3,364,896               | \$ | 3,336,936               |
|   |    |                         |    |                         |
| LIABILITIES AND STOCKHOLDERS EQUITY   |    |                         |    |                         |
| LIABILITIES:  |    |                         |    |                         |
| Drafts payable  | \$ | 144,669                 | \$ | 125,767                 |
| Payables to clients   |    | 408,245                 |    | 493,943                 |
| Payables to broker-dealers and clearing organizations                       |    | 26,420                  |    | 18,217                  |
| Accrued commissions and advisory fees payable                               |    | 121,008                 |    | 110,040                 |
| Accounts payable and accrued liabilities                                    |    | 183,599                 |    | 175,742                 |
| Income taxes payable  |    | 24,017                  |    | 24,226                  |
| Interest rate swaps   |    | 9,665                   |    | 17,292                  |
| Securities sold but not yet purchased at market value                       |    | 2,680                   |    | 4,003                   |
| Senior credit facilities and subordinated notes                             |    | 1,390,132               |    | 1,369,223               |
| Deferred income taxes net   |    | 127,126                 |    | 147,608                 |
|   |    | 127,120                 |    | 117,000                 |
| Total liabilities   |    | 2,437,561               |    | 2,486,061               |

# STOCKHOLDERS EQUITY:

| shares issued and outstanding at Se                             | 00,000,000 shares authorized; 94,246,414<br>eptember 30, 2010 of which 7,405,811 are<br>ssued and outstanding at December 31, | 87                         | 87                         |
|---|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Additional paid-in capital                                      |   | 690,194                    | 679,277                    |
| Stockholder loans   |   | (52)                       | (499)                      |
| Accumulated other comprehensive                                 | loss  | (5,874)                    | (11,272)                   |
| Retained earnings   |   | 242,980                    | 183,282                    |
| Total stockholders equity<br>Total liabilities and stockholders | equity  | \$<br>927,335<br>3,364,896 | \$<br>850,875<br>3,336,936 |
| (1)   | Includes \$10,799<br>and \$7,797<br>pledged to<br>clearing  |                            |                            |

See notes to unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements. 2

organizations at September 30, 2010 and December 31,

2009,

respectively.

# LPL INVESTMENT HOLDINGS INC. AND SUBSIDIARIES Condensed Consolidated Statements of Stockholders Equity (Unaudited) (Dollars in thousands)

|   | Cor | nmon | Additional<br>Paid-In | Stoc | kholder | Com | cumulated<br>Other<br>prehensive<br>Income | Retained   | Sto | Total<br>ockholders |
|---|-----|------|-----------------------|------|---------|-----|--|------------|-----|---------------------|
|   | St  | tock | Capital               | L    | oans    |     | (Loss)                                     | Earnings   |     | Equity              |
| BALANCE<br>December 31, 2008<br>Comprehensive income:         | \$  | 87   | \$ 670,897            | \$   | (936)   | \$  | (15,498)                                   | \$ 135,762 | \$  | 790,312             |
| Net income<br>Unrealized gain on                              |     |      |                       |      |         |     |  | 28,922     |     | 28,922              |
| interest rate swaps, net of<br>tax expense of \$1,793         |     |      |                       |      |         |     | 3,163                                      |            |     | 3,163               |
| Total comprehensive<br>income<br>Exercise of stock options    |     |      | 258                   |      |         |     |  |            |     | 32,085<br>258       |
| Tax benefits from<br>share-based<br>compensation              |     |      | 147                   |      |         |     |  |            |     | 147                 |
| Stockholder loans<br>Share-based<br>compensation              |     |      | 4,965                 |      | 443     |     |  |            |     | 443<br>4,965        |
| Repurchase of 10,000 shares of common stock                   |     |      | (181)                 |      |         |     |  |            |     | (181)               |
| BALANCE<br>September 30, 2009                                 | \$  | 87   | \$ 676,086            | \$   | (493)   | \$  | (12,335)                                   | \$ 164,684 | \$  | 828,029             |
| BALANCE<br>December 31, 2009<br>Comprehensive income:         | \$  | 87   | \$ 679,277            | \$   | (499)   | \$  | (11,272)                                   | \$ 183,282 | \$  | 850,875             |
| Net income<br>Unrealized gain on                              |     |      |                       |      |         |     |  | 59,698     |     | 59,698              |
| interest rate swaps, net of<br>tax expense of \$2,229         |     |      |                       |      |         |     | 5,398                                      |            |     | 5,398               |
| Total comprehensive income                                    |     |      |                       |      |         |     |  |            |     | 65,096              |
| Exercise of stock options<br>Tax benefits from<br>share-based |     |      | 56                    |      |         |     |  |            |     | 56                  |
| compensation<br>Stockholder loans                             |     |      | 272                   |      | 447     |     |  |            |     | 272<br>447          |
|   |     |      | 10,121                |      |         |     |  |            |     | 10,121              |

| Edgar Filing: LPL Investment Holdings Inc Form 10-Q      |       |          |      |             |              |           |         |               |            |               |
|--|-------|----------|------|-------------|--------------|-----------|---------|---------------|------------|---------------|
| Share-based<br>compensation<br>Issuance of 20,000 shares |       |          |      |             |              |           |         |               |            |               |
| of common stock  |       |          |      | 468         |              |           |         |               |            | 468           |
| BALANCE<br>September 30, 2010                            | \$    | 87       | \$   | 690,194     | \$           | (52)      | \$      | (5,874)       | \$ 242,980 | \$<br>927,335 |
| S  | ee no | tes to u | inau | dited conde | nsed co<br>3 | onsolidat | ed fina | ancial statem | ents.      |               |

# LPL INVESTMENT HOLDINGS INC. AND SUBSIDIARIES Condensed Consolidated Statements of Cash Flows (Unaudited) (Dollars in thousands)

| Septemb2010CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES:<br>Net income\$ 59,698Adjustments to reconcile net income to net cash provided by operating activities:<br>Noncash items:\$ 59,698Depreciation and amortization67,472Amortization of debt issuance costs3,623Impairment of fixed assets840Loss on extinguishment of debt37,979Share-based compensation10,121Provision for bad debts3,682Deferred income tax provision(22,711)Impairment of intangible assets10,121Loan forgiveness3,932Other(79)Changes in operating assets and liabilities:<br>Cash and securities segregated under federal and other regulations44,659Receivables from clients(17,804)Receivables from clients(12,452)Receivables from others(26,234)Securities owned(3,284)Securities borrowed(3,284)Drafts payable18,902Payables to clients8,203 | 2009<br>\$ 28,922<br>81,596<br>2,807<br>4,965 |
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| Cash and securities segregated under federal and other regulations44,659Receivables from clients(17,804)Receivables from product sponsors, broker-dealers and clearing organizations(12,452)Receivables from others(26,234)Securities owned(3,284)Securities borrowed(782)Other assets2,548Drafts payable18,902Payables to clients(85,698)  | (165)   |
| Receivables from clients(17,804)Receivables from product sponsors, broker-dealers and clearing organizations(12,452)Receivables from others(26,234)Securities owned(3,284)Securities borrowed(782)Other assets2,548Drafts payable18,902Payables to clients(85,698)  |   |
| Receivables from product sponsors, broker-dealers and clearing organizations(12,452)Receivables from others(26,234)Securities owned(3,284)Securities borrowed(782)Other assets2,548Drafts payable18,902Payables to clients(85,698)  | 71,986  |
| Receivables from others(26,234)Securities owned(3,284)Securities borrowed(782)Other assets2,548Drafts payable18,902Payables to clients(85,698)  | 21,551  |
| Securities owned(3,284)Securities borrowed(782)Other assets2,548Drafts payable18,902Payables to clients(85,698)   | 54,910  |
| Securities borrowed(782)Other assets2,548Drafts payable18,902Payables to clients(85,698)  | (30,965)                                      |
| Other assets2,548Drafts payable18,902Payables to clients(85,698)  | (4,868)                                       |
| Drafts payable18,902Payables to clients(85,698)   | (1,028)                                       |
| Payables to clients (85,698)  | (3,341)                                       |
|   | (51,203)                                      |
| Payables to broker-dealers and clearing organizations 8,203   | (72,082)                                      |
|   | (355)   |
| Accrued commissions and advisory fees payable 10,968  | 2,129   |
| Accounts payable and accrued liabilities 5,498  | (74)  |
| Income taxes payable 63   | 4,626   |
| Securities sold but not yet purchased (1,323)   | (1,104)                                       |
| Net cash provided by operating activities 107,821   |   |

See notes to unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements.

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# LPL INVESTMENT HOLDINGS INC. AND SUBSIDIARIES Condensed Consolidated Statements of Cash Flows (Continued) (Unaudited) (Dollars in thousands)

|  | Nine Mont<br>Septeml | ber 30,    |
|--|----------------------|------------|
|  | 2010                 | 2009       |
| CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES:<br>Capital expenditures                      | \$ (10,934)          | \$ (6,403) |
| Proceeds from the disposal of fixed assets   | \$ (10,954)          | 135        |
| Purchase of securities classified as held-to-maturity                              | (5,392)              | (3,746)    |
| Proceeds from maturity of securities classified as held-to-maturity                | 5,200                | 3,700      |
| Deposits of restricted cash  | (4,121)              | (12,759)   |
| Release of restricted cash   | 2,971                |            |
| Net cash used in investing activities  | (12,276)             | (19,073)   |
| CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES:  |                      |            |
| Proceeds from senior credit facilities   | 566,700              |            |
| Redemption of subordinated notes   | (579,563)            |            |
| Net repayment of revolving line of credit  | (0,001)              | (56,500)   |
| Repayment of senior credit facilities  | (9,091)              | (6,318)    |
| Payment of debt issuance costs<br>Payment of deferred transaction costs            | (7,181)<br>(3,253)   |            |
| Repayment of stockholder loans   | (3,233)              | 462        |
| Proceeds from stock options exercised  | 56                   | 258        |
| Excess tax benefits from share-based compensation                                  | 272                  | 147        |
| Issuance of common stock   | 468                  |            |
| Repurchase of common stock   |                      | (181)      |
| Net cash used in financing activities  | (31,592)             | (62,132)   |
| NET INCREASE IN CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS  | 63,953               | 26,250     |
| CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS Beginning of period                                      | 378,594              | 219,239    |
| CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS End of period  | \$ 442,547           | \$245,489  |
| SUPPLEMENTAL DISCLOSURES OF CASH FLOW INFORMATION:                                 |                      |            |
| Interest paid  | \$ 73,994            | \$ 61,997  |
| Income taxes paid  | \$ 62,804            | \$ 41,420  |
| NONCASH DISCLOSURES:   |                      |            |
| Capital expenditures purchased through short-term credit                           | \$ 2,436             | \$ 105     |
| Increase in unrealized gain on interest rate swaps, net of tax expense             | \$ 5,398             | \$ 3,163   |
| Discount on proceeds from senior credit facilities recorded as debt issuance costs | \$ 13,300            | \$         |
|  |                      |            |

## Table of Contents

See notes to unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements.

# LPL INVESTMENT HOLDINGS INC. AND SUBSIDIARIES Notes to Condensed Consolidated Financial Statements (Unaudited)

# 1. Organization and Description of the Company

LPL Investment Holdings Inc. (LPLIH), a Delaware holding corporation, together with its consolidated subsidiaries (collectively, the Company) provides an integrated platform of proprietary technology, brokerage and investment advisory services to independent financial advisors and financial advisors at financial institutions (collectively

advisors ) in the United States. Through its proprietary technology, custody and clearing platforms, the Company provides access to diversified financial products and services enabling its advisors to offer independent financial advice and brokerage services to retail investors (their clients ).

# 2. Basis of Presentation

**Quarterly Reporting** The unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements have been prepared pursuant to the rules and regulations of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). These unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements reflect all adjustments that are, in the opinion of management, necessary for a fair statement of the results for the interim periods presented. These adjustments are of a normal recurring nature. The Company s results for any interim period are not necessarily indicative of results for a full year or any other interim period. Certain reclassifications were made to previously reported amounts in the unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements and notes thereto to make them consistent with the current period presentation.

The unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements do not include all information and notes necessary for a complete presentation of financial position, results of operations and cash flows in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles in the United States of America (GAAP). Accordingly, these financial statements should be read in conjunction with the Company s audited consolidated financial statements and the related notes for the year ended December 31, 2009, contained in the Company s Annual Report on Form 10-K as filed with the SEC. The Company has evaluated subsequent events up to and including the date these unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements were issued.

*Consolidation* These unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements include the accounts of LPLIH and its subsidiaries. Intercompany transactions and balances have been eliminated. Equity investments in which the Company exercises significant influence but does not exercise control and is not the primary beneficiary are accounted for using the equity method.

*Use of Estimates* The preparation of the unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements in conformity with GAAP requires the Company to make estimates and judgments that affect the reported amounts of assets and liabilities, revenue and expenses and related disclosures of contingent assets and liabilities. On an on-going basis, the Company evaluates estimates, including those related to revenue and related expense recognition, asset impairment, valuation of accounts receivable, contingencies and litigation, and valuation and recognition of share-based payments. These accounting policies are stated in the notes to the audited consolidated financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2009, contained in the Annual Report on Form 10-K as filed with the SEC. These estimates are based on the information that is currently available and on various other assumptions that the Company believes to be reasonable under the circumstances. Actual results could vary from these estimates under different assumptions or conditions and the differences may be material to the unaudited condensed consolidated financial statements. *Reportable Segment* The Company s internal reporting is organized into three business channels; Independent Advisor Services, Institution Services and Custom Clearing Services, which are designed to enhance the services provided to its advisors. These channels qualify as individual operating segments, but are aggregated and viewed as

one single reportable segment due to their similar economic characteristics, products and services, production and distribution process, regulatory environme