

## How to listen to your clients and find out what they really need

We will consider how to build client understanding.

An improved understanding of your client's business position will grow trust and create more long term and mutual value from the relationship.



### 1. Invite clients to 'away days'

Perhaps your business has an annual event like a partners conference or business development retreat. You will also probably have more regular team meetings, launch events and budget or planning forums.

Typically such events consist of a plethora of 'talking heads' telling you how it is.

The issue is that this is very inward looking and unlikely to stimulate positive discussion and change behaviour.

You may come away from such initiatives feeling unenthused and not enlightened in any way. You then revert to role and continue to perform the same tasks in the way that you did previously.

An effective technique to get more out of these events is to invite your clients to attend. Show them how important they are and that you want to better understand their issues and experience. Listening to your clients in this environment is very effective.

### Why?

Most importantly, your client feels valued for being invited. The invitation breaks down barriers that existed before and increases openness. Your team will learn valuable insights about the client's business position. This knowledge can then be leveraged to identify new opportunities and improve client care.

To get maximum value ask the client the following questions:

- What do we have to do to deserve and earn more of your business?
- How can we obtain unbeatable referrals from you?
- What should we be doing more of, and what less of?
- What can we do that will make us more attractive to you?
- What are the critical factors that you consider in making a buying decision?

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## 2. Plan independent Client Survey Reviews into the business calendar

Does your brochure claim to 'delight its clients' or invest in Client Relationship Management (CRM)? Does your business plan refer to an 'externally focussed ethos'?

If the answers to either questions is 'yes', how is this demonstrated? What is the evidence?

A planned and regular Client Survey Review programme is common practice in businesses that espouse client friendly values. Such an approach keeps such firms ahead of competition as they are more client savvy.

### What are the benefits of running Client Service Reviews?

- Identify blind spots in current service provision
- Find out what your clients are really saying about your firm
- Find out what your clients actually buy
- Increase client retention
- Increase share of client spend
- Improve client care
- Demonstrate genuine interest in the client relationship (not simply winning the sale)
- Create positive word of mouth marketing

Some firms have introduced such schemes and deliver all the interviews in house. This is better than not doing Client Service Reviews but has a number of disadvantages. Candidly, biased, emotive individuals whose time is charged at £250 plus per hour assuming the role of an independent, trained expert is a drain on a firm's valuable resource and fee earning time.

Interviews must be structured, have clear objectives and lead to action. Employing the services of an impartial and experienced interviewer will deliver more value and enable credible benchmarking of performance.

## 3. Attending industry meetings with clients

Attending industry meetings with clients is a credible alternative to the more typical hospitality which focuses on the golf course and is out of office hours.

A fantastic way to maximise value from attending conferences, industry forums, business breakfasts, seminars and symposiums is to invite a client. They will benefit from the insight gleaned and you will have golden time to build a closer business relationship.

By attending events together you will be able to translate what you have learned into possible application in your client relationship.

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#### 4. Read your clients internal newsletters

Reading your clients internal newsletters will help you to see the world from their position.

Pay attention to the style, language, themes and topics.

You may pick up information about planned office moves; imminent conferences; or cause related activities that you can support.

There may be an opportunity to contribute articles for future issues. Perhaps you can add value by providing expertise in non core activities

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