

Planning for Client Feedback

Part Two

In the last edition of Business Developer we looked at the importance of having clear objectives when you plan to gather client feedback; to identify why you are seeking client feedback and what you intend to do with it.

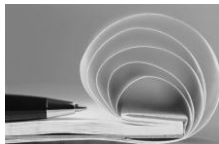
Certainly you should never embark on client research if you intend to do nothing with it as this will send all of the wrong signals to your clients and staff.

In Part Two, we look at how to mobilise your research and subsequently your response to the findings.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire design will depend on your objectives and the type of information that you are trying to obtain. Once these factors have been clarified, the questionnaires or discussion guides can be finalised.

Research agencies working in other industries often use quantitative surveys and report statistics for their client's perspective. Generally, however, the sample size for construction companies is not large enough to generate meaningful or statistically significant results. In addition, a quantitative survey means that there is no opportunity to explore the issues behind the scores, because there is little capture of qualitative information, and this is often where the value is. As a result, these surveys often raise more questions than they answer and therefore it is difficult to link quantitative surveys to service improvement. MarketingWorks has found that, in the Construction Industry, surveys that are predominantly qualitative are more practical and the findings can lead to specific actions. These can be linked to quantitative results, e.g. KPIs tracked over time, can enable the business to create client-focused performance improvements.



Interviews

Face-to-face interviewing is the most expensive method but is also the most effective, as it provides the interviewer with the opportunity to build rapport and empathy with the respondent and what she/he has to say. The interview will often last longer than

anticipated, provided the interviewer is able to raise questions that stimulate the respondent and lead to productive discussion and better insight.

In the context of the value of most clients to their supplier organisations, the cost of a face-to-face interview to elicit exactly what a client's perceptions are against the background of their needs is a good investment. In practice, some clients elect to have a mix of face-to-face and telephone interviews and, as long as the balance is right, this leads to good results.

Sampling

Being a qualitative study the approach to developing the research sample is different to its quantitative counterpart. It is less 'scientific', but calls for sound judgement in selecting the target clients. People have been known to try and bias the sample to those clients who can be relied upon to endorse their service, but far more is learned by taking a strategic and dispassionate perspective and identifying respondents who are important to your business and who will be honest and direct. It is important in organisations that the exercise is seen to be one of consultation, learning and improvement and not a witch-hunt.

Approaching Clients

An introductory letter explaining why you are undertaking the survey will prepare your clients and incline them towards participation. The consultants can then follow up the letter with a telephone call to seek an appointment.

Most clients are more than happy to participate and invariably will give you more time than they said they would, simply because they have so much to say.

Whilst respondents are offered the option to have their answers reported anonymously, a large majority of clients are quite happy for their comments to be attributed.

Analysis and Report

It should be agreed with the consultants at the outset what outputs are expected. MarketingWorks offers clients a detailed report that includes the key findings of the survey, the conclusions we draw and specific recommendations.

We seek to present the findings and our conclusions, as this provides an opportunity for discussion and questions. MarketingWorks' clients have obtained great value and

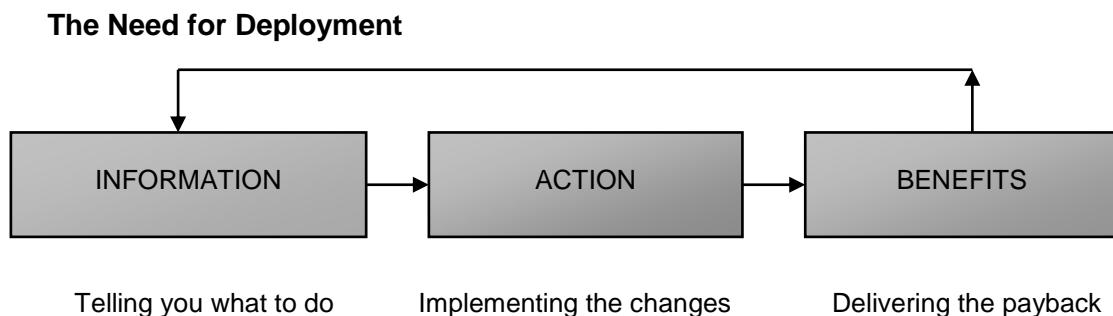
enjoyment from this process, even when some of the feedback calls for improvements to be made.

It is vital that, once an organisation has embarked on client research, you then listen to what your clients are saying, show you have heard, and identify actions to address the issues raised.

Acting on the feedback

Having received the feedback from your clients, you will need to identify the appropriate method of deployment and communication to address the findings and actions you have identified. How you do this will depend on your objectives in undertaking client research and the type of client survey you have undertaken.

Inevitably there will be issues to address, be they strategic or tactical, company-wide or client specific.



The most common reasons for no action being taken on the findings include:

- The survey had poorly defined objectives and/or was not aligned with strategic goals
- Poor communication of results
- Internal politics and/or resistance to change
- No improvement goals set
- No ownership of improvement goals and/or accountability

MarketingWorks advises that clients develop a plan of action for deployment activities, beginning with the decision as to who it is most appropriate to involve in the deployment, followed by the communication of the survey results. It is important that the results are communicated in order to:

- Raise awareness and help focus on important issues

- Let all stakeholders know you are listening and responding
- Use the information that your clients have given you to identify and prioritise improvement opportunities and develop “better practices”
- Agree an approach for each major issue
- Finalise your deployment action plans and a communication plan

The deployment may be through workshops and meetings, the mobilisation of client teams or a combination of activities.

To be successful, the implementation of improvements needs:

- Clear objectives
- Ownership and accountability
- Time commitment and resource availability
- Communication
- Demonstration of early successes
- Long term momentum and support



MarketingWorks recommendations

This is one of the most client-focused activities that an organisation can undertake and it can deliver unbelievably valuable feedback that can help you to transform your business. However:

- The survey must be designed to address your objectives
- The sample must be selected carefully, avoiding bias
- When you receive the client feedback it is important that you deploy actions to address the issues arising

MarketingWorks has worked with many clients to elicit valuable feedback from their client base and helped them to mobilise deployment planning and implementation. To see case studies and testimonials please visit www.marketingworks.co.uk or to see more on the MarketingWorks client surveys, please view the following documents:

[Client Perceptions Survey](#)

[Key Client Relationship Survey](#)

Jan Hayter, Director of Marketing, MarketingWorks.