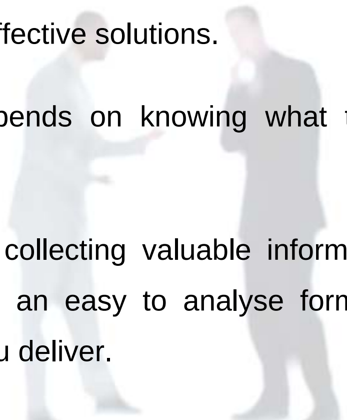
Planning for Client Feedback

Part One

In an increasingly competitive and client-focused world, organisations must understand how to position themselves to meet the needs of their clients who are seeking better and longer term relationships than was the case ten years ago. More and more they are looking for service providers who will add value to their business, as well as delivering cost-effective solutions.



Retaining your clients depends on knowing what they really think and what is important to them.

The keys to success are collecting valuable information about your clients on a regular basis, storing it in an easy to analyse format and using it effectively to improve the service that you deliver.

It is important that you identify at the outset why you are seeking client feedback and what you intend to do with it. Once you have done that, you can identify the most effective ways of capturing that feedback.

Define your objectives and priorities

First of all you need to examine why you are considering gathering client feedback. Your reasons may be different at different times or may be related to other initiatives that you have in your business improvement programme.

The following are some of the questions that you might ask of yourself and your colleagues:

1. How will you use the information? For example:

   ⇒ Will you use the information as an input to your identification of strategic direction and your development of 3-year and 1-year marketing plans?

   ⇒ Is it to develop appropriate communication messages and plans?

⇒ Will you use the data to help you develop and improve your services?

⇒ Is your specific aim to get closer to your most key clients and understand better their needs?

⇒ Is your aim to ensure day-to-day performance is being maintained by monitoring your projects; testing the perception and satisfaction of your clients on specific projects?

Then you can begin to think about what kind of information will help you to make these decisions and plans.

2. What do you want to know? For example:

⇒ Your general image? What kind of organisation you are perceived to be?

⇒ To appreciate what clients want more of and what they want less of?

⇒ To understand how they perceive your organisation; its strengths and weaknesses?

⇒ To see how they see your current and future relationship?

⇒ To understand how they view your competitors?

⇒ To test the response to a new idea or service?

⇒ To see how you are doing on a current project?

No one survey can adequately answer all of these needs or address all of these issues. It is important to be clear as to why you want to survey your clients and what you will do with the information.

Type of feedback

For a measure of client satisfaction over time, there are several approaches that you can take, depending on the nature of the business relationship that you have with that client.

For clients that you have identified to be key to your business, we would advise that you seek to understand your clients' strategies in the future and how they impact on you. Their in-depth perception of your current relationship and where they would like to see it going in the future will help you to shape your service to their current and future needs. The MarketingWorks Key Client Relationship Survey is Qualitative and is designed as a tool to help develop your client strategy and the relationship with your key clients.

This investment is critical for key clients, but would be costly to undertake for all clients. For value clients, it may be that you will need to undertake a less in-depth interview with a cross-section by telephone.

When you come to review your strategic and tactical marketing plans, then it will be invaluable to undertake a MarketingWorks Client Perceptions Survey. This is a mix of Qualitative and Quantitative feedback that provides an overview of the clients' perceptions of your company, its image and culture, strengths and weaknesses. It also seeks to identify your future with the clients interviewed and their perception of competition. From your segmented client database, MarketingWorks would select a random sample from each client segment.

Who should gather and analyse the feedback?

When it comes to monitoring your day-to-day projects, then the most cost-effective feedback will come from your client delivery teams' regular project reviews and also from senior management through their client review meetings. If you have KPIs set up with clients, this information will feed into the mix. You may not have the resource in-house to analyse and draw conclusions from this feedback, but you will certainly be able to capture the actions required from the client teams and monitor their implementation.

For other client research it is usually beneficial to use an external resource to undertake the interviews and analyse the results. It is important that interviewers understand the construction industry, but they must also have no preconceptions and be viewed by the interviewee as an independent agent. Interviewees will then feel

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able to be more open in their responses.

The external agency can then give you an unbiased and informed analysis of the outcomes of the survey and advice and recommendations on the actions you should consider.

MarketingWorks Recommendations

- ⇒ Clarify your objectives for gathering client feedback
- ⇒ Review the different sources of client feedback that you have now and how you use it
- ⇒ Develop a client feedback strategy that identifies the data you need in the future and how you will use it
- ⇒ Discuss with MarketingWorks the most appropriate next steps for your organisation.

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For more information on client surveys contact Janhayter@MarketingWorks.co.uk or click here to read more