

Survey findings: firms ignore staff ideas when making important decisions

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Professional services firms are making important decisions without a detailed understanding of their clients' needs and requirements, according to the findings of a new survey.

The study revealed that firms are failing to harness their growing feedback volumes, with less than half recording the informal feedback shared with staff, while only one in five asked its staff for ideas.

The poll, by 'always-on' client listening company MyCustomerLens – which uses artificial intelligence (AI) to collect and analyse insights for legal and other professional services firms – also found that while many firms harvest customer feedback data from different sources, few have a centralised collection point in which to make sense of it.

The most popular means of collecting feedback was in client meetings, used by 65% of firms, closely followed by interviews and reviews, both of which were carried out by 63% of firms, according to the survey.

The least popular means included asking and recording staff ideas – used by only 20% of firms – and conducting or commissioning research, used by just 10%.

Most feedback was contained in individual reports – in spreadsheets, Powerpoint presentations, transcripts and Word documents – with 48% of firms reporting that was their principal way of storing information. Some 45% of firms said most feedback was 'in the heads and notebooks of their staff'.

Other places for storing feedback included from email inboxes and shared folders, used by 30% of businesses CRM systems (28%), separate databases (23%), collaboration tools (18%) and centralised

databases (15%).

Paul Roberts, CEO of MyCustomerLens, said: “The survey results show that, in almost half of firms, important information about their clients’ needs rests with their staff, but very few seek ideas from those employees when making important decisions.

“Firms are collecting feedback from a range of sources, but the information remains largely decentralised. In addition, fewer than half use complaints to help inform process improvements rather than just for fixing specific issues.

“This means that strategies are being guided, often by partial information gleaned from only one or two sources. While firms often have other sources of information to hand that may inform or challenge their decision making, it remains distinct and hidden from the process.”

He added: “Another notable finding is that staff ideas are not being tapped into, which means many firms are missing out on a valuable source of market intelligence.

“If staff are consulted at all, their responses are more likely to be fed through HR and people management channels, rather than through customer feedback recording channels, and so it doesn’t get connected up.”

MyCustomerLens, which uses artificial intelligence to provide businesses with real-time client insights, interviewed 40 legal and advisory firms throughout the UK online in January.

While not being a properly representative sample of the sector as a whole, it does provide valuable anecdotal insights, according to the company.

It found that timing is a significant factor in gaining quality insights, with only 5% reporting that they sought feedback at the start of their relationship and only 8% did so at the start of a project.

After pitching to a potential client, fewer than half, (40%) said they sought feedback on how the process had been handled and how they had performed.

Among those already working with clients, a third said they gathered information during a project, while most (73%) did do at the end of a project.

A significant number (43%) admitted they only sought client feedback periodically while one in five said the process was ad hoc.

Roberts said: “Few firms seek feedback from clients at or near the start of their engagement. This is a missed opportunity to gain valuable insights into first impressions, which can often be crucial to the success of their relationship.”

Asked to name the biggest challenges they face, regarding client listening, 78% of firms said they were not collecting enough data to make properly informed decisions, while 53% complained that the people within their organisations were not sharing the information they had learned with colleagues.

Other challenges included getting teams to take meaningful action based on feedback findings – mentioned by 55% of firms – while the same number said there was a lack of aggregation, with feedback data not contained in a centralised location.

Roberts said: “Despite the different sources of data, in some cases only a small percentage of clients were being interviewed, or surveys were carried out annually and at the wrong time of year for particular sectors, or partners had to opt-in clients, rather than opting-out and so important ones were missed.”

MyCustomerLens’ proprietary software provides businesses with a competitive advantage, allowing them to properly plan and make informed decisions, based on real-time insights about how they are perceived by their clients.

Drawing on the full range of feedback sources, including interview transcripts, feedback forms, surveys, operational data and unsolicited verbal and email comments, MyCustomerLens software uses AI to identify themes and trends and to create heat maps and mood charts, which record how firms and their services are viewed.

As well as constantly collecting and monitoring feedback in a centralised location and automating analysis, the software also puts the insights in context, and allows firms to engage more effectively with their clients.