

WHAT CLIENTS WANT 2022

Key client listening themes from 2022 and things to consider going into 2023, to ensure strong client relationships.



Anna Lake Consulting

EXCELLENT
SERVICE
DELIVERED BY
GREAT PEOPLE

CLEAR
ADVICE

UNDERSTAND
MY BUSINESS

LISTENING
SHOWS YOU
CARE

TELL ME
MORE

MORE
EVENTS
PLEASE

QUICK
RESPONSES

2022 CLIENT LISTENING THEMES

By the end of December, I'll have completed over 120 client listening interviews this year. My clients are mostly from the professional services world (with a couple of exceptions), but their clients are from a whole range of sectors and geographies and are both businesses and individuals.

Regardless of industry or size, there are some high-level themes which occur time and again in my interviews. There are many more than this, but these are the ones I'd highlight, supported by actual (anonymised of course) quotes:



EXCELLENT SERVICE DELIVERED BY GREAT PEOPLE

1

No matter what sector you're in, if you're offering a service – be it accountancy, law or drainage services (one of my non-professional services clients!) – your people are key.

If they're hiring you, they already believe in your technical competence so what they then want is an excellent service delivered by people who are great to deal with.

“...they're a nice bunch of people to work with which is always good. You want to work with people you enjoy working with, jobs are tough enough without dealing with difficult people.”

“I find our main contacts ever so helpful, ever so friendly and we couldn't wish for a better relationship.”

“...they were just very easy to work with. They had, I suppose, good social capital, and that's what you need if you're going to engage with someone.”



CLEAR ADVICE

2

Clients of professional services firms want clear, pragmatic advice. They don't want to wade through pages of content to get to the crux of the issue.

You may see their request for advice as an opportunity to flex your intellectual muscle, but clients don't care – they want to know the options, or the answer.

“I think the most useful thing is that they give, particularly on the employment side, and xx specifically, very very practical advice. It's less about the law, than about strategically how to manage particular issues.”

“Their advice is very good in terms of length, it's generally only as long as it needs to be and they are very clear in terms of what next steps are, what the crunch point is in terms of their risk assessment.”

“...the reason queries are put to them is because we're looking for more than a statement of the law.”



UNDERSTAND MY BUSINESS

3

Clients want you to understand their business and its challenges – sounds obvious but this is one of the strengths people often highlight in interviews.

It saves clients time if they can take something you give them which is already written in the context of their business and with an awareness of how it will be received by internal stakeholders – it also makes them look good!

“I have to do less translation of his advice from legal language to business language. I can take something that I am given and yes put my own steer on it and put my words around it as I need to, but I don’t have to rewrite whole paragraphs to make it more palatable to the business.”

“She takes the time to understand our business and she understands what’s going on so I feel that confidence from her that she can help support us when we need it on the things that we need.”

“...we have a lot of history, and it makes my life easier that I don’t need to explain everything from scratch or be worried that they don’t understand how things work.”



LISTENING SHOWS YOU CARE

4

People are time poor, but they do see the value in client listening and view it as a testament to your commitment to continuous improvement and a statement of the value you place on their relationship with you.

Don't ask for too much time though – half an hour is plenty of time for me to gain some real valuable and actionable insight from your clients.

“...getting hold of somebody like you to come in and talk to his customers, find out what's going on, making sure that if there's anything he could change he does so, is brilliant. I wish more people would do that...”

“...it's good that you've been commissioned to do this, I think that that shows real commitment to customers, and I like that.”

“...having this call and the email from xx (the Managing Partner) is a big statement to prove how much they care about their clients, and I didn't hesitate to do it...”



TELL ME MORE

5

Tell people more about what you offer – yes really! Time and again I hear interviewees say, we use xx (other) firm for xx service when it’s something my client could have offered!

This isn’t about a hard sell but about looking out for the cues which suggest your client may need additional support in an area, finding out more and introducing a colleague at the right time. Clients would rather work with companies they already know rather than go through the hassle of finding extra suppliers.

“I think they could showcase themselves more to us specifically. Speak to that capability and maybe broaden that base a little bit.”

“This time of the year we will be reviewing our suppliers, we need to review them on an annual basis, it’s a new compliance requirement to make sure we’re getting the best service and value, so now is actually a good time to talk about what else you can offer.”

“I’ve been really happy with the engagement. It’s certainly a company I’d like to find out how we can use more.”



MORE EVENTS PLEASE

6

Although we're now firmly into the hybrid working era, many clients welcome face to face interactions with their suppliers, especially when it comes to marketing events and seminars.

They want to cement their relationship with you via personal interactions in a less formal setting. So if you had cut back on in-person events, it might be time to reconsider.

"...they used to do seminars at their offices which were very useful...it was nice for me to take my team to meet people face to face. I know now we're all using Zoom and Teams and you can put a face to it but it's still nice to actually meet someone."

"It would be nice if they could do a few more in-person events. I know it's the way of the world now, and maybe it is a lot easier and accessible for a lot of people but it would be nice to also go in and also have some in-person interaction. They used to do lots of breakfast seminars and they were quite good..."

"...it was just a standard event they had on but the colleague that I brought along, we brought along for a reason. It was all part of seeding a message ahead of the bigger transformational change we wanted to make."



QUICK RESPONSES

Responsiveness is crucial to clients – they want comfort that you’re dealing with their query and find it really irritating if they feel their request has gone unnoticed.

A holding response is always useful and appreciated and if you’re unable to meet a deadline for whatever reason, tell them – and make sure you hit the revised timescales. Clients know they’re not your only customer, but with pressures from their own internal stakeholders, it’s helpful for them to know matters are in hand.

“They’re on the ball for getting responses back to me, if they need anything more they’re literally back within a day or so with additional questions and we always hit the deadline well in advance..”

“They both come back to me really swiftly and I think that speaks volumes. I’m not just lost in the ether so to speak.”

“...the other law firm we use often miss deadlines and it is a nightmare for the team to manage because they’re relying on that advice coming back in and our CEO doesn’t have a lot of empathy if she doesn’t have the advice she asked for when she asked for it.”



FIVE CONSIDERATIONS FOR 2023

The above themes were important to my interviewees this year, and I'm sure those themes will continue into January and beyond. What else will clients want from their suppliers as we move into rather uncertain times?

I'll keep you posted on those, and in the meantime, here are some things to consider for 2023.

1

FOCUS ON THE 'FAN ZONE'

This is where your clients and repeat referrers are. Find out what they want and need from you and don't shy away from asking difficult questions about your engagement with them.

Ask forward looking questions as well as those which talk about what's happened already – a forward look will uncover further opportunities to grow the client account.



2

GET AS MUCH DATA AS POSSIBLE

If you are using surveys, keep them short and although interviews are a higher value investment, they are worthwhile - a 15 minute conversation elicits so much more than a half-completed survey with no verbatim comments.

Look at the data from all your feedback sources to give you a fuller picture of the client relationship, then fill any gaps and look at ways to maximise the opportunities you've identified.

3

MAXIMISE YOUR MARKETING BUDGET

Unfortunately, marketing budgets are often the first to be cut in a recession, so make your marketing more effective by making research-based decisions which should yield a greater ROI than hunches or a 'spray and pray' approach.

Client listening allows you to find out what topics are of interest to clients, how they like to receive information from you, shows your current clients you care and gives you lots of content to help you attract new clients too.



4

ACT ON THE FEEDBACK

If clients are making time to talk to me, make sure you do something as a result of what they've shared. Otherwise, it's a waste of their time and your investment.

If you don't have the time to look through full transcripts of interviews, I can instead produce a summary pulling out the key points from the conversation.

5

STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD!

How do you differ from other businesses offering the same service?

Find out and maximise on that point of differentiation – when hard times hit, and costs are cut, it could be your approach to client care that makes all the difference.



If you're thinking about introducing client listening interviews into your business, either as a new activity or to supplement surveys and you'd like a no obligation chat about how I can help, please do contact me on one of the methods below.



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Best wishes,

Anna



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