Bringing Back Client Delight:

It's More Important than Ever

By Susan Collin, Rothstein-Tauber Market Research and Brand Strategy

Market researchers tend to think of themselves as analysts, scientists or data collectors. Above all, we are business people, and like in any business, putting our best foot forward to our clients is critical. Keeping our competitive edge is paramount, especially in today's economic environment. One way of doing this is bringing "client delight" back into the equation.

I say "bring back" because sometimes we use our charms, and pull out all the stops to win the first project. We then take it for granted that the second and third projects will automatically follow. Most of us are all doing a good job, following the proposal requirements and delivering high-quality research on time and on budget. The "delight" factor is of utmost importance to make the client think of you in that extra special light, and want to continually work with you and your organization.

The "delight" factor will go a long way in helping clients at least partially deal with their ever-increasing pressures, among them:

- Smaller research staffs, so they need to do more with less
- Research staff having less market research training/experience
- In meetings all day, which means they're harder to reach, and decision making hits a log jam
- More pressure from competition, Wall Street and their general managers
- Shorter product development cycles, which demands that decisions be made more quickly

Delighting clients is easy if you put yourself in their shoes and think about how you would want a partner to treat you and work with you. Is it a simple phone call to say that the project is moving along as expected or dropping everything to work the weekend that will surpass expectations? To help you navigate, I encourage you to go on a brief fact-finding mission: your client's background will help determine the amount of handholding needed to reach project success. Ask your client their preferred method of communication, and best times to contact. Likewise, find out the types and frequency of updates they want. Client reactions will help gauge if you are truly delighting or if you need to change course.

Do everything you can to make sure you and the client are on the same page regarding project timing and deliverables. How many times have you received a call in the middle of the project and have been asked “when will I receive the report?” This question can occur repeatedly despite the fact that the dates are sitting in the proposal. One suggestion is to repeat the timeline in your e-mail cover note so it is more easily accessible. Also, always be specific about dates for receiving client supplied information in order to keep the project on schedule.

When there are problems, share them early in the process, and present them as challenges – that’s the corporate term so use it. Before you cry wolf, however, be prepared to offer solutions whether it’s a trade-off in the number of interviews for cost or delivering partial results. Don’t forget to figure out your responsibility for the challenge before the call. While there is no guarantee, owning up may help it pass more easily and get you another opportunity.

Short of poor delivery, nearly nothing can make a client feel worse than feeling they work for you versus the other way around. There are a number of things you can do to avoid this perception: answer their calls/requests promptly, follow-up when you know an internal meeting was held, provide timely updates, build schedules that allow a reasonable time for client review before they are to issue to the team, show that you and your organization are flexible and be proactive rather than reactive.

There are plenty of other “delighters” that relate to proactive service and analysis. Some examples are asking to be part of the client team’s kick-off meeting and adding meaningful insights to the report. These include integrating related results

from another project, including a special subgroup that would pre-empt questions, including a new type of analysis that they have not seen before or using a new format that will make the report even more management-ready.

Let us not forget that both new and old client relationships can benefit from nurturing. How many times have I been asked to provide a proposal because I just so happen to have made contact at the right time? Too numerous to count.

Here are 10 things you can do today to delight anyone on your client roster, especially those you have not heard from in awhile.

1. Show enthusiasm when they contact you.
2. Ask about their family or favorite activity.
3. Be prepared for meetings.
4. Share a positive or negative comment that a consumer, friend or colleague has made about their brands.
5. Follow-up on the project: how did the team receive the findings, what are the next business steps or what has been the initial in-market performance?
6. Show the client you have acquired knowledge about their business or category outside of a project at hand.
7. Extend an appropriate social invite
8. Offer to be a sounding board for any business or research issue, even if it does not yet relate to a specific project.
9. Offer to contact their internal colleague to gain information to move the project forward.
10. Always say thank you, even when responding to a client request.

Start delighting today. It will improve your business relationships and favorably impact your company’s bottom line. A delighter all around!

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