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The high cost of overlooking client feedback

Client feedback is one of the most underused commercial tools available in professional services. Mary Cloonan explains why the firms that ask are the ones that grow



Most firms would say they know their clients well.

What they often do not know is what has not been said; a frustration that never surfaces, work that went elsewhere without discussion or a change in the client's business the firm discovered six months too late.

These are quiet gaps and they cost firms real fee income.

Fees are lost quietly, not dramatically

Professional services firms rarely lose clients suddenly. The work continues, invoices go out and the relationship appears to be secure.

Beneath the surface, however, a client may be starting to look around for another service provider. The result? A competitor asks the right questions from the get-go and picks up the brief that should have been yours.

By the time any of this becomes visible, the opportunity to act has already passed.

The firms that protect and grow fee income most effectively are not always the ones winning the most new business. They are the firms that stay closest to what is happening “inside” existing relationships.

They spot the gaps before they widen and find out what is changing before the client starts to look elsewhere. This kind of awareness requires a structured approach and client feedback is at the heart of it.

The commercial case for asking

Client feedback is frequently treated as a “nice to have” in client relationships. This framing is among the costliest assumptions a firm can make, however.

When the feedback process is handled properly, it becomes a direct tool for protecting and growing fees.

It gives partners clearer visibility across client relationships, earlier warning of emerging risks before they harden into a decision and a practical way to identify work that is needed but might otherwise never surface.

New business is hard won. Existing clients already know the firm, trust it and often seek more support than they currently receive.

Fee growth starts here, not with the next pitch.

Data makes decisions easier

The right online feedback survey, sent to the full client base, provides firms with a breadth of responses that individual conversations cannot match.

When clients complete a properly structured survey, they are telling the firm directly how they feel, what they value and where their concerns lie. This is a fundamentally different quality of information, and it makes commercial decisions easier to make with confidence.

It can surface patterns, flag relationships that need attention and help identify the clients who are ready to ask for more.

Where a client flags something worth exploring, a conversation follows. These conversations tend to go somewhere because both sides already know what needs to be discussed.

The cost of not asking

Every month without structured client feedback is a month when fee gaps quietly widen. Frustrations go unheard, timing opportunities are missed and work goes to firms that simply asked the question first.

The firms that ask for feedback consistently outperform those that rely on instinct alone, not because they are more talented, but because they work from

fact rather than assumption.

Getting client feedback is not a large undertaking. It does not require a significant commitment of partner time. It just requires the right approach, designed around how the firm works, and implemented in a practical, considered and commercially focused way.

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