

Ask the Experts: Establishing Your Own Client R & D Team

What Do Your Clients Want?

What attracts clients to your business? Which of your products and/or services are most appealing to them? Are your fees too high, too low or just right? What new product or service should you roll out next?

How many clients will likely buy your newest product or service? Are you spending your time on the things that are most important to your clients?

If you are like many business owners, you may be fuzzy on the answers to questions like these. Often, when we are uncertain, we'll try harder or work harder hoping that we'll figure it out. But trying harder only results in two things: limiting yourself to your own vantage point, and an unnecessary headache.

Are You a Lone Ranger?

Most of us think we have to figure everything out ourselves - it is *our* business isn't it? If we don't know what our clients want and need, maybe we shouldn't be in business! So we wrack our brains, guess, make mistakes, struggle...and struggle some more. We say things to ourselves like, "I wonder if anyone will be interested in the topic for this workshop?", or "I wonder if more clients would attend this workshop if it were during the day or evening?" Often we'll spend far too much time wracking our brain on something that only our clients could answer - and answer easily.

While you may be "it" when it comes to your business, that doesn't mean you can't get feedback from the outside world. In fact, if you operate in a vacuum, you will miss some great business opportunities.

When in Doubt, Ask!

When you find yourself wondering what your clients might want from your business, stop! Instead, go directly to the source: ask the experts - your clients (target market). Run your idea by them and ask for feedback. Don't forget to ask them what else they might be interested in. In fact, if you aren't coming up with any product or service ideas on your own, ask your clients for their ideas. Everyone likes to express their opinion. And everyone has one, so ask away!

Another thing happens when you ask for feedback: you create buy-in with your clients. They've helped create your products and services, so they have an interest in seeing them succeed. You also create "raving fans" because you've created programs just for them. Another added bonus: your R & D members will want to refer others to you because they played a part in your success.

Happy clients, happy you!

Can it Really be That Simple?

Yep!

Pushing the Ball Uphill is Only Good for Your Physical Health

I'm all for trial and error as a great business lesson. Goodness knows I've trialed and erred many times! But often the learning curve is too steep, and too expensive! I once released a program that I thought would be a smash hit and no one signed up! The next time I released a program, I made sure my target market was involved in helping create it (and, yes, it was full two weeks before the start date). Asking my clients for their input "pulled" me toward success instead of me trying to "push" it.

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If it Seems Too Good to be True, it May be That Good!

We've long been told to be wary of things that are too simple. We are cautioned not to take the "easy" way out. I have found the opposite to be true: if it seems effortless, you are probably on the right track.

Most of my successes came when I wasn't "efforting". Asking my clients what they'd like from me is effortless: I ask, they tell. That's my policy, and I'm sticking to it!

What Would Your R & D Team Look Like?

By now, you've probably figured out that this article is more about asking your clients for their input rather than about the intricacies of creating a formal R & D team.

Your R & D Team could take a variety of forms. You could:

- send an occasional survey via email
- make informal phone calls to certain clients now and then
- select a handful of clients you can run things by
- host a group call several times a year to touch base with clients as a group
- have a formal R & D team with regular ongoing communication and even "membership" benefits such as free/inexpensive participation in pilot programs and/or discounts on your products and services.

Put Out the Invitation!

So, are you ready to begin asking the experts?

Make sure you share why you are asking for feedback, what you will use it for and how your program will work. Be specific about what you are looking for and what the commitment will be for participants.

Go ahead and put out the invitation!