



Executive
Marketing Recruitment.

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Closing the Client Experience Gap and the future of client experience

A report from tml Partners from their roundtable debate
with marketing leaders in the Professional Services sector



Event in association
with Clear M&C Saatchi

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specialising in brand, experience & innovation

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Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Establishing your baseline and finding distinctive touchpoints
- 3 Senior stakeholder buy-in
- 4 The importance of having common courtesies and a human conversation
- 5 Conclusion
- 6 About our co-hosts
- 7 About tml Partners



Introduction

tml Partners recently hosted a roundtable session, bringing together marketing leaders from leading professional services firms to discuss Closing the Client Experience Gap and the future of client experience. Brands in attendance included:

Adam Soames, Global Head of Business Development & Strategy, Hogan Lovells
Andy McClure, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer, International, Marsh
Dave Stevens, Chair and Co-Founder, Business Marketing Club
David Craigen, Director, Womble Bond Dickenson
Francis Mainoo, Head of Sales, Moore Kingston Smith
Katherine Bailey, Director, Go To Market, Brand, Marketing & Communications, EY
Lesley O'Leary, CMO, Charles Russell Speechlys
Nick Burbridge, Leader, Deloitte 368
Paul English, Global Leader - Markets & Clients, Grant Thornton International
David Price, Associate Director, tml Partners
Charlie Green, Partner, tml Partners
Simon Bassett, Managing Director, tml Partners
Rosa Wilkinson, Director, Corporate and B2B, Clear

(NB This event was held on 12 March 2020, before social distancing measures were introduced)

Rosa Wilkinson, B2B lead at Clear (M&C Saatchi Group's global strategy consultancy focusing on brand, experience and innovation), started the conversation with an introduction to CLEAR's ongoing Experience Gap study.

An Experience Gap is the perceived difference between the promises you make and the experience you deliver. CLEAR's work in this space began in 2018, with the first global study of its kind to determine how to size & close the gap (covering 34,000 consumers across 4 markets); followed up with 30+ interviews with senior leaders in brands working to close those gaps.

A key finding is the opportunity cost of these broken promises. On average, experience gaps cost UK brands £220-390m a year in lost revenue.

Being able to size the gap is critical for CMOs, who are increasingly leading their organisations in closing it. Customer or client experience is now often a core part of the remit and there is a growing understanding that customer leadership equals marketing leadership. But it can be a real challenge to determine where to focus and invest for competitive advantage, across branding, communications, innovation and the physical experience.

Rosa then outlined three observations for the future of client experience in professional services:

1. Beware of 'levelling up': too often CX initiatives are informed by generic client listening or syndicated research around blunt attributes – which ultimately just reinforces parity with your competitors. Advantage comes from not just resolving client frustrations, but in identifying where your firm can uniquely win and deliver an ownable experience.
2. Defend your distinctiveness: In professional services there is very little tangible difference in what's offered. It's about HOW you deliver it – and what it's like to work with you. Client (and prospect) experience is the most tangible demonstration and reinforcement of your brand's most differentiating asset – your culture.
3. Maintain momentum and collective responsibility: CX initiatives (like those for innovation and brand) are often disconnected from firm strategy, culture or operations. Not only does this reinforce a 'once and done' mentality, but it also overlooks the risk of engendering 'transformation fatigue'. Done well, client experience is everyone's responsibility – and should create a powerful 'firm effect' beyond individual partner-client relationships.

The conversation then opened up around the table to a lively discussion, derived from our guests' experiences, which centred on five big questions:

1. Who should own and drive responsibility for client experience?
2. How can brand be used to direct client experience?
3. What are the metrics that matter for client experience?
4. Can you really achieve distinctiveness in client experience?
5. Where should you start to close the experience gap?



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I. Who should own and drive responsibility for client experience?

David Price from tml partners started the discussion with an observation that from the outside, "we see a lot of business investment in client experience with different touchpoints in different areas, most importantly client ownership". Francis Mainoo picked up on the idea of client access being critical in building a consistent experience across a multinational network. "How do we work out who owns the client when one office is charging another? We have a new tool which we use, driving collaborative engagement. A lot of discussion is around who owns the client and how we add money to that client and trusting the jurisdiction of the office."

Lesley O'Leary described the ongoing transformation of Charles Russell Speechlys, with a problem of ownership over client experience, because it involves so many moving parts.

Whilst Adam Soames shared a valuable lesson in engaging a partnership: "The key was that we brought our partners in and asked them to design the journey, it couldn't be seen as an experiment. One of the challenges we faced was not being able to unpack what the client experience was, and the nuances of it. After narrowing it down to a select number of key principles, we are now focused on embedding each of those steps into the client journey and asking ourselves what are the marginal gains along the way? After running for 12

months, we have seen a significantly increased level of engagement and above average revenue coming in. Now, we want to take the learnings from that and trickle it down.

This resonated with Paul English, who shared that at Grant Thornton, there's an iterative process of taking design ideas out of the practices and sharing them back again.

Dave Stevens asked if we should we worry about terminology. "Client and customer experience makes it easy for people to see it as a compartment of marketing, which makes a partner think 'ah someone else is actually responsible for this'. The problem is that the firm as a whole doesn't feel like they own it."

Reflecting on her experience on working with professional services firms, Rosa noted it's important that significant initiatives like client experience shouldn't be owned by the brand or marketing teams. "When I look at projects I've been involved in, they've never worked unless the sponsorship of some senior steering committee is on board. Outside of progressive London law firms who are mindful of maintaining cultural advantage over the US entrants, many partnerships still see marketing as the people who do the events – and when you meet the leaders of these teams you can then tell that they are not making the real decisions."

2. How can brand be used to direct client experience?

The debate about the experience gap between brand promise and delivery was timely for Lesley as she led her firm through a significant rebranding exercise. "We're trying to go back to basics and work out what makes us different. We found that HOW we do things is what unites us...The business works around a single organising principle, which has to do with our personality type."

Using a personality type to define brand and ultimately client experience raised considerable interest in the room, particularly for Rosa. "Having a personality type for a business... connects brand and culture and perhaps ultimately client experience. Before you

work with a firm, you can only ever go by whether this brand speaks to the kind of person that I am. Working with Invesco on translating their purpose into global brand positioning hinged on being able to encapsulate what it was like to work at Invesco and what it would be like to work with them as a client. There shouldn't be a cultural difference between who you are as a firm and the types of clients you are attracting, but it's vital that HR is totally involved in that."

Nick Burbridge of Deloitte 368 mentioned the use of Deloitte Business Chemistry (which is based on Myers Briggs) to help identify personality types as helpful in creating client-facing teams.

3. What are the metrics that matter for client experience?

We then moved onto the tricky subject of measurement, which all attendees agreed was important to engage colleagues in the commercial reality and impact of delivering client experience well.

Paul English described a journey of brand positioning and client experience informing each other. "We started with data from the bottom up as well as then drawing the brand top down. We're looking at what's working through measuring the "brilliant basics" as well as signature initiatives. We're sequencing prioritisation and creating a seamless journey. And looking at ways to encourage wider business conversations, like a 6-box simple conversational tool for partners to use with clients. We also

tried a score card, where every partner need to have so many calls about the client's agenda. It's worked when a CEO embraced the idea. Now other firms across our network are following."

One approach beyond the standard metrics like NPS is to identify one or two critical data points which have demonstrable impact. Andy McClure at Marsh outlined a powerful case study: "We tried to find an entry point, looking at correlations in the client data. One specific metric we identified was whether the client could recall having a conversation about something not related to a specific claim. We could show a link to retention, it was the single most important correlating question relating to subsequent client loss."

4. Can you really achieve distinctiveness in client experience?

This was acknowledged as a challenge by Katherine Bailey: "That's the challenge. Trying to be distinctive, I don't know we really can be!". David Craigen echoed this, noting the main focus was just trying to get to a consistent level of client experience. "It's so hard to be distinctive. So what do you do?"

Nick recognised the challenge of having "our people" as the differentiator and what that means for marketing. "Our people are those who are having direct contact with the clients. Relationships are important but that's changing – we're looking at leveraging online communications too."

Rosa shared a learning from the Experience Gap study of the different expectations that customers have across different sectors – for example, in financial services the experience bar is much lower than in hotels. "There are bits of professional services and law, where clients have been 'trained' to expect less, so the baseline becomes

so low compared to other markets. For example, Dentons clients a few years ago just loved the online deal rooms; going further back Baker McKenzie had 13 client experience principles which directed simple things like not sending different bills for matters involving multiple offices in the firm. You don't need to be Apple! Sometimes it's about picking one touchpoint and doing it really well, for example with Allen & Overy the organising idea was applied to give guidance to partners about what sort of conversations they should have with a client in the lift."

Paul agreed that distinctiveness comes through execution of these specific things, but also giving colleagues the confidence to deliver the right experience. This resonated with Francis, who recounted many conversations with client-facing colleagues in the back of taxis to ensure they were fully prepared for more valuable conversations with clients in turn.



5. Where should you start to close the experience gap?

With the ongoing agenda around the integration of technology into professional services, what attendees felt was fundamental not to overlook was the human touch. David Craigen observed, "it can be counter intuitive – people don't want the tech, they want the results. We are taking a step back and humanizing technology." Dave Stevens remembered a client who preferred to read things on paper – and a partner who took the time to do this before every meeting.

There was recognition of the role of technology in delivering client experience, with Katherine noting EY uses systems to ensure more coordinated client communications – "so that they don't receive 12 different emails from us a day". But one point all agreed on was the importance of a personal approach to client experience. Adam Soames remarked that having worked in the accountancy world, where professional qualifications include broader business awareness and softer skills, there was a marked difference when he came into law. Lesley talked about the importance of 'O-shaped lawyers' in driving this change: "Our focus is having a human conversation. It's about good bedside manner."

Proactivity and human empathy were identified as critical in securing good client experience. Simon contributed that at tml, "we insist that a month later after we meet someone, we do a courtesy call – and people fall off their chairs. No-one else today actually rings up the clients. It's about common courtesy." Adam also recounted similar small gestures being critical at Hogan Lovells – including earlier 'difficult' conversations about fee increases and having structured relationship briefings when clients are served by different parts of the firm (sometimes involving the clients themselves).



Conclusion

What we learned during the discussion was the critical role of senior marketing leaders in harnessing brand to engage the wider firm, with the evidence base to make the case for change and continue to press for progress. Getting fee-earning colleagues and leadership on board early, and with confidence, is critical, as is finding the key touchpoints which can be realistically and consistently delivered well to drive differentiation. And vital to all of this is remembering that fundamentally, better client experience hinges largely on more empathetic and relevant human interaction. As Andy summed up: "What we are seeing is that repetitive engagement changes through processes and actions. It's about executing consistently and small things can create surprise."





About our Co-Hosts, CLEAR M&C Saatchi

Clear is a global strategy consultancy specialising in brand, experience & innovation.

Our speaker, Rosa Wilkinson leads the thinking and growth for our B2B and Corporate practice. She delivers global engagements combining a broad range of brand and marketing disciplines (including insight, strategy, identity, innovation, experience, capabilities and internal engagement). She particularly enjoys working with clients in regulated environments or with complex stakeholder sets and value chains.

A history graduate, Rosa has 15 years' experience in brand consultancy. She started out at The Value Engineers and developed a deep specialism in effecting business change at Dragon Rouge (where she led the London Rouge Corporate strategy team). She has extensive experience and a deep personal interest in professional services, with clients including ACCA, Allen & Overy, Atkins, Chartered Accountants Worldwide, Dentons, Grant Thornton, Hogan Lovells, ICAEW and The General Medical Council).

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About tml Partners

With a team of highly experienced consultants, we provide specialist marketing expertise that is unrivalled by generalist headhunters and in-house resourcing teams. We network extensively in this community continually adding value with thought provoking events and publications to help facilitate the agenda for the marketing leaders of tomorrow.

Finding the right marketing talent is far from obvious and ineffective hiring is high risk. tml Partners mitigate this risk with a truly dynamic perspective on hiring the best marketing talent. We're trusted and connected networkers in the senior marketing community and spend a lot of time understanding the motivations and building meaningful relationships with the best, hard to find, passive talent.



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