

CLIENT CASE STUDY

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OXLEY & COWARD SOLICITORS LLP

Rotherham, South Yorkshire

9 PARTNER FIRM

ACTIVE FROM MAY 2013

675 surveys in 11 months

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Law League
performance & compliance, measured

In the words of Oxley & Coward's Managing Partner, Richard Sheppard, "nobody can market your firm better than your clients". In fact, the majority of this firm's work comes from either existing clients or their recommendations, so practicing what they preach seems to have become a way of life at Oxley & Coward.

In the latest of our Law League member firm case studies, we look at how feedback results are used at this traditional high street firm, where just over 20 solicitors serve their local Yorkshire community and beyond.

"Law League helps us to really focus on what matters to our clients"

Client feedback has been integral in identifying ways to develop staff and providing a standard of service which keeps customers coming back. "Law League helps us to really focus on what matters to our clients" says Richard and this allows Oxley & Coward to protect their revenue streams.

Until May 2013 the firm used its own in-house customer satisfaction survey. To Richard's knowledge they were the only firm in Rotherham to ask their clients about the experience they'd encountered with a solicitor, so this in itself set them apart from competitors. Initiatives like this is what "separates us from other firms in the local community" notes Richard and yet it's not just about ensuring that the firm differentiates itself from other solicitors. He is keen to point out the impact that a feedback request has on a client: "If we ask them to tell us about their experience, they believe they have a direct impact on the growth of the firm. We're engaging them again."

Culturally the firm is committed to requesting and acting upon client feedback. It "gives us an insight into what's happening – rather than micro-managing staff, our clients tell us where we need to go and what we could do differently." It is this very knowledge that helps the firm to retain clients, something that Richard is keen to continue given the competitive nature of the legal marketplace and the costs associated with new client conversions.

**OXLEY &
COWARD**
SOLICITORS LLP EST. 1791



Oxley & Coward Solicitors LLP: Communicating with their clients in the way each one feels most comfortable

IMPLEMENTATION

Oxley & Coward switched to Law League in May 2013, using their previous survey invitation process. The survey system provided by Law League was flexible enough to log the firm's combination of both on and off line survey submissions and to provide key data analysis, including the ability to view results by both department and fee earner, which has proved to be particularly important to Richard.

COMMUNICATION

Most of the firm's surveys are completed on paper as opposed to online. Richard explains that the firm's operational area "isn't an affluent one. The disadvantaged don't tend do have access to the internet" so the firm communicates with them in the space they feel most comfortable – hence the high proportion of paper based surveys.

Clients are asked for their communication preferences at the start of a matter. Email may not be their original preference but if the fee earner notices that this becomes the default one then the client is surveyed by email.

A reference number is added to their paper based survey forms allowing Dawn Margetts, Quality Coordinator at the firm, to track response. Where appropriate, account managers deal with ongoing feedback but this applies to only a certain proportion of Oxley & Coward's client base.

ACTING ON FEEDBACK

Feedback is taken seriously and the results are made available to both clients and staff.

"Don't ignore feedback. Clients have taken the time to give you feedback and it's important to them."

"Don't ignore feedback" he says. "Clients have taken the time to give you feedback and it's important to them. It's how they viewed the service and it's up to us to see if altering it is feasible."

A feature of Law League that resonates with staff is the benchmarking against other LawNet firms. Displayed as a report in the firm's Reception area, Oxley & Coward's satisfaction ratings across 12 performance areas are benchmarked against those of other firms. Richard says that they "want to be in line with others on the benchmark. That's the key – we take comfort and pride in our benchmark and pride in our common values. And we need to keep a good rating."

Oxley & Coward have a balanced and pragmatic approach to using survey results to guide the direction of the firm and the development of its staff. Sharing feedback as widely as possible is seen as key to making it the 'norm'. Regular departmental meetings are held where results and clients' suggestions for improvements are discussed. Section heads are issued with recent results and these are shared with team members. Any negative feedback is dealt with

Communication Preferences

"Respecting a client's communication preferences is not just a courtesy, it's good business. It's not about you; it's about your client."

Lydia Ramsey, author of "Manners that sell – adding the polish that builds profits".

"We tend to think our timely, accurate work is all that is necessary to satisfy and retain a client. But your clients' satisfaction may also be tied as much to how you communicate as what you communicate. Catering to your client's preferred method of communication may result in a more positive reception and image for you and your firm."

*Introducing a Client-centric strategy:
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Oxley & Coward Solicitors LLP: using feedback to identify specific training needs and develop staff

Training & Development

“This leads to better staff morale and a motivated workforce and helps give a positive image/brand to organisations.”

CIPD on the benefits of staff training and development

discreetly on a one-on-one basis with the staff member concerned because “we have to question why it’s happened. That person may have a lot on their plate.”

As the firm’s former Training Partner Richard uses results to identify relevant training needs and coaching opportunities. It “helps us to protect the work a fee earner does. Feedback helps us to better ourselves because it’s a competitive market out there.”

Where the opportunity arises for staff to alter their service delivery, full support is implemented. “There’s no naming and shaming so people are open to feedback. Of course we’re disappointed when it’s not 10 out of 10. But it’s a subjective process and it helps us see the bigger issue.”

Richard also sees Law League as a “good device for risk management”. A pattern of negative feedback identifies a particular issue, for example, which can then be addressed.

TOP TIPS

Richard’s Top Two Tips for developing loyal clients are as follows:

- 1) Get back to your clients within a reasonable timescale
Clients need assistance and guidance from their solicitor. They “aren’t unreasonable people and the majority will accept a delay if you tell them why it has happened”. But stick to your promise and keep the client updated so that they feel that the matter is important to the fee earners as well as to themselves.
- 2) Make yourself available at a time convenient to the client
Being flexible to fit in with your client’s life includes returning calls out of hours e.g. in the evenings or after work. Going the extra mile here shows you value that person so they’re more likely to have a positive experience and instruct your firm again.

WHAT WORKS BEST FOR OXLEY & COWARD

Richard and his staff check their feedback regularly on Law League and it’s discussed at their monthly management meetings. He has identified three key benefits to the system:

- ✓ **Simple format:** from the ability to quickly input completed paper based survey forms to accessing clear results, the system is user friendly
- ✓ **Client needs identified:** whether it’s an overall snapshot of how fee earners deal with a particular area such as ‘Ongoing Cost Information’ or the ability to track qualitative client comments, specific feedback areas are clearly shown
- ✓ **Dynamic reporting:** quick and convenient online report generation creates comprehensive documents, for any date range required, saving time

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Our thanks to Richard Sheppard for his participation in this case study interview. If you would like to find out more about how Law League could help your firm to measure both performance and compliance through client feedback please contact Rayne Tompson.