

What I Learned From Meeting With 100 Clients

Client Care Corner

WRITTEN BY

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At the end of last year, several Troutman Pepper attorneys asked my Client Care team to report on trends we saw in the last 12 months and our advice for 2022.

It was the perfect opportunity for me to reflect on everything I learned last year. And after 100 client meetings, more than 50 in-depth client feedback interviews, and a large-scale electronic survey of hundreds of firm clients, I learned a lot.

Here are the trends we saw last year:

Scorecards: More and more clients are proactively rating and ranking their outside firms via an outside counsel scorecard. We saw an increasing number of these in 2021 and have heard from clients as recently as last month that they are actively looking into launching scorecards if they haven't already. Each client has a different approach, with some just focusing on financials and others providing quantitative and qualitative feedback from multiple in-house representatives. If you're outside counsel and you haven't yet been exposed to the scorecard process, you likely will in the next two years. Troutman Pepper's Client Care Office is doing a lot of scorecard work, from helping our attorneys respond to feedback to advising clients on how to develop and launch a scorecard.

Focus on DEI: In 2020, clients began talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion more than ever. In 2021, we saw clients actually begin to take action. My Client Care team is working with the firm's [DEI group](#) on a number of client-facing DEI projects, and we have had a record number of conversations with clients about their DEI efforts. Those clients that haven't yet asked for DEI metrics or set benchmarks for outside counsel are looking to do so in the next year. It's more important now than ever before to critically look at the diversity of your teams and ensure you are providing meaningful work opportunities across demographics.

Value: In 2021, we saw a significant number of RFPs asking about value and how the firm will provide value beyond traditional legal services. This theme was supported by client conversations on the same topic. With record increases in the cost of legal services industrywide, clients are looking closely at their outside firms to make sure they are getting the most bang for their buck. High-quality attorneys and legal services are table stakes, and clients want to see true business partners who are looking for ways to make clients' jobs easier in addition to successfully handling matters.

Contract Lifecycle Management: In client interviews last year, the topic of contract lifecycle management came up repeatedly. Clients are dealing with large volumes of contracts, and are realizing their current systems for review and processing are inadequate. At Troutman Pepper, we are working to address this problem. For some clients that aren't ready for an enterprise-grade solution, we have built technology tools to help them manage CLM. For other clients with more significant CLM needs, we have connected them with our attorney experts on the subject, who work with clients to select and implement their preferred vendor's CLM solution.

Horizon Scanning: The top comment we heard in our electronic feedback survey and client interviews is that clients want attorneys to be strategic thinkers who look around corners and spot issues before they become problems. This is not an easy skill, and it requires deep knowledge of your client and their business, but it's the best way to provide value. Clients don't just want you to handle the matter for which you're retained. They want you to tell them how to be better at what they do and what they should be looking at next.

And here's the advice we're giving to attorneys in the new year:

Talk to Your Clients: With packed schedules and billable demands, it's easy to forget the relationship management that needs to occur to keep clients loyal to your firm. Prepare a list of your top clients and prospects and develop a plan to reach out to each of them just to check in, off the clock. Ask about priorities for the next year, what's keeping them up at night, and how they're weathering the latest pandemic setbacks. If you give clients room to talk, you might be amazed at their candor and the opportunities for growth they will share.

Develop Client-Centric Solutions: In 2021, we saw more clients asking about value and technology, but many firms miss the mark in this area. Their biggest mistake: developing solutions in a silo without client input. If you are looking to add value to a client relationship, your best first step is to have a conversation with the client about their needs and pain points and how you may be able to help. Developing a tech solution, program, or initiative and getting client engagement on the back end is much less successful.

Check in on Client Preferences: In 2021, Troutman Pepper's Client Care Office talked to dozens of clients about their preferences on everything from communication to work product to staffing. What we learned was that clients' preferences are more well-defined than ever. After almost two years of working remotely, we've seen Zoom burnout, a greater emphasis on communicating succinctly, and differing levels of comfort with in-person events. Use this insight as an opportunity to have a check in with your clients to make sure you're working efficiently and effectively in the manner in which they prefer.