

THE 5 GOLDEN RULES OF CLIENT COMMUNICATION

HOW TO SYSTEMISE YOUR CLIENT
COMMUNICATION FOR MAXIMUM VALUE

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INTRODUCTION

COMMUNICATING THE RIGHT VALUE

80% of high-performing accountancy firms say adding value to their existing clients is their most effective means of growing. Central to this ability to add value is the need for frequent, personal interactions with your business clients.

So why is communication, and regular contact with clients, neglected by many practices?

Communication is central to growing and maximising your relationships. Effective communications make clients feel valued – whether it's a Skype call, an email or simply picking up the phone. Regular, personalised contact also illustrates the value you provide as an adviser, making you an indispensable part of your client's business success.

So how do you improve your client communication skills? And what impact will this improved communication have on your client retention, lead generation and revenue pipeline?

5 RULES FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION

There are five key principles to apply when looking to improve the impact of your client communications.

1. **Don't put communication on the clock**
2. **Make clients feel they matter**
3. **Don't wait to connect until there's a problem**
4. **Face-to-face isn't the only way to communicate**
5. **Talk about what they care about (and listen!)**

In this guide, we'll show you how to make your communications more effective, keep your clients engaged and build working relationships that will benefit your practice growth.

COMMUNICATING IN THE TECH AGE

The scope of when and where you can stay in contact with your business clients is huge, in part down to the impact of technology and software in providing fast, cheap ways to communicate.

Cloud accounting systems, and mobile communication tech, have also removed geography as a limiter on change – giving business owners real choice when it comes to choosing an adviser.

- **Switching advisers is simple** - accounts are no longer paper-based or sitting on local drives. Moving to a new accountant just takes a few clicks and access being granted in the business owner's cloud software.
- **Adding new clients is easier** - although it's easy for clients to leave, the cloud also makes it far easier to bring new clients on board. **Cloud-based accounting firms add five times more clients than traditional firms**, according to recent stats.
- **Client service is the differentiator** - to stand out from the crowd, your client service has to be outstanding. Being a cloud practice isn't enough - clients want a level of service that's fast, proactive and completely efficient - with value added where required.
- **If you're not proactive, you'll lose clients** – stats from Accountex Group show that **72% of small businesses changed their accountants because the firm wasn't offering proactive client service**. So if you're reactive, and a poor communicator, you'll lose out.
- **Work on developing relationships** – make sure you're giving existing clients a service they can't do without. That's what makes happy clients stick around, and helps you pick up businesses that are unhappy with their current adviser.

You'll never get it perfect, of course. But when you use the advantages of technology as a communications tool, you're far more agile, flexible and proactive in keeping clients satisfied.

STARTING OFF RIGHT

The best way to maximise your communication levels is to apply best practice right from the very first client meeting – and onboard clients to your way of working from day one.

- **Be clear in your communication** - good communication is essential for setting relationship parameters at the start of the relationship, limiting problems later on.
- **Get to know the client** - learning about the client's needs and expectations prevents misunderstandings further down the line. This is where asking pertinent questions and listening carefully is invaluable and sets the right tone for the relationship.
- **Dig into the client's history** - if a potential client has had three accountants in the last three years, and views them all as rubbish, there's every chance the client is the problem. Talk to their ex-advisers and make sure you dodge any bullets.

5 GOLDEN RULES OF CLIENT COMMUNICATION



1. DON'T PUT COMMUNICATION ON THE CLOCK

Regular, honest communication is central to building a valued relationship with your client. But clients will be far less comfortable sharing their problems when they know the clock is ticking.

- **Don't bill for each communication** - billing for conversations gets in the way of a good relationship. Turn off the clock and focus on understanding where you can help.
- **Charge based on value, not time** - basing your fee on value delivered, rather than time taken, presents you as a trusted advisor rather than a drain on their cash flow.

- **Communication time isn't wasted time** - talking to clients keeps you in the loop and helps resolve business issues quicker, adding to the client's perception of your value.

By restricting contact, you miss out on the chance to know your clients' businesses better. Open communication is how they will reveal the issues they don't even know they have – ones that you can solve and charge more for.



2. MAKE CLIENTS FEEL THEY MATTER

Make time for client communication with every client on your books, however big or small. And don't be 'too busy' to give them the advice and customer care they need (and crave).

- **Make the time** - schedule regular calls and meetings with all clients to make sure you're always in regular contact and in the loop.
- **Be timely with responses** - clients won't feel valued if your replies and responses are slow and unforthcoming. Make responding quickly a real priority.
- **Listen to client feedback** - ask for regular, honest feedback and listen to clients' concerns. If there's an issue, identify it and resolve it – and thank the client in full. Remember, no news is not necessarily good news.

Even bad clients can be turned into good business. For example, if clients are consistently late with submissions and bookkeeping, look for opportunities to help them resolve these problems. For example, suggest a move to [Receipt Bank](#) and a faster, automated way of managing their transactions and data entry.



3. DON'T WAIT UNTIL THERE'S A PROBLEM TO CONNECT

Research by MYOB in Australia found that 93% of business owners would prefer a real-time accountant – a trusted adviser who kept in touch regularly and didn't just react to problems.

- **Communicate regularly** - the onus is on you to be proactive, to keep communication frequent, and to help the business owner see the road ahead clearly.

- **Call clients before they call you!** - move away from being reactive and actually schedule time to talk to clients.

- **Look out for potential problems** - analyse clients' numbers and flag up any issues well before they become urgent. Clients are likely to blame a missed problem on you, even if it's their fault!

Clients love advance warning, especially when it comes to knowing their tax liabilities. Moving clients to real-time data in the cloud makes it easier to keep them informed of tax they owe and when it's due. Using intelligent data solutions, like Receipt Bank, provides you with tax data that's 100% current.



4. FACE-TO-FACE ISN'T THE ONLY WAY TO COMMUNICATE

Every chance you have to communicate with your clients is a chance to build trust and strengthen your relationship – and social media and digital tools make that far easier.

Digital tools like social media, webcasting solutions, Skype and automated email etc. have revolutionised the ways you can keep in touch.

- **Maximise your social media usage** - social media is a two-way communication channel, so it's easy to keep track of clients, and be helpful at minimal cost to you. Set time aside to check in with clients on social and see where you can add value.

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- **Make more impact with video** - YouTube is now the second most used search engine. So rather than sending dry emails to clients, share useful videos – or even start vlogging and making your own helpful video content.
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Stand out by giving practical online advice. Invite clients and prospects to a free webinar with tools like [Join.Me](#) or [GoToWebinar](#). By giving practical help, you add easy value for clients and demonstrate expertise in the market.



5. TALK ABOUT WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT (AND LISTEN!)

When it comes to client meetings don't just talk about current work. Talk about the whole business, how they're faring and where there are known issues: you might just find more work.

- **Listen to their current issues** - understand the client's issues and demonstrate your knowledge and potential to help. Don't plug your services directly, but outline how you can work with them to find a resolution.
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- **Offer help beyond the accounting basics** - make it clear you can help in other areas, such as payroll management, strategic advice and software implementation etc.
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- **Strengthen your working relationship** – by diversifying the services you deliver, you strengthen the relationship and make yourself invaluable to the client's business.
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Offer free catch-up meetings. Invite clients to a free meeting to talk through business and personal goals. It gets you inside their thinking and on the same wavelength.

HOW TO SYSTEMISE YOUR CLIENT COMMUNICATIONS FOR MAXIMUM VALUE

Systemising your client communications allows you to make communication and appreciation part of your normal workload, rather than a crisis event.

It also helps to maximise your service offerings, retain and attract more clients and grow your fee base. And the technology needed to run an efficient communication strategy is inexpensive and readily available – whether it's as simple as Google sheet and calendar, or as a free CRM system like Hubspot.

Most importantly, systemised communication puts you in control of the client interaction process.

It reduces the time and effort spent on communications
Makes it easier to measure and track the results
Keeps you organised and timely with all your client contact.

STEP 1: CATEGORISE YOUR CLIENT BASE

The starting point for any systemisation of your communications is to categorise your clients according to some key attributes, including:

The value (both revenue and relationship quality) they bring to the firm
The amount of time and resources it takes to service them
How well you, as a firm, are maximising their value.

Step one is to organise your clients into up to four categories.

1. A-CLIENTS

An A-client is one of the 15% to 20% of the clients that account for 70% to 80% of your firm's revenues – in other words, they're your platinum-standard, high-profit clients.

Data regarding your historic sales and revenues is now so easy to source and re-configure. So you can quickly sort clients by revenue for the previous year (client meaning relationships, not just one entity) and identify those that are generating substantial fees.

TO QUALIFY AS AN **A-CLIENT**:

- ✓ You're adequately serving their business needs
 - ✓ They continually have new projects for you
 - ✓ As a client, they generate sizable revenues for your firm
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2. **B-CLIENTS**

A B-client is one that, right now, you're likely to be under-serving but that has potential to generate sizable revenues for the firm – they're a dormant A-client in waiting.

How do you spot this potential? For example, you might have a business client for whom you only do tax returns. But, based on your inside knowledge of turnover, number of employees etc., you know you could easily provide a number of additional services. It's about knowing the business, spotting the opportunity and turning them into a star client.

TO QUALIFY AS AN **B-CLIENT**:

- ✓ You're meeting their basic needs, but know you could offer more
 - ✓ The relationship is good enough to maintain a deeper service offering
 - ✓ As a client, there's potential to upsell and bring in increased fees and revenue
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3. **C-CLIENTS**

A C-client is a client where's the little or no scope to increase your services, and where the revenues generated are small.

C-clients can be good clients, despite the relatively low or average fees they bring in. Their work isn't complex, they pay on time and are pleasant to work with.

Typically, they'll be clients looking for the basics, such as statutory accounts and a tax return. Don't confuse the 'C rating' with school grades and assume these client need to become B-clients to make the grade. A firm can have all C-clients and do very well. In a sense, they're your reliable clients – the slow, steady ones that help you win the race.

TO QUALIFY AS AN C-CLIENT:

- ✓ You're delivering the basics, but know there's little scope for additional services
- ✓ The relationship is undemanding and they submit everything on time
- ✓ As a client, they keep the money coming in but aren't a cash windfall

4. D-CLIENTS

A D-client has the potential to fit into any of the preceding classifications. But these clients fall down as an ideal client by being problematic in one or more area.

Its likely they'll be unprofitable to your firm as a result of poor rates, realization, or utilization. They also might be hard to work with because they're abrasive, late payers, or never timely (and always creating scheduling problems).

It's also possible they could require services that are too specialist or difficult to provide – for example, they're your only public sector contract and you can't justify the customisation involved.

TO QUALIFY AS AN D-CLIENT:

- ✓ You're providing the required services, but there are inherent problems
- ✓ The relationship is overly demanding, too specialist or not productive
- ✓ As a client, the fee is good, but you waste time, resources and money on them

STEP 2: GET YOUR COMMUNICATIONS ORGANISED AND TIMELY

The next step is to organise communications to maximise value. By reviewing, categorising and rating your client base, you now know how to direct your comms to the right people, and with the right outcomes – it's about getting the best messages to the people who need to hear them.

- The organisational process could be as simple as building a communications plan in a Google Sheet and putting reminders for calls, meetings and emails into your calendar.

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- Or it could be as complex as using a full-scale customer relationship management (CRM) system and linking it to your email, marketing and project management systems.
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The complexity of your client interactions is up to you. But the level of contact must be often enough for you to be aware of their business health, and tailored enough for them to feel valued.

- **Prioritise your best clients** - contact your A and B-client every month as an absolute minimum, more if there are pressing issues to discuss.
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- **Log your interactions** - have a system in place to log when you called and what the follow up action is: it's a highly effective way to create additional fees and referrals.
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- **Make clients feel valued** - checking in to see how clients are doing has real value. It makes them feel cared for and gives an opportunity to talk through any problems.
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- **Set goals for calls** - make sure there's a reason for the call beyond just 'checking in' though. Apply what you know of the client, ask the right questions and make your communications become part of a systemised, revenue-growing strategy
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- **Ask for honest feedback** - asking clients for feedback on your work helps to improve a client relationship as well as deal with any complaints and prevent a client from leaving.
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- **Look for referral opportunities** - Periodically and systematically asking for referrals from clients helps to grow their lifetime value and your overall revenue.
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Receipt Bank extracts the key information from your clients' bills, receipts and invoices, removing the need for manual data entry. Receipt Bank then allows you to publish this data directly to your chosen accounting software.

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- ✓ Expense Reports
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- ✓ World-class Integration with Xero, QuickBooks Online, Sage One, Twinfield, Kashflow, FreeAgent
- ✓ Built-in foreign currency support
- ✓ Project and Class management
- ✓ Dedicated training platform and education resources
- ✓ 5 Star reviews on Xero Community & QuickBooks Apps.com
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