



WHAT CUSTOMERS REALLY WANT

Most customers have a high regard for the trust and competence of their financial advisors. These were some of the positive findings of the recent research commissioned by Masthead, South Africa's largest independent broker organisation, among some of its members' customers.

"By conducting research, Masthead aimed to determine customers' satisfaction with, and perceptions of, broker members' services and offerings," says Ian Middleton, Masthead MD. "Listening to customer feedback is vital for brokers to deliver appropriate support and services to their customers. It is also a key element for members running successful businesses. In turn, it provides Masthead with information that we can use to customise and enhance our service offering to our members."

With professional input from an independent research company, research was conducted anonymously. Members identified and flagged their top customers, thereby enabling them to distinguish that group's feedback and regard their responses with greater significance.

Competence and service

"It is extremely pleasing to see that trust and competence were rated very highly by customers across all the categories during the research process," says Middleton. "These two elements form the foundations of professionalism and we applaud Masthead members on this achievement."

Another finding was that customers ranked customer service/intimacy (relationship) higher than advice and product knowledge. On this point, there was a higher rating among 'A' category customers. "This is a good thing because it reflects that the high-value customers are satisfied with the level of support they receive and are therefore less likely to look elsewhere for financial advice," says Middleton.

Segmenting clients

He noted that the 'D' category customers rated the relationship experiences as highly as the 'A' customers, while 'C' customers rated them lower than the 'D' customers.

"This raises the question of whether 'D' customers are being over-served or whether 'A' customers are being under-served," says Middleton. "Based on this result, we urge all brokers to periodically review their customer databases to understand who their valuable customers are," he says. Then one can set up a value proposition to meet the needs of all customers.

He elaborates: "the 'A' customers should receive premium service and be made aware of this. After all, they're the ones who contribute substantially towards paying the bills. You should also establish an appropriate service or support system for 'D' customers. If they're being over-served, it's costing you money."

Clients want more interaction

During the research, customers were also asked to suggest what their broker and staff could do to make the most significant impact on the business relationship. "While they listed a range of things, customers' overriding message is that they want more contact, and they want to be kept informed about the status of their investments or financial plan. They don't specify how the communication or contact should take place," says Middleton.

"In light of this, we recommend that brokers set up a communication plan for their customers, which can combine face-to-face, electronic and telephonic contact. Also, communication need not come directly only from the broker, but can come from the broker's other staff," says Middleton.

"Masthead is pleased with the outcome of the research, which generally provided positive feedback," says Middleton. "We will be conducting more of this research and invite brokers to contact us if they are interested. The feedback received and the conclusions drawn will help to direct our future decisions, which we believe will further enhance broker-customer relationships."

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