



ALTMORE BUSINESS LAW

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Summary of pertinent Law Society Research findings

In 2004, the Law Society published research into client satisfaction¹ with legal services. The following key findings about the relationship experience emerged from a survey of 250 businesses and 50 solicitors. The focus was on uptake of, experiences and satisfaction with legal practices.

Uptake of legal services among businesses

2/3 of respondents instructed a solicitor when forming a new company; 1/3 did not.

Small and Medium sized enterprises (SMEs) were likely to need a solicitor more than once in a year for different kinds of advice.

Business and commercial type instructions accounted for 50% of firm instructions; property and employment law were the other main areas of focus.

Decision making about who and how to secure legal services

Generally, clients stuck with one law firm except when businesses were bigger in which case they might travel to others (e.g. where more diverse needs called for it; where conflicts of interest arose). Those who stuck with one firm did so because it offered the range of legal services required; they had built up a trusting relationship and/or it was easier/less effort. Proximity and previous longstanding relationships also influenced people to stay with one firm.

Specialist niche firms were used by about 10% of firms – generally small companies used smaller practices; size of legal practice was typically predicted by size of company.

Many consulted other professionals about legal matters (i.e. accountants, auditors, consultants). Business and commercial advice (including legal elements), was handled to a large extent by accountants/auditors, followed by banks. Why was this the case? Cost/perceived cost was a key driver as was a perception that an accountant could frame everything they needed (not just but including the legal dimensions); businesses expected the non-legal firms to be more widely informed; speedier executors.

Perceptions that other professionals might be more up-to-date; offer advice free/ more cheaply; could give advice on the need or not for a solicitor; might have a better grasp of commerce and business...were all pertinent.

Personal recommendation and knowledge were key in finding a new legal firm.

Areas of greater and lesser satisfaction among business clients

Choices of solicitor were based on the following (with which satisfaction levels were very high overall) :

Ability to keep people updated on progress(pro-activity)
Use of plain English
Empathy/concern re clients' business
Personality (i.e. someone they can get along with; someone with a calming influence)
Expertise
Resources at/close to hand

¹ Hall, Julian “ Client Views: Small and Medium –sized Enterprises” (Law Society: UK; 2004)



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Commercial angle of advice
Fee levels
Availability.

Areas of lesser satisfaction were:

quality of documentation lay out and
meeting room attractiveness.

The solicitor's view

Solicitors themselves (also consulted in the survey) were aware of client' priorities and tended to rank them in the same or within one point of clients' ranking order. The exception was: effort with and understanding of client's business interests and concerns. Here, solicitors did not show equivalent appreciation of importance when compared with client rankings.

As stated earlier, among clients there was a propensity to delay involving a solicitor until late in the day when a matter becomes too complex or too worrying; or when their accountant so directed them. Early engagement of solicitors was not common.

Key areas of satisfaction concerning clients were: Efficiency, quality of advice; good teams and adequate resources to handle the work; commercial approach(e.g. accessible, relevant, assessment of risks, direction); personality of person; value of advice to the business (E.g. solicitors being prepared to give that little bit extra).

Some of the recommendations drawn from the findings:

Raising client awareness of how the earlier they engage a solicitor, the easier it is to help and that it is also more cost effective (prevention versus cure).

Solicitors demonstrating a broader set of skills and knowledge and contacts.

Clarity about capability, capacity, length of time, likely fees, etc with clients and early discussion about likely variations (e.g. job becomes more complex).

Better signposting of people to other business supports (e.g. Gazette, Business Link).