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Jan. 11, 2023

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Most practitioners pride themselves on delivering accurate, complete, and timely information to clients, and engaging with them in a friendly and focused way. This earns repeat business and referrals, because compared to a firm who does not deliver in a reliable manner and who might not be as friendly, the positive and timely firm always wins.

But is this enough to really stand out in today's highly competitive environment? What was just described is in fact just table stakes and is properly categorized as

"client service." To truly stand out today, firms also need to deliver a top notch

Of note is the fact that 80% of these same firms reported that attracting and retaining the right client (as opposed to just any new client) is extremely important. These firms are all predominantly using email and a portal to communicate with their clients. This gap between what clients want (a mobile experience), and what they are currently delivering (email and a portal) will need to be addressed for any firm seeking to differentiate themselves from its competitors.

Moving forward, firms should endeavor to create an experience for their clients that is easy, seamless, secure, and is mobile-enabled.

Other Brands are Delivering An Ideal Client Experience

When you think of a truly seamless experience working with a company, which brand comes to mind? Is it Airbnb with its easy mobile app, full property details, reviews, and great self-service tools, or perhaps it's the NY Times mobile app, where literally any article written by the publication can be easily searched with just a few typed queries? What other companies come to mind? When you think about companies that you love to work with, they all have something in common – they enable you to work with them on your own time, without calling them, using just your mobile phone or computer.

Probably the best integrated mobile experience offered to the greater public is provided by modern banking apps. Compare the experience the banks offer today via their apps, with their prior in-person and phone-only experience – then ask yourself if you would purposely choose a bank that didn't have a full-service mobile app. It isn't difficult to guess your answer – it's NO. And why is that? It's because you love being able to conduct all your banking on your own time, from anywhere and

anyplace, securely, using just your mobile phone. You don't have to call the bank to

When will the Accounting Industry Catch up with The Banks?

It's interesting to note that the accounting and tax industry is perhaps the only professional service industry that routinely asks its clients to open, read, and action lengthy emails, and then to click a link in the email and log in to a portal to upload their documents. Banks would never do this – you might get an email from the bank telling you there is a secure message waiting for you inside the app, but if you are asked for a document, the request would never come by email. In fact, the banks actively warn customers NOT to be fooled by emails asking for documents or to click a link in an email. This is for security reasons, and to train clients to have healthy habits instead of putting themselves at risk by clicking links in any email..

Accountants and bookkeepers who want to stand out from the crowd should consider taking steps now to provide an ideal client experience for clients to work with them digitally. To see where your firm stacks up, it is helpful to take an assessment test so you can discover your strengths and hotspots.

Getting the experience right will be particularly important when seeking to attract and retain premium clients, because those are the clients who can easily afford to go elsewhere.

To Attract and Retain Premium Clients, Pay Attention to All Touchpoints

The biggest implication is that firms need to pay attention to the experience they give their clients when working digitally with the firm. Across all touchpoints, it needs to be secure, easy and mobile-enabled. Clients should be able to scan documents using just their phone, and to self-serve important reports and

documents without having to ask a firm member to send them. Logging in should be

To see the difference this can make in how a client feels working with a firm, compare the above two-minute process on a delightful app, to the current multi-step process that many firms ask their clients to go through today. Here is the current flow: 1) Firm sends email requesting documents or an action by the client. 2) The client must open it, read it, then step out of their day, find a printer and a scanner, and then log in to a clunky portal and upload the documents from their computer. At no point can they use their mobile phone. If a scanner and printer are not available, and the client is not near their computer, the email and the document request cannot be dealt with at the time. So the firm waits, and the client has to remember they have a task to do.

Ensuring that tech solutions are easy, modern, secure, and mobile-enabled will go a long way towards attracting and retaining more premium clients.

Becoming a Truly Modern Firm Has Benefits, for Everyone

Technology has evolved and the expectations of clients have evolved too. Premium clients will be looking for a complete experience from their firm. Consider implementing an all-in-one client "accounting app" like Liscio, to help clients be successful when working digitally with your firm. Becoming the accountant in their pocket, and teamed with your firm's already-excellent work product and friendly responsive staff, is a combination that will ensure you stand out when compared to the competition.

The best part is that everyone will benefit. The firm moves faster because clients respond so much faster when it's drop-dead easy for them to do so. Security worries vanish because just like the banking apps, security is built-in and automatic. But

perhaps the very best outcome is that since everyone can work at peak velocity and

industries. Prior to Liscio, he co-founded and led SpringAhead and Tallie where he served as Chief Executive Officer. He also served as the Chief Financial Officer of Occam Networks, the Corporate Controller of C-Cube Microsystems and as an auditor for Arthur Andersen. He holds a Masters degree in Business Administration from UCLA's Anderson School of Management and received his CPA license in California.

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