



ALPHA



White Paper

New and Old Ways to Nurture Client Relationships

The rules are changing...

Whether your goal is to build new client relationships, or to develop and maintain the ones you've already made, your route to success can be achieved through one single factor: excellent communication.

Starting the process is easy. Simply ask yourself a couple of key questions: Are we meeting our clients' needs? Are they getting what they do need elsewhere? As a business, you are only relevant if you are supplying what your client wants. Finding this out can be done in a myriad of ways: surveys, competitor research, even competitions and prize draws.

ALPHA LTD

St Andrew's House
St Andrew's Road
Cambridge CB4 1DL
United Kingdom

 @thisisalphalive

thisisalpha.com

Many of the old marketing rules are of limited use these days and have to be adapted; some are simply obsolete. You can't go out and meet new clients at conference and industry events right now, and that situation might not change for the foreseeable future, but things are starting to happen online. At the very least, you should be making sure you are proactive in checking event and event listing websites for updates and information, as well as always staying tuned to the world's grapevine: social media.

Email marketing campaigns are as valid as they ever were – in other words, they are only as good as your market research, your brand message and the quality of the product or service you are offering.

Fact: social media is business media

Social media is simply the best way to always be there for your clients. Social media should be thought of as a conduit between you and your clients, which is open 24/7. It is far from being 'lightweight and ineffectual' – terms often bandied about by businesses who are unsure of how to approach this new, sometimes challenging, multi-dimensional arena of communication.

Alongside developing a strategic calendar for the kind of content you post, the best times of the day to post, and the amount of posts you schedule, your social media accounts need to be managed on a daily basis. All queries and comments that come through the channels need to be addressed and answered in a friendly, professional and efficient manner. This not only shows the client or prospect who is making contact that you are an engaged, trustworthy and open organization, it also builds your reputation with the rest of your followers. Remember: all social media channels are very public, and how you manage people's requests will advertise your strong points and also your weak points, should you let them.

Co-creation: building better together

Co-creation is one of the new business buzzwords and, ideally, it is something that both businesses and their clients can engage with in a specifically designed, neutral space. Co-creation is not the old-fashioned view of business as a one-way street; it is a dialogue, building a concept or developing a project where both parties can benefit from regular input provided constructively.

Organizations of all kinds – commercial, academic, charitable – are increasingly using these open innovation initiatives to reach beyond their boundaries, to enhance their own internal advancements as well as expand their influence and their markets in the wider world.

Living labs are one way to provide a totally new and unbiased platform for companies to engage with clients in this new 'co-creation' process. They have the potential to enable businesses, authorities, researchers, and clients across many different fields to collaborate on creating, validating, and testing new services, business ideas, markets, as well as technologies in real-life environments.

Living labs: an ever-evolving concept

Although a relatively new concept, the idea behind living labs has already evolved. As the emphasis on how we work together has necessarily changed, there has been a move to 'translate' these geographic, physical spaces to a virtual arena.

To begin with, living labs were constructed as open spaces divided into a number of co-creation spaces where companies could engage with their client, prospective clients, or 'test clients'. The aim was always to create a neutral environment in which each party could explore what the other had to offer, what they each expected, and so on, with the assistance of a neutral facilitator.

Atmosphere is of paramount importance in co-creation. Studies have found that both firms and living lab facilitators put emphasis on the importance of the environment in the living lab. The guidance provided by the living lab facilitator is proactive and enthusiastic, while still maintaining a neutral position. Space is given to client action and interaction, but there is also opportunity to discontinue the co-creation process, should this become necessary.

Space to talk

Creating comfortable spaces alongside the workshop areas is key to deriving honest answers and insights from clients. These can take the form of smaller 'think tank' or break out zones, a shop, and a café area for relaxation and breaks, which are also important factors to take into consideration when moving to a virtual living lab. These could easily be transformed into chat rooms, and even 'fun' areas such as simple games zones to help break the ice and get the flow of conversation going in a more natural way.

It is a well-documented fact, that the creative process is boosted by informal conversation and flexibility. Living labs reflect this need to take a break and regroup so that nothing is lost by moving to a virtual, online space.

An engaged client is a happy client

Recently, research has been carried out, detailing the efficacy of co-creating in living labs. By conducting focus groups, interviews and observations, as well as a number of formal and informal visits to existing living lab spaces to analyse workshops, a sizable amount of data has been collated and summarized. In general, feedback on these living lab spaces is positive, with both clients and businesses feeling that the creative process was effective and enabled them to eliminate problems upstream.

Engaged clients play a central role in the development of new services and products. The co-creating experience highlights the value of the services and/or products to both company and client. Through the co-creation process, many attributes can be explored, such as attitudinal factors, the social context, the perceived relevance of the service and/or product, personal goals, client capabilities, and the client relationship as well as skills and motivation.

Using a co-creation process within a living lab environment can help companies evolve their relationships with their clients along with their services and products, by keeping the client in a central position during development.

Communication is everything

As we've seen, communication is key to establishing and then building high-quality client relationships that are mutually beneficial for both your company and your clients.

In fact, strong client relationships can easily be built and maintained with regular communication; what will really help push these relationships to the next level are the creative and effective ways in which you choose to engage with your clients. Living labs are an evolving way of bringing the client into the conversation about what products and services they will need and want to be provided tomorrow. The question is, are they the future of client relationships? We think they could be...

Found that interesting?

If you're not already signed up to our newsletter, register on our [News](#) page to receive lots more great articles that will help you on your journey to going global.