

7 Ways to Improve Client Communications

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To truly stand out, advisors must enhance communication with clients. Communication is the lifeblood of stability and primary source of growth for your firm.

According to a Institute for Private Investors survey, the top three things clients look for from advisors is not “better performance” or “more services”; it is to 1) listen and be more attentive 2)

be more honest and open and 3) use less sales talk. The common thread here is *communication*.



Mike Slemmer

In an earlier [article](#) we discussed how effective marketing differentiates your firm. Now let's look at ways an advisors can differentiate themselves through communication with their clients.

Many firms are very interactive during the initial “intake” session of gathering information about the client and his or her family, but then lose psychological ground by not continuing two-way interactions. Think about it from the client's perspective – you have them in for an initial session, you want them to talk, and it's all very interactive. But then all of a sudden – BOOM – they become clients and the main medium becomes reports and other one-way communications.

Financial experts excel at communicating by providing data and information, which is often inconsistent with the style and approach needed for optimal communication. What feels like open communication to you may be ineffective and even offensive to clients with different behavioral styles. Moreover, the problem is exacerbated when most communication comes in written form – reports, newsletters, etc. – when *in excess of 90%* of the population learns and understands new information by non-written means.

When we ask advisors how they are communicating, they often say “we talk to our clients all the time.” While advisors solicit information from clients from time to time, they usually do it through a general survey. It yields “data,” but your clients don't feel heard. When it comes to effective communication, don't assume you are doing it “right” by the client's measurement. Ask them what kind of interaction they want and need. Present information differently to different clients, giving them different avenues for dialogue with you. And of course, always stay



“on message”! Every client interaction is an opportunity that must be taken to resell them on the unique value you offer. The same positioning and differentiation used in your marketing must be evident – and reinforced – in your client communications.

Effective communication really is the lifeblood of an advisory business. Clients don’t want to feel as though they were “marketed to” before the sale, but then ignored once they’ve joined the firm. They still want education, they still want dialogue, and they still want to feel as though you want their business!

Most clients won’t leave an advisor because of poor performance; they leave because another advisor comes along and makes them feel as though their business is more important to that other firm.

So, what are some specific steps you can take to forge a stronger connection with your clients? Here are the seven keys to client communication success:

1. Communicate in more than one manner with clients. Do you rely exclusively on e-mail? Snail mail? The once per year in person meeting? Mix it up and give clients a different taste of communication approaches throughout the year.
2. Focus on education. The financial markets are confusing to many people and people like to feel as if they know what’s going on. Give them a primer on some aspect of investing. Provide a newsletter with tidbits about the markets. Send them an interesting research study. If you are not a good writer, there are lots of firms available to help you with ideas and communication. You just need to know what your clients are looking for.
3. Make your meetings interactive. Don’t just sit down with their report and go through it. Talk to them. Ask them about their life, their family, their latest golf game. Engage with them on levels other than just portfolio returns.
4. Call them! Yes, just for no reason. Check in and ask how they are doing? Do they have any questions? Let them know you are pleased to be working with them.
5. Drop a note or a card for birthdays, anniversaries, the purchase of new home or car, etc. If you don’t know these dates, you need to get them! You should know what matters to your clients and their families.
6. Communicate “behaviorally” – modify your style and your approach for the client. If you talk slowly and they are a fast talker, then speed it up. When clients are more informal and you are formal, drop the formality while you are talking to them. If you think quickly and they like to process, think about something while you give them time to chew on what you’ve said. Meet them halfway – don’t make them adapt to you.



7. Give clients options about how much and what kind of communication they can get from you. Ask them – how many times a year, how do they like to receive new information, how best do they learn? It's really not hard to communicate in ways people like – if you know what those ways are. It's not as cumbersome as it sounds. There are only so many ways to communicate, but asking someone what they want will make them feel as though you've focused on their particular needs.

Use any or all of these ways to keep a focus on communicating. Try different methods and different approaches to reach out to and keep in touch with your clients outside of the standard annual review. Value the “soft skills” - they are under-utilized in this business but valued highly by the clients with the money.

[The Collaborative](#) provides business development support for RIAs and others in the wealth management industry and can be reached at info@the-collaborative.com.

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