

Instant Coffee, Model T, and Changing Tastes

By [LawVision](#) on June 3, 2021

Want to stand out?

This coffee station at my vacation rental reminds me of Henry Ford's famous quote about being able to have any color of car we want (so long as it's black). Here, I have many choices of coffee (so long as it's instant), but a real differentiator would be to have a drip coffee or espresso maker.



The same idea applies to law firms working with similar inputs (laws, talent, clients, precedential thinking, traditional business model, etc.). If you want to differentiate your firm, as all progressive law firm leaders want to do, could you think differently and apply different processes to these common inputs and package solutions into different products and services your clients value?

What do clients value?

Know my business! is a common cry heard from clients around the world. Newer roles like "Chief Client Officer" and initiatives like client listening programs, customer experience (CX) mapping, and the trend towards organizing law firm services by client industries are all examples of how law firms are trying to align with the needs and desires of their clients, understand their business, and speak their language.

When we conduct interviews with clients of law firms, we learn that each one has something unique to say. Often, these clients reveal things to us that their law firms find surprising. Firms can use this unearthed trove of valuable information to inform their strategies.

Tastes change.

“The times they are a-changin.”^[1] Tastes change, too. Your strategy from before the pandemic is probably stale. What you were doing to earn your clients’ loyalty then may not work as well today and tomorrow. Take another cue from Henry Ford. His Model T saw amazing success. “By the early 1920s more than half of the registered automobiles in the world were Fords. More than 15,000,000 Model T’s were built and sold.” These cars were “affordable, simple to operate,” and “durable.” By the mid-1920s, however, competitors were building cars that were “better suited to the quickly modernizing roads and consumer tastes...It became clear to everyone that updates and lower prices for the T would no longer suffice.”^[2]

Customers no longer valued affordability, operability, and durability the way they did just five years prior. Car customers wanted something different and fresh.

Time to redesign. Start with a tabula rasa.

What did Ford do? He pulled his top-selling car off the assembly line and started from scratch! “In late 1926 Henry Ford directed his engineers to start work on a new Ford – the Model A,” and “in May 1927 a ceremony was held to honor the end of production of the Model T. It was the end of an era,” and the beginning of a new one in Ford’s evolution-oriented mindset which has kept the company alive to this day.^[3]

“The new Ford was a completely different car that did not carry-over any parts from the Model T... As for the name, Henry Ford said that the car was so new and different that they would ‘wipe the slate clean and start all over again with Model A.’”^[4]

What if you could start from scratch and design your practice on a clean slate – what would you want to do differently to solve your clients’ problems? Who would have a stake in your business? Who would you have work alongside you? Which processes would you use? Which technologies? Which talent? What other resources would you leverage? Would you start by obtaining the voice of your client?^[5]

Give clients what they crave.

The mere act of obtaining client insights and feedback is one way to inform your potential differentiation right now (and it does not require a large investment of time or money), because many firms aren’t even doing this.^[6]

As you work to modernize your practice, be sure you understand which parts of your practice your clients no longer crave and make changes that will appeal to the modern tastes of the stakeholders that matter most to your business.

Sources:

^[1] Bob Dylan, 1964

^[2] [The Model T \(ford.com\)](#)

^[3] Ibid.

^[4] Ibid.

[5] [Your Clients Are Not Stupid; Stop Rate-Hiking as if You Think They Are – LawVision](#), May 2021

[6] [Too Many Law Firms Aren't Interviewing Their Clients. Here's What They Stand to Gain | The American Lawyer](#), May 2021