

## Why Client Service is Not a One-Size-Fits-All Proposition

By [LawVision](#) on March 7, 2014

Over the past decade the words from the lips of client service evangelists have heralded different variations on a theme: what is good client service? I know, because I am one of them. While reputation, responsiveness and the mantra-of-the-day – value – have each in turn captured the spotlight, the core definition of client service has remained virtually unchanged – or at least unchallenged. And why not? The idea that each client wants an attorney who is responsive and delivers value seems uncontroversial.

Yet like virtually everything else in today's legal world, client service is undergoing its own transformation. A singular definition no longer fits the bill. As clients grow accustomed to wielding the "big sword" (aka buying power), they grow increasingly comfortable with asking for what they want – not just what is offered to them.

As a young girl, I used to look forward to trips with my grandfather to the Dairy Dome. After a long day of sweating it out playing kickball or riding my bike, there was nothing more refreshing than a soft-serve ice cream cone. When we reached the counter, my eyes barely able to see over the threshold, the moment would come to decide – what would it be today: vanilla, chocolate or a twist? With chocolate or rainbow jimmies (sprinkles for you non-Bostonians)?

Those were big choices – and at the time, more than enough options to excite my mind. Today, when I take my sons for ice cream the possibilities are endless. Dozens of flavors and more than 40 different toppings from coconut flakes to peppermint patties. Today, a customer can get exactly what she wants with seemingly limitless combinations.

This phenomenon of custom-tailored delivery of goods and services is not limited to ice cream, of course. You can acquire anything from footwear to furniture to meet your unique needs and specifications. Even personalized – or genome-based – medicine is on the horizon. It is not so far-fetched, then, to recognize the signs of increasingly tailored requests and demands coming from law firm clients.

For example, consider the corporate counsel who asks his firm to deliver the same portfolio of work – for half the fees; the VP of Regulatory who brings his counsel in to brainstorm ways to redefine the current legislation; or the HR Director who asks her attorney to deliver training on Environmental, Health and Safety to her floor managers. Each of these clients is focusing on a different aspect of service – value, innovation and preventative law, respectively.

The opportunity for law firms is to "read" each client, recognize these different priorities and determine how to effectively respond to them. This approach demands a fluid dialogue with clients as well as the willingness (and wherewithal) to adapt to client needs – one client at a time.

The challenge: the process improvement model to deliver work profitably at half the price is not the same model which allows a firm to devise innovative strategies on a regular basis. Those firms who try to service all clients with a one-size-fits-all proposition will ultimately deliver optimal service to none. In my next blog post on April 1st, I will explore what it takes to deliver a personalized client experience from pitch to close.