Client Research: Debunking Myths and Maximizing ROI

AIA

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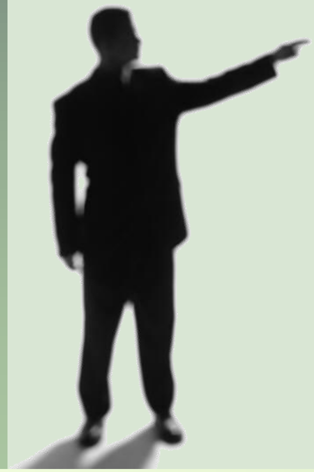
Introduction

My Background

My Passion for this Topic



Learning Objectives

- ✓ Explore and debunk 4 myths about client/prospect research per industry anecdotes and case studies.
- ✓ Identify 5 key elements of a client/prospect study that should drive the questions asked and application of data gathered.
- ✓ Define 3 strategies for leveraging client/prospect research in BD/project delivery/strategic planning.

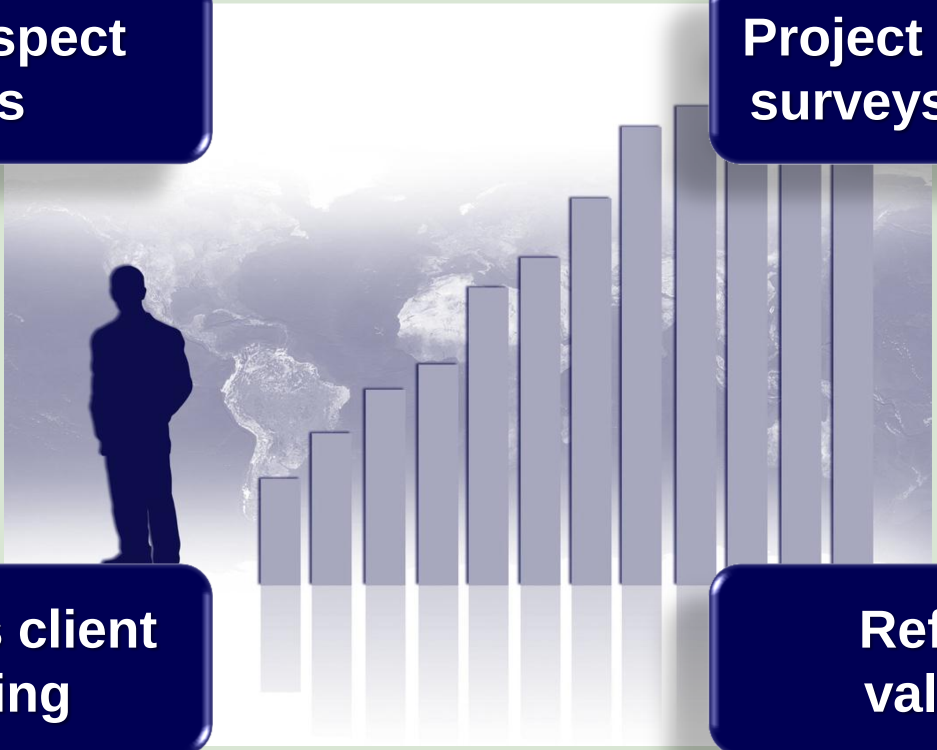
Learning Objectives (cont.)

- Participants will learn nine tips for maximizing return-on-investment from client/prospective client research

Types of Client Research

Client/prospect studies

Project satisfaction surveys/interviews



Continuous client monitoring

Reference validation

Types of Client Research (cont.)

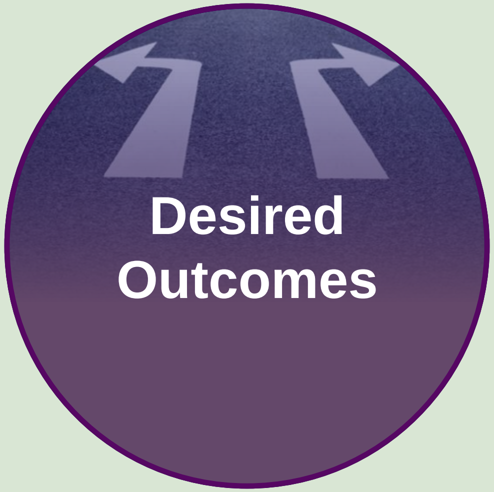
Client/Prospect Studies:
- Conduct every 2-3 years
- Good precursor to strategic planning; marketing/BD planning

Project Satisfaction Surveys/Interviews:
- Conduct mid-way and/or at conclusion of project—ideally in person, but can use a written survey

Continuous Client Monitoring:
- Ongoing interviews with current clients
- Good tool to stay in touch, assess client satisfaction, value conveyed

Reference Validation:
- Useful for eliciting testimonials and assessing whether a client is a "supporter" or truly an advocate

Client/Prospect Studies



Client/Prospect Studies (cont.)

- A strategic relationship-building tool
- Sends clear messages to clients:
  - You don't take them for granted; you value their feedback
  - You value self-reflection and continuous improvement
  - Enables you to strategically target influencers/decision-makers
  - Provides four "touches" with target

Client/Prospect Studies (cont.)

- Can feed data back to client leader and project team to immediately address weak spots
- Data is also invaluable to marketing, BD, HR, finance & accounting staff

Client/Prospect Studies (cont.)

Essential Components

- Interviewee List
- Interview Guide
- Letter from CEO/Mkt Sector Leader
- Interviews
- Analysis of Findings
- Handwritten T-you & Action Plan

Debunking Myths

MYTH

Clients will feel bothered (*messaging is so important!*)

Clients will feel "offended" if a third-party conducts the research

Statistical significance is necessary

We already know what they're going to say

Sample Interview Quotes

From three different client studies:

> ***"This*** *(study)* ***made me feel valued, and I appreciate it. We've realized here at*** *(Organization Name)* ***that this research they're conducting makes them a more impressive company."***

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Sample Interview Quotes (cont.)

"Undertaking these interviews demonstrates to me that (Firm A) wants to be poised to provide the services its clients need, and that they're not sitting back on their laurels."

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Sample Interview Quotes (cont.)

"I appreciate you asking (what advice I have for my client). I'm a quality management guy from many years ago, and it's very refreshing that they're asking these questions of owners."

Sample Interview Quotes (cont.)

"I think it's great that they're doing this type of study — they need to do this if they're going to be successful. We don't want to have to rely on just Company A."

Most Common Mistakes

Don't use skilled and/or independent interviewers

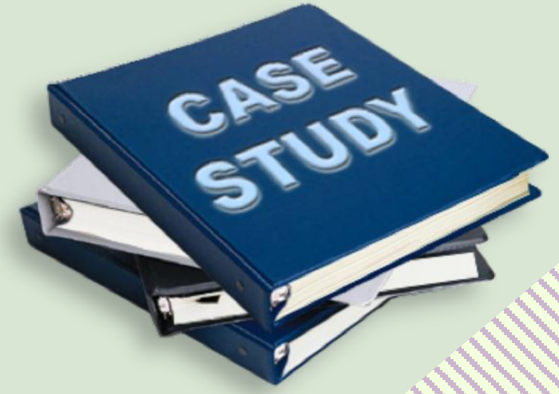
Process is haphazard

Using a written survey

Not leveraging study for client development

A/E/C Industry Case Study #1: Client/Prospect Study

- **Rationale for conducting given challenging economic times**
- **Data-gathering considerations: written vs. in-person vs. phone interviews**
- **Development of introductory letter and interview guide**
- **Strategies for increasing participation rate**



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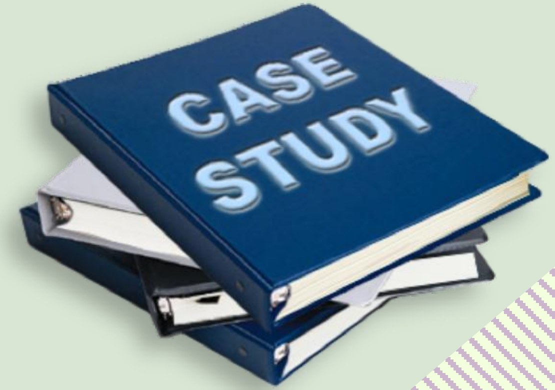
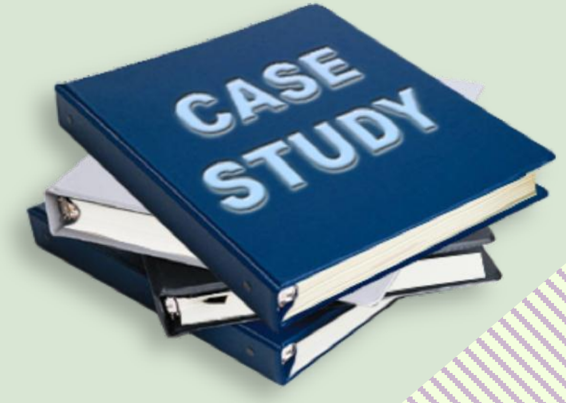
Case Study #1 (cont.)

- **Strategies for disarming participants, particularly prospective clients**
- **Determination of analytical framework**
- **You've gathered and analyzed the data, now what?**



Case Study #1 (cont.)

- Select "aha" findings:
  - Market opportunity: pre-con services
  - Greater pre-positioning needed in Healthcare



Case Study #1 (cont.)

- Success stories:

How the study paid off…

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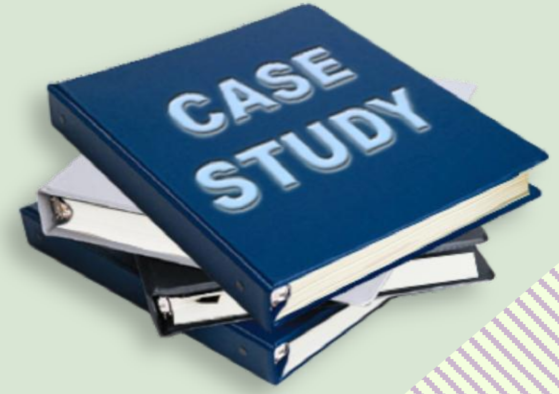
Case Study #2: Continuous Client Monitoring

- Rationale for initiative
- Initial push-back: “I don’t want an outside party talking to my clients”

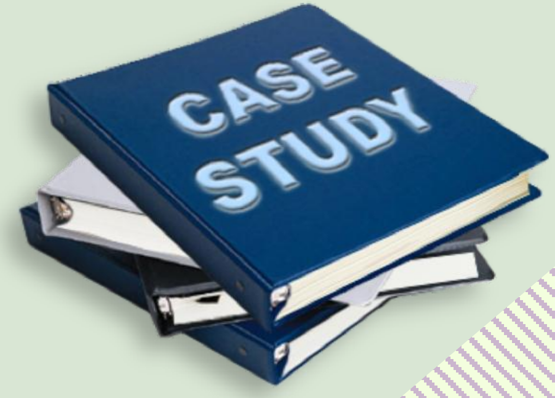


Case Study #2 (cont.)

- A tale of two clients:
  - » "I don't need the small talk—'just the facts, ma'am.'"
  - » "They need to incorporate rapport-building time trying to connect the dots and share information versus trying to get the next project."

Case Study #2 (cont.)

- Take-aways:
  - Matching communication styles is critical (between client contact and PM/client leader)
  - Can PM/client leader develop/evolve, or is a course-correction needed?



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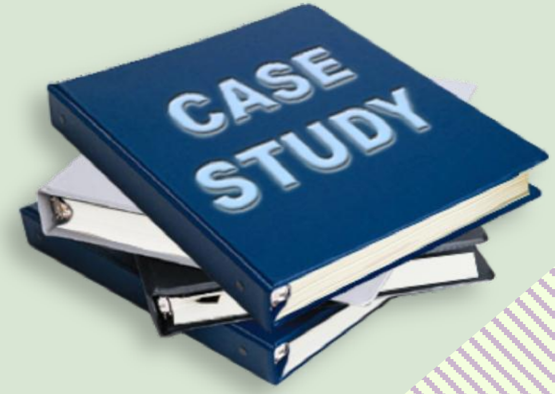
Case Study #2 (cont.)

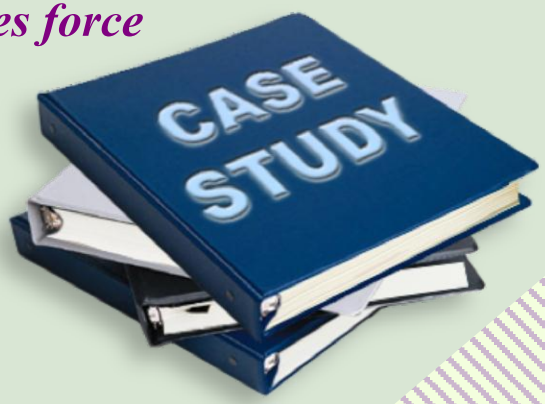
- Take-aways (cont.):
- One person’s “8” is another’s “5”
- Clients perceive and experience value differently
- At times, communications with clients don’t match desires of clients:
  - Under-communication
  - Over-communication
  - Welcoming a more proactive BD & partnering approach



Case Study #2 (cont.)

- What advice would you offer?

"Being in communication and being engaged with your clients aren't the same thing. They could look for ways to stay engaged a bit more proactively. I'm more accustomed to consultants promoting other services that they can do. I believe there are other things that they could do for us, and they could probe more as to what I'm doing that they could help me with. I'm not suggesting a sales force coming to me, but I'd be perfectly open to having them say, "Aaron, here's what's coming up regarding a particular regulation. Is there anything that we can help you with?"



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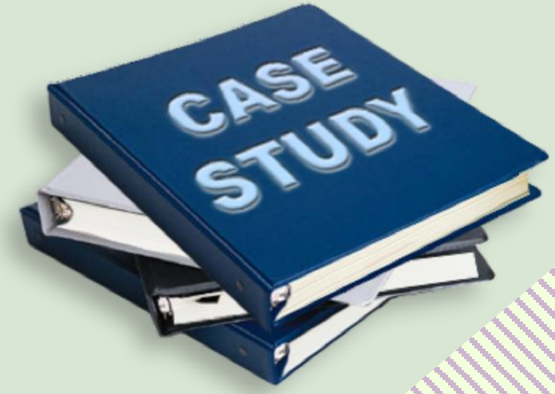
Case Study #2 (cont.)

- Take-aways (cont.):
- Don’t undertake if you’re not ready to listen and act:
  - Firm culture is determinant: CYA or continuous improvement?
  - Client action plans shared with project team



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Leveraging Studies in Client Development

- Strategies for leveraging the study process:
  - » Follow-up meetings to address:

Problems

Misperceptions

Unmet needs

Incorporating Data into Strategic Planning Process

Trends/drivers impacting client base

New service offerings

Competitive analysis

Strategic positioning & messaging

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Client Research: Your Greatest Challenges?

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Strategies for Maximizing ROI

- Include prospective clients
- Make sure interviewer knows ins and outs of client, interviewee, projects
- Share data with project team, and then entire company

Strategies for Maximizing ROI

- Input intel into relational database
- Develop Client Action Plan in response (biggest gripe is that nothing changes)
- Circle back with the client (ASAP if there are issues)

Strategies for Maximizing ROI (cont.)

- ✓ Harvest testimonials, if appropriate
- ✓ Don’t turn research into a dust-collector; revisit data
- ✓ Repeat every few years for benchmarking

Questions…

Want more tips, resources, case studies, and best practices? Opt into *The Friedman File*.

Richard Friedman

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