

Client Information Overload Solution: Trust and Confidence over AI



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Some might argue that sales pitches whose sole purpose is to obtain work destroy the conditions required for trust to develop. This scenario highlights the inherent conflicts facing law firms attempting to build trust with clients and sell their services.

However, ironically, the current information overload clients (as well as others) are experiencing has created an opportunity for two old standbys — trust and confidence to be your best relationship builders.

We've presumed that more data equals more helpful information and a better chance to gain knowledge. But this line of thinking has led us down a deep rabbit hole where we find ourselves today: swimming (more like drowning) in data we can't harness.

Information overload is overwhelming by the data we must process at work and home. Information overload reduces our capacity to function effectively, leading to poor decisions in both our work and personal life and even the inability to make decisions, sometimes called analysis paralysis. When this situation persists, burnout is a typical result.

Oracle recently completed a giant study of 14,000 business leaders, giving numerical support to the above premise. Some of the statistics contained in the survey results included the following:¹

- 74% of those responding say the number of decisions they must make daily has increased more than ten times over the last three years.
- A similar proportion — 78% — complain they are bombarded with more data than ever.
- 86% say the volume of data is making decisions in their personal and professional lives more complicated, not less.
- A stunning 72% admitted there are times when the sheer volume of data, and lack of trust in that data, prevent them from making any decision.



Seth Stephens-Davidowitz,² author of a book called *Don't Trust Your Gut*, espoused,

"They are tempted to throw out the confusing, and sometimes conflicting, data and just do what feels right."

Those obsessed with AI will hold out that it is the solution to information overload, and maybe at some future point in time, it will, but I would suggest that AI tools like ChatGPT have a few real hurdles to overcome first, including:

- They ensure that programs aren't consciously or unconsciously encoded with structural biases.
- If a significant portion of the world's data was created in the last couple of years, how to protect against the risk that history is ignored (history, while not a hitching post, should be a guidepost)?
- The potential simplicity of use risks ignoring the need for human separation of content between fact, opinion, and relevancy.

Lest there is any doubt of the prominence of AI in our business and personal lives, technology research firm IDC estimated worldwide spending on AI will be \$50 billion in 2023 and \$110 billion annually in 2024.

As mentioned earlier, this era of information overload and the resulting paralysis offers an excellent opportunity for law firms. Theodore Roosevelt's message in his famous quote sums it up best:

"Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care."

While law firms have always known that trust and relationships, much more than money, are the currency of business, they sometimes need a solid nudge to remember and act accordingly.

It's simple enough — no trust equals no clients.

Transparency plays a critical role in trust and relationship-building. What is it? Simply, openness, communication, and accountability.

Ineffective communication is a substantial detriment to trust. Effective communication is about more than just exchanging information. It's about understanding the emotion and intentions behind the data. As well as conveying a message, you need to listen in a way that gains the whole meaning of what's being said and makes the other person feel heard and understood.

A good relationship requires two-way accountability between the lawyer and the client. When you set clear boundaries, it encourages a mutually beneficial relationship. Doing so will ensure respect and trust from them, particularly as you approach the relationship on equal terms.

What other steps can a law firm take to build trust and confidence in a relationship?

- Listen actively — can only be done when you are not talking;
- Connect with your client — ask your client to identify any decisions they are struggling with and then develop a plan to help them achieve the best decisions (*Talk them off the ledge*);
- Ensure your client grasps what is needed to execute (*Help them stay off the ledge*); and
- Ensure the eventual solution gets implemented properly (*The memo is not the end but the beginning of earning trust*).

Information overload is a technological problem with a fundamentally human solution that requires trust and confidence in your advisors.

1. Fortune CEO Daily
2. He partnered with Oracle on the study.

Stephen Mabey is a CPA, CA and the Managing Director of Applied Strategies, Inc. Stephen's focus is on law firms in general and on small to medium size law firms in particular. He has written about and advised on, a wide range of issues including - leadership, business development, marketing, key performance indicators, strategic planning, mergers, practice acquisitions, competitive intelligence, finance, mergers, practice transitioning, compensation, organizational structures, succession and transition planning, partnership arrangements and firm retreats. In 2013, Stephen was inducted as a Fellow of the College of Law Practice Management in recognition of his sustained commitment to the highest standards of professionalism in law practice management. For more information, visit appliedstrategies.ca or connect with [Stephen Mabey on LinkedIn](#).

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