smps Foundation

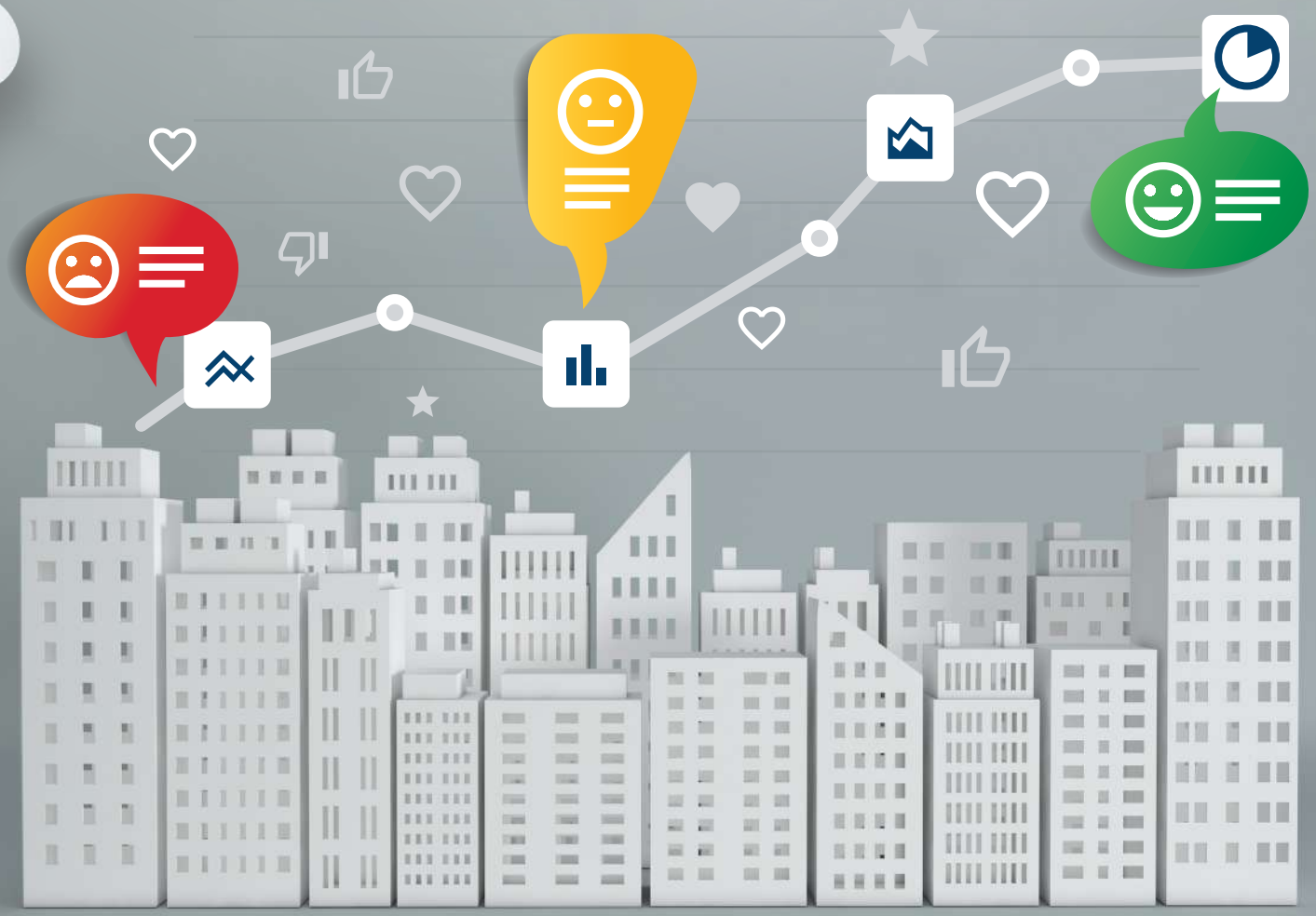
ClientSavvy
A ClearlyRated Company

2025

BENCHMARKS, INSIGHTS, AND TRENDS

CLIENT EXPERIENCE IN THE AEC INDUSTRY

Research examining the current state of Client Experience (CX) in AEC firms, offering insights for CX structures, benchmarks, outcomes, and best practices.



Introduction

The past several years have brought major shifts in how Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) firms communicate, market, and sell both to existing and prospective clients. In addition to delivering exceptional projects, clients expect exceptional experiences throughout the design and build process. As AEC firms double down on growth, the competition for both clients and talent continues to increase. For this reason, Client Experience (CX) has emerged as both a mindset and a discipline to go beyond former "client-centric" approaches to truly put the client at the center of all phases of project development.

78% of AEC buyers view CX as a top consideration for firm selection (Gitnux). We've seen a growing number of firms investing in CX-related initiatives such as organizational transformation, strategy, training, client feedback programs, and journey mapping. Since the first time CX appeared as a trend in Society for Marketers of Professional Services (SMPS) Foundation research six years ago, an increasingly large number of AEC firms now have team members dedicated to CX, with titles such as Chief Experience Officer and Director of Client Experience becoming more common. This trend is accelerating. SMPS Foundation research in 2019 found only 56% of marketing leaders thought CX would be their top differentiator, yet 2025 research from FMI Consulting, published by the SMPS Foundation, showed that number has risen to 87%. Given these staggering changes over just a few years, Client Savvy, A ClearlyRated Company and the SMPS Foundation are fully committed to advancing the future of CX in AEC.

To initiate our efforts, we're thrilled to share this first-of-its-kind research study on CX in the AEC industry. **Our research shows that firms leading the charge in adopting CX strategies win more work, grow faster, deliver higher margins, and retain top talent.** We intend to repeat this research annually to track CX trends, adoption, best practices, and impacts over time. In this first study, we collected data and uncovered fascinating insights about the current state of CX — including its reach and adoption, how firms are structuring, funding, and operationalizing CX initiatives, and most importantly, what the most successful firms are doing differently to achieve measurable results.

Take a look at the insights and takeaways in this report to learn how you can explore, adopt, and elevate CX at your firm to recruit and retain talent, gain new clients while retaining existing ones, drive near-term profits, and support long-term business viability.

Thank you to all the firms that responded and contributed to this research, and for your contribution to advancing CX in the AEC industry. We can't wait to see what the future holds!

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What does CX look like in the AEC industry in 2025?

In 2025, as AEC firms strive to differentiate themselves, gain new business, and retain valuable clients, marketers are embracing CX as a formalized, strategic discipline. No longer seen as just a set of soft skills or client service gestures, CX has become a business-critical function. It's structured, measured, and largely supported by leadership because early adopters see meaningful business results. The data is clear: firms adopting CX are consistently outperforming industry peers on the results that matter (profits, growth, employee retention, and more).

Clients are more commonly expecting personalized responses and instant answers to questions, along with seamless service, just like they've come to expect from the consumer brands they buy from every day. In other words, they want to be known and understood and expect a very human experience. In the AEC industry, successful CX leaders are building firms that balance technology, production, and empathy in the pursuit of outcompeting their peers. Only by placing the client at the center of their strategies can these CX leaders achieve these goals. To foster a greater understanding of why and how these leading CX firms and their CX leaders are succeeding, we're happy to share our research and its findings.

We heard from nearly 150 AEC firms to uncover:

- Their biggest challenges and opportunities
- CX impact on growth and profitability
- How firms structure and fund CX programs
- Who owns and drives CX initiatives
- The CX tools and technology firms are using
- The most common CX practices being employed today

The data revealed that CX is no longer a buzzword. It has become a core business function delivering measurable outcomes, including revenue growth, increased profitability, ease of new market entry, and enhanced client loyalty. The most successful firms position CX as a firm-wide imperative, not just a marketing tactic, and are seeing business results that far outpace non-adopters. This analysis shows that top-performing firms are distinguished not just by what they do, but by how they approach, structure, and measure the CX efforts.

At the same time, challenges remain: integrating CX across an organization, proving ROI, capturing timely client feedback, and aligning internal departments to best implement CX tasks all add complexity to business operations. While marketers increasingly recognize CX as a competitive advantage, maturity varies greatly across the industry. Leadership buy-in and a client-centric culture are critical to success, but not yet universally accepted. As more firms invest in smarter CX tools, establish clearer performance benchmarks, and gain stronger leadership support, those who embed CX deeply into their strategy are poised to lead the industry forward.

Key Takeaways

AEC Buyers Expect Better Experiences

Client expectations in the AEC space are shifting fast. While AEC firms may still see themselves as technical experts first and customer service providers second, their clients increasingly expect a frictionless, responsive, and very human experience across every interaction.

According to recent studies:

- **78% of AEC buyers** view seamless CX as a top decision factor in firm selection (Gitnux).
- **68% of clients** expect real-time updates throughout their projects, not just status reports at milestones (Gitnux).
- AIA research shows that **68% of architecture clients** favor firms known for strong client relationships and communication, not just technical skill (Emulent).

This shift is fueled by business-to-consumer (B2C) experiences—fast, digital, intuitive—that now shape how clients expect to be served in B2B professional services. As a result, CX has become a core expectation, not an optional add-on.

For AEC firms, this means investing in CX isn't about being flashy; it's about being relevant. It's about retaining clients who have more options than ever. And it's about competing on value, not just price or credentials. CX also means understanding what value means to each client. Too many leaders confuse good CX as providing the white glove treatment to every client every time. Good CX isn't about luxury but about aligning service with client preferences and expectations. Some clients do prefer a white glove experience and gladly pay a premium for it. Others are seeking an Amazon-like transactional relationship: a fairly priced one-stop-shopping experience delivered without friction. Many firms may need the ability to deliver both, depending on who the client is. Firm leaders need a focused set of capabilities to identify, manage, and deliver the right experience to each client, every time.

Your clients aren't comparing your service to your competitors, they're comparing it to Amazon, Uber, and Apple.

01

CX is a measurable driver of business performance.

Our research shows that 69% of the variance in firm performance (e.g., the gap between top performers and laggards) is explained by how CX is structured, measured, and managed.

02

Top-performing firms treat CX as a core strategy, not an aspiration.

They assign ownership, use feedback to shape decisions, and tie CX metrics directly to measurable business outcomes like revenue, retention, and referrals.

03

Building a holistic approach to CX is vital.

Checking a box by sending out an electronic CX survey is not enough to become a high-performing company. It takes leveraging client feedback throughout the client journey and at all levels of the organization and embedding it in business decision-making and project management to unlock the benefits of a CX program.

04

Complacency is common and dangerous.

Most firms think they're average or above average in delivering CX. But many overestimate their performance as viewed by their clients. Without unbiased measurement, firms risk overestimating their performance. Without leadership commitment, even accurate insights rarely translate into action.

05

Your ideal clients are trying to tell you something.

Feedback reveals which types of clients are most aligned with how firms deliver value today. Our research shows that firms that take the time to deeply get to know their clients and understand buyer personas are more likely to be top performers. The strategic priority is clear: firms that identify the clients most aligned with their strengths, deepen those relationships, and build growth around them are more likely to outperform peers.

Bottom Line

CX has become a defining factor in how firms grow, retain clients, and differentiate in the market. Firms that prioritize it are pulling ahead, while those that neglect it are increasingly at risk of being left behind.

SECTION 01

Strategy & Approach

SECTION 01

Strategy & Approach

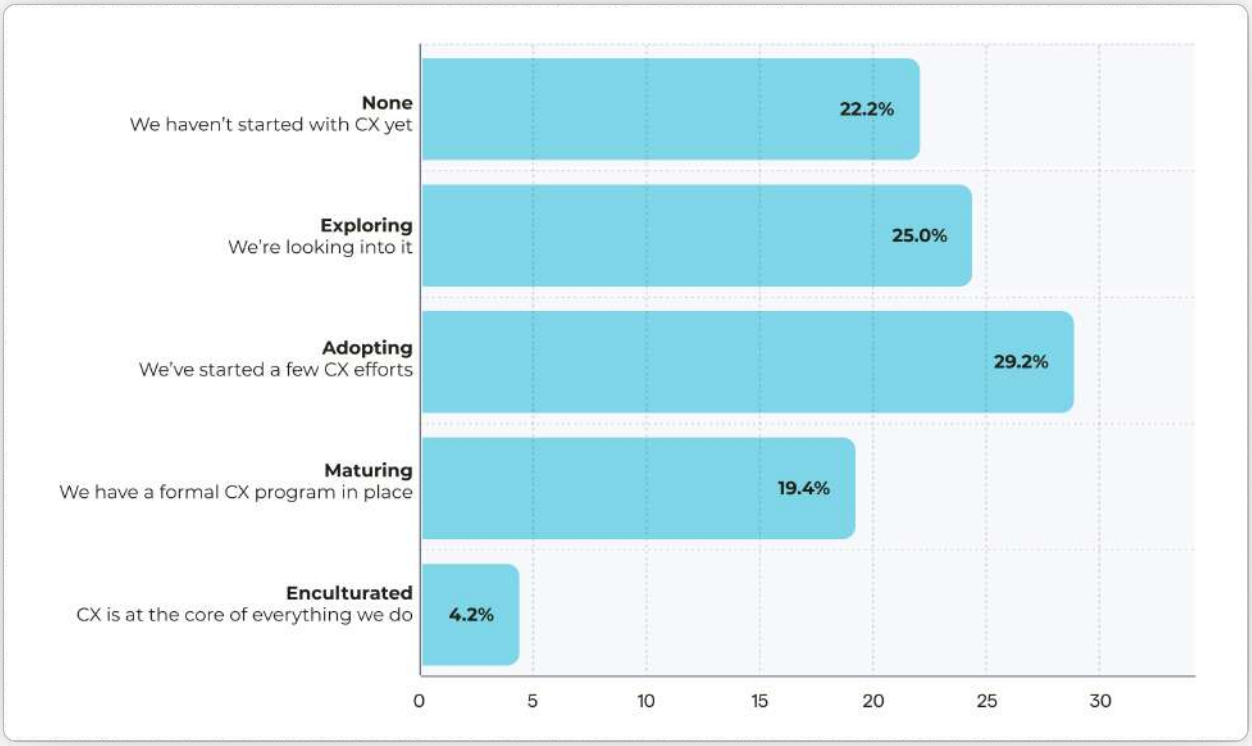
The AEC industry has long prided itself on technical excellence. But in recent years, a new differentiator has emerged: the ability to consistently deliver a superior CX. Yet, our findings reveal a wide disparity between intention and implementation.

In our survey nearly half (47%) of respondents reported their firms do not have a formalized CX strategy. Of those that do, only 4.2% describe their CX program as "enculturated"—meaning CX is truly at the core of how the business operates.

This lack of structural clarity is more than a missed opportunity; it represents a measurable performance risk. Our regression analysis shows that **69% of the variance in firm performance can be explained by how firms manage and measure CX efforts**. Firms with formal CX structures, built on defined strategies, clear ownership, and disciplined measurement consistently outperform those without. What distinguishes top performers is not only their commitment to CX, but also the way they embed that structure as a business imperative rather than treating it as a marketing function.

CX without structure is noise. Top-performing firms use structure to turn CX into a strategy.

Does your organization have a formalized Client Experience (CX) strategy?



Where Firms Are on Their CX Journey

Firms across the AEC industry are at very different stages of their CX journey. Here's how the landscape breaks down:

22.2%

Not Started

These firms have no formal CX efforts underway. Any client experience that occurs is unstructured and happens by chance rather than by design.

25.0%

Exploring

These firms are asking questions, gathering information, and beginning to understand the value of CX—but haven't yet committed to a path forward.

29.2%

Adopting

Firms in this phase have launched CX initiatives, but often lack structure, leadership, or integration with broader business goals.

19.4%

Maturing

These firms have a formal CX program in place and are beginning to connect CX to firm-wide strategy, feedback loops, and performance metrics.

4.2%

Enculturated

For members of this small but growing group, CX is embedded in the firm's DNA. It shapes how decisions are made, how teams are rewarded, and how client relationships are managed across the project lifecycle.

76%

of AEC firms do not have a formal CX strategy.

The real transformation begins when CX stops being a project and starts being a principle.

Building the Business Case for CX

(For Firms Just Starting Out)

If your firm is in the "not started" or "exploring" phase of its CX journey, the most strategic first move isn't launching a new survey, it's building a business case rooted in how CX can solve real business problems.

Here's a proven four-step approach leaders can use to drive that conversation:

01

Define the Business Problem or Opportunity

Start by identifying a core business challenge or opportunity. Think of issues such as talent retention, revenue stagnation, proposal win rates, or inability to grow existing client relationships. Then, identify what's getting in the way—the roadblocks standing between the firm and the outcome it wants.

Example: *"We're losing repeat work from key accounts."*

02

Conduct a Root Cause Analysis

Now dig into what's *really* behind the problem. Interview internal teams, review past and present client feedback, and examine delivery breakdowns. Often, you'll find the root causes are CX-related failures: misaligned expectations, communication gaps, unmet emotional needs, or lack of follow-through.

03

Assess the Impact

Quantify the cost of inaction. Who is affected by this breakdown? What's the financial impact: lost revenue, rework, churn? What's the internal impact: burnout, misalignment, blame games? Putting numbers and names to the pain makes it harder to ignore. For example, can you quantify (even if it's a conservative estimate) what this is costing the business? These could be loss statements, such as "we're losing $3.6M a year due to employee churn," or they could be gain statements like "improving our proposal win rate from 32% to 36% would add $4.8M in new client revenue annually." Top performers tie their CX programs to actual revenues. Tracking revenue growth as a CX Key Performance Indicator (KPI) was the strongest predictor of overall business outcomes in our analysis.

Tip: *Even anecdotal evidence ("We lost a $2M client after one customer service misstep.") can catalyze urgency if it's framed around consequences.*

04

Propose a CX Response That Drives Measurable Value

Now, after quantifying the benefits, introduce a CX plan. Show how specific CX capabilities (like milestone-based feedback, Project Manager CX training, or closed-loop systems) directly address the root causes of the problems you identified. Frame CX not as a new initiative, but as the logical solution to a defined business problem.

Strategic Framing: *"We're investing in CX not to feel good, but to fix what's broken—and grow where we're stuck."*

If you've started CX, who at the firm has bought in to improving Client Experience?

Who owns CX? If your answer starts with "marketing," you're not alone, but you may be underperforming as a result.

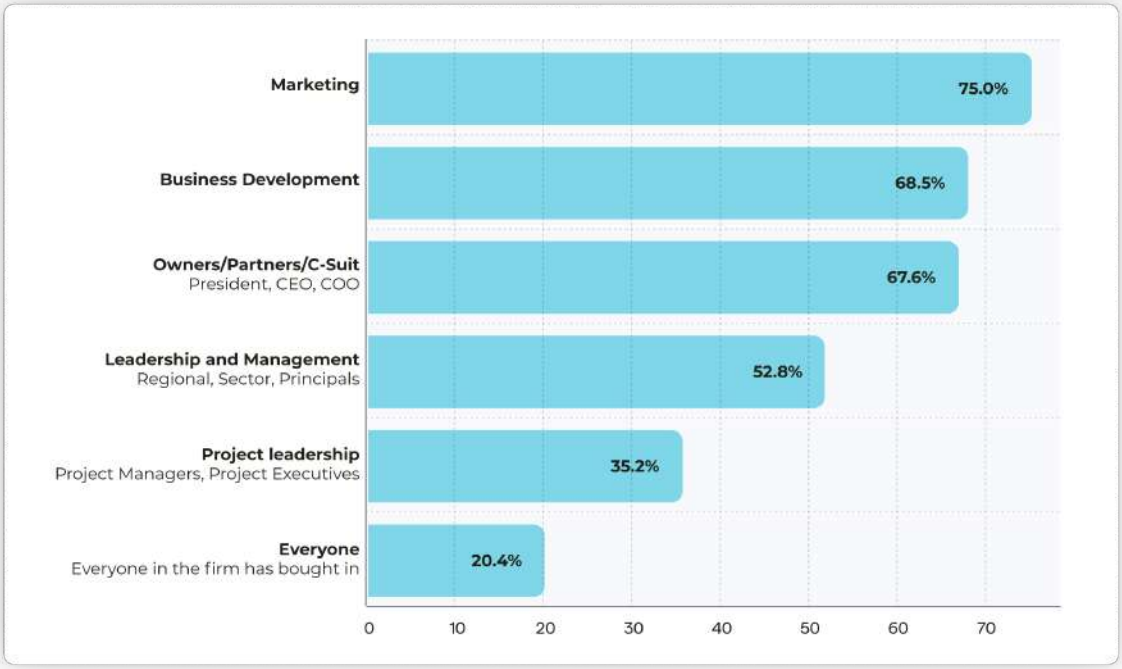
Our research found that while marketing (75%) and business development (68.5%) are the most common champions of CX, only 52.8% of firms report buy-in from leadership. And in terms of structural responsibility, just 35.2% have buy-in for CX from project delivery or operations personnel.

That gap matters. Our analysis consistently shows that high-performing firms involve senior leadership and delivery teams in CX, not just marketers. Nearly 70% of top-performing firms have a dedicated CX role or team. 74% of top performers have buy-in from regional or sector leadership, versus just 50% among average firms. Additionally high-performing firms have buy-in among project leaders (61%, versus 27% among average firms). Top performers often differentiate themselves with buy-in for CX at the executive level, but also among project leaders and mid-level leadership. Low-performing firms, on the other hand, tend to silo CX, often limiting its reach to annual marketing reviews or Business Development collateral.

When no one owns CX, everyone assumes someone else is listening to the client. And no one is.

The firms seeing the greatest return from CX are those where leadership doesn't just approve of CX, they lead it, and foster buy-in throughout their mid-level leadership teams. They ensure that the people closest to clients—PMs, sector leaders, operations staff—own the responsibility of listening, responding, and improving to better serve client needs and enhance the overall customer experience.

This is the inflection point for many AEC firms. Marketers can spark CX conversations, but the true impact comes only when leadership and delivery teams buy in, take ownership, and act accordingly.



CXPERT ADVICE

A Playbook for Marketers

Turning Buy-In into Business Impact

For marketers championing CX, the real challenge isn't launching the next feedback initiative. It's shifting perception—from "CX as a campaign" to "CX as a lever for business performance."

So how can a marketer get leadership not just to buy in, but to show up?

1. Tie CX to the Metrics Leaders Already Care About

The research speaks volumes:

- Firms that use **revenue growth as a CX KPI** outperform significantly ($p = 0.09$).
- **Strategic use of client feedback** is a strong driver of high performance ($p = 0.08$).
- Nearly **70% of top performers** have dedicated CX leadership, and they're 2–3 times more likely to involve senior executives.
- Top performing firms are over 2 times more likely to have dedicated CX teams compared to average firms. They are also much more likely to have buy-in for CX at all levels of the organization, especially among mid-level leadership and project leads.

This is your proof point.
CX isn't a marketing metric. It's a business outcome engine.

2. Make CX a Tool, Not a Philosophy

Executives respond to leverage. So reframe your CX strategy around addressing their top priorities and solving key problems:

- **Struggling with employee retention?** Feedback illuminates where there is friction in project delivery. CX enables delivery of more value to clients, affording higher fees, resulting in the ability to pay above-market wages while maintaining (or increasing) effective multipliers.
- **Missing growth targets?** Milestone-based CX insights reveal unmet client needs, allowing seller-doers to confidently offer additional services that drive value in a true partnership.
- **Operational inefficiencies?** Clients will show you where the waste lives, if you ask and listen. Deeper client understanding reduces needless over-delivery so teams can focus on efficient, effective value delivery.

Every conversation about CX should start with a business objective and end with how CX moves the needle.

3. Cross the Delivery Line, Then Redraw It

Yes, marketing doesn't "own" the project. But marketers can build the systems that empower project teams to own the experience, an experience a CXO can further elevate. This includes:

- Standardized milestone-based feedback
- Closed-loop client communication templates
- Cross-functional training on how to effectively act on client insights
- Designing value-added, low-friction journeys through the project lifecycle
- Advocating for clients at every touchpoint in the client journey, from first impression to final invoice

This is where you stop being "just" marketing.
This is where you become a CXO-in-waiting.

FOR THE AMBITIOUS MARKETER

Build a New Path to Executive Leadership

If you're the marketer driving CX in your firm, you're even closer to strategy, operations, and culture than most realize. Use that to your advantage...and to your company's benefit.

Start building your case to lead not just campaigns or pursuits, but to grow and expand your role to impact company **culture**. Position yourself (and actually ask top leadership for their blessing) to become the firm's first **Chief Experience Officer** with influence over:

- Project delivery standards
- Technology and digital client tools
- Internal process design
- Hiring and onboarding
- Strategic planning

You're already shaping the client's voice. Own the systems that make that voice matter.

CX isn't a department. It's a discipline. And in the AEC firm of the future, it might just be your seat at the table.

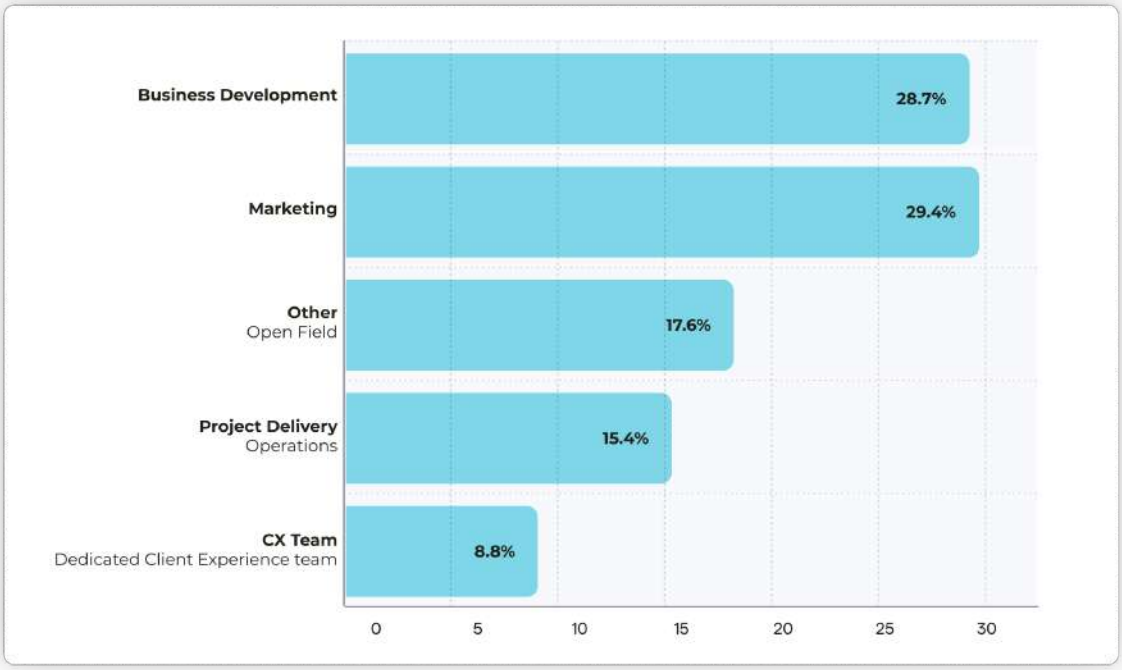
Departmental Ownership of CX

When asked who manages CX, most firms point to marketing (29.4%) or business development (28.7%). While these departments may initiate CX efforts, they rarely control the delivery systems that shape the day-to-day CX. Only 15.4% of firms assign CX ownership to operations or project delivery, the very teams closest to the client. Even fewer (8.8%) have a dedicated CX team.

This fragmentation reveals a common pitfall: treating CX as a communications challenge rather than a service design opportunity. Top-performing firms break this mold. They ensure that CX leadership spans the delivery chain, from pursuit through punch list.

Firms with a dedicated CX leader or team are 147% more likely to be a high-performing firm.

Which department within your organization is primarily responsible for managing the CX strategy?



In most AEC firms, marketing and project delivery operate in parallel. Marketing sets expectations, while delivery shapes the client's lived experience. When these functions work in isolation, gaps emerge. But when they collaborate around CX, expectations and delivery align, creating a more consistent and trusted client journey.

Our research shows that top-performing firms are more likely to treat CX as a shared responsibility across departments. Marketing brings client insight, communication expertise, and a strategic lens. Delivery brings deep project knowledge, client relationships, and operational follow-through. Together, they create a CX where feedback informs action and client needs are addressed in real time.

Although still rare, firms where marketing and delivery collaborate on CX initiatives report stronger client loyalty, smoother project execution, and clearer ownership of the client journey. This partnership begins with shared goals, like improving project handoffs, standardizing client check-ins, or jointly reviewing milestone feedback. From there, it often grows into co-led training sessions, playbook development, and accountability measures.

If your firm is serious about improving CX, treat it as a shared responsibility. Firms that align marketing and delivery around client outcomes see stronger loyalty and smoother execution

Clients don't care who owns the experience; they care that someone does. The best firms make CX a team sport.

What are the primary goals of your CX initiatives?

GOAL	AVERAGE RANK
Improve project/client management (e.g., identifying issues early, managing client expectations, growing client spend, client loyalty and retention)	**1.76**
Improve business development (e.g., increased referrals, new client acquisition and growth, increased client spend)	**2.59**
Improve operational efficiency (e.g., less reactive, measuring quality, improving partner relationships, winning the talent war)	**3.40**
Improve financial outcomes (e.g., growth, higher profitability, reduced AR, maintaining equity after M&A)	**3.59**
Improve marketing (e.g., brand differentiation, market share, competitive advantage)	**3.71**
Other (open field)	**5.95**

Key Insights

- **Top Priority:** Improving project/client management clearly emerged as the most important goal, with an average rank of ~1.8 — suggesting firms view better client interactions and management as foundational to their CX efforts.
- **Business Development** ranked second (~2.6), highlighting how CX supports growth through referrals, new client acquisition, and expanding existing accounts.
- Goals related to **efficiency, financial outcomes, and marketing** followed closely but were seen as secondary priorities.

When asked about their CX priorities, AEC firms delivered a clear verdict: "Improve project/client management" rose to the top—ranked well ahead of business development, marketing, or financial outcomes. Our analysis shows this focus is more than aspirational. Firms that prioritize project/client management as their primary CX goal significantly outperform their peers ($p = 0.08$). In fact, these firms foster stronger loyalty, manage expectations more effectively, and retain clients at a higher rate than their less successful peers.

Ironically, while improving project delivery is the most common reason firms are investing in CX, the project delivery organization is the least likely organization to own CX (15.4%). Until this misalignment is resolved, marketing will struggle to deliver the business results both clients and executives are asking for: better project outcomes.

Business development came in second, underscoring the dual purpose of CX: deepening existing relationships and earning new ones. But efforts to improve operations, finance, or marketing ranked lower—suggesting that many firms still see CX through the lens of relationships, not operational systems.

This data reinforces a shift we're seeing across top performers: CX is no longer about touchy-feely goodwill. It's about project outcomes. It's about elevating expectations, uncovering friction points, and following through to eliminate them.

If marketing and operations can align around that goal, CX becomes more than a shared value, it becomes a shared playbook.

The firms growing fastest aren't chasing new clients—they're delivering better experiences to the ones they already have.

CXPERT ADVICE

Elevating vs. Exceeding Expectations

Too often, firms set their sights on "exceeding client expectations" without ever clarifying what those expectations actually are. But here's the truth: you can't exceed what you haven't first understood.

Elevating expectations means shaping and managing what clients believe is possible. It's proactive. It's consistent. It's about setting the standard and then meeting it with clarity, responsiveness, and follow-through. Elevated expectations are the foundation of trust.

Exceeding expectations, on the other hand, is episodic. It's the surprise extra, the delight factor. It can help your firm earn loyalty—but only when built on a baseline of consistent delivery. Without first elevating expectations through intentional CX design, attempts to exceed them often land as random or irrelevant.

When firms commit to elevating the everyday experience, they earn the opportunity to occasionally exceed it. That's how trust turns into advocacy.

Elevating expectations creates a new normal. Exceeding them occasionally creates applause. The best firms do both—in the right order.

SECTION 02

Structure & Activities

SECTION 02

Structure & Activites

CX does not thrive by accident; it requires ownership and structure. Yet nearly half of firms have no one formally responsible, leaving CX as an afterthought. Top performers create clear accountability through dedicated leaders, teams, or cross-functional committees, ensuring CX is consistent, intentional, and repeatable.

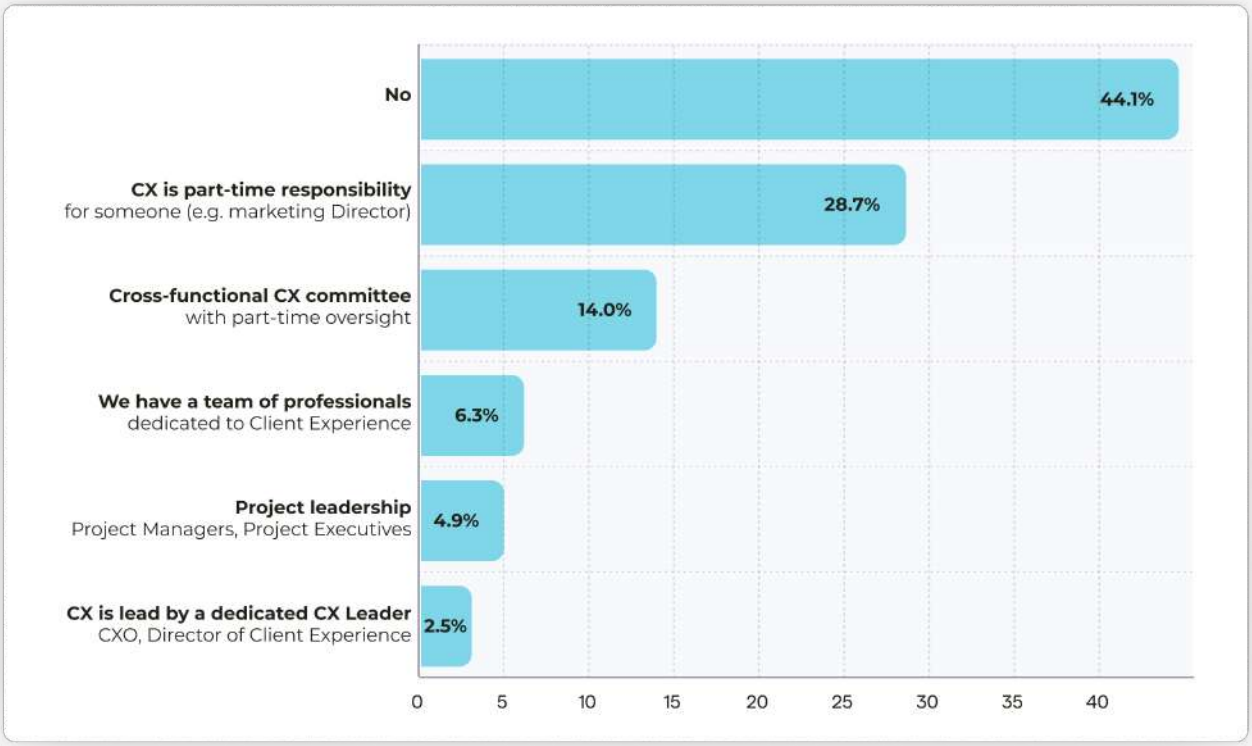
CX is inherently cross-functional. Yet in too many firms, CX conversations happen in isolated pockets—if they happen at all.

While 37% of low-performing firms report discussing CX only once a year, over 60% of top performing firms discuss CX at least monthly. This rhythm of collaboration matters. Frequent conversations reinforce shared priorities, uncover blind spots, and empower teams to act in real-time.

Moreover, high-performing firms report taking a proactive approach to CX. They don't wait for problems to surface. They anticipate issues, adjust expectations, and engage clients before friction grows.

On the other hand, low-performing firms are overwhelmingly reactive, addressing CX only after something goes wrong. That mindset often reflects a deeper cultural issue—where CX is treated as damage control rather than as an opportunity for value creation.

Does your organization have a dedicated team or role responsible for managing CX?

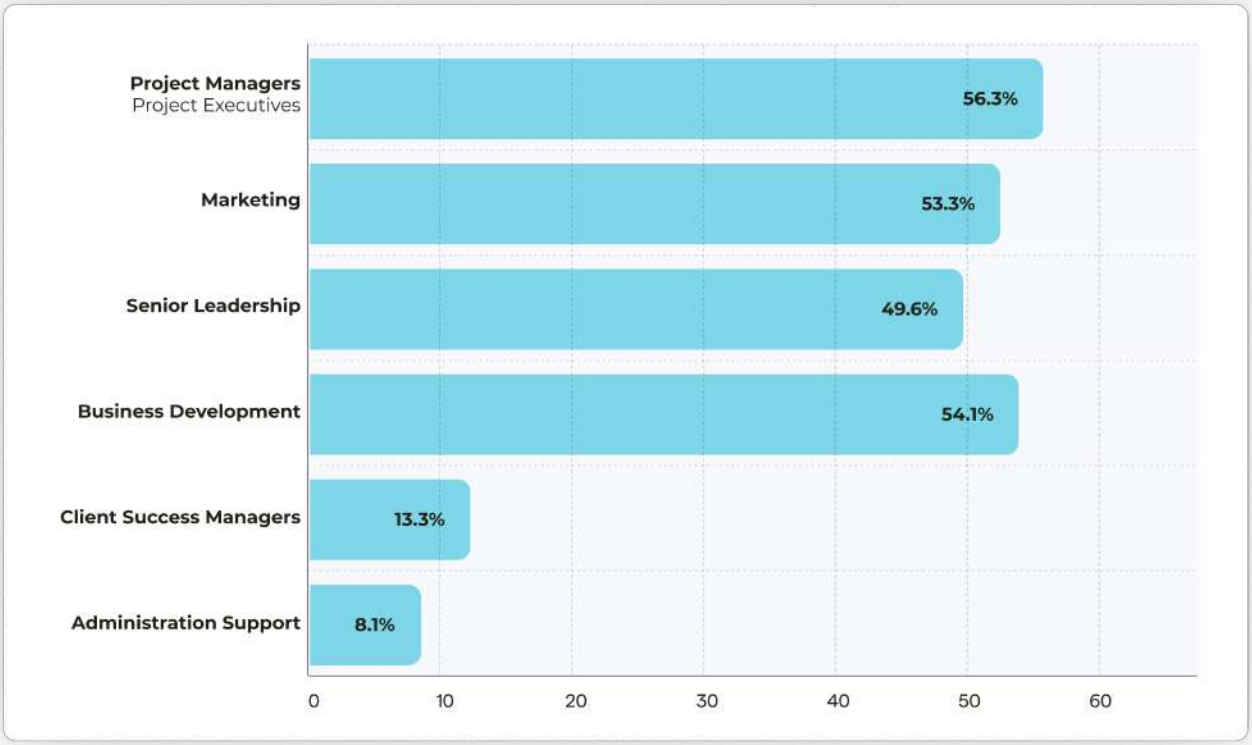


The best client experience doesn't happen in a silo. It happens in a huddle.

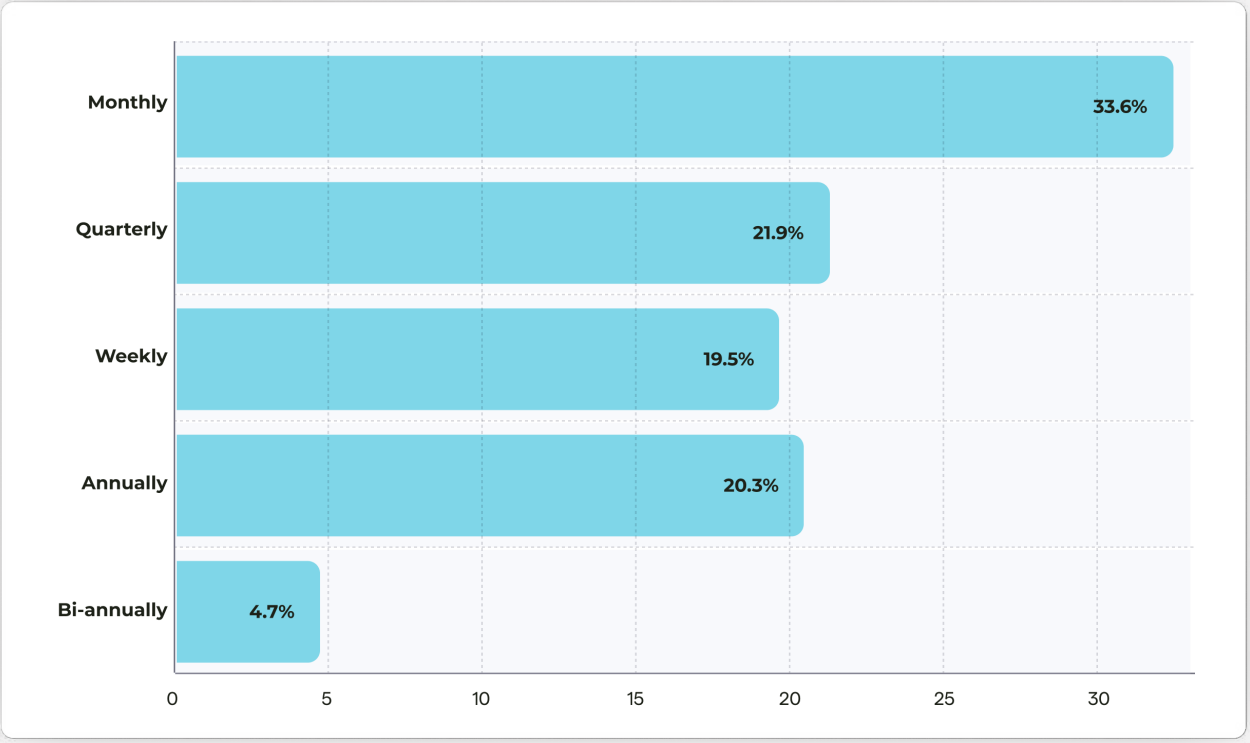
The same difference is seen in how firms approach feedback. Low-performing firms use client feedback to look for what's gone wrong. On the other hand, high-performing firms seek to understand what's going right. The drive to understand how excellence is crafted and delivered makes excellence commonplace, standard, and repeatable. Furthermore, feedback programs focused on excellence motivate and invigorate employees–they love leaning in on their strengths. CX teams that rally around recognized excellence regularly outperform their peers.

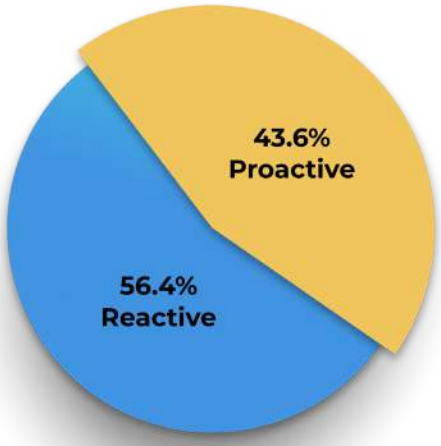
True CX impact is found not in campaigns or dashboards—but in the regular cadence of conversations between marketing, business development, delivery, leadership, and client-facing teams. Where those conversations are structured and frequent, the client feels it.

Which roles within your organization are most involved in the day-to-day CX activities?

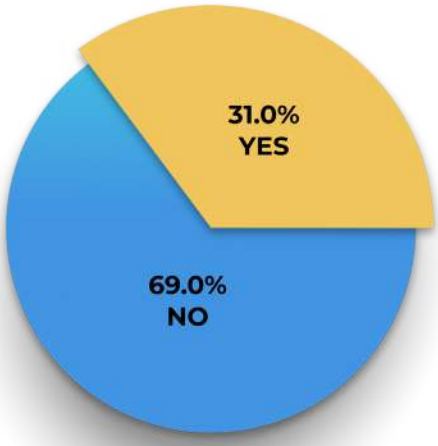


How often is CX discussed across multiple departments?





Would you say your firm is more focused on proactive CX improvement or reactive client issue resolution?



Does your firm provide training or professional development specifically focused on CX for team members?

CX Activities in the Last 12 Months

It's not about how many CX tools you use, it's whether your people know when, why, and how to use them.

CX isn't an abstract idea, it's built through repeatable actions. Our research explored which CX activities firms are actually using, and more importantly, which of those correlate with better business outcomes. The most commonly used tactics include:

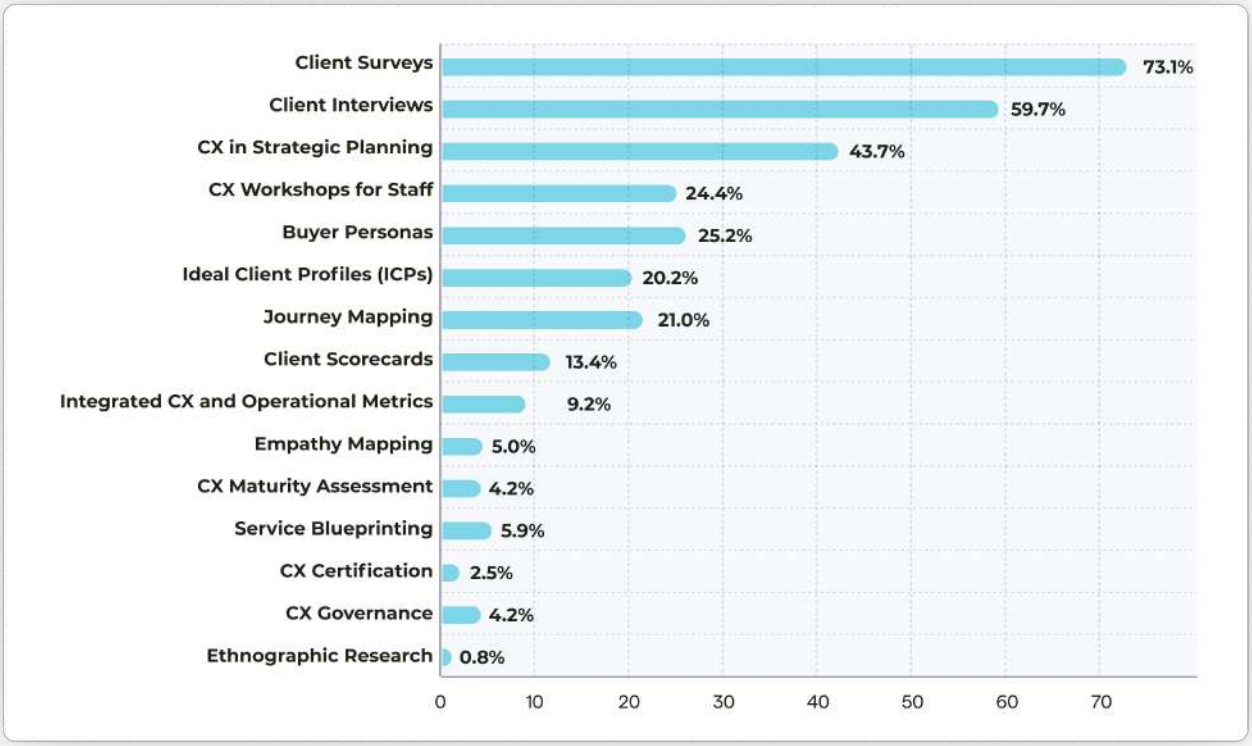
- Electronic surveys (used by a majority of respondents)
- Client interviews and in-person meetings
- Internal CX dashboards and reporting tools
- Formal feedback follow-up processes
- Experience-focused training for staff

But usage alone doesn't guarantee performance. What matters is how these tactics are implemented, integrated, and ingrained into everyday business practices.

Top-performing firms distinguish themselves not by the quantity of CX tactics used, but by their **intentional deployment**. For example, firms that combine milestone-based feedback **with structured follow-up** and **team training** on how to act on insights report significantly higher confidence in their CX programs and stronger business outcomes.

Similarly, the use of client interviews, especially at critical project moments, positively correlates with improved performance, reinforcing the value of human connection and interaction in complex professional services.

Ultimately, the firms that outperform the pack use CX tactics as part of a broader **system of learning and responsiveness**. They treat each feedback touchpoint as a moment to deepen understanding, reinforce trust, and strengthen client relationships.



SECTION 03

Tools & Technology

SECTION 03

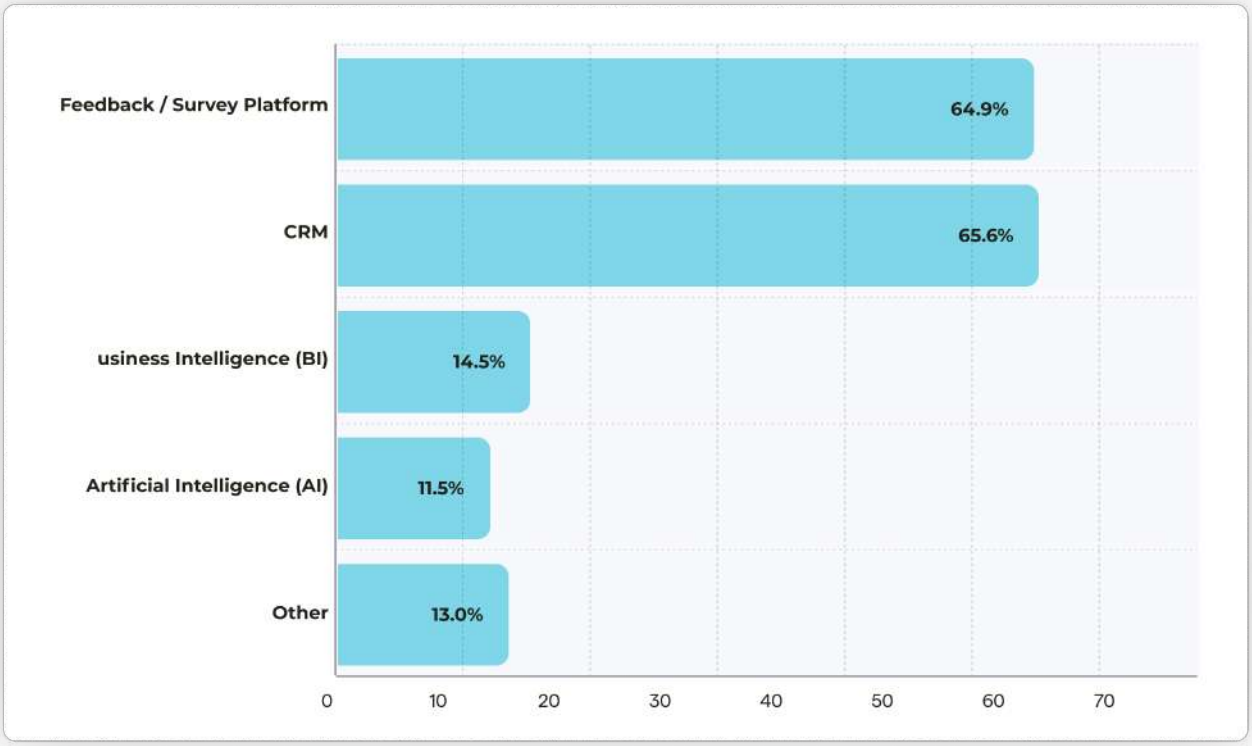
Tools & Technology

Technology as a Cross-Functional Bridge Builder

Technology should be at the center of AEC firm CX efforts, as technology enables client insight, process management, and provides visibility into the entire client journey across all touch points. Currently, most firms haven't fully utilized technology to improve and manage experiences. Frontline staff hold most of the client touchpoints, but accounting impacts CX. Are invoices easy to pay and process, or do they introduce friction? IT plays a role: file sharing, document controls, and other tools clients interact with shape experiences and introduce or alleviate friction as well.

Leading firms integrate all functional silos of the business in a concerted effort to measure, improve, and support CX and CX processes. Technology can be the rallying point to connect IT, HR, Finance, Risk, Legal, and others around client centricity and low-friction delivery.

Which technologies does your organization use to manage Client Experience?



The Role of Feedback Platforms and CRM in CX

Today, the vast majority of AEC firms use some form of a client feedback platform, and for good reason. These tools bring structure, consistency, and visibility to the client's voice. They enable milestone-based surveys, automate feedback collection, and surface insights that might otherwise go unheard. In high-performing firms, feedback platforms aren't optional; they're operational. They ensure that no client sentiment is missed, and no signal is wasted.

But the power of feedback platforms multiplies when paired with a robust Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Bottom-performing firms are half as likely to pair a feedback platform with CRM. Feedback tells you what's happening. CRM tells you who it's happening to, when, and where in the relationship lifecycle. Together, they allow firms to:

- Track experience trends across accounts and market sectors
- Pinpoint relationship risk before it becomes attrition
- Align marketing, business development, and project teams with real-time client insights

In a professional services environment where relationships are the product, firms that combine feedback and CRM are positioned not just to listen—but to lead.

Feedback platforms capture the voice. CRM tracks the relationship. Together, they create a 360° view of CX.

Integrating BI and AI for Smarter CX

The most forward-looking AEC firms are pushing beyond basic feedback and CRM. They're beginning to integrate BI tools and AI to uncover deeper, faster, and more predictive CX insights.

These technologies can analyze vast amounts of data from various sources including CX programs, project KPIs, and client communications, to help leaders better understand, disseminate, and take action on the data derived from their CX programs, including:

- Identifying which behaviors correlate with client satisfaction or reduce churn
- Forecasting client risk based on experience patterns
- Visualizing how CX improvements ripple across proposal win rates, utilization, and increased client referrals

By integrating AI-driven insights and BI dashboards with feedback, financials, and operations data, firms can transition from static reporting to intelligent, real-time decision-making. These tools not only flag problems, they recommend where and how to fix them.

The firms growing fastest aren't just collecting feedback, they're using it to see around corners.

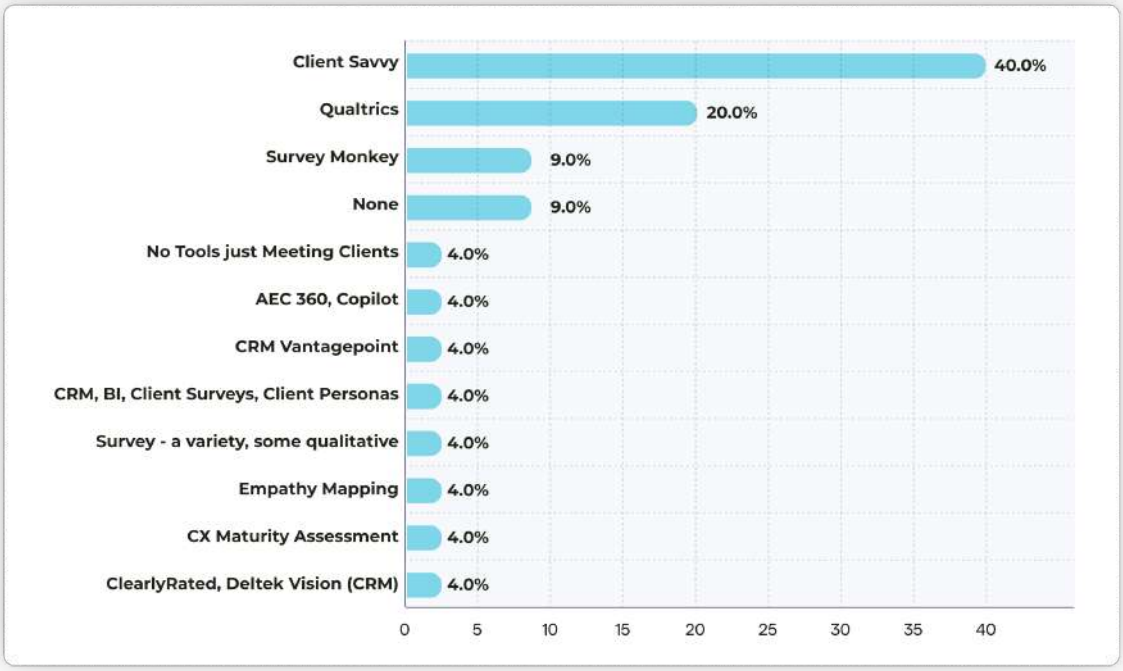
As CX matures, so must the tools that support it. BI and AI platforms are quickly becoming critical infrastructure, not just to understand what happened, but to anticipate what's coming next. In an increasingly competitive market, speed and insight are no longer luxuries. They're advantages.

What, if any, CX tools do you use?

Client Savvy emerges as the most commonly mentioned tool by a significant margin, followed by Qualtrics. This suggests growing recognition of the value of CX solutions to systematically gather, analyze, and act on client feedback. Yet CX technology in AEC remains in its early stages, with relatively few established options. Many firms reported using no dedicated tool or relying on informal methods, highlighting the limited toolkit available today. While such approaches may work in the short term, they often lack the structure, consistency, and scalability needed for continuous improvement, leaving firms that invest in dedicated solutions better positioned to gain a competitive edge.

The importance of leveraging technology and tools for CX management cannot be overstated. Today's clients expect timely, responsive, and personalized experiences — expectations that are difficult to meet without systems in place to capture feedback, identify trends, and coordinate action. These tools enable firms to move from reactive problem-solving to proactive experience design. They provide measurable insights, help benchmark performance over time, and make it possible to demonstrate the return on investment (ROI) of CX initiatives. Firms that fail to adopt such tools risk falling behind and overlooking opportunities to improve both the CX and the bottom line.

What, if any, CX tools do you use?



Overcoming Challenges with CX Tool Implementation

Despite the clear benefits of CX tools— (feedback platforms, CRM, BI, and AI) many firms still struggle with successful implementation. Our data points to the root causes:

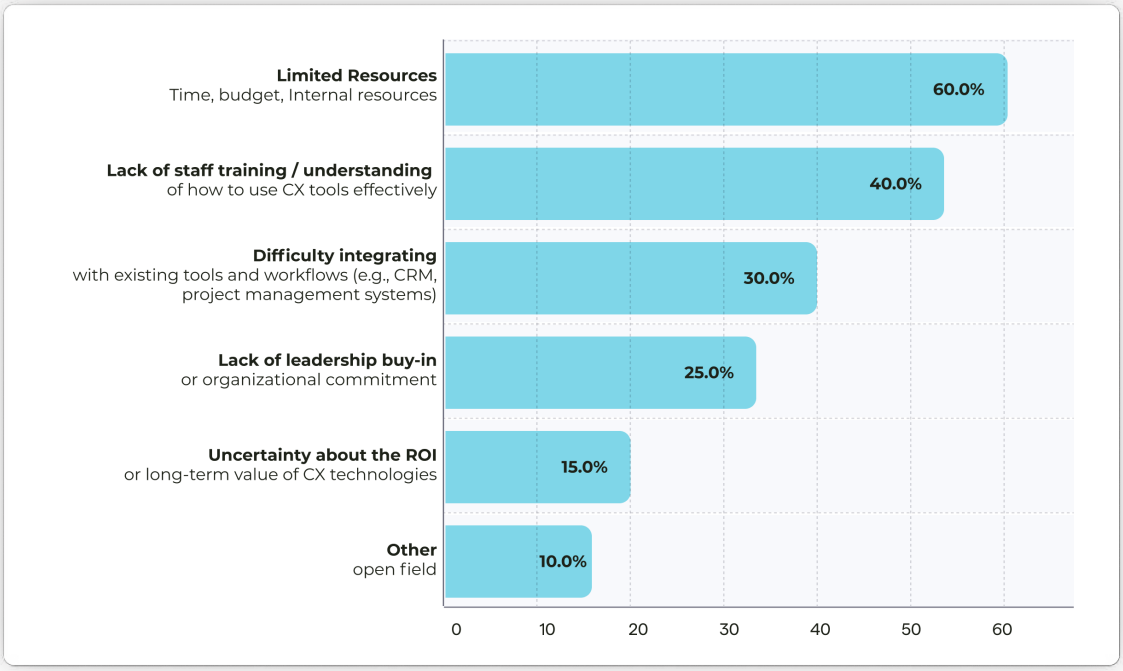
- **Lack of training and enablement:** 60% of low-performing firms cite poor training and low understanding of CX tools as a top barrier, compared to only 35% of top performers.
- **Fragmented ownership:** Without clear leadership and cross-functional coordination, feedback dies in silos.
- **Unclear value proposition:** Teams often view CX tools as “extra work” rather than as enablers of better outcomes.

The firms overcoming these challenges do three things well:

- **Start with a strategic *why*:** Rather than launching tools in isolation, they link CX systems to firm-wide business goals—like improving client retention, uncovering delivery friction, or driving growth into new markets.
- **Invest in enablement and accountability:** They train teams not just on how to use the tools, but how to interpret data and take meaningful action. They assign owners for both the tools and the resulting insights.
- **Show quick wins:** High-performing firms highlight early success stories to build momentum—whether that’s saving a client at risk, winning a referral based on feedback, or preventing scope creep mid-project.

The biggest barrier to CX success isn’t the tool—it’s what your team does after the data arrives.

What are the biggest challenges in integrating CX technologies into your processes?



SECTION 04

Client Feedback & Research

SECTION 04

Client Feedback & Research

Feedback is the engine of CX, yet firms vary widely in how often—and how well—they capture it. Some check in only after a project ends, while top performers build feedback into the rhythm of delivery, collecting insights at key milestones when they matter most. The difference shows: frequent, well-timed feedback strengthens trust, surfaces risks early, and guides both project execution and firm strategy

Our data reveals a wide variance in how frequently AEC firms collect client feedback. While some limit themselves to post-project reviews or annual surveys, the firms performing at the highest levels incorporate **feedback at key project milestones**—and do so regularly.

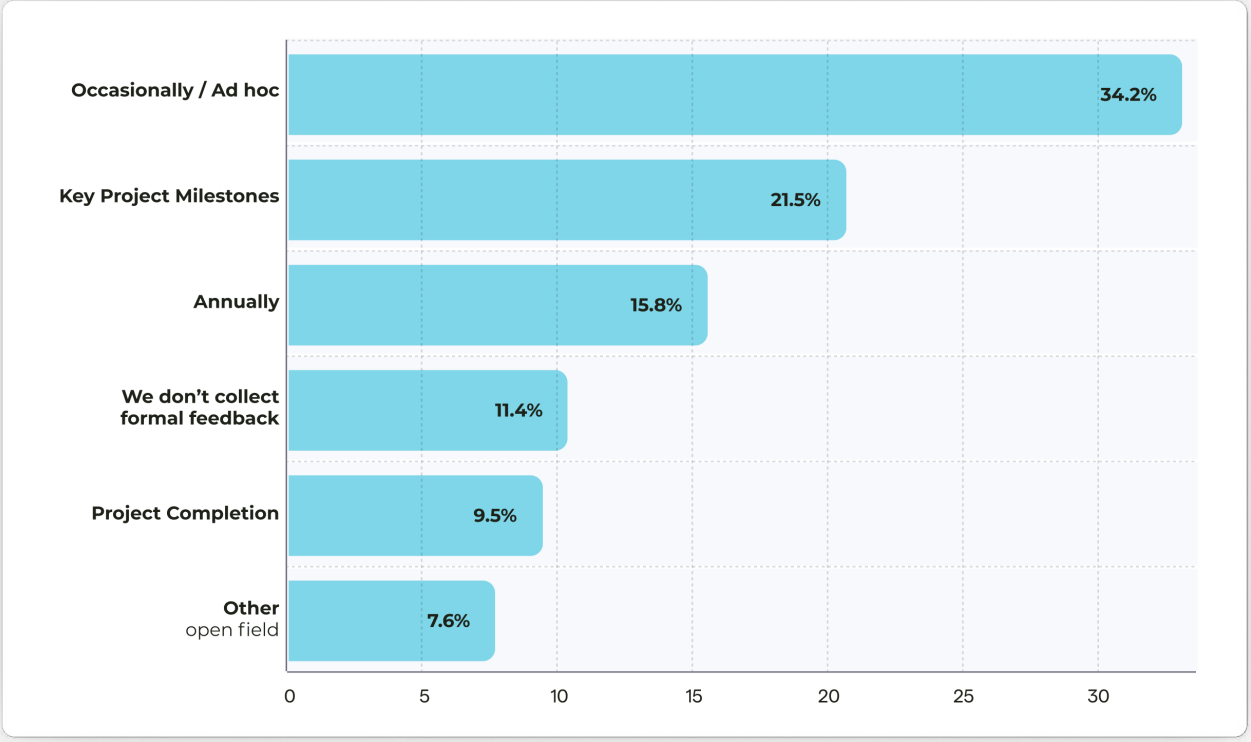
How Frequently Should Firms Collect Feedback?

The reason is simple: more frequent, well-timed feedback uncovers risk earlier, reinforces expectations, and creates momentum for relationship growth. High-performing firms use this cadence to:

- Catch issues before they escalate
- Reinforce positive experiences in real time
- Gather insights that guide project delivery and firm strategy

But frequency alone isn't enough. Firms must **earn the right to ask often** by making participation easy and meaningful. Best practices include:

How frequently does your organization collect formal feedback from clients?



Firms that collect feedback at multiple stages during a project report higher confidence in their data and greater follow-through on action.

- Keeping surveys brief and contextual
- Setting client expectations at project kickoff
- Following up with "you said / we did" responses to show impact
- Using survey responses as the basis for in-person conversations

Firms that follow these practices see consistently high participation, even in high-frequency feedback loops, because clients understand that their input leads to action.

Milestone-based feedback, done well, becomes less about surveying and more about **building a culture of responsiveness**. And that's where the performance lift begins.

Best Practice

The right time to ask for feedback is when it changes the outcome, not just an autopsy after the project is over.

CXPERT ADVICE

Getting Started with Feedback: What Works

Firms new to milestone-based electronic feedback often worry that asking clients their opinions or about their experiences too often will lead to fatigue or low participation. But our research, and practical experience, shows the opposite: when done right, high-frequency feedback earns trust and drives engagement.

Here's how top firms consistently get it right:

- **Send feedback requests at the right time**—at natural milestones in the project where client perceptions are fresh and decisions can still be influenced.
- **Send it to the right people**—target decision-makers and influencers who experience your work firsthand.
- **Make it personal**—feedback invitations should come directly from the PM or relationship owner, not from a generic system.
- **Trigger real-time alerts**—when critical feedback comes in, it should immediately prompt action, not wait for a quarterly review.
- **Close the loop with accountability**—establish a follow-up protocol so every piece of feedback is reviewed, responded to, and resolved when necessary.
- **Don't overwhelm clients**—response rates of 30-50% can be sustained long-term by touching base every 8-12 weeks on projects.

The secret to high participation isn't the survey—it's what you do next.

This system—timely, personal, responsive—creates not just a survey process, but a reliable rhythm of client dialogue. It's the foundation for a scalable, firm-wide culture of listening and improvement.

Methods of Collecting Client Feedback

One of the clearest lessons from our analysis is this: the way you measure CX deeply influences the impact you get from it.

Top-performing firms don't just collect feedback—they measure what matters and do so with rigor. Our regression analysis showed that firms tracking revenue growth as a CX KPI enjoy significantly stronger business performance ($p = 0.09$). Why? Because it creates accountability. CX stops being a feel-good initiative and starts being a revenue driver.

Strategic use of client feedback is another key differentiator. High performers use feedback to shape business planning and service offerings ($p = 0.08$), not just to validate past behavior. In other words, client insights guide what gets built, sold, and delivered.

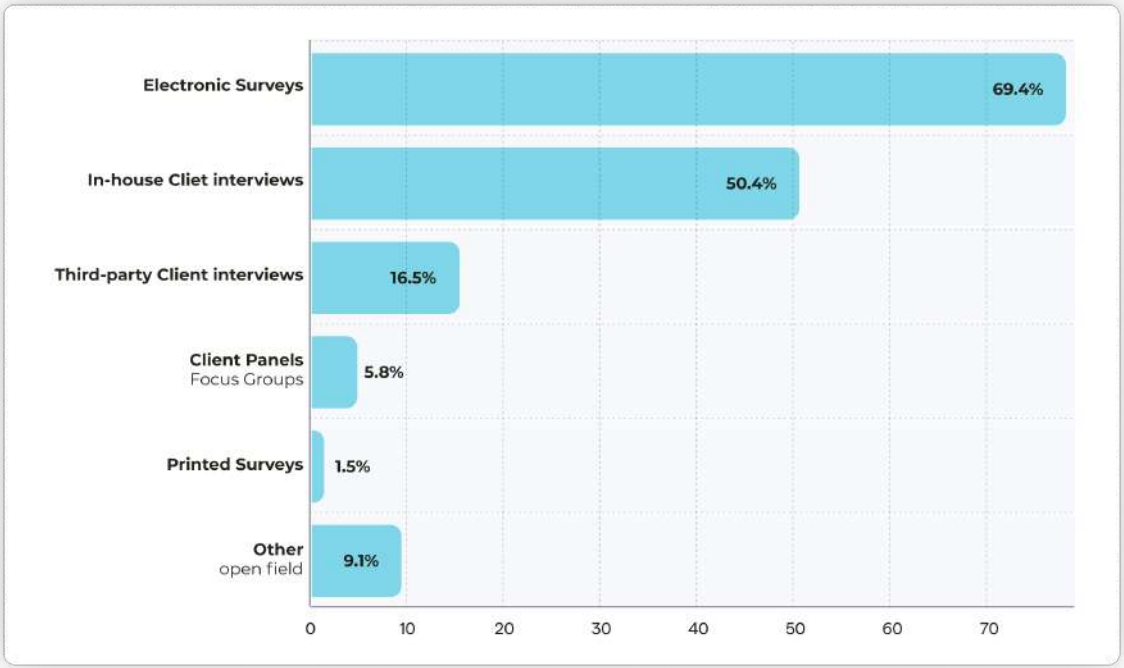
The firms that trust their CX data the most are the ones who act on it the fastest.

But the tools you choose matter. Our data reveals a **negative association** between relying solely on electronic surveys and overall firm performance ($p = 0.08$). The highest-performing firms use surveys not as an endpoint, but as a conversation starter, opening the door to deeper, individualized discussions that surface root issues and reveal opportunities. Without the broad scan of milestone-based feedback, firms risk missing patterns and having blind spots. But when surveys are followed by real dialogue and specific follow-up, they become a catalyst for improvement. In contrast, firms that stop at the data collection stage often lack the context, trust, and actionable insight needed to drive positive change.

The highest-performing firms balance both: they use electronic surveys as a baseline, then engage clients directly at key moments. They close the loop, connect insights to actions, and measure outcomes that executives care about.

Finally, low-performing firms consistently report **a lack of confidence** in their CX data. Three out of four don't trust it. That's not a technology problem, it's a strategy problem. When data isn't being collected broadly, regularly, and objectively, leaders can't trust it to drive meaningful action.

What methods do you use to collect client feedback?



CXPERT ADVICE

The Strategic Power of Client Panels

Client panels offer something no survey or interview can replicate: **a window into shared experience, live comparison, and collective insight**. Bringing together multiple clients in a moderated discussion enables firms to uncover what clients care about most, not in isolation, but in chorus.

Here's how leading firms do it well:

- **Select a thoughtful mix of clients**—diverse roles, industries, and relationship tenures can offer a fuller picture.
- **Use a neutral, skilled moderator**—ideally not a current project lead, to foster open conversation.
- **Frame the discussion around challenges and aspirations, not just satisfaction**—ask what clients see changing in the industry, how they define value, or what makes a partner indispensable.
- **Listen for convergence and divergence**—where clients agree reveals shared priorities; where they don't expose unmet needs or segmentation opportunities.
- **Follow up and show impact**—as with any feedback, appreciation and visible action builds trust and signals seriousness.

When clients talk to each other, firms learn what clients are really thinking.

And one more untapped benefit? **Training your internal teams through exposure**. When project managers, technical leads, and other front-line staff attend these sessions—not as presenters but as observers—they gain direct access to the authentic client voice. They hear not only what matters most to clients, but how clients talk about it. This kind of immersive, real-time learning sharpens empathy, refines service delivery instincts, and drives cultural alignment.

One firm had their biggest client say to an audience of thirty seller-doers "We almost always choose the highest priced proposal, because it's usually the highest value." Moments like these can radically and instantly shift key behaviors that drive growth, profit, and overall firm health.

Encouraging employees to ask follow-up questions in these settings creates even deeper understanding and connection. Over time, panels become more than a feedback tool—they become a **culture-building experience** that reinforces the firm's values and raises the collective CX IQ.

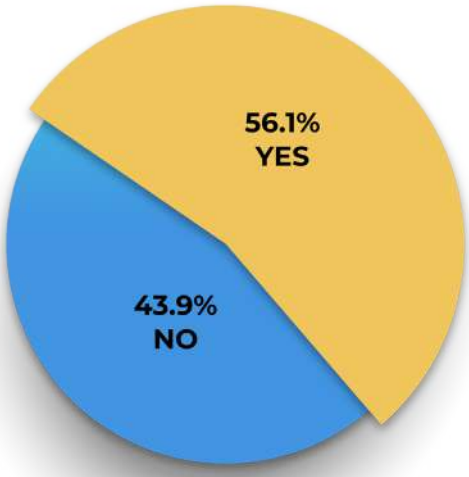
Client panels aren't about performance reviews. They're about strategic alignment, innovation, and earning a seat at the table for what's next.

Using Client Feedback to Drive Strategic Planning

Firms that incorporate client feedback into strategic planning are three times more likely to be a top-performing firm (76% vs 24% for bottom performers). They're twice as likely to realize above-average profit. Strategy derived from the actual strengths and needs expressed by clients is far more likely to be successful, resulting in more success in achieving the objectives of your strategic plan.

For marketing leaders looking to elevate their influence, there may be no greater opportunity than the annual strategic planning session. Done well, integrating client feedback into these discussions can shift the firm's focus from abstract goals to client-aligned action.

Do you use client feedback to inform strategic decisions (e.g., business planning, service offerings)?



When client feedback shapes strategy, you stop guessing what clients want, and start designing for the clients you want most.

01 Aggregate Feedback into Actionable Themes

Before walking into the boardroom, collect and synthesize feedback from milestone surveys, client interviews, and follow-ups. Look for repeated patterns and pain points. Don't just report on satisfaction scores, identify where friction exists in project delivery, communication, or value perception. Highlight the top three recurring challenges your clients experience.

02 Segment Enthusiasm by Client Type

Don't stop at what's wrong. Identify what's working, and for whom. Which clients are your biggest advocates? What project types, scopes, or sectors generate the strongest loyalty? Segment client feedback by characteristics like industry, project size, or location to reveal who finds your firm most valuable today. These are the clients you want to replicate.

03 Reframe Strategy Around Ideal Client Growth

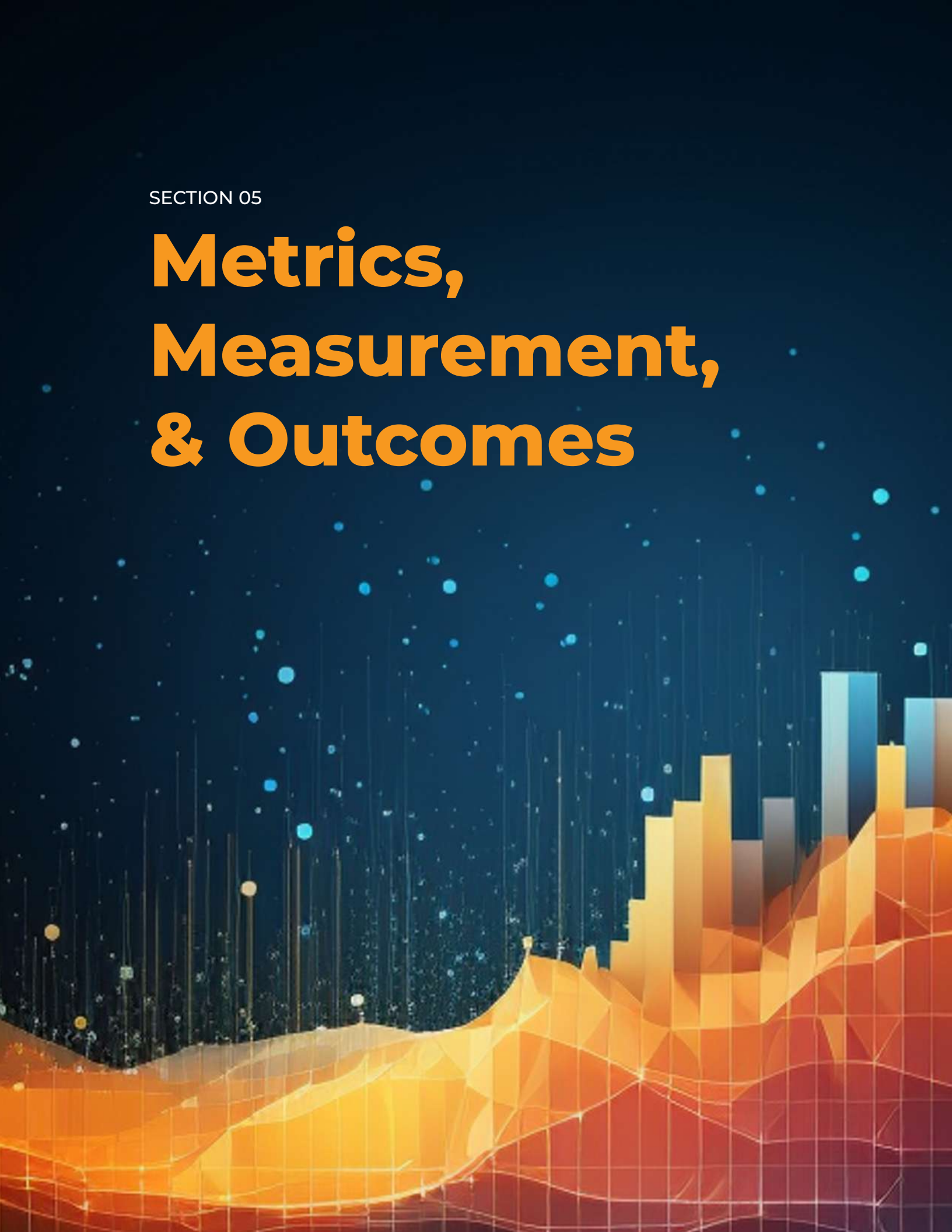
Bring the focus of the planning conversation to finding, winning, retaining, and growing ideal clients. Use client feedback to guide decisions on which services to scale, which relationships to invest in, and where to refine operations. Ground the conversation in what clients are telling you they value most, and where you're falling short. Don't be afraid to use client feedback to shed poor-fit clients that don't align with who you are as a firm. Focus on your existing strengths and shore those up rather than diluting efforts to be all things to everyone–where you risk being nothing to no one.

04 Connect CX Activities to Business Outcomes

To move from insight to investment, tie your CX initiatives directly to measurable business goals: increase in client retention, revenue per client, proposal win rates, or share of negotiated work. Recommend prioritizing CX tactics, like milestone feedback loops or PM training, that drive these outcomes. This turns CX from a cost center to a growth strategy.

SECTION 05

Metrics, Measurement, & Outcomes

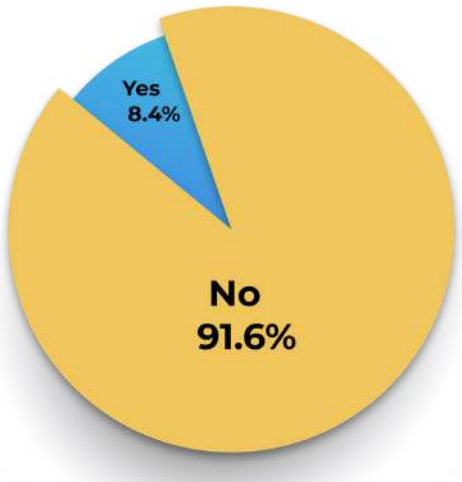


SECTION 05

Metrics, Measurement, & Outcomes

The impact of CX on firm performance isn't theoretical, it's measurable. Our regression analysis revealed that 69% of the variance in overall firm performance can be explained by how CX is approached, structured, and measured. That's not a mere correlation, that's a strategic roadmap.

Firms that track the ROI of their CX program are 94% more likely to realize above average growth and 113% more likely to have above average profitability. These two activities, combined with having a dedicated CX leader and incorporating feedback into strategic planning are the strongest drivers of sustainable business performance.



Does your firm measure the Return on Investment (ROI) of Client Experience initiatives?

Top-performing firms are far more likely to:

- Track **revenue growth and client retention** as explicit CX KPIs
- Integrate **client feedback into strategic decisions**
- Empower **teams closest to the client** to take ownership of experience delivery

These firms show stronger performance across the eight business outcomes we tracked: revenue growth, profitability, proposal win rate, referrals, share of negotiated work, employee retention, ability to hire, and ability to attract ideal clients. Their approach to CX isn't isolated—it's embedded.

In contrast, low-performing firms usually fail to measure CX rigorously. They lack feedback loops, ownership, and clear expectations for improvement. Worse, many don't trust their own data, an indicator of deeper cultural gaps in accountability and action.

For firms seeking measurable business growth, the conclusion is clear: CX isn't just a differentiator, it's a driver.

You can't improve what you don't measure. And you can't lead what you don't believe in.

Measuring the Impact of CX: From Anecdote to ROI

CX has long been seen as a "soft" metric: intangible, unquantifiable, nice to have. Our research proves otherwise. In fact, the firms that measure CX with discipline and link it to business outcomes are the ones driving the highest performance across every key metric.

Top-performing firms approach CX measurement with both breadth and depth. They don't just ask, "Are our clients satisfied?" They ask:

- Are we retaining our best clients longer?
- Are clients referring us more often?
- Are we increasing share of spend with ideal accounts?
- Are project teams learning and improving based on feedback?
- Are our processes evolving based on what clients are telling us?

These firms embed CX metrics directly into business dashboards. **Revenue growth, retention, proposal win rate, and share of negotiated work** are treated not just as financial outcomes, but as CX performance indicators

Our research found that:

- Firms using **revenue growth as a CX KPI** are significantly more likely to outperform their peers ($p = 0.09$).
- Those that **integrate client feedback into business planning** are more agile, more innovative, and more aligned with their clients (Beta = 0.285).
- Over half of top-performing firms **track and close the loop** on feedback, converting input into action and action into loyalty (58%, versus only 25% among low performers).

The ROI of CX isn't a mystery. You just have to look in the right places—and be brave enough to act on what you find.

What to Track

Effective CX measurement combines leading indicators (feedback scores, engagement levels, follow-up actions) with lagging indicators (revenue growth, client churn, margin improvement). Leading firms track both, by monitoring:

- Net Promoter Score (NPS) and Client Satisfaction at project milestones
- Percentage of feedback followed up on within 7 days
- Number of at-risk clients proactively retained
- Referrals and repeat work initiated through CX outreach
- Growth among "ideal client" segments

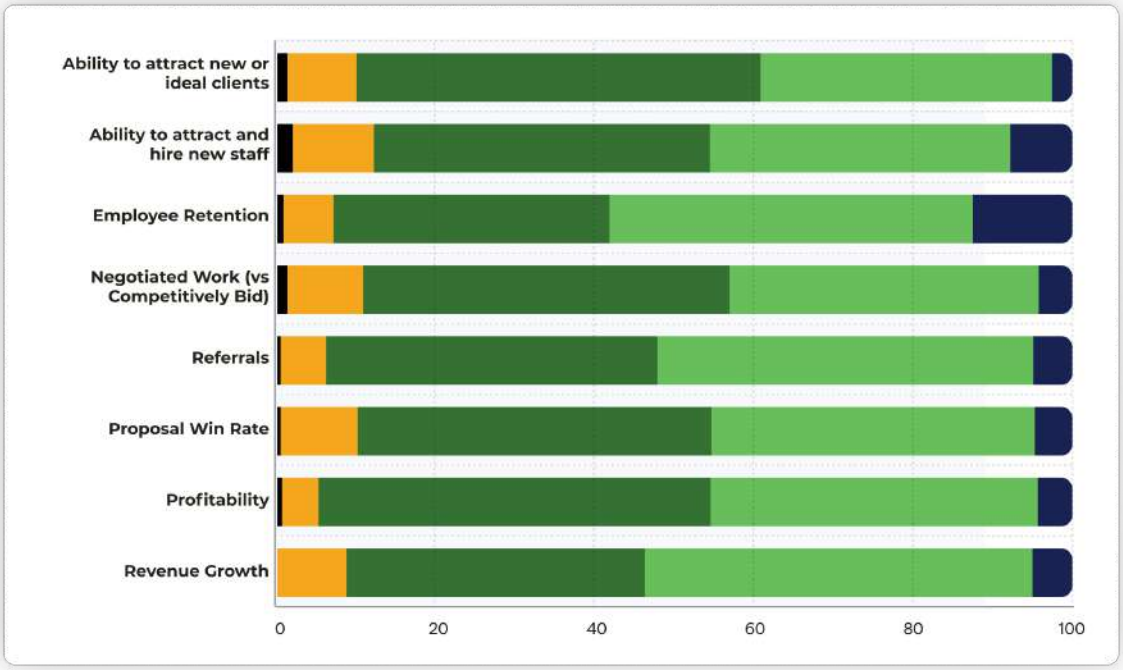
How to Make the Case

Numbers make a difference. When feedback shows that three clients cited poor communication as a risk to future work, and those accounts total $8M in revenue, CX becomes a leadership-level priority.

Firms can calculate the cost of silence (lost opportunities due to unaddressed client concerns) and the value of clarity (how acting on feedback drives retention, cross-selling, and market differentiation).

By treating CX data with the same seriousness as bottom-line financial performance, top firms transform listening into leverage.

How would you rate your firm's performance in the following areas compared to your competitors?



■ Far below average ■ Below average ■ Average ■ Above average ■ Far above average

CXPERT ADVICE

The Dangerous Comfort of "Average"

One of the more revealing aspects of our research was how few firms self-identify as low performers. Most see themselves as "average" or "above average"—even when their CX practices and business outcomes suggest otherwise.

This perception gap matters. It breeds complacency. Firms that believe they're doing "fine" are less likely to invest in measurement, leadership, or feedback systems that could reveal deeper truths. Without structured data and external benchmarks, it's easy to assume that silent clients are happy, and repeat business is a sign of loyalty, not convenience or expedience.

And there may be an even more troubling possibility: some truly low-performing firms didn't respond to the survey at all. If a firm isn't thinking about CX, it may not have participated, meaning the data here could actually understate how far behind some firms really are.

Cautionary Insight
The most dangerous place for a firm to be is not at the bottom, it's comfortably in the middle, thinking they're at the top.

Top-performing firms don't assume. They ask. They measure. They follow up. They know that true CX improvement requires deliberate effort—not vague impressions.

If your firm isn't measuring CX rigorously, acting on feedback, or connecting experience to outcomes, it's not just missing opportunities, it may be falling behind without even realizing it.

SECTION 06

Trends & Challenges

SECTION 06

Trends & Challenges

What trends in the AEC industry do you think will have the biggest impact on Client Experience in the next three years?

The dominant theme emerging from the responses is undoubtedly AI, cited by a large number of respondents as the single most significant trend likely to impact CX in the coming years. Many recognize that AI is poised to fundamentally change the way firms operate, enabling faster analysis, more personalized interactions, predictive insights, and automation of routine tasks. This has the potential to raise client expectations for responsiveness, precision, and value, making it essential for firms to thoughtfully integrate AI tools while maintaining their human touch.

Beyond AI, respondents also highlighted several technology-related trends more broadly—such as the adoption of digital reporting tools, IT resources, and social media—that collectively reflect the ongoing digitization of the client journey. Clients today expect firms to leverage technology to enhance communication, transparency, and efficiency, and firms that lag in this area risk appearing outdated or unresponsive.

How Trends Are Shaping Client Experience (CX) in the AEC Industry

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI is poised to change the way firms interact with clients, raising expectations for responsiveness, precision, and value.

Technology Adoption

Clients expect AEC firms to use digital tools that boost communication, transparency, and efficiency.

Generational Shifts

Younger decision-makers have different expectations around communication styles, speed of service, and values-driven engagement.

Economic Pressures

Price sensitivity has increased, putting pressure on firms to differentiate themselves beyond cost.

Human Connection

Fewer in-person meetings and leadership turnover threaten to erode the intimate client relationships that build trust.

Another notable theme is the generational shift in both clients and staff, particularly with Gen Z entering the workforce and client roles. This shift brings different expectations around communication styles, speed of service, and values-driven engagement (e.g., sustainability, diversity). Firms will need to adapt their CX strategies to resonate with younger decision-makers while continuing to meet the needs of established client leaders.

Respondents also expressed concern over economic pressures and commoditization of services, which increases price sensitivity among clients and puts pressure on firms to differentiate themselves beyond cost. In a more competitive, price-driven market, client loyalty hinges on the quality of the experience and the depth of relationships firms build — emphasizing the importance of clear value differentiation and emotional connection to long-term viability.

Some respondents lamented the decline in human connection, citing leadership turnover, private equity ownership, fewer in-person meetings, and a lack of understanding of the AEC industry's nuances as challenges that can erode trust and intimacy with clients. While technology offers tremendous benefits, it also risks depersonalizing interactions if not balanced with authentic human engagement.

Finally, regulatory changes and broader economic volatility were noted as environmental factors that will continue to shape client expectations and priorities. Clients increasingly look to AEC firms not just as service providers, but as trusted advisors who can help them navigate complexity, comply with regulations, and achieve their goals despite uncertainty.

What are the biggest challenges your organization faces in delivering a superior Client Experience?

The most common challenges respondents cited revolve around time, staff resources, and expertise, underscoring that while many firms recognize the importance of CX, executing on it remains difficult in practice. Let's unpack what this means and why it matters:

Time as a Barrier

Time constraints emerged as the most frequent challenge. Respondents described difficulty finding time to *plan, execute, and sustain* CX initiatives because client demands, project deadlines, and operational responsibilities dominate day-to-day activities. This suggests that for many firms, CX is treated as an aspirational goal rather than a deliberate, prioritized strategy. Without dedicated time carved out, firms risk falling back into reactive mode, addressing issues only as they arise rather than proactively designing exceptional experiences.

Staffing and Resource Limitations

Closely linked to time is the issue of limited staff and stretched resources. Many respondents noted that reduced headcounts, high employee turnover, and competing responsibilities make it hard to assign accountability or maintain momentum on CX efforts. When CX becomes just "one more thing" piled onto already overloaded staff, it struggles to gain traction and risks being deprioritized.

Skills, Knowledge, and Training Gaps

Even when firms dedicate adequate time and resources, many respondents indicated that employees lack the knowledge, skills, or training needed to effectively execute CX strategies. This reflects a broader organizational challenge: recognizing CX not just as a set of tactics but as a discipline requiring education, structure, and investment. Without understanding what "good" CX looks like or how to deliver it consistently, employees are left to guess, and clients can feel the inconsistency.

Consistency, Processes, and Technology

Some respondents also pointed to inconsistent operations, ad hoc processes, and underutilized technology as barriers. Even with the right intentions and people in place, firms can struggle to scale and sustain their efforts if there aren't clear workflows, measurable standards, and tools to support CX initiatives. The lack of process and technology integration often leads to disjointed experiences that feel impersonal or uncoordinated to clients.

Competing Priorities and Cultural Factors

Underlying all of these is the challenge of cultural alignment and focus. Many firms described being pulled in multiple directions by project demands, market pressures, and internal politics. Without leadership commitment to making CX a strategic priority, embedded into the fabric of the firm, it can quickly get overshadowed by more immediate, tangible concerns like budgets and deadlines.

Why This Matters

Firms that successfully overcome these barriers stand to gain significant advantages: stronger client relationships, higher loyalty, better referrals, and a differentiated market position. Addressing these challenges requires deliberate action:

- Allocating dedicated time and resources to CX initiatives
- Investing in training and empowering staff with clear guidance
- Building consistent processes and leveraging appropriate technology
- Cultivating a firm-wide culture that values and rewards client-centric behaviors

By treating CX not as an afterthought, but as a core component of their strategy, AEC firms can transform these challenges into opportunities, delivering experiences that set them apart from competitors and drive sustainable growth.

Challenges to Delivering a Superior Client Experience

Limited Time

Difficult to carve out time to plan, execute, and sustain CX initiatives.

Lack of CX Skills

Employees lack the training or knowledge to execute CX strategies.

Staffing & Resources

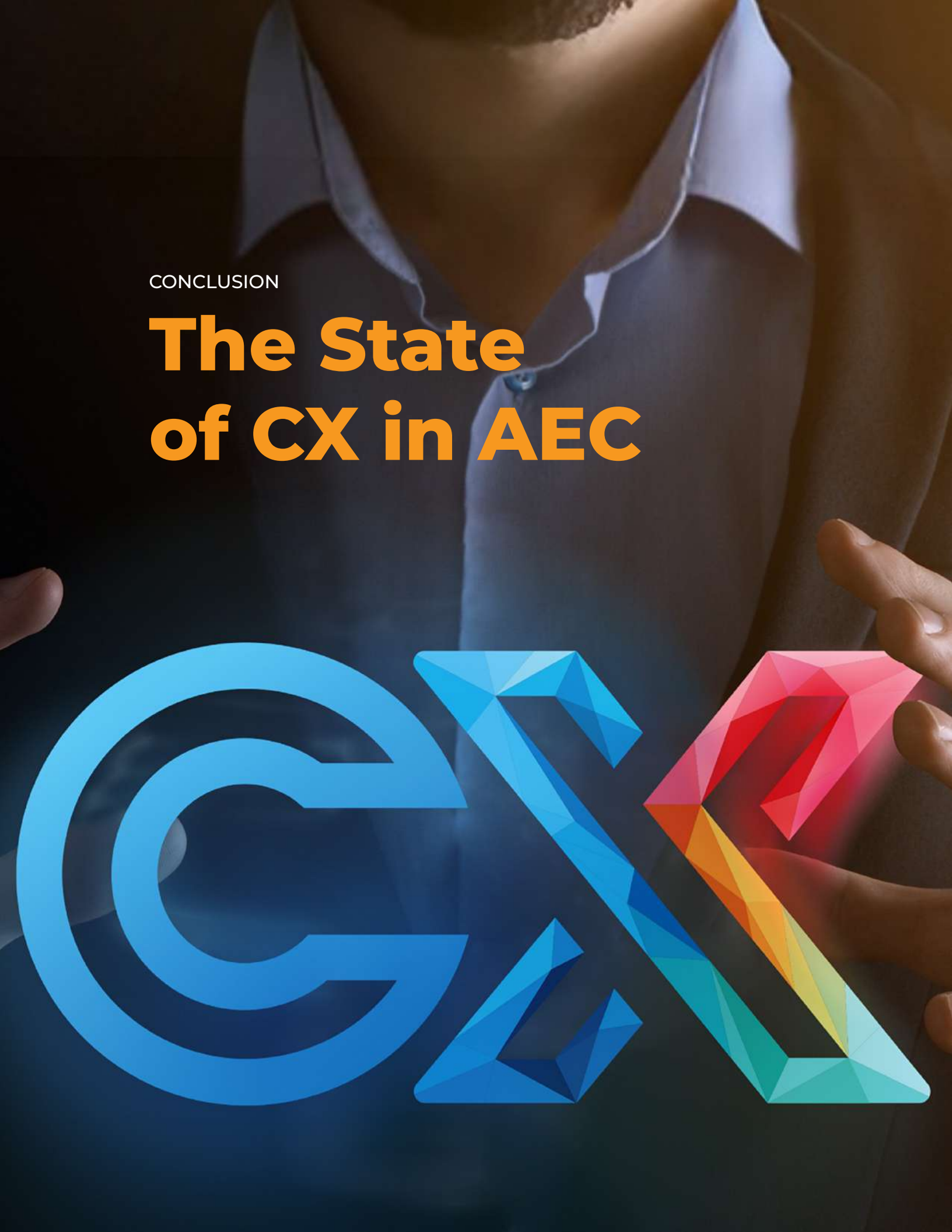
Insufficient staff and stretched resources hinder CX efforts.

Consistency & Focus

CX is derailed by inconsistent processes and competing priorities.

CONCLUSION

The State of CX in AEC



CX Journey from Afterthought to Strategic Driver

For two decades, CX sat politely at the bottom of many firms' agendas. This year, it moved to the front of the room. Across our sample, key leaders in the AEC industry aren't asking whether to do CX anymore; they're wrestling with how fast and how deeply to implement it. The signal is clear: firms that treat CX and client listening as a system, not a slogan, are pulling ahead of the pack.

What the Data Shows

Our findings are unequivocal: the strongest-performing firms approach CX as an accountable, measurable, and strategically integrated function. They not only commit in principle but support it with structure, leadership engagement, and consistent measurement directly linked to business outcomes.

- **Revenue Growth as a KPI**
  Firms that track revenue growth as a CX metric outperform their peers across nearly every major business measurement. Tying CX directly to financial results and evaluating it alongside retention and other critical metrics creates a culture of accountability and visible ROI.
- **Clear Ownership**
  Nearly 70% of top performers have a dedicated CX role or team, often embedded in operations or project delivery. Senior leaders are actively involved, ensuring CX priorities are embedded in decision-making rather than siloed in marketing.
- **Client Feedback Integration**
  Some 80% of high performers incorporate client feedback into business planning and service design. More than half have formal processes to close the loop with clients, gathering input more frequently and through more varied channels to create actionable insights.
- **Focus on Project & Client Management**
  When setting CX priorities, leading firms often choose improving project and client management as their top goal. This focus strengthens loyalty and retention, producing broad downstream gains in revenue and profitability.
- **Cross-Department Collaboration**
  Over 40% of high performers discuss CX across departments monthly; more than 20% do so weekly. This drives a proactive, not reactive, approach to CX.
- **Team Capability**
  Training gaps in CX tools and methods are far less common in high performers, enabling teams to deliver consistently on expectations.
- **Multi-Layered Listening**
  Relying solely on electronic surveys correlates with lower performance. Leaders combine surveys with in-person meetings, targeted follow-ups, and relationship check-ins, analyzing and sharing feedback promptly, and acting visibly to close the feedback loop.

Organizations that measure meaningfully, integrate feedback into leadership and structure, and maintain a proactive approach to CX consistently outperform. Having the systems, processes, and visibility to bring these elements together makes the difference between good intentions and sustained high performance.

The Pattern Among High Performers

High performers share a recognizable playbook:

- Make **revenue growth** a CX KPI.
- Integrate feedback into **strategy**, not just marketing.
- Put real accountability **on the org chart**.
- Emphasize project/client management behaviors clients actually *feel*.
- Broaden how they listen and develop buyer personas to guide decisions.
- Train consistently and measure rigorously.

Why the Stakes Are Rising

AI is shifting the competitive landscape. As automation reduces differences in technical output, firms can no longer rely on expertise alone to stand out. What remains as a clear differentiator is the client relationship: trust built through consistent value and disciplined follow-through.

In a world where machines can generate drawings or documents, advantage shifts to how intentionally firms design the experience around delivery. Differentiation becomes more about how well firms anticipate needs, communicate clearly, and make the process feel both reliable and human.

Where to Start with CX

If you want to operationalize CX, start here:

- **Choose one outcome that matters**, such as revenue growth or client retention, and make the connection to CX explicit and visible.
- **Designate an accountable leader or owner** with authority that spans marketing, operations, and support functions.
- **Collect and embed feedback** at project milestones and ensure the loop is closed with clients every time.
- **Equip Project Managers** with training on client behaviors and use real client comments as coaching tools.
- **Publish and share what you learn** with the firm, turning insights into meaningful actions that improve delivery and relationships.

Together, these steps create momentum. They shift CX from a concept discussed in meetings to a discipline practiced across firms, building habits that compound into measurable performance over time.

The Inflection Point

The AEC industry is at a turning point. Firms that normalize client listening, integrate CX directly into strategy, and connect their people more closely to clients are already pulling ahead. Those that delay risk falling further behind.

Getting started does not require perfection. What matters is commitment, consistency, and a willingness to respond to clients in meaningful ways. Small steps build momentum, and momentum builds trust. Over time, this cycle becomes the foundation of stronger relationships and measurable business results.

For firms ready to accelerate, engaging a seasoned CX guide can provide focus, accountability, and proven practices. But the most important step is to begin—letting clients themselves help shape the firm you want to become.

CX is not a passing initiative. It is a business discipline that, when structured and sustained, becomes one of the most reliable drivers of growth, profitability, and long-term advantage.

Methodology

This study was conducted through a comprehensive survey of marketers, business developers, firm leaders, and other professionals across the AEC industry. The objective was to gather meaningful insights into how firms approach and manage CX, as well as to identify key trends, challenges, and opportunities shaping the industry.

The survey was fielded between April 18, 2025, and June 18, 2025. We collected nearly 200 responses, with 145 firms represented in the final sample. The sample includes a diverse cross-section of the AEC industry, spanning different firm sizes, disciplines, market sectors, and geographic regions. Respondents provided candid perspectives on their firms' strategies, tools, and performance, offering a valuable snapshot of the current state of CX in the AEC marketplace. This robust sample enables a deeper understanding of both the progress firms have made and the obstacles they continue to face in delivering exceptional client experiences.

About the SMPS Foundation

BUSINESS TRANSFORMED THROUGH MARKETING LEADERSHIP

The mission of the SMPS Foundation is to deliver intelligence and insights for growth professionals and leaders to help them navigate trends, change, and business evolution in a highly competitive marketplace.

The Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) is the only organization dedicated to creating business opportunities in the A/E/C industries. With more than 7,000 members, SMPS provides leadership and professional development programs, industry research, business-building events, and vital marketing resources. Through SMPS, A/E/C professionals in North America tap into powerful networks to form project teams, secure business referrals and intelligence, and benchmark performance. The Society is committed to validating the practice of marketing and business development as essential to the success of all professional services firms. To learn more, visit smps.org.

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About Client Savvy

ClientSavvy
A ClearlyRated Company

CLIENT FEEDBACK SOFTWARE PURPOSE-BUILT FOR AEC FIRMS

Client Savvy was founded in 2004 by architects who recognized a critical gap between project delivery and client experience in the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) industry. Since then, the company has helped more than 700 AEC firms design, deliver, and measure client experiences that drive growth, retention, and referrals.

As pioneers and thought leaders in CX for professional services, Client Savvy has led the movement to make CX measurable, actionable, and tied directly to business outcomes. Our client feedback platform leverages the patented CXI® (Client Experience Indicator), a 7-point sliding scale that evaluates how client experiences align with expectations. Client Savvy delivers higher response rates, richer insights, and earlier risk detection than traditional survey methods, while real-time dashboards, AI sentiment analysis, and analytics enable firms to respond quickly and strategically.

Beyond technology, Client Savvy partners with organizations to embed client experience into daily practice. Its programs, ranging from Client Perception Studies to ongoing Voice of the Client initiatives, help firms integrate feedback into business development, project delivery, and strategic planning. The result is reduced risk, improved retention, and stronger market differentiation.

In 2025, Client Savvy joined forces with ClearlyRated, uniting two leaders to accelerate a CX revolution across professional services. The partnership enhances value for clients by combining CX expertise with ClearlyRated's reputation management solutions, AI-powered analytics, and broader professional community. Client Savvy's team remains fully dedicated to helping AEC firms achieve measurable growth through superior client experience.

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