

Most business opportunities do not arrive as polished ideas in a strategy deck. They show up as small, repeated frustrations: a client asking for the same update twice, an invoice stuck in someone's inbox, or a team copying information from email into three different tools. Because these problems feel ordinary, businesses often work around them instead of asking what they reveal.

That is a costly habit. Persistent workflow pain points can signal unmet demand, wasted capacity, and the possibility of a more valuable service or product. The mess itself is not automatically an opportunity—but studying who experiences it, how often it happens, and what they already do to cope can uncover where a business can create lasting value.

For agencies and other service businesses, this matters especially. Client expectations are rising, delivery models are under margin pressure, and new technology is making customers wonder why routine tasks still take so long. In that environment, customer frustration is not merely a complaint to manage. It can be useful evidence about what the market is ready to pay to fix.. Exactly.

Frustration Is Often the First Clue

Durable businesses tend to solve problems people care about enough to change their behavior. Frustration can reveal that problem before customers know how to describe a solution. They may not say, “We need a workflow automation platform.” They may say, “Why do I have to forward that email again?” or “I thought we already paid this invoice.”

Those comments matter because they describe friction in the customer's own terms. A single annoyance might be an isolated incident. A recurring irritation across multiple people, teams, or clients may point to a broader gap in the way work gets done.



Look for the workaround, not just the complaint

People develop workarounds when an official process does not serve them. They keep a private spreadsheet beside the project management tool. They send an email to confirm that a form was received. They create a

recurring calendar reminder to chase invoices. These habits may look like individual preferences, but they can be evidence of a broken handoff.

A workaround is especially revealing because someone has invested time in avoiding the official process. The question is not only, “What frustrates people?” It is also, “What extra steps have they added to get the outcome they need?” That is where an overlooked business opportunity may be hiding.

- **Repeated explanations:** Customers or staff have to provide the same details more than once.
- **Manual status checks:** People send emails just to find out whether work, approvals, or payment have progressed.
- **Shadow tracking:** Teams maintain spreadsheets or notes because the main system does not show what they need.
- **Frequent corrections:** Information is re-entered or repaired after being passed between people or tools.

Tool Sprawl Turns Small Friction into a Workflow Problem

Most businesses do not set out to create a tangled technology stack. They add tools to solve immediate needs: email for communication, a project platform for tasks, a form for intake, accounting software for invoices, and shared documents for reference. Each addition may be reasonable on its own. The difficulty comes when the tools do not share context or trigger the next step reliably.

That is how a simple customer journey becomes a patchwork workflow. A lead submits information in one place. Someone copies it into a project board. A colleague sends a kickoff email. Later, another person prepares the invoice from a separate record. If a detail changes, the team has to remember which systems to update.

The visible problem may be “too many tools,” but the underlying issue is often unclear ownership and fragile handoffs.

Technology can amplify both. A new app may make one task easier while leaving the overall process just as confusing.

Workflow symptom What may be happening underneath Opportunity to investigate Details are copied from email into several systems There is no dependable source of truth or automated transfer Improve intake, data flow, or system integration Invoices are delayed after work is approved Approval and billing are disconnected Create a clear approval-to-invoice handoff Clients repeatedly ask for status updates Progress is not visible or updates are inconsistent Design a predictable communication and reporting process Staff maintain private tracking spreadsheets The shared workflow does not match the work people actually do Redesign the process around real operating needs

For an entrepreneur, consultant, or service provider, each pattern raises a practical question: Is there a group of customers with this pain, and can we solve it more reliably than they solve it today? The answer might be a software product. It might also be a well-defined implementation service, a managed process, or a productized offer that removes a recurring operational burden.

Agency Operations Put the Opportunity Under Pressure

Agencies experience workflow friction from both sides. Clients want responsiveness, clarity, and measurable results. Delivery teams need enough focus and margin to do excellent work. When every client gets a slightly different process, the agency can end up spending valuable time coordinating rather than delivering.

Consider a common sequence. A prospect approves a proposal by email. The team waits for a kickoff form. The client sends some answers in the form and other details in a follow-up message. A project manager builds tasks manually, while finance waits for a separate signal to prepare the first invoice. If no one owns the transition, the work may stall even though everyone is busy.

That delay affects more than internal efficiency. The customer experiences uncertainty: Has the project started? What happens next? Is the invoice correct? They may judge the agency by the gaps between the promised service and the actual experience.

Productized services depend on repeatable operations

Productized services package a service into a clearer scope, process, and price. The model can make buying easier and delivery more predictable, but it also exposes inconsistency. If each customer requires a different chain of emails, manual exceptions, and custom invoice handling, the service may be standardized in name only.

Workflow pain points can therefore point to opportunities inside the business as well as opportunities to sell to other businesses. An agency might discover that it can deliver a familiar service faster by standardizing intake, approvals, reporting, and billing. Last month, I was working with a client who learned this lesson the hard way.. Or it might find a niche in helping other agencies fix those same operational bottlenecks.

The opportunity is not necessarily “automate everything.” A useful first step may be to define a clear owner for each transition, establish what information is required, and specify what event moves the work forward. Then decide whether email, existing software, or a new tool should support that process.

AI Is Raising Expectations—and Making Friction More Visible

AI tools have changed what many customers believe should be possible. They see demonstrations of rapid research, automated summaries, instant drafts, and assistants that can act on information. As a result, they may be less willing to accept slow, repetitive processes that once felt normal.

This expectation inflation creates pressure, but it also creates an opening. Customers may ask why a routine report takes days, why a request needs to be entered twice, or why a billing update requires a chain of email messages. Some of those tasks can be shortened with automation or AI. Others still require judgment, approval, or careful handling.



The opportunity lies in separating delay caused by avoidable coordination from work that needs human expertise. Applying AI to a poorly designed workflow can simply move the confusion faster. Before introducing a tool, map the process: What information enters? Who reviews it? What decisions are made? What should happen next? Where does email carry essential context, and where is it just filling a gap?

When used thoughtfully, AI can help summarize communications, extract details, draft responses, or flag missing information. But businesses still need clear rules for review, accuracy, privacy, and accountability. Customers do not value “AI-powered” as an abstract label as much as they value a dependable outcome: fewer repeated questions, clearer next steps, and less time spent chasing progress.

How to Tell a Real Opportunity from Ordinary Inconvenience

Not every messy process deserves a product or a major transformation project. Some friction is occasional, low impact, or too specific to one team. A promising business opportunity usually has stronger signals: the pain recurs, the affected group is identifiable, the consequences matter, and people already spend money or effort trying to address it.

1. **Describe the problem without naming a solution.** “Invoices are often sent late because approval details arrive in separate emails” is more useful than “We need an AI finance app.”
2. **Identify who feels the pain.** Is it the client, the account manager, the finance team, or all three? A precise audience makes it easier to assess demand.
3. **Measure frequency and consequences.** Track how often the issue occurs and what it costs in time, rework, delayed cash flow, customer trust, or missed capacity.
4. **Study current workarounds.** Find out what people do today, what tools they use, and why those approaches are insufficient.
5. **Test willingness to change.** A complaint is not proof of demand. Look for evidence that customers will adopt a better process, pay for help, or commit to a pilot.
6. **Start with a narrow, repeatable fix.** Solve one meaningful handoff well before expanding into a broad platform or sweeping transformation.

These steps help distinguish a useful market signal from a loud but low-value irritation. They also reduce the temptation to build around assumptions. Instead of investing immediately in a new tool, a team can test a revised intake form, a better approval rule, or a structured email sequence and see whether the problem actually improves.

Turn Customer Frustration into a Better Offer

A strong offer connects a specific pain to a concrete result. “We streamline operations” is broad. “We help small agencies move from client approval to accurate invoicing without repeated manual follow-up” is easier to understand and evaluate.

That clarity does not require a complicated solution. Sometimes the best answer combines a few existing tools with a well-designed process. A properly configured intake form, a reliable project template, clear invoice triggers, and responsible email communication may outperform a large software stack that no one owns.. edit: fixed that

It also helps to position the outcome in customer language. Customers may not care that you have reduced the number of internal handoffs. They do care if they receive a clear kickoff, know what information is needed, and are not surprised by a delayed invoice. Translate operational improvements into experiences people can recognize.

Make the improvement repeatable

Once a fix works, document the steps, exceptions, and ownership. A durable opportunity becomes more [inc.com](#) valuable when the solution can be delivered consistently rather than recreated from scratch for every customer. That may lead to a productized service, a reusable implementation package, or a focused software offering.

Keep measuring after launch. Has customer frustration decreased? Are fewer emails needed to move work forward? Are invoices going out at the right time? Are staff reclaiming capacity, or has the process simply shifted effort somewhere else? These checks prevent a polished new workflow from hiding the same old problem.

The Mess Is a Signal, Not a Strategy

Messy workflows hide business opportunities because routine friction is easy to normalize. Teams adapt to missing information, disconnected tools, delayed invoices, and endless email follow-ups. Over time, the workaround feels like the process—even when it frustrates customers and quietly consumes margin.

But frustration alone is not a business plan. The real opportunity appears when a recurring pain affects a recognizable group, creates meaningful costs, and can be solved in a way customers trust and value. For agencies, that may mean making a productized service genuinely repeatable. For a consultant or founder, it may mean packaging a proven workflow improvement into an offer others can adopt.

Start by paying attention to the small complaints people repeat. Trace the handoffs behind them. Find out what customers are already doing to cope. Then test the simplest reliable improvement. In a world where AI is raising expectations, businesses that reduce unnecessary friction—not just add more tools—can turn everyday customer frustration into a lasting advantage.