

Getting More Customers

***HOW TO GET AN
ABUNDANCE OF
CUSTOMER REFERRALS
THAT KEEP YOUR
CALENDAR FULL***



You Need Clients

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If there's one thing all businesses need in greater abundance, it's customers.

There seems to always be a balancing act between serving your current customers and keeping a steady stream of prospective customers “waiting in the wings.” If you get that balance right, you'll enjoy:

- STEADIER REVENUES (*everyone wants those, right?*)
- A ROCK-SOLID REPUTATION (and that will actually serve to grow your waiting list)
- BETTER AND DIFFERENT OFFERS—for example, JV partnerships come to those with profitable, thriving businesses

Of course, if you get that balance wrong, you could wind up with months of little work and even lower profits, followed by months of “nose to the grindstone” non-stop work that leaves you feeling stressed out and overworked.

That's not a place you want to be.

So the question is, how can you maintain that delicate balance, so you can have a predictable workflow—and budget?

One of the best ways is to cultivate relationships that turn into an endless stream of customer referrals.

Be THAT Person. Yeah You!

AS SIMPLE AS IT SOUNDS, THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO IS TO BE THE KIND OF PERSON EVERYONE WANTS TO HANG OUT WITH.

You know the one. They are kind to everyone. He/she goes out of their way to help others. They are respected and trusted by all.

Now obviously, some of this is just your personality. But let's face it, if you didn't already have some of this going on, you wouldn't have become a business owner in the first place, right?

The trick is to make the most of the personality traits you already possess, so you can attract an audience of like-minded people who will happily do business with you.

And let's talk about that for just a minute, because it's important. Like-minded people. This is the market you truly want to attract, because after all, who would you rather work with? Someone who enjoys the same hobbies and vacation spots as you do? Or someone who couldn't care less about your favorite beach retreat?

Your business will be a lot more fun if you're working with people you truly enjoy—and who enjoy you as well. And the way to do that is to put your personality out there on display.

***BUT DON'T JUST BLOW YOUR OWN HORN.
REACH OUT AND BE KIND TO OTHERS, TOO.***

Give a public shout out to a friend or colleague who did something amazing. One entrepreneur created a “Shout Out Saturday” video each week and posts it on Facebook and YouTube. She’s sharing the great things her customers are doing, and it’s gaining serious attention.

Not only that, but her kindness and generosity are truly contagious.

She’s one of those people that others really want to be around, and you can do the same thing. Not by being someone you’re not, but simply by being more, well, you.

Now, let’s be crystal clear here. If spreading the love through charity donations really isn’t your thing, or you’re not comfortable giving public praise and showing affection online, then don’t force it. Nothing will turn off potential customers more than the perception that you’re “not real.”

But that doesn’t mean that you can’t bring in a flood of referrals. You just have to concentrate on other methods.

Love Your Customers

.....AND MAKE SURE THEY KNOW IT

What do your customers get when they work with you? Of course they get your time, and that’s a valuable commodity. But what about perks?

- ✓ Have you created VIP weekends for select clients?
- ✓ Have you sent them an unexpected reward for a job well done?
- ✓ Have you introduced them to movers and shakers in their market?

- ✓ Have you offered them special access to high value services as a reward for their loyalty?
- ✓ Have you sent them a small gift (or anything of value to them) just to say, “I’m thinking of you”?
- ✓ Have you offered them a discount on your next big live event or product?

These types of customer “perks” will not only show your customers how much you care about them, but it will build loyalty in a way nothing else can.

When a customer gets the VIP treatment from you, where do you think he’s going to send his friend or colleague, who’s looking for just what you provide? To you, of course. He won’t even hesitate, because you treat him so well, he’ll know his friend is in good hands.

But don’t think that all customer perks have to be big-ticket items. Sometimes they can be as simple as a handwritten thank you card or a phone call on their birthday. Small gestures can have a huge impact on someone’s life, and they’ll remember your thoughtfulness for years to come.

The True Secret to More (and better) Referrals

So you’ve made sure you’re the kind of person people naturally gravitate towards. You’re kind and considerate; you’re a good friend; you give generously to charities and worthy causes, and you show your respect and appreciation to your customers.

And still, that waiting list is looking a little...short.

If that’s the case, there is likely one thing at the root of the problem.

You simply haven’t asked!

.....Think about that for just a second.

When is the last time you actually said to a current or past customer, “Do you know anyone who would benefit from my services/product? Could you give me a referral?”

Chances are you’ve never said it. It’s the kind of thing we don’t naturally think about doing, or if we do think about it, it makes us more than a little uncomfortable.

And if you’re saying to yourself, “I do ask! It’s on the bottom of every invoice/in my email autor-responder/on my business card!” Stop right there.

These impersonal, thoughtless words are not the answer. In fact, they probably have the opposite effect—if anyone is reading them at all.

What we’re talking about here is not an added line in an email or filler on a business card. We’re after true human interaction, and when you get this right, you’ll have more customers than you can count.

There are a few “rules” to follow for this kind of referral seeking:

- Never ask when you’re presenting a bill
- Always ask in person if you can, on the phone at the very least
- Ask more than once
- Make it easy for clients to refer you

Make these four points a part of your routine, and your customers will begin referring friends and colleagues to you on a regular basis.

BUT BEFORE YOU START ASKING, THERE’S ONE MORE STEP YOU NEED TO COMPLETE.

Create A Script

MOST OF US ARE NOT BORN SALES PEOPLE.

In fact, it can make us downright uncomfortable. And asking for referrals is very similar to asking for the sale, so you may find yourself:

- ✓ Speaking hesitantly
- ✓ Lowering your voice
- ✓ Unconsciously changing your body language

You probably don't even know you're doing these things, but they have a definite impact on the way your request is perceived—and consequently on the results.

A SCRIPT WILL HELP.

When you know exactly what you're going to say, and you've practiced it multiple times, it will sound more natural and engaging, and it will get you better results.

Your script doesn't have to be sales-y or weird sounding. In fact, it shouldn't be. It should quite simply be you—just more confident.

Here's a sample script you can start with:

You know [NAME,] I really enjoyed working with you. I was so inspired by how hard you worked and what we accomplished.

I love how you [INSERT SPECIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENT HERE]. I know that really made a difference in your [LIFE/BUSINESS].

You know, I have a few spots open in my calendar program for customers just like you. I wonder if you can think of any friends or colleagues who could benefit from working with me? I'd love an introduction, if you do.

It's simple and straightforward, won't make people—even you—uncomfortable, and gives your client the perfect opening to say, “Yeah, my friend John has been stuck with [issue your services/product solve] for a long time, and just the other day he said he didn't know what to do next. I know you could help him!”

This is gold. When your customer can see exactly how you could help a friend or colleague, he's going to do the groundwork for you. So not only will you get the referral, but your prospective customer will already be “pre sold” on working with you.

Just like top speakers and presenters, you'll want to practice your script. While you might think practicing will make it sound stilted and artificial, the opposite is actually true.

Practicing your script until you know it backwards and forwards will allow you to be natural and authentic. You'll be able to respond thoughtfully if the conversation takes a turn, and recover quickly if you get interrupted. In short, the more you practice, the less you'll sound like you practiced.

Your “script” is also a living thing. Just like you tweak and test your email auto-responders, you will want to do the same with your script. Pay attention to your customer's body language as you talk to them. Do they disengage or become distracted every time you mention their specific accomplishments?

MAYBE LIVEN THAT PART UP A BIT.

And speaking of livening up your script, remember these important points when speaking to your customers about a referral:

- **BE ANIMATED AND EXCITED.** Speaking in a monotone or rushing through your script is a sure sign that you're uncomfortable.
- **SMILE.** Even if you're speaking to your customer on the phone, a smile can (literally) be heard in your voice, so remember to smile when you talk.
- **STAND UP.** This is especially true if you're on the phone. Standing will automatically make your voice more powerful and engaging. Make it a habit to stand up when talking on the phone and you'll see the difference in your voice.

One word of caution, though, when it comes to asking for a referral: don't be pushy. That should go without saying, but it's important, so let's just say it.

You should not:

- **BE LOOKING FOR “A NAME”.** This is a tactic more suitable for a car salesman than a professional/entrepreneur. And a list of names won't do you any good. Much better to have that personal endorsement you get when your client can actually see how you can help her friend.
- **ACCEPT JUST ANY REFERRAL.** Not everyone is a good fit for you. Being able to spot referrals that are less than optimal will save you much time and trouble down the road—and will help cement your reputation as only accepting quality customers.

Follow Up

HUMANS ARE FORGETFUL CREATURES.

That's why we have calendars and to-do lists and apps like Evernote—because “out of sight” really does mean “out of mind” in most cases.

Your referral request is not immune from being forgotten, so it's important for you to have a plan to follow up.

Make a note in your calendar as a reminder, or if you're using a CRM system such as Zoho or ACT, you can add the information right to your customer contact record, and even automate it.

Just like in sales, it takes several “touches” to cement the deal. Getting referrals is very much a matter of making it a point to both ask, and remind.

WHILE IT'S ALWAYS BETTER TO ASK FOR REFERRALS IN PERSON OR ON THE PHONE, IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT TO MAKE IT EASY FOR CUSTOMERS TO SEND PEOPLE YOUR WAY.

A click to forward an email, an extra business card, or a blog post worthy of sharing are all easy ways for your customer to make a quick introduction.

The key here is to be always in referral mindset. Carry extra business cards and always give two or even three, never just one. Take a minute to email your client about that new blog post or event. She might not see it otherwise. Give your auto-responders a “forward to a friend” call to action.

These tactics are no substitute for personal interaction, of course, but when added to your overall referral plan, they can be just what your customers need to take action.

Here's another option to make it easy: offer a referral fee. Call it an affiliate program, a “refer a friend” incentive, or just a finder's fee, the promise of a small monetary gift can help people to remember you when the subject of your business offering comes up.

But that's not to say the reward has to be money, either. Maybe it's an extra service, or an upgraded product, or (for really prolific referral partners) a VIP weekend. Maybe it's just a gift certificate to a local spa or restaurant.

Whatever your incentive, referral rewards can be just the push your customers need to remember you next time someone asks, “Who do you know who's a great [your service]?”

Make sure you have a clear description of your ideal customer to offer.

Make it Part of Your Routine

Just as you've documented and systemised your marketing with automated scheduling, email marketing and other hands-off routines, you can do the same for your referral generation.

Make the asking for and follow up a part of your regular marketing routine. Incorporate it into your checklists and create reminders for yourself or your team.

You could follow a checklist with every call, and your sign-off includes not only a recap of the actionable items for your customer to work on, but also a quick, "Do you know anyone I should reach out to who might benefit from the type of work we're doing together?"

It's a gentle reminder to keep an eye out for potential referrals, and it works.

Remember to keep notes about who you've talked to as well (CRM), so when you're headed to an event, or phoning a customer, you can follow-up quickly.

ONCE YOU'VE REALLY INCORPORATED ASKING FOR REFERRALS INTO YOUR DAILY OR WEEKLY MARKETING ROUTINE, IT WILL BECOME SECOND NATURE.

Remember Your Manners

GETTING A REFERRAL IS NOT THE END OF THE RELATIONSHIP.

Make no mistake about it, this is more than just “business,” and loyalty and gratitude are the keys to long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships.

Remember, too, that by offering a referral, your client is expressing a much higher level of trust in you than he does by paying you. Even if he’s in your highest-level service offering, spending thousands of dollars with you regularly, sharing you with his network is very different. Now he’s telling others that he trusts you, and that they should, too.

He’s putting his reputation and maybe even his personal relationships on the line, and that deserves a great deal of gratitude on your part.

We’ve already talked about offering a monetary incentive, and that’s important, too, but don’t ignore the personal touch.

SEND A HANDWRITTEN THANK YOU CARD.

Sadly, this is a lost art, but it can be so empowering. And resist the urge to send a “fake” hand written note through a service such as Send Out Cards. Doing that just says you couldn’t be bothered to send a real thank you, so you outsourced it. It won’t make your customer feel special, it will make them feel like a commodity.

SEND A SMALL GIFT.

This doesn’t have to be elaborate or expensive, but it does have to be personal. Rather than sending off an impersonal item, take the time to find a gift that will have meaning. For example, if your customer has recently embraced time management as a part of their self-improvement journey, a quality, personalised journal will be appreciated.

Keep an eye out for items that immediately make you think of your customer—perhaps a quirky T-shirt—and start a list. You don’t have to wait for a referral, though. Surprise gifts are fun to give—and receive—for any reason, and doing so will make your customers love you even more than they already do.

MAKE A CHARITABLE DONATION IN THEIR NAME.

For some people, giving back is a huge part of their lives. If that's your customer, chances are he/she would be truly moved by a donation to his/her favorite charity. You get to do a good deed, plus you can thank your customer in a way that means the most to them. It's a true win/win for everyone—including the charity.

Become A Referral Machine

Whether you prefer to think of it as karma, or just know that “what goes around, comes around,” referrals do have a tendency to multiply. The more you give, the more you'll receive.

So make it a point to refer others back to your customers as well. Perhaps one of your customers has an online store selling personalised planners, while another customer struggles with time management. It's a perfect match, and one that both customers will benefit from.

Don't forget about other service providers or businesses, though. We've already established that not everyone will be a great fit for you. Perhaps a potential customer needs services you do not provide, or faces a roadblock that's not in your area of expertise. Don't be afraid to send her to another good business.

Just be sure that the business you recommend has a rock-solid reputation for excellence. By referring a customer to this business, you're essentially saying, “I trust this person to do right by you,” so make sure you mean it.

This is why it's important to belong to business networking groups and organizations both off and online. You'll get to know other businesses and their areas of expertise, plus you'll create your own referral network you can call on whenever you have an opening in your schedule.

Industry or market specific groups are ideal. General groups can be helpful as well, though, especially if you often get inquiries from people in need of a services or products for other areas of their lives.

Connect Others, and They'll Connect You

Local Meetup groups offer a great opportunity to network with people who live and work in your area, and those face-to-face meetings are often more productive and form a more lasting bond than do online relationships. Look for groups in your area that cater to those in your market.

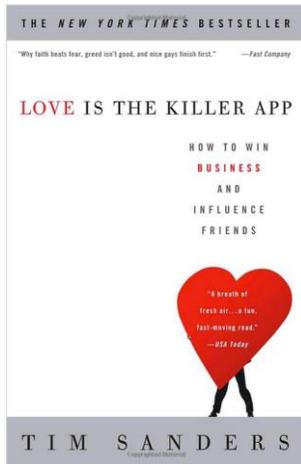
There are scores of meet up groups that have formed to cater to small businesses and just about every niche you can think of.

Business conferences and events are another place to meet and connect with others (and be connected). In fact, any time you attend an industry event, one of your goals should be to meet and establish a relationship with at least three people in your niche.

BUT DON'T LET IT END THERE. AS WE'VE SAID, PEOPLE ARE FORGETFUL.

You have to make it a point to follow up with everyone you meet. A quick note, a thank you card, or a phone call are all easy ways to stay in touch and remind people who you are and what you do.

Not only that, but following up will even help you remember those you meet, so next time you're chatting with someone who is looking for a web designer, you can easily say, "Oh, I met Debbie Designer at a conference just last month, and I think she'd be perfect for your project. Let me send you her contact info."



In his book, “Love is the Killer App,” Tim Sanders makes the point that if you connect enough people to one another, they’ll reciprocate by connecting you to those they know.

These types of connections are what fuel the referral machine, so take the time to spread the love, and it will come back to you in the form of more (and better) customers.

Keeping your customer roster full is critical to your success.

While you don’t want it so packed that you have no time to think, you do want to have a steady stream of new and returning customers so that you can know without a doubt what your profits will look like from month to month.

By taking the time to establish routines, put systems in place for following up, and to practice spreading the love through referrals and connections, you’ll soon earn a reputation as the go-to business in your market.

And once you’ve accomplished that, you’ll never have open spots in your calendar again.