

10 Secrets to Getting More Referrals

Word of mouth advertising, spreading the word, personal recommendations, putting in a good word, and a dozen other ways to say it...

Referrals.

Absolutely the best form of advertising there is. No sales pressure, no credibility problems, and very low cost of sales. People refer customers to you as a favor to their friends, the customers. If it's done as a favor to you, that's usually a bonus.

Think about it. The last time you recommended a movie, or a business, did you do it as a favor to the person you were talking to or the business you were talking about? The person, in all likelihood. A friend or business acquaintance. And if your recommendation was to fall through, you lose credibility. They know that. You're trying to help them and putting the value of your opinion on the line when you do. That means something.

Referrals have to be earned. People won't tell the ones that will listen most, their family and friends, to use your service if they know it's no good. Once you have earned it, it should come naturally. But it often doesn't.

Why? Simply put, people forget. They're busy and your business isn't their top priority. Referrals are the absolute best way to make sure that you keep the new business coming in. That helps you to spend more time working than selling. And it means time spent with people who know what you're all about instead of cold calling!

Here are 10 of the absolute best ways to get more referrals:

1. Ask for them

The simplest way in the world to get referrals is to ask for them. Whenever someone compliments you on a job, let them know you appreciate it, and that you'll do just as good a job for their friends. Tell them that you'd appreciate it if they could spread the word if they really like your work.

You may assume that people would tell their friends, but it's amazing the difference it makes if you give them that gentle reminder. People like to help those that do a good job for them. It makes them feel smart, and they feel good helping out their friends, who just happen to be your next customers...

2. Trade them.

Make a deal with other businesspeople you know. If you know they do good work, offer to tell people about them every chance you get, and ask them to return the favor. It's a good way to start building relationships and it tells you what they really think of your work.

If they agree, make sure you keep an eye out for people to refer them to. Keep up your end of the bargain, and the odds are good they'll keep theirs.

3. Reward them.

The idea of 'finders fees' is very common in big business, but it is frequently ignored in small business. It shouldn't be.

Make it known that when someone sends you a job, there's something in it for them. Perhaps a set fee, or a percentage of the total. If they send you a new customer and you're in retail, maybe a discount on their next purchase. Whatever you do, make sure it's something worthwhile for them and sensible for you. \$10 for a \$25,000 job is insulting. \$10 for a one time retail customer buying a used tennis racket might be too much.

In retail it is best to go with discounts. That encourages the customer to make additional purchases, or increases their loyalty as they see what else they can do with the money. Anything that expands the customer base for a retail outlet is worth rewarding.

4. Give them.

Want someone to send you referrals? Send some their way.

Nothing will start the process and make it solid like having them know that you're ready to return the favor. So return it in advance.

Some people will send you referrals after this simply because they know it's not going to be a one way street. Others because they appreciate the thought you showed them. And some will do it out of a feeling of owing you something. Very few will ignore it.

5. Print them.

Use testimonials in your literature and advertising.

Some people will wonder if they are the only ones that really liked your service, or if you did a good job for them just to get some extra business. If they see that others also appreciate your work and were willing to say so in print, they'll feel

more comfortable in stepping out of their shell and making their own satisfaction known.

Some people need the knowledge that they're not the only ones who think a certain way before they'll say so.

6. Give out more business cards.

Yes, they do make a difference.

If someone has your card, or hopefully more than one of them, they will do *something* with it. If you have asked them when they're in the right frame of mind to pass it along, they will.

One of the best things you can do with business cards is to give more than one. If a person has just told you how much they like your work, hand them 5 business cards. Tell them something like : "Well, I certainly appreciate the good word. If you think you'd be doing them a favor, maybe you could pass these on to people you know when they need work done. Make sure you keep one for yourself in case you need to get a hold of me, though!"

Yes, this works. It's different, so they remember. And it's personal, so it matters to them.

7. Community service.

People are always willing to recommend those they see as leaders. Public service projects are a great way to become that leader and give something back to your community at the same time.

Make sure you don't do this just for publicity, though. Find a cause you personally believe in and work with that. It will be much more satisfying for you, and more productive for the group you help. And you won't come across as a phony.

If you're helping with a cause you believe in, people will see that you care. And they'll realize you will probably care as much about your work as your cause.

8. Sponsor something.

A sports team, a fund-raising drive or even a cookbook for a school. This falls into nearly the same category as community service, except that it is seen as advertising. It has the same effect. It keeps your name in front of the community and gets people talking about you and your business.

What you sponsor should be dictated by the type of business you're in. A doctor will do well sponsoring a marathon or charity golf tournament, but perhaps not a taverns dart team. Sports bars and construction companies do well with baseball teams, but might not do as well with a bake-off. Match your clientele with the activity.

Don't think this works? Ask the people who sponsor team after team, for years. They're not doing it solely for fun. Although it can get to be enough fun to be worth it.

9. Be helpful.

Yes, something that simple. People appreciate someone who is helpful. If they appreciate you, they'll remember you and want to return the favor. Again, do this where it's appropriate and where it's meant sincerely. Like most things that lead to referrals, this is something that becomes an end in itself before long.

10. Join a networking group.

You may be familiar with the idea of networking groups. They get together on a regular basis and exchange leads. These groups are composed of professionals who are checked for integrity before being accepted for membership so that each member is sure that they are only recommending quality businesses to their family and friends.

Joining one of these groups is like having a troop of professional salespeople armed with the best closing tool available. Personal recommendations. If your business is run with integrity and you back up your work, it's definitely an option worth pursuing. For more information on professional networking groups, see the section on them.

Referrals can make a huge difference in the success of your business. Don't leave them to chance. Get an organized plan for generating them. And keep at it. Make it work and soon you'll be dealing with the problem of having more business than you can handle. And then, of course, you'll be referring these new customers to someone else.

Won't THAT be nice!