

Hints & Tips for working your network to get more referrals....

Doing good work for your customers and hoping that they will refer your business is not a strategy for success in gaining referrals.

I'm sure that there are a lot of reasons people don't refer your business even if they are very satisfied customers. You need to recognise that barriers exist and have a plan to overcome them.

Some suggested steps to take as a part of this plan are as follows:

1. Be systematic and organised in your approach
 - As a starting point, develop a list of existing and former customers who you are going to call and ask for referrals.
 - Then work this list systematically – decide how many calls you are going to make per day / week and schedule time to do this
 - Use a CRM system to manage your call schedule and record the outcomes of calls and diarise and follow-up actions
 - Make it a part of your regular activity
 - Don't just work your list once and put it aside.
 - Keep adding to the list as your customer base grows and rework it at regular (6 monthly?) intervals – taking care of course that you don't become an annoyance to your customers in the process.
2. Be clear about the reason for the call
 - Identify a 'hook' or a reason for the call as a 'way in' before you start talking about referrals – especially if the call is going to be somewhat 'out-of-the-blue' for former customers.
 - It could be any number of reasons, i.e. to tell them about something new that you are doing or you could just cut straight to the chase and tell them you are ringing to ask for referrals – the approach you take will depend on the individual and your relationship.
3. Don't be afraid to ask for referrals – make sure they know that you want them.
 - You will get more referrals if people know that you need or want referrals. Many of your customers won't know how you get new business.
 - Some may think that you are always very busy (especially if you have led them to believe that!) and don't need referrals.
 - The fact that they were referred to you themselves does not minimise this problem.
 - This is especially true if your customers are not directly involved in any selling activity themselves and therefore they may underestimate the potential value and importance of a referral for you.
 - Overcome this problem by educating your customers that you do in fact welcome referrals.

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- In fact tell them that most of your new business comes by way of referrals from current and past customers and you want to keep it that way.

4. Deserve referrals

- This shouldn't be a problem for you given the quality of work that you deliver for your customers but you'll get more referrals if your customers and contacts feel comfortable enough to refer you business.
- In order to take the risk of advocating someone to use your services, people must have enough confidence in their own judgement about you.
- Be punctual in all of your dealings with people, return calls promptly and be consistent in your follow up and communication. Potential referral sources will equate this behaviour with trustworthiness.

5. Make it easy for people to refer you

- Don't just ask... 'do you know anybody who might benefit from working with us?' Be more specific, you will get more referrals if people know exactly how you can benefit others.
- Make sure they know the types of organisations that you believe that you work best with, the sort of work that you do best and where you can add most value. This will help them make a judgment on whether or not any of their contacts are appropriate to refer you to.
- You'll get more referrals if clients and contacts know how to refer your business. Do you want them to give their contacts your business card (if so give your customers some of your cards), do you want them to call / email on your behalf, do you want them to help set up a meeting etc etc
- You can make life even easier for them by giving them the appropriate words to use as the introduction for your company.

6. Understand 'what's in it for them'

- You need to understand why customers and contacts give you referrals in the first place.
- In many cases, it is not to benefit you, but to help the party to whom they are referring you!
- This is important, because it reflects a shift in attitude from one that is about you to one that is about how you can help others and make the referring party look good in the process.
- That is why it is important to keep people informed as the entire process proceeds, so they KNOW that they have helped that the person or company - It makes THEM look and feel good!

7. Make sure that they know all there is to know about your business

- Your customers' contact with your business may be limited to a part of your business.
- Improve your chances of gaining a referral by making sure that they understand all the ways you help your customers.

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8. Say thank you & possibly reward them

- You will get more referrals if you thank people enough.
- Thank them verbally, both at the time of the referral and later after contact has been made with the prospect.
- Then thank them in writing.
- Finally, if you think it is appropriate, thank them with a small gift or meal out after your project is complete.
- Use the "thank you" process to keep referrers informed of progress you have made with the referral. They will probably want to know the outcome of their actions.