

8 Steps To More Referrals

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Written by Bill Cates

Do you want to attract more high-quality clients through referrals? Then check out the following list of eight things you need to do to get there.

1. Treat the entire referral process with importance

How you talk to people about referrals is how it will come back to you. Don't be wishy-washy or apologetic about looking for referrals. Be confident. Make sure you don't forget about referrals, and when you ask, make sure you create enough time to have a good talk about them. To begin a conversation about referrals, say something like, "I have an important question to ask you."

2. Earn the right to referrals through the process you take clients through

Quickly bring value to every prospect and exceed your clients' expectations. Think process, not products. Selling a product or handling a transaction does not make you referable. Putting people through a process, however, and getting them to think about the big picture does. Use a specific client-service model to make sure you stay in contact with your "A" clients in a way that provides ongoing value and builds business relationships.

3. Create your own personal sales force with centers of influence

You probably have one or two centers of influence who can send you referrals. But if you have one or two, why not 10 or 12? Think like an entrepreneur. Create your own sales force. Teach them how well you take care of your clients and the value you bring to your clients, what types of people you serve the best (use an ideal-client profile), and the best way for them to give you their referrals. The most important thing to remember about getting referrals from centers of influence is to make sure you are indeed referable.

4. Expand your results by targeting niches

The best way to create a reputation is to narrow your focus to an affinity group that has both formal and informal ways of communicating with each other. When you target a niche, you can serve this market better and become more valuable, and the referrals will start coming in. Tell one or more of your small-business clients that you're thinking about targeting other businesses like theirs.

5. Let everyone know you work from referrals and that you value their help

Do all your clients know that you're accepting new clients and that you value their help in reaching out to others who may benefit from knowing you? Hold periodic meetings and mailings to remind your clients that you're always looking for people who will benefit from your value. Be on a mission to serve, and let everyone know about it. Find ways to plant seeds for referrals by saying things like, "Don't keep me a secret" and "I'm never too busy to see if I can help others you care about through the important work I do."

6. Upgrade the quality of your referrals by learning as much as you can about your new prospect

Don't just settle for a name and a phone number. The person who just gave you a referral is a great source of information who can help you make a better connection. Learn as much as you can about your new prospect before you contact them, such as how they know each other, why it might be a good match, how the prospect might react to the referral, the best way to contact them, what you can do to pique their interest, and what your referral source likes about the prospect.

7. Keep your referral source up-to-date with how you are following up on their help

When someone gives you a referral, there are three things you must do to keep the referrals coming from that source:

- 1) Follow up on every referral you get as soon as possible
- 2) Let your source know you are following up on their help
- 3) Thank your referral source with a handwritten note and a small gift

8. Expect to get introductions

Don't go into your relationships with prospects and new clients wishing and hoping that you'll get referrals. The work that you do is extremely important. Be on a confident mission of service to others. Let that confidence show through. Enroll others in your mission. And when you ask for referrals, think in terms of getting introductions. In these days of the Do-Not-Call regulations, getting introduced to your new prospects has never been more crucial.

Bill Cates is the author of "Get More Referrals Now" and the president of Referral Coach International. His new book, "Don't Keep Me a Secret" will be released in September 2007. He can be reached at info@referralcoach.com. For more information, visit www.referralcoach.com.