

Referrals are the Backbone of your Business

Having your name passed to someone else by one of your clients is one of the more satisfying aspects of your business. Not only does it demonstrate that your client was pleased with your work, but also that they felt your services were worth recommending to others. Quite a compliment!

Getting repeat business and referrals is a major factor in growing your business. It has been suggested in marketing books, if you are providing a good service, that 80% of your client base should come from repeat and referral business. You can get referrals from a number of sources. Some may even come from people that you haven't worked with, but may come from people you have helped or impressed.

But let's start with the people who you have done business with. Do you provide value to your customers/clients? For example do you offer a personalized service to fit your client's needs? How do you handle complaints - do you guarantee your work? Do you meet deadlines or get work completed prior to the deadline? Do you try to make a point of exceeding your customer's expectations?

If you WOW your clients, you are a good candidate to encourage "word-of-mouth" marketing. This type of marketing comes from creating an experience where other people keep talking about you (in a good way). By others speaking highly about you and your business and recommending you, they're almost like your "sales" force, and can help build your business. Think about the last time you were pleasantly surprised by a high level of customer service; didn't you tell everyone about it? Think of having a great experience in a new Restaurant, don't you tell people about it and continue to go back?

If you have clients who continue to refer your service be thankful and acknowledge them. This should also include acknowledging and thanking long-term repeat clients who have supported and stayed with you for a number of years. Remember to let them know that they are appreciated.

A couple of ways to encourage referrals is first and foremost to provide **great service**. If clients or people you meet ask how they can help you, ask them if they know of anyone else who could use your services - if people are happy with your service, they will gladly help you out. **Thank** people for their referrals. A simple verbal thank-you may be sufficient. Other times a handwritten note or card, or maybe an unexpected gift certificate to the theatre, bookstore or a restaurant, or an invitation for lunch, dinner or a special event that they would enjoy, demonstrates your appreciation.

Referrals are the backbone of any successful business. Don't take these referrals for granted and remember to **make** the time to acknowledge the people that have helped your business grow!

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