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12 Ways to Get More Business Referrals

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What could be sweeter than a business referral? You pick up the phone or get an email from someone who says they want to know more about your service or product because they were referred to you by a mutual contact.

Some people say they get most of their business *by referrals*. But how do they do it? Turns out they usually worked their tails off to create a nourishing network, or their company has been in business so long that it has deep roots and expansive branches. So how can you get more referrals? Here are a few ways you can build a referral network within a short period of time:

1. Realize that you have many types of referral sources: customers, vendors, people in contact with your prospects, employees at target organizations who work with your prospects, members of target associations, friends or relatives of prospects and even journalists who cover your customers' industry. (The list goes on...and the strategy is different for each type of referral source.)
2. Routinely *give* referrals. When you are perceived as a useful business networker, people will make more of an effort to repay your kindness...just to keep your leads coming. (Hey...it's human nature.)
3. Look for synergies in bringing two business friends together. She is a florist and he is a wedding planner or she reps hotel fixtures and he is the general manager of a hotel. That creates an even greater synergy if you also do business with wedding planners and hotels. It just takes a quick email introduction to bring business friends together.
4. Offer a referral fee. Many types of companies routinely offer cash referral fees, particularly real estate brokers. But referral fees don't have to be cash. They can be a gift certificate to a great restaurant, spa or resort or a gift card for music or books or coffee—all depending on the value of the referral.
5. Join and participate in targeted associations or leads groups, but make sure they contain people you can do business with or (don't forget) people who do business with your prospects.
6. Stay on people's radar screens by periodically calling, emailing or seeking out referral sources at events, but do so in a way that conveys something of value to your networking partner. Don't just call and beg for a business lead. It's annoying.
7. Make it easy for someone to refer business to you by having plenty of information on your email (including a vCard) and using legible business cards with copy on only one

side for ease of use and electronic scanning. Dense graphics, tiny print and dramatic colors look amateurish and don't convey information very well.

8. For a special touch of class when addressing an important referral source, send a handwritten note on good stationery. And connect with a personal comment.
9. Invite a networking friend to an event that would benefit them. You'd be surprised how often you'll get a reciprocal invitation to a gathering that could be important to you.
10. Make it easy for a referral source to let prospects know about you...by sending articles you have had published, white papers or e-brochures your firm has created. And don't forget to let your online business network (LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.) know how beneficial it is to use your services or products...and those of your networking friends.
11. Connect with people by commenting on their social network postings: blogs, LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. (Giving leads this way announces to the world that you are a good business friend to have.)
12. Acknowledge career or community achievements of your networking friends by sending them a note, especially if their new responsibility could be useful to you or your own business friends.

Feel free to forward this to anyone you think might benefit from it.