

Making Real Money With Referrals

Putting your biggest fans and satisfied clients to work for you is easier than you may think!

Seems like you've scoured the earth for your dream car — a cherry-red '65 Impala with whitewall tires and a 350 crate motor, just like the one your grandpa used to drive. So far, the search has led you to seven classified scams, one of which resulted in a dusty, fruitless trip to Deaddog, New Mexico. Then a friend from your classic car club tells you that Trusty Vintage Autos, a small dealership about an hour away, is displaying an Impala on its website.

From the first phone call, your sales associate at Trusty's is a pleasure to work with. She answers your questions knowledgeably and even emails you the Impala's entire service history. When you arrive to check out the car, she's friendly and courteous, and after a bit of friendly back-and-forth, you agree on a reasonable price. As she prepares the final paperwork, you tell her how happy you are to be dealing with such a professional outfit.

"Thanks," she says. "Hey, if you know anyone else who might be in the market for a classic auto, feel free to pass along my name. About two-thirds of my clients come from referrals, so I'd really appreciate any business you could send my way." She hands you a folder packed with cards and brochures.

Your first thought is that you can't wait to hand out her stuff at the car club's next meeting. Your second is, "Wow. Why don't I do more of that?"

In truth, you'd rather eat broken glass than request referrals, even from clients who are obviously pleased with your work. The one time you opened your mouth to try, you started shaking so hard the client offered you a sweater. You've convinced yourself that you'd rather overspend on advertising and pay exorbitant dues to a networking group than request a single referral. Now your salesperson's breezy approach to self-marketing has you reconsidering. She's likely just secured herself a steady stream of (well-deserved) business from your friends — and she hasn't spent a dime.

Isn't it time you did the same?

How much do referrals help?

Referrals are important — period. Asking your satisfied clients to do the selling for you is one of the fastest, easiest and least expensive ways to grow your business.

Imagine, if you will, that you own a commercial carpet-cleaning company. Since some of your best customers are restaurants, you call up a prospect — a steakhouse that you drove by last week — to talk about your spring special. What's the chance they'll take you up on this amazing offer? Well, here's the bad news. Assuming you've done your market research and have decent sales skills, your odds of success are somewhere between 2 and 10 percent.

Why the long odds? Because much like you, **Clients prefer to work with people they know** — or at least know of. When a job needs to be done, they're more likely to choose a high school chum, the guys next door or someone they've worked with previously over a stranger like you.

Now let's imagine you call up some of your satisfied clients and ask if they know anyone in need of your services. One client introduces you to the manager of Porky's BBQ. Turns out Porky's last carpet cleaner could never quite work the BBQ sauce out of the cream-colored shag. "I hear you do great work on tomato-based stains," says the manager.

Voila! Because your past client (whom the manager knows and trusts) has done the selling for you, your chances of closing this sale have skyrocketed. In fact, your chances of converting a referred prospect are around 50 to 90 percent, according to Joanne S. Black, author of *No More Cold Calling*.

In addition to saving you time, money and aggravation, referral marketing can improve your quality of life in ways that advertising can't. For one thing, referral-based relationships tend to start off with a high degree of trust and positive expectation. And if a referred client ends up singing your praises, it'll likely strengthen your relationship with the person who made the original referral — not to mention generate new ones.

No client lasts forever

Making a referral marketing plan and sticking to it helps you replace those inevitable clients who go out of business, slash their budgets, hire in-house people, relocate overseas, merge with the big dogs or find other mysterious reasons to dump you like a bad prom date.

An example from my own practice: I started my full-time voice talent career in 2008 with two anchor clients, both of whom I acquired through referrals. My contracts with them guaranteed me \$24,000 during my first 12 months in business. When those deals closed, was I tempted to shut off my engine and celebrate? You betcha. As business people, we all dream of the day we can kick back, relax and let the marketing do itself. Unfortunately, most of us never reach that point. My experience was pretty typical. Within 13 months, one of my VIP clients had dried up completely, and the other's voice-talent budget had been slashed by 50 percent. After 27 months, that second client also went the way of the dodo.

Fortunately, I'd been disciplined about sticking to my marketing plan, which included garnering all the referrals I could. So although the economy was lagging and I'd lost two anchor clients, my business actually continued to grow over the next 3 years! Why? 65% of my business comes from referrals!

What motivates a referral?

If you've survived to adulthood, you've probably given dozens — even hundreds — of referrals in your lifetime. Maybe you've directed a friend to a hip boutique or spread the word about an honest mechanic. Or maybe you've gone online to post a five-star review of your favorite hotel or restaurant. Your decision to refer was most likely motivated by one of the following:

You wanted to do the business a favor.

As a businessperson yourself, you likely have great respect for hard-working companies that demonstrate commitment to quality. Recommending a business to others shows your appreciation for a job well-done.

You want to help out a friend or associate.

When someone comes to you with a problem, there's no better feeling than handing them the perfect solution, whether it's a trustworthy temp agency, a specialized vendor or a skillful stylist.



You want to look good.

If you've ever played matchmaker for your single friends, you've seen how brokering a successful match can win you the undying gratitude of both parties. Likewise, you know that being a good "matchmaker" among business-people can strengthen your own network, build your reputation and increase your visibility within the community. If requesting referrals directly strikes you as shameless self-promotion, please note that referral marketing benefits your "matchmaker" as well. So assuming you're honest and produce quality work, you're actually doing potential referrers a favor by suggesting they pass on your info.

Conquering anxiety

If fear is keeping you from growing your business through referrals, it's time to take an honest look at what's holding you back. Are you afraid of biting off more work than you can chew? Letting your friends and associates down? Concerned you'll unleash a fury of negative feedback?

It's true that referral marketing has its share of risks, but so do all forms of promotion. Asking for referrals won't drain your bank account, alienate your customers or require you to sit through endless networking meetings. In fact, the most likely negative outcome is that you'll hear the dreaded word "no." Considering the potential benefits, is that really so catastrophic?

Some helpful thoughts to remember as you gather your courage:

You're not alone.

Unless you're a self-absorbed narcissist (in which case getting more referrals is the least of your problems), marketing yourself effectively takes real courage. Even the most accomplished people in your industry have no doubt experienced the same feelings of doubt and anxiety you feel now.

A good referral benefits both parties.

As noted above, many people use referrals to help out friends and associates — and build that all-important trust factor. Who knows? Maybe one of your former clients knows someone who truly, madly, desperately needs your products and services right now.

As you give, so shall you receive.

If the thought of asking for a referral has you feeling queasy, think of some of the businesses you have recommended to others. Were they the most stratospherically amazing companies you could ever hope to encounter? Nah. I'm willing to bet that they were honest, friendly, hardworking folks much like yourself.

Sell yourself with benefits.

Even in today's world, where everyone seems to be blogging, Facebooking and Tweeting about themselves, asking for a referral can still feel a little gauche. But it's possible to be a humble person of character and still market yourself effectively. How do you do it? Emphasize the ways you can make potential clients' lives easier.

Your (self-) marketing plan

Ready to start reaping the benefits of referral marketing? Excellent! But before you blaze a trail forward, take a moment to think through your approach. Having a plan in place can make sure your efforts don't fizzle after an initial burst of enthusiasm — and help you fight the urge to coast when you're in a busy patch. Your plan needs to help set you up for success — not failure.



Maximize your refer-ability.

You don't have to be perfect to be worthy of referrals, but do be strong and consistent in the following areas:

- Producing high-quality work
- Behaving accountably and meeting deadlines
- Pricing reasonably
- Offering excellent customer service
- Responding in a timely manner to phone calls and emails

Identify your prospects.

List people within your circle of influence who know your professional abilities and character. Your list might include business associates, satisfied clients, mentors, past colleagues and industry contacts. As you catalogue your prospects, keep a positive attitude and assume each person is a potential referrer, not the other way around.

Reach out.

You can ask for referrals in whatever way seems most appropriate — in person or by phone or email. We'll discuss exactly how to approach prospects and what to say in just a moment.

Follow up.

Sometimes a referral doesn't turn into real money for days, weeks, months or even years. When you make the initial contact, ask if you can follow up from time to time. Use a spreadsheet or client-management software to keep on top of your contacts.

Stay in front of prospects.

Use your newsletter and other client communications to keep yourself in potential referrers' thoughts. Holiday cards, vacation reminders, special offers and free info products can jog a prospect's memory — and encourage sales.

How should I ask?

There's no magic formula for requesting a referral. After you've been at it a while, you'll no doubt figure out an approach that works best for your personality, industry and clients. In the meantime, here are a few tips that have worked for myself and others.

Do ask.

Many people assume that if their clients aren't breaking into a spontaneous song and dance of praise, there must be some sinister reason. But consider that between ringing phones, grumpy bosses and calls from the kid's principal, your potential referrers may have other things on their minds. They might be thrilled to recommend you — following a gentle nudge or suggestion.

Strike while the iron is hot.

When you finish a project or close a sale, ask your client this magic question: "How do you feel?" (Don't ask: "What do you think?" You want an emotional response, not a cool-headed analysis.) If the feedback is positive, consider asking for a referral on the spot. It's a reasonable request at this point, and because the conversation is focused on benefits, it feels natural.

Share your sales approach.

To nix any worries in prospects' minds that you'll attack their valued associates like a rabid snake-oil salesperson, reassure them that there will be no hard sells. Explain that you'll follow up on introductions with a friendly email or phone call. If appropriate, offer to begin with a new-client discount or a free, no-obligation consultation.

Thank your referrers.

Even if a referral doesn't result in a sale, follow up with a thank-you card or phone call. Your courtesy will be remembered — and may inspire more referrals in the future.



The magic words

To get you started, here are two scripts that have successfully won me referrals for my voice over business. Feel free to adapt the wording to your own needs — while some call that stealing, my friend and mentor, Susan Berkley, calls it “creative emulation.” I like that.

Hi Will. I just finished updating my website: www.poppasvoice.com. You will find them on the Home Page. I invite you to check it out. If it's been awhile since you've listened to one of my demos, here's my popular Demo Sampler. I thank you in advance for keeping me in mind for any upcoming project that might need a voice actor and/or audio production. As always, I thank you for any referrals that you might think of.

Hi Lisa. I'm wondering if you know of a producer or two around the country who may be looking for voice talent at different times throughout the year. If so, please send me their contact information. I'd like to reach out to them and see if I can earn their confidence. Sixty-five percent of my work comes from people that I know and from referrals, so this email is an effort to help me keep that percentage high. I thank you for your time and I truly appreciate the consideration.

By the way . . . 65% of my business really does come from referrals and people that I know.

Social media and referrals

Admittedly, I wasn't an early adopter of the social media craze. Then one of my clients posted a commercial I created for him on his Facebook page. Suddenly my work was in front of over 1,000 people — and I had no clue who any of them were! When you work in the creative industry, an unsolicited referral like that is pretty freakin' priceless.

The current social media boom offers many opportunities for clients to promote you via Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, with new sites emerging every month. If they're satisfied with a project, you might suggest that they do you a favor by:

- Posting or Tweeting a link to a piece of your work
- Linking to your business site
- Providing a testimonial for your LinkedIn profile or personal website
- Reviewing your business on Yelp, TripAdvisor, Yahoo Local or other sites your clients trust

More ways to request referrals

Whether or not you decide to approach clients directly for a recommendation, there are several other ways you can encourage them to spread the word about you:

Email signatures.

A thoughtful email closing is a great way to thank clients for their business — and encourage future referrals. Such as, “My business continues to grow through customer referrals. I am blessed by that trust and confidence.”

Invoices.

If you've just wrapped up a successful project, your invoice can remind satisfied clients that you welcome referrals. Consider adding a personalized thank-you note inviting new business to the footer of your billing documents.

On-hold marketing.

If your business is one of a growing number that use on-hold marketing, add a message to your program welcoming referrals.

Business cards and brochures.

Make sure that your marketing materials invite referrals. And when you give them away, always offer potential clients a few extras to pass along.

simplify your self-marketing

If you want to learn more about marketing your business, simplifyMyAdvertising can help. We're a full-service advertising agency that specializes in working with small and medium-sized companies to grow their business efficiently and effectively.

To schedule a no-obligation consultation, please contact David Brower, Chief Creative Officer, at 855-746-7543 (toll free) 855-simplify. You can also reach David by email at David@simplifyMyAdvertising.com.

To learn more, visit www.simplifyMyAdvertising.com.

I need a referral from you!

If you have found this FREE 411 REPORT, or any of my reports on www.PoppaLLC.com valuable, please feel free to pass them along to your friends, peers, employees, family, competitors or even strangers you may meet along the way. I mean really...how could I write a report on referrals and not ask YOU for one?

About the author

David Brower has over 20 years of experience in marketing, advertising and creative communications. He began his career in radio and television and became a highly-rated on-air personality and award-winning play-by-play announcer. He later served as VP and General Manager for a group of radio stations in Chico, California.

From 2001 to 2008, David worked as a Regional Marketing Manager for the nation's eighth-largest automotive group. In this role, he directed the creative and marketing activities of 29 dealerships in 12 states and oversaw an annual advertising budget of over a million dollars.

When his corporate job was eliminated during the 2008 economic crisis, David decided to pursue his dream of working full-time as a voice actor and audio producer. He launched the successful audio production company POPPA, LLC that year, followed by simplifyMyAdvertising, a full-service marketing firm, in 2010.

To learn more about David Brower and his company, please visit www.PoppaLLC.com and experience what he calls his "family of creativity."

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