

**HOW TO INCREASE BUSINESS
FROM CURRENT REFERRAL SOURCES
By Mark Powers and Shawn McNalis**

If you look around you, you'll notice a network of people already in place who are referral sources. These individuals offer a wealth of opportunities for increasing business.

Cultivating Clients For A Lifetime:

Your job is not only to use your skills to help clients through a legal situation, but to ease their mind and build their trust. Begin this trust-building process right away by asking clients what they want from you as their lawyer so that you know their expectations up-front. While they're still in your office, explain each stage of your work together. Then, send an engagement letter shortly after your first client meeting to educate them as to your full range of services and reinforce your desire to build a long and productive working relationship.

As time goes on, don't forget to pay close attention to existing clients with regular check-in calls and notes. Also make sure you include clients in important practice changes and decisions, and solicit their feedback. Keep them up-to-date on any new directions or services you incorporate. If appropriate, ask clients mid-project what they think their needs will be in the future.

Develop a tickler file on each client which includes not only information on their matter and the legal services they desire but also names of family members, marital status, colleges, hobbies, etc. Make sure this information is stored somewhere that you can access each time you talk to your clients.

While gathering this information, search for areas of common interest that can serve as the foundation for the relationship. Try inviting clients to join you in non work-related activities to further the bonds between you. Golf, tennis and fishing are excellent activities for building rapport.

Cross-Selling Your Client Base:

Now that you've started seeing clients in terms of a lifetime and not just one matter, your next step is to rate your existing client base and learn strategies for upgrading or cross-selling them. You'll soon realize there is a great deal of hidden revenue to uncover in this process.

To rate your existing clients, begin by applying the "80-20" rule. You will probably find that 80 percent of your income comes from 20 percent of your clients. You may actually be wasting a great deal of time and energy dealing with clientele who are uncooperative and require too much energy for too little return.

Give your client base a rating from A to D. "A" clients listen to your advice, trust you, pay bills on time, send referrals and have high growth potential. "D" clients consistently don't pay or resist paying their bills and don't send referrals. By upgrading or getting rid of your "C" and "D" level clients, you can free up valuable hours for you and your staff to spend on developing your practice.

Once you determine your top-level clients, establish criteria for certain services or products you wish to promote and develop a list of attributes that are reliable predictors of these client needs. If your client information is in a database that allows you to sort by given parameters or fields, it will be easy to generate reports or lists of those clients who meet these criteria. If your information is not computerized, delegate a staff member to hand-sort your files using your list of criteria. The criteria for higher-end estate planning services, for example, could be: income above \$600,000, age above 50 and family-owned businesses.

Once you select a group, choose past clients as candidates for products and services you provide in other practice areas or that another attorney in your firm provides. Then, strategize on your own, or with other attorneys in your firm, about cross-selling or upgrading these groups and create an offer. For example:

- Call clients and schedule an appointment to update their files or discuss a particular legal concern.
- Invite a small group (either by letter or phone call) to attend a complimentary informational session at your office on a specific legal issue. Open up with a question and answer period after the initial presentation. Let clients know you will meet with them individually after the session.
- Host a VIP lunch in your conference room or at a restaurant. Select a very important client to feature and meet the other attorneys in your firm. Invite higher profile clients who have worked successfully with one member of your firm and who you think may benefit from other firm services.
- Create a questionnaire or needs analysis which you can mail or give to your clients in person. Design this questionnaire as a legal evaluation checklist that allows clients to discover where they currently stand and what they might need. Offer them a complimentary session with you to discuss the results.
- Send a cross-selling letter to clients informing them of further services provided by the firm. For example, tell them that in addition to real estate transactions, your firm has expertise in a wide variety of legal matters including corporate law, estate planning and family law. Offer your clients complimentary consultations in any of these areas.

As you're implementing these techniques with existing clients, continue to pay close attention to how you're maintaining relationships with referral sources.

Maintaining Trust and Rapport with Referral Sources:

It's no secret that the best way for you to get new business is through word-of-mouth and personal referrals. As you know, clients picked up from referrals are less expensive to find, more loyal and less price-sensitive.

Just as your clients can be separated into categories, so can your referral sources. Certain referral sources consistently send quality clients your way. We call these individuals "Rainbrokers." For Rainbrokers to refer at least one "A" or "B" level prospective client to your firm per year, they must trust you *and* remember your name. You must develop what's called

positive “top of mind” awareness. It is critical that you let them know that you appreciate their ongoing faith in you.

Find out their opinions on how you handle the referrals they send so that you will then know your source’s frustrations and standards. Do you know, for example, how quickly they would like you to see the referred clients? Or what fee structure they would be comfortable with? Or whether or not they want to be kept in the loop? Depending on your practice area, attorneys are usually your best referral source. However, it’s been shown that 70 percent of attorneys don’t refer out to other attorneys because of these frustrations.

You can interview your referral sources to find out their standards. Listen and don’t be defensive. They’ll be flattered that you cared enough to ask. Send a follow-up letter explaining how your firm will now operate when source sends a referral. If you reliably acknowledge, reward and encourage referral sources, they will support your practice for a very long time.

Mark Powers is the President of Atticus, the nation’s leading practice management education and training organization for attorneys. Shawn McNalis is Atticus’ head coach and curriculum director. For more information on Atticus seminars and programs, including Atticus Rainmakers, visit www.atticsonline.com or call 1-352-383-0490.