

15 Tips for Getting Client Referrals to Grow Your Freelance Business

By John Wood

How's your [copywriting business](#) going?

Are you getting enough work?

Or are you experiencing painful and costly gaps between good-paying assignments that seriously put a dent in your monthly income?

If so, there's an easy way to expand your customer base and pretty much fill your funnel up with as much work as you can handle.

It's based on the principle that is behind the sales power of social media:

People listen to their friends and respect their advice.

If you're not tapping into this power, you're leaving big money on the table and most likely working too hard when it comes to getting clients. Because as sales trainer Tom Hopkins notes in his book *Sales Prospecting for Dummies*, the close rate for referred leads is 6 out of 10 compared to 1 out of 10 for non-qualified leads.

And the best news of all is that once you get to a certain point, you'll find you can pretty much [get all the clients you need](#) through the referral process and rarely, if ever, have to cold call companies to solicit their services.

To do so, it's important to have a referral-acquiring system in place that you pay attention to and implement whenever appropriate. To help you get started, I've put together 15 tips to help you enhance and fine-tune your referral-acquiring skills:

- TIP #1 – It's important to set a target for your referral activity each month. This gives you something to shoot for and makes you more aware of your level of referral-acquiring activity. To determine how many, base your number on the amount of new clients you'd like to bring on board each month.

So for simplicity reasons, instead of closing six out of ten (the Tom Hopkins statistic), let's say you figure that for every two referrals, you will get one actual client. That means if you'd like to get two new clients every month, you'll need a minimum of four referrals per month.

- TIP #2 – It makes good business sense to give your clients an incentive for providing you with a referral. Maybe offer them a gift card for each referral they provide you with. If they can't personally accept gifts, offer to make a donation to

their favorite charity. Or you might want to offer them a discount off the next task you perform for them. Now, of course, you have to specify that their referrals have to result in business for you before they qualify.

- TIP #3 – When's the best time to ask for a referral? Some people say that whenever you get a new client, you should immediately ask them for three referrals. This might work for some, but I've always felt more comfortable asking for a referral after I've proved myself to a client. But it's really up to you and what you feel more comfortable with.

The best strategy might be a combination of the above. When you get a new client, after you thank them for your business, explain to them that your business, like many businesses, runs on positive word of mouth. And if you do a good job for them, you'd be most appreciative if they'd refer your services to some of their friends or business associates. Then quickly add that you're not looking for names right now. Tell them that if after you finish performing the specific work for them, they're happy with your services, you'd be grateful if they'd consider coming up with the names of three people who could also benefit from your services. This way, you set up an expectation that you will be asking them. Hopefully, this will also get them to start thinking about people they could refer to your business. Also, explain your referral rewards system to give them added incentive.

If you ask them after you've done business with them for a while, you might want to use the opening line master marketer Jay Abraham recommends in his book *Getting Everything You Can Out of All You've Got*. Jays says, "Tell your clients that you realize you enjoy doing business with them and they probably associate with other people like themselves who mirror their values and quality. Tell them you'd like to extend to them the opportunity of referring their valued and trusted associates to you." If the last line is not something you're comfortable with saying, of course, you can alter it to fit your style.

- TIP #4 – Put a system in place to acknowledge every referral you get from a client and keep them posted on your progress with their referral. Some clients won't care and they'll tell you so. But it's important to proactively keep your client posted on the status of their referral (until told otherwise).
- TIP #5 – Educate your client. Let your client know the type of businesses that typically benefit from your services. More or less describe your dream customer to your client. What industry are they in? How big are they? What stage are they at in their online marketing efforts? Also, make sure your client is aware of what services you're capable of providing businesses with. Maybe you've only provided one of your services, such as writing emails. In that case, you'll want to make them aware that you also write landing pages, home pages, etc., or whatever other services you provide.
- TIP #6 – Make it clear to your client that when you meet with, talk to, or advise the person they refer to you, they're under no obligation to go with your services. Let your client know your initial call to the person they referred to you will be to review their situation and for you to give them tips and pointers on how they can improve their online marketing services. Also, let them know that even if they don't choose to go with your services, you're confident they'll benefit from your conversation.
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TIP #7 – If you're just starting out and don't have clients to ask for referrals, you can always target people you interact with in everyday life. Make a list of people who provide you with professional and personal services and belong to the same organizations as you do. Add the names of friends and family whom you feel might be a good source for referrals.

Then put a plan together to contact them. Maybe you want to talk to them over the phone or perhaps you feel more comfortable emailing them or sending them a letter in the mail. If you feel uncomfortable about this, see the next tip.

- TIP #8 – Always remember, *you're not begging; you're offering to help others be successful*. How you feel about asking for referrals often dictates how successful you'll be. You have to be confident in the services you provide — that's a given.

But you have to view asking someone for a referral not as an inconvenience to them, but as an opportunity for them to help a friend benefit from your services through greater conversion rates and bigger profits.

Plus, it's important not to come off like you're desperate for business. Position the referral process as a natural part of your business.

- TIP #9 – If you're nervous about asking for a referral, a good way to ease into asking is to get your client involved.

Say something like, *"Let me ask you a quick question, if I may. A big part of my business is word of mouth and I'm working on putting a referral rewards system in place. What would you prefer as a token of my appreciation for referring one of your business associates or friends to me – a discount off future services or a gift certificate?"*

This is a non-threatening way of opening up the conversation – and it gets your client involved in the process. This is important because when they feel part of the process, they're more likely to act upon your referral request.

- TIP #10 – Set up a strategy to keep in touch with referrals who don't immediately give you business. If you have sales software or use an online calendar program, set it up to remind you to follow up with your referral prospects in a few months (or whatever time period is appropriate for their specific situation). Plus, make sure you add them to your newsletter subscription list if you have one.

But don't just forget about them. It only takes a couple of minutes to follow up with them down the road, and it could pay off for you big time.

- TIP #11 – Send a "Thank You" card. Now, obviously, once you get a referral, you'll thank the person who gave it to you over the phone and/or via email. Why not send a thank-you card to them through regular mail? I guarantee your client will appreciate it. Plus, it will make you stand out from the pack because few people mail out thank-you cards these days.
- TIP #12 – Create a log to track your referrals. Use your sales software, or at minimum, set up a database in Excel. This way, you can quickly see at a glance where you stand and what actions you should be taking in the future.

- TIP #13 – Ask for testimonials at the same time. If you haven't asked for a testimonial from your client, make sure you ask them either before or after you ask them for a referral.

When you receive a testimonial from a client, it could serve as a good lead-in for asking for a referral. Say something along the lines of, *"Thanks for your testimonial. I really appreciate it. Since you're obviously happy with the service I've provided you, and much of my business is built on excellent word of mouth, do you know of any business associates or friends who would benefit from my services? Before you answer, I'd like to tell you about my referral program. For every referral I receive from you that turns into a paying client, I'll give you a \$50 gift certificate good at Name of Store."*

- TIP #14 – If you use a business card, the next time you order a batch, add something along the lines of: "Ask about my very generous referral program." If you hand out enough of them, it could be just the thing that tips the scales in your favor when your prospect is deciding what copywriter to call.
- TIP #15 – If your client likes your services, ask them to write about it on social media sites. This is an excellent way to promote your business and could result in some good leads coming into your business without you lifting a finger. Ask them to recommend you on LinkedIn, tweet about you on Twitter, "Like" you on Facebook, or post a description of what you've done for them and how happy they are on an appropriate message board.

One thing I can tell you for sure, if you don't ask, you'll rarely receive. Put a plan together to continually ask for referrals and you'll quickly find you'll never again have to worry about running out of paying assignments – which will skyrocket your income and help you meet and exceed all of your [copywriting](#) and money goals.

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2 Responses to "15 Tips for Getting Client Referrals to Grow Your Freelance Business"

These are golden tips and I'll use every single one

Guest (butch247) – over a year ago

I am a certified networker by the Referral Institute in Sweden (ReferensAkademin), so this post is an example on what we learn in this course. It is always good to repeat stuff and remind yourself of how well referral marketing could work for you. I got some tips on how to lead in the conversation into a referral reward program. I am a member of networking group that will have that in place online, combined with physical meetings.

Guest (Martin Lindeskog) – over a year ago

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