

How Others Can Promote Your Business

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“If there’s anything I can do to help you, just say the word.” A well-intentioned but meaningless phrase? Heck no!

Friends and supporters are among your most valuable assets. Don’t let opportunities dissolve into thin air. Take them at their word. They probably *really do* want to help you succeed. But you haven’t given much thought to this valuable way to beef up your business. Why not say, “Well, thanks for bringing that up. Will you introduce me to people you know? Or can you send my business card with a personal note?”

Be prepared with *specific ways* they can help your business in a meaningful way. Start by setting aside some time to think it through; just like you would if a high-priced consultant were advising you.

Friends and supporters can bring you referrals for new business, if you’re prepared to tell them how. Your competition is probably building their business on personal referrals and repeat customers. You should too. Start a list of the kinds of people that would be the most valuable prospects for your business, along with names of those who might know them.

Here are some of the advantages available to your enterprise, and some ways to think through a systematic approach to referral marketing.

- **Let friend and supporters provide referrals.** Ask for names of specific individuals who need what your company offers. Additionally, your friends can pass on your name and number to others. If you take advantage of these opportunities consistently, you’ll increase the percentage of business through referrals. (Give them extra business cards to hand out.) Ask if you can follow up directly with a low-key offer to meet for coffee, etc.
- **Let them introduce you to prospects.** Your contacts can give you more than names and numbers. They can help build new relationships on the fast track by introducing you to folks that are likely to need what you offer. And they can help improve your chances for success by giving you some key information about the prospect. At the same time, they can “warm up” the prospect by talking about how they came to know you, some of the things you have in common with the prospect and the value your company can offer.
- **Let them endorse your company’s products or services.** Your contacts can encourage others to try out your company by talking during *informal* conversations (no sales pitch) about the *benefits* they’ve enjoyed.
- **Let them display your products or promotional material.** If they place your literature on their company bulletin board or customer counter, visitors will ask questions or take a copy to read later. Ideally, some might take your promotional materials and place them in more places, increasing your visibility and the number of potential contacts. Do you have point-of-purchase displays or collateral marketing materials? Put them to use!

- **Let them distribute your information or marketing materials.** Examples include a take-out restaurant that inserts your flier or “sell sheet” with every bag, or a dry cleaner that attaches a coupon to each plastic bag that covers clean clothes. They might even be able to insert your page into their organization’s newsletter.
- **Let them help get your story published.** If your market is business-to-business, there are numerous specialized, niche magazines, newsletters and Web sites that target the decision-makers you need. It’s often a small world within industry segments and it’s not unusual to find that some of your contacts will know writers and publishers that can help get a mention or an article published about your company’s products or services.

The key to turning potential into opportunity is being as prepared as possible. The more you know about who might be of help, the faster your business will grow.

And look for opportunities to help others in the same manner. Make sure that you are always a fair and responsive business contact yourself. Many of your contacts can benefit from these same techniques when *you* provide names and introduce them to prospects that can help build their business.

And when a referral becomes a customer, be sure to recognize and reward the friend who made the connection for you. This is the vital action that can encourage your friends and supporters to send more referrals.

Think ahead and develop a list of ways to reward friends and supporters who help you. Plan and budget the necessary funds for gifts and gestures of appreciation. Instead of email, write a personal hand-written thank you note. You don’t have to be Martha Stewart to know that the personal touch is always appreciated.

There’s no need to be shy about asking for a favor. When someone does you a favor, they get something in return: the implied promise of a favor from you.

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