

The Art of the Ask

How to Overcome the Fear
of Asking for Referrals

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BEST PRACTICES GUIDE | SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING



When you think about your main source of new business, where does it come from? If you're like most small business owners—the answer is referrals. And even though you know this to be true, it's likely you're not doing everything you can to get more referrals. Why is that?

What is it that really keeps you from asking your existing customers for a referral? You know the answer already, don't you? Fear! The thought of asking makes you feel nervous. Then the fear of rejection creeps in.

"What if they say 'no?'" "Will they think I'm being a pest?" "Will they look at me in disgust or with pity?" "Will they lose respect for me?"

The last thing you want is to bother people or make them feel uncomfortable. So instead of asking for the referral, you focus your energy elsewhere. You look for any other thing to do other than what you should, which is simply ask for the referral.

Here's a little secret...

Most people, especially happy customers, are truly glad to help when asked. There's really nothing to be afraid of at all. And if you think about it, if most of your new business comes from referrals and you're not doing everything you can to get more, shouldn't you be more afraid about all the business you're losing out on by not asking?

Don't let fear hold you back

It's time to get what you want so your business can move forward and grow. This guide is designed to make the "asking" easier for you. Whether it's in person or online. You'll learn how to ask more effectively and know the precise moment when it makes sense to ask. Let's take the fear out of asking for the referral and remove your concern so you can finally feel like the asking is a fearless task. Sound good?

Here's what we'll cover

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The Three Types of Referrals

Are there really three types of referrals? In today's socially connected world there are in fact, three types of referrals.

Let's take a closer look:

1. Traditional referrals

These are the referrals we're most accustomed to. They happen when someone is looking for a solution to a particular problem. This problem leads to the person reaching out to their network and asking, "Does anyone know anyone who can help with (insert problem here)?"

Today these referrals aren't just face-to-face interactions. They can happen both in person and online.

2. Testimonials

Testimonials are a form of referral that can continually work for your business. They can be used strategically to promote your business and to overcome objections from potential customers. They can live on your website, in your email marketing, in print, and in any other form of promotion you do for your business.

3. Online recommendations and reviews

Many online networks such as Facebook or LinkedIn and review sites like Yelp or Google+ Local allow customers to leave recommendations or reviews for the businesses they love. These recommendations and reviews come into play when potential customers are searching for businesses online. Glowing recommendations or reviews have the potential to sway the decision in your favor.

All part of your referral machine

These referrals expose your business to potential new customers. And because your business has come highly recommended, these potential new customers are already eager to do business with you.

But, as you know, before that happens, you need to ask.

Don't worry, we'll show you how.



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How to Ask for Referrals in Person Without Fear

The main reason asking for a referral creates a sense of fear is simply because it feels like a selfish act. But the reality is... it's actually not that selfish at all if you're asking in the right way.

What you're really doing is trying to help someone else find a quality solution to their problem.

Here's an example...

Let's say you're speaking with a customer and they're telling you how pleased they are with your product or service. That's the perfect time to say, "Thank you, I'm so glad you're happy. I know how hard it can be to find a good (insert your product/service). I've heard plenty of horror stories."

At this point, your customer will either agree with you or share a horror story of their own or of someone they know. That's your cue to listen, empathize, and then say, "Well, if you know of any other people having a hard time finding good work, feel free to pass along my name. Or if you have anyone in mind, I could drop them a line myself and save you the trouble."

See how this changes the situation? There's nothing to fear, you're being helpful. Not that scary now is it? You just need to make a commitment to asking for referrals when your customers are pleased with your business.

This is the perfect time to ask for a testimonial, too!

Again, let your customer know how glad you are they're pleased. Then say, "I'd love to find out more about what you liked about your experience. Would you mind if I asked you a few questions?" Most people will be happy to answer the questions for you.

If possible, record their answers so you don't have to take notes. You can then transcribe the audio later. You can even email the questions if they'd rather answer them that way.

Once they've answered the questions ask, "Would it be okay if I used your comments in a testimonial?" Then you'll have some great feedback you can use on your promotional materials.

Marketing strategist, Sean D'Souza (psychotactics.com) offers **six questions that help you get great testimonials** and give you insight into what hesitations people may have had before they became your customers. Keep the following six questions handy:

1. Was there any hesitation that would have prevented you from buying this product/service?
2. What did you find as a result of buying this product/service?
3. What specific feature did you like most about this product/service?
4. What would be three other benefits about this product/service?
5. Would you recommend this product/service? If so why?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

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Should you have a referral program?

Depending on the nature of your business, referral programs offer an additional incentive to existing customers who refer your business to their friends.

California-based Gourmet Coffee Service offers a day at the spa for customers who refer people who become new clients of the business.

Referral programs work for businesses big and small.

If you decide a referral program is right for your business, be sure to let people know it exists. You can do this in person and online.

Just remember...

Happy customers are happy to help you. Keep this in mind and there'll be nothing to fear.

Now let's take a look at how you can ask online.



The Holiday Collection

from
Gourmet Coffee Service

[Click Here to Order Yours!](#)



Like us on Facebook 

We're giving away over \$10,000 in weekly prizes to our fans

Enjoy a Spa Day On Us!

7 Awarded This Year



Refer a Friend

and when they become a client, you get to relax.

[Click Here](#)

GOURMET COFFEE SERVICE
HOLIDAY COLLECTION

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...

Enjoy a delicious holiday blend roasted to perfection.
Let Gavina bring out that holiday spirit in your office.

PUMPKIN SPICE
EGGNOG
CANDY CANE CREAM *NEW*

24/2.5oz Ground \$39.95 per case

Gavina is a proud supporter of the Toys for Tots Foundation. For each unit of Holiday Collection coffee

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How to Ask for Referrals Online Without Fear

With so many people sharing online, there are many opportunities for people to refer you. These referrals can come in the form of sharing your content, sharing a coupon or discount, leaving a recommendation or review on a social networking site, and—of course—a traditional referral.

So when is a good time to ask for a referral online? Just like offline, any time you're providing value or when someone responds positively to you. This is when people are happy and more apt to help you.

Keep in mind it's best to keep your "ask" within the context the person is engaging with you. For example, if someone is raving about your latest email newsletter, ask them about referring others to subscribe. Or if they contact you to rave about a product, ask them about referring others to the product.

Again, happy customers are happy to refer—no need to fear!

Let's take a look at some places you can ask online.

1. Ask in your email newsletter

Send a message similar to the following: "Thanks for subscribing to our newsletter. Do you know someone who would also benefit from this information? Please forward this link so they can sign up too." You can even offer an incentive. "Refer three friends and I'll send you a (coupon/special report/other incentive) as a thank you."

Also, plan occasional messages where you ask for something specific, like a recommendation or review for an online site like Facebook or Yelp.

2. On your website/blog

Make it easy for people to share the stuff they like. Add "share" buttons to your blog posts and webpages. Include a clear call to action to share: "Did you enjoy this post? Share it with your friends and colleagues."

3. Online workshops/webinars

When you hold an online workshop or webinar, ask registrants to forward the information to people who they know would also benefit from attending. After the webinar or workshop, send a follow-up email and ask if they'd like to share information about their experience. If they say yes, send the testimonial questions included in the previous section.

4. In your regular emails

Has someone ever sent you an email with praise about your product or service? That's the perfect time to ask for a referral. You can even include a permanent P.S. to your email signature that says, "Know someone who needs help with (problem you solve)? Send them here: (include a link to a special webpage for referrals)."

5. Co-marketing

Are there complementary businesses you can work with to extend your reach? Each of you can offer something of value to each other's audiences. And don't forget to include a line or two asking them to share these materials.

Asking online is easy

Be sure to review all your online materials. Are there any places you're not asking for a referral but should? Make updates to these places. Asking for referrals should be part of your system. The great thing about asking online is that many times you just need to remember to include the information. Once it's there, it works for you continually. Easy!

Now let's find out about those times when you don't need to ask at all.

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How to Get Referrals Without Having to Ask

Referrals without having to ask? How is that possible?

Remember people love to talk about the great experiences they have. At Constant Contact, we call them WOW! experiences. When your business does something out of the ordinary or above and beyond what is expected, customers will talk. They'll tell their friends in person and online. And when they talk online, your business benefits from the social visibility which can reach more new prospects than if the interaction happened one-to-one.

Here's how to find your WOW!

A WOW! is something that makes your customers' eyes light up. It doesn't have to be big, but it does have to be memorable or different. The best news is that you only need one or two things to make people go "WOW!"

First, map out your customer touch points and processes

Look at everything from how people find and enter your business (online and offline), how they evaluate your products and services; how they buy from you and any post-purchase follow-up or service.

Once you've mapped your customer process, trace your customers' experience yourself. Call your business to see how employees answer the phone. Send invoices or marketing collateral to your home address to see how materials arrive and look from your customers' perspective. Test your online shopping cart—just how easy or hard is it to purchase from you? Ask a friend or colleague to be a secret-shopper and give you a full run-down.

Look for the "little" bumps or glitches in your process, smooth those out, and then look for one or two places where you can create a WOW!

"To Go" parking spaces — huge WOW!

A pizzeria, for example, had "pizza to go" customers complaining. During really busy times when the parking lot filled up, people had to park in the next lot. To get to the pizza place, they had to cross a busy bypass road that divided the two parking lots. Picking up a pizza—especially with young kids in tow—was a little dangerous.

The store owner talked to his landlord and had two parking spaces right outside his storefront designated as "Pizzeria to Go Customers Only"—with a time limit of 10 minutes. Problem solved. Happy customers. WOW!

Focus your WOW! in places that reinforce your differentiation, not the basics.

Test your WOW!

If you're not sure that your WOW! is working for you—or if it's the right one—test it. Listen carefully to feedback. Look to see what makes people respond or what lights up their eyes.

Look at the feedback you receive in email, on social media or review sites, or what people say to you or your team during conversations. Write down what you read and hear—you'll know soon enough if your WOW! is registering with people.

A WOW! gets people talking

These WOW! moments create situations where you don't need to ask for a referral because people are thrilled with the experience you've provided. Powerful stuff when it comes to word-of-mouth referrals.

The More You Ask, the More You'll Grow

Remember, most people like to help other people they know, like, and trust. Remind yourself that the worst that can happen is that your client says, "No." Not that terrible when you think about the benefit from those who say, "Yes." Make asking for the referral part of your routine. When you've completed a transaction with a happy customer, that's the perfect time to ask for a referral.

Now go forth without fear and ask for referrals to help your business grow. You can do it!

We'd love to hear about your success with finding new customers. Send us an email at partnerfeedback@constantcontact.com.

Did you find this guide useful? Feel free to pass it along to a friend.

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