

7 Steps For Attracting an Endless Stream of Referrals

Many healers and holistic practitioners seek clients through referral sources and if you are not one of them, you should be! Building your business through referrals is one of the best ways to have a constant stream of clients flowing into your practice. The best referral sources are those that you can build mutually beneficial relationships with, where there is a relationship of give and take on both sides.

If your attempts at getting referrals for your private practice are failing to bring in the number of clients you wish to have, following the 7 steps below are sure to get more of them knocking at your door.

1. Determine Your Best Referral Sources

Begin with the people you already know and think about who might be in a position to refer to you. Who is most likely to have access to your target market that could also benefit by referring to you? Who are the people that are "centers of influence" in that they seem to know everybody?

After you have thoroughly gone through your own contact list, ask your friends and colleagues for people they might know, but be sure to be specific as to the kind of people you ask for. Finally, brainstorm other professionals whom you think might be appropriate and make a list of who they are and then seek them out. Determining your best referral sources in a logical and systematic way will greatly increase your referral rate in the long run.

2. Get Clear Before You Contact Potential Referral Sources

You must think through what you're going to say to potential referral sources before you contact them. This includes being clear about your marketing message (knowing who your clients are, the problems they are having, and the ways you help them), as well as having ideas on how you might want to partner with them. You don't want to sound like you are unclear or confused in what you are doing and end up leaving a bad impression.

3. Make Contact With Your Potential Referral Sources

If it's someone you know or a name given to you by a friend or colleague, you might want to call and offer to take the person out for lunch. If that doesn't work or seems inappropriate, you might want to simply speak to the

person on the phone. If you are contacting someone completely cold (e.g. a name from the phonebook or other directory), I suggest you write the person a letter first advising who you are, the services you offer, and how you might be of benefit. In the letter, let the person know that you will be following up with a phone call in the near future (usually within a week or two at the most).

Once you are in conversation with potential referral sources, focus on listening to them. Learn everything you can about the challenges they are having with their business and what they need in order to solve their problems. Ask lots of questions and make sure to limit your own talking. Through doing this, not only will you build rapport by making the person feel heard and understood, you will also learn valuable information that will help you if you end up partnering with them.

4. Follow-Up and Keep in Touch With Potential Referral Sources

Unless you know for sure there is no interest from a potential referral source during the first attempt at making contact, make sure you follow up with the person. This means if you don't get a call back or a response to your initial letter, don't give up. As with all marketing strategies, follow-up is key to succeeding.

Now, I am not suggesting you pester a potential referral source with endless phone calls and letters. But recognize that people have busy lives and that a lack of immediate response doesn't necessarily mean they are not interested. It takes time to build relationships of trust, so you must be persistent and patient.

Remember too, that there are many different ways of following up. Maybe you have an article or some other piece of information that could be value to a potential referral source or his or her clients. If so, you could send it to the person as part of your follow-up strategy.

You must also develop a strategy for keeping in touch with referral sources on a regular basis. Once you have built relationships of trust through repeated contact, you will notice that the referrals will start coming. There are numerous ways to keep in touch. For example, send note cards, holiday cards, articles of interest, phone calls, etc. Be systematic about how often you get in touch (e.g. monthly, quarterly).

5. Contact Prospective Clients Immediately Once Referred to You

When you do get a potential client from a referral source it's important that you contact the person as soon as possible. If you leave it too long the potential client may have lost interest or have found another way to solve his or her problem. People are impressed and appreciative when you respond quickly. It shows you care about the potential client and that you are professional in the way you do business. Further, it shows your referral source that they can rely on you to respond quickly which builds trust.

6. Advise Referral Sources That Prospective Clients Have Contacted You

Unless confidentiality is an issue, let your referral sources know that the person who was referred has contacted you (or that you have contacted him or her). Keeping referral sources in the loop in this way lets them know that you are worthy of their referrals and prevents them from wondering what happened. If they are concerned about the person, it will also provide them with some comfort knowing that you have made contact.

7. Thank Referral Sources for Every Client They Refer to You

You can thank your referral sources by contacting them directly via phone, sending them a nice card, treating them to lunch, or perhaps even giving them a small gift. Always say thank you in some way, whether or not the person they referred becomes a client. Remember, if you want to keep the referrals coming, you must put effort into the relationship on an ongoing basis.

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Juliet Austin is a Marketing Coach, Consultant & Copywriter who assists counselors and other professionals in building successful practices. Her focus is on helping her clients overcome their fears, learn no or low-cost marketing strategies, create effective promotional materials, and develop and follow through on a plan of action. In addition to her coaching and consulting, Juliet offers various workshops and teleclasses on a variety of both on and off—line marketing topics. She is a graduate of CoachU and The Institute for Life Coach Training. Juliet is also a member of The School of Coaching and Director of the Canadian Office of The Institute for Life Coach Training.

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