

The Number One Strategy for Attracting More Clients

By Robert Middleton

When I ask Independent Professionals where they find most of their new clients, most answer "by word-of-mouth." But ironically, very few have any strategy for increasing word-of-mouth business. They just do the best job they can and "pray" for referrals. Well, that's not enough.

In the past I've written about many ways to many to generate word-of-mouth business, but in this special report I'll be focusing on just one method, the approach that works the very best at generating more referrals.

Even though most people know about this method, it always surprises me how few people use it consistently. It's a bit like a magic ring that we forget to rub. In this report I'll explain what this method is, how it works, and give several specific examples of how you can implement it in your own business. I'll end with a 4-step Action Plan.

I've met Independent Professionals who use this method almost exclusively to generate word-of-mouth business and several have shared with me that this one technique has been responsible for completely filling their practices. Later on I'll be sharing an interview with consultant Andrea Nierenberg, perhaps one of the foremost practitioners of this art.

There seems to be no limit to how many ways and variations there are to market your business. The key however is not to search out the "ultimate technique" but to start to implement the most simple techniques immediately and then expand to more sophisticated

ones. You may find however, that some of the simplest techniques are also the best.

So what is this method that will generate so much word of mouth business? What is this strategy that I consider so important that I've put it into a private report? What is this technique that is so simple, so easy and so inexpensive that anyone can use it from the very first day they go into business? What is this approach that is so powerful, once you see the results you'll want to keep doing it until the day you retire?

The number one way to generate referrals is this:

Hand-Written Thank-You Notes or Cards.

Now before you dismiss this as a bunch of fluff, stick with me. I'm going to prove it to you and show you so many ways to use this referral generation method that you'll be able to use it every single day.

Why do people refer business in the first place?

Several reasons. One, people like to refer business. It makes them feel good. People are making a contribution when they refer business. They are doing a "good deed" and that makes them feel good about themselves. Given the opportunity, people would refer business to others all day long.

Another reason is the law of reciprocity. If people feel they owe you something, they are more likely to give you something in return. One of the things they will give is referrals.

One more reason is the law of affinity. If people feel that you like them they will often go out of the way to help you. People get so little appreciation these days that when someone appreciates them they are likely to talk about it.

Because of these three factors, thank-you notes are the ideal marketing tool and generator of referrals. But there's also some things to consider when talking about word-of-mouth business.

How exactly does word-of-mouth business happen?

You provide a service. The client talks about it. The level of enthusiasm, conviction, delight and other factors increase the chances that the person hearing about your business will check out your service. It might take that client talking about you five times, ten times or twenty times before someone picks up the phone and calls you.

What you are trying to do in increasing word-of-mouth business is very simple. You are attempting to increase the level of enthusiasm, conviction and delight in your client.

Think about how you decide to go to a movie. It doesn't work like this:

You: "I went to a movie yesterday, the name of the movie was XYZ."

Them: "Great I think I'll go to that movie too."

In the same way, when someone is talking about your business it doesn't go like this:

You: "I worked with xyz management consultant on a project this month."

Them: "Great, I need a management consultant, please give me their name so that I can use them as well."

If this were the case there would be no need of marketing at all. Word-of-mouth would be instant and frequent. You'd just need a project or two and before you knew it, you'd have all the business you could handle.

What really happens in the course of the conversation above is that the person speaking with you asks several questions: "What did they do for you, what was it like working with them, did they produce the result you were looking for. etc."

If you respond with enthusiasm, conviction and delight, the chances are much higher that you'll get that call. So our job is to intentionally do whatever we can to increase those kinds of responses from our clients.

Little Things Make All the Difference

Our clients expect us to get the job done. They expect results. They expect good service. They expect us to keep our word. So if you give all of these things to a client you'll be giving them exactly what they expect. You can't offer less than this and expect to get word-of-mouth business.

But if you give them more than they expect, you'll start getting the enthusiasm, conviction and delight that results in much more-word-of mouth business.

And what I'm saying is that hand-written thank you notes and cards are the very foundation of that "More-Than-You-Expect" strategy.

Think back to the few times you've received a hand-written thank-you card or note. Didn't it make you feel good? Didn't it make you feel that this person really cared? Didn't it make you feel good about the person who sent the note? Wasn't it something special, a bright spot in your day?

That's exactly why they work so well. And the more you use them, the better they work.

Hand-written thank-you cards and notes work to generate more word-of-mouth business because:

- It's unexpected and it makes people feel good
- It really shows you care and are thinking about them
- Shows that you're organized and on top of details
- Increases both your trust and affinity with people
- Demonstrates that you went out of your way to do something for them
- Gives them something tangible and physical that reminds them of you
- Is easy to show to co-workers and associates
- Is easy and inexpensive for you to do
- Can be done virtually every day
- Can be done no matter what your budget is
- Doesn't take any real "marketing smarts"
- Makes you feel good as well as bonded to the client

So when do you send hand-written thank-you notes and cards?

Frequently, regularly and systematically.

This isn't something you do once in awhile. This can become your core, central marketing activity. Andrea Nierenberg, who I'll talk about in a minute, has something she calls "The Power of Three." She makes a habit of sending at least 3 thank-you cards every single day. If you can't imagine doing that, Andrea suggests doing it like you take vitamins - one-a-day at minimum!

When should you send thanks-yous and what should you say?

When you've set an appointment

Set the tone of your meeting by letting them know you're looking forward to getting together with them.

"I really look forward to meeting with you next Tuesday about the possibility of helping you in your distribution efforts. I've enclosed some additional information on our services. I'll see you at 1:00 p.m."

When you get new business

As soon as you close a deal, your hand-written note will make them feel confident that they've engaged you.

"Thank you so much for having confidence in me for this upcoming project. I'm really looking forward to working with you and your staff. I'll see you bright and early on Monday."

When you complete a project

When you're all done with a project, a hand-written note gives closure and increases the chances they'll hire you again.

"It's been great working with you on the XYZ Project. Working with you has been very rewarding and I'm excited that we were able to accomplish the objectives we set. Looking forward to the next time we can work together."

When you get a referral

Don't just send a note when you get the business from the referral. Send a note right after you've spoken or met with the referral, even if you didn't get the project, thanking them for referring you. When you get the project, send another note.

"I truly appreciate the lead to ABC company. They called me today and we had a very productive conversation. I'll be meeting with them next Thursday. I'll keep you posted on how it goes."

"I recently got a new assignment in the XYZ division. Again, I'm thankful to you for bringing me into to ABC Company. I've done 5 successful projects so far and it wouldn't have happened without you!"

When someone helps you

It could be anything. Someone gives you a resource, an idea a compliment, an encouragement. They get a note as well.

"Thanks for saving me the other day! That information was just what I needed for that project. I'm glad I can always count on you in a pinch. If you need anything, do let me know."

When you meet a new contact

Through a networking event, through a business associate or any other business situation. Write a note on the back of their card so you don't forget them and send a thank-you note the following day.

"Great meeting you at the association gathering last night. Here's a copy of that article I mentioned. If there's any way I can help you make contacts in the association, please don't hesitate to give me a call."

Wow, that's a lot of notes, you say. Yes it is, but you want to make it such a habit that you do it almost instinctually. You do it as a way of doing business, as a way of life. And after all, it's not such a big deal; you can do a complete note, including address and stamp in about 2 minutes flat.

Does this work? Let me introduce Andrea Nierenberg.

I recently wrote the lead article in a publication called Consulting Today. So when reading the issue I came upon an article Andrea had written, Non-Stop Networking. It was excellent. I looked up her web site and then gave her a call. I was impressed with her ideas on what she calls "Self Marketing." Her web site is selfmarketing.com. Make sure you check it out because she has all kinds of useful articles, plus some great tapes for sale.

I asked Andrea if I could interview her about her use of thank-you notes, her main marketing activity. Andrea has built a non-stop word-of-mouth business, almost entirely through hand-written

thank-you notes and cards. Yes, she also sends email thank-yous when appropriate and even sends out a quarterly newsletter (and somehow manages to personalize all 3,500 with a short note! - "Hi Robert, hope you're doing well - Andrea").

The "Thank-You Chain"

Andrea sends out notes for all the occasions listed above - and more. She calls this the "Thank-You Chain." She gets a lead. She sends the person who gave her the lead a thank-you note. She calls the lead. If it turns into a meeting, she sends a thank-you note. If she doesn't get the meeting, she sends a thank-you note. Everyone in the organization who helps her in any way gets a thank-you note.

Especially when she gets a new project within the company, she sends a note to the person who got her into the company in the first place.

Guess what? Nobody forgets Andrea! She's the "thank-you note" lady. One of her clients has a drawer full of Andrea's thank-you notes! He said he'd be depressed if he stopped getting them!

Not only does Andrea get a lot of business because of thank-you notes, she KEEPS a lot of her business. Can you imagine another vendor (Andrea does sales and marketing workshops and other training) getting the business? It doesn't happen because Andrea has the client in "Golden Handcuffs." They LOVE her. After all, she's always thanking people!

Recently Andrea had a meeting with a client who didn't show up. The client's PR person and salesperson were there. What did Andrea do? After she got home she sent the media person and salesperson thank-you cards acknowledging them for their professionalism. Soon after she got a call to do work for the chairman of the company! From disaster to triumph. Andrea has had this kind of thing happen time and time again.

When Andrea does a training session she not only sends a note to the client, she sends a note to everyone who attended the seminar! That's right. Everyone. She usually writes them on the plane on the way home. Do you think this is overdoing it? Not at all, because it usually ends up generating even more business. Once when writing thank-you notes on a plane the person beside her asked, "are you a professional note-writer?" Andrea explained what she was doing. That person ended up hiring her for a project -- several projects, in fact.

Some Tips for Making Thank-You Notes Work

Buy lots of thank-you cards and postcards and note paper.

Bring these with you, especially when you travel.

Bring stamps with you as well.

Write the note immediately or as soon as you can - don't wait until tomorrow.

Make each note personal and sincere. It doesn't need to be long. Two to four lines is fine.

How About Email Thank-Yous?

Email thank-yous, by their very nature are less personal, however a few months ago I realized the importance of email when an associate sent me an email praising my eZine and web site. I neglected to respond. I just appreciated the appreciation and went on to something else. A couple weeks later I got a flame (nasty email) saying that it sucks that I hadn't responded to his compliment.

I didn't like hearing this but I knew he was right. From that point on I've made it a habit to respond to every single email (other than spam) as quickly and as courteously as possible. Who knows, that person may be my next biggest client.

Email, of course has many benefits and that's its instantaneous nature. One thing that has really worked for me is to provide a gift

whenever someone finds a typo in my InfoGuru Manual. I put up a Typo Alert on the first page of the manual telling I'll reward anyone with a free report if they find any typos. Now I get one or two messages a day from people who just got the manual. I respond immediately with a link to a free report. As a result these people are so grateful that they go over the manual with a fine-tooth comb, finding even more. (Someday I hope this won't be necessary!)

So my rule of thumb is that if someone contacts me through email, that's the medium I use for response. For everything else I now use written cards and send them by snail mail.

Little Extras

Sometimes the occasion calls for more than a thank you card or note. Something that always works is sending newspaper or magazine clippings - articles, cartoons or other items relevant to your recipient. How about advertising specialties? Andrea has a great one - a little plastic case. When you open it, it's a mirror, about 3" X 2" and says opposite the mirror: CAN YOUR SMILE BE HEARD? It made me smile and it no doubt refers to a point made in one of Andrea's seminars.

The point is, thank-you notes and cards are just a starting point. From there on be as creative as you like. But ultimately you're doing the same thing no matter what you send; you're acknowledging someone for helping you in some way. I promise that it will come back to you tenfold.

**You now know the Number One Strategy
to Generate More Referrals and Word-of-Mouth Business.**

This is it. This is the one. It works. It works like magic. Andrea calls it the "34¢ Marketing Strategy." Three notes a day will cost you about \$1 per day or about \$22 per month. That you can afford. The time - maybe half hour a day. Perhaps less. That you can fit in. Now it's time to take action.

A Word About Guilt

Many of us were urged to write thank-you notes when we got a present. If you're at all like me, you really didn't know what to say. I was intimidated by a thank-you note sent by a cousin for a Christmas present from my mother. The note was so well written, so upbeat, so sincere, that my mother read it aloud to everyone in my family. I always felt I should be able to do as well. I never did. So I'm someone with "thank-you note guilt."

If you're in the same boat, I suggest forgiving yourself.

You really don't need to write a literary masterpiece. It's the thought that counts. Make them short and sweet and simple like my examples above. I promise that if you get into the thank-you note habit you'll feel better about your business than you ever have before. A good time to write them is at the end of the day because it ends your day on a positive note - pun intended!

Your Thank-You Note Action Plan

1. Get some thank you notes. Here's a place on the web I found the other day for some very nice note cards. Another one is Cardstore.com which enables you to do customized cards. Your local office supply store also will have these at a reasonable price.
2. Buy several dozen nice postcards as well.
3. Later on you can get personalized cards designed, but don't wait for that.
4. Send out your first cards today. Yes, today! And then make it a habit to do it every day from now on.

Don't procrastinate. Do it now!

Wishing you all the best for your business,

Robert M.

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