

# Unleash the Power of Your Referral Engine

By Robert Gerrish

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As every marketing consultant will tell you, the most cost effective way to grow your business is through referral. Referrals are the delightful consequence of others doing your selling for you. So why do referrals happen and what can we do to generate more?

Here are my secrets for unleashing the power of your referral engine

Isn't it wonderful when the phone rings and you find yourself talking to someone who already knows what you do, probably has a good idea of what you charge and is, in effect, poised to become a client. Oh what a feeling!

Every good business - whether involved in the sale of products or services - can enjoy a steady flow of referrals and yet very few do anything about generating them; opting instead to sit by the phone, waiting and hoping.

To build a powerful referral engine - and we all can - we first have to understand who refers for us.

The simple answer: Advocates.

Advocates are people who believe in us. They look to move us forward in our business and are pro-active in their supportive behaviour towards us.

Ponder for a moment: Can you think of people around your business right now who fit this category? What are you doing to support their efforts? What more could you do?

Advocates deserve our close attention. We should make a fuss of them and take steps to speak with them regularly.

Sometimes we have advocates who don't quite get it right -family members are a common such group. Perhaps they don't fully understand what we do or who we do it for. For advocates to be effective they must have a good grasp of our business offerings and a strong sense of our ideal client.

So how do we enlist the support of more advocates?

In most cases advocates have made it to that position themselves. They may have experienced our business first hand or heard of our expertise from others - either way they're likely to have moved through a sequence. Understanding this sequence and the categories that exist is the key to generating more advocates and, thereby, more referrals.

The sequence may be summarised as:

- [] Strangers - the contacts we've yet to make
- [] Acquaintances - those we have had minor contact with
- [] Friends - that is 'business friends', people with whom we have some warmth
- [] Fans - supporters, though not quite advocates
- [] Advocates - bullseye!

Understanding this sequence and recognising where people are around us - in which category - is the key to unleashing the real power of business referrals.

As an exercise, write down the names of people around your business under each category and brainstorm steps to move them closer. Here are some ideas to get you started:

Moving acquaintances to friends:

Follow up on conversations and show a genuine interest in what's going in their business and life.

Friends to fans:

Talk about your recent business successes; share your personal values and beliefs; demonstrate your integrity (which means it must be in good shape).

Fans to advocates:

Invite them! Often all a fan needs to become an advocate is an invitation to step up to the position.

Robert Gerrish supports business owners on a path to loving their work. From his base in Sydney, he coaches clients from the US, Europe & Australasia. To receive more of his tips subscribe to his Flying Solo ezine at <http://www.flyingsolo.com.au>

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