

Super Lawyers®

MASTER THE ART OF REFERRALS





A SOURCE OF BUSINESS you can't overlook

For many people, a home is the most expensive purchase they'll ever make. While real estate websites and mobile apps can help buyers identify houses they might be interested in, having an experienced agent to facilitate the process is critical. And longtime real estate agents know that one of the strongest and least expensive ways to gain new business is to tap into their existing client base for referrals. In fact, research shows that referrals are the number one source of business for real estate agents.*

It's the same for attorneys. Building a referral network is one of the most profitable ways to build a successful legal practice. Oftentimes, people hiring an attorney are dealing with injury or financial distress, or planning for a loved one's death. These are extremely personal matters, and having someone vouch for your services can make

all the difference in providing a comfort level for prospective clients.

The fact of the matter is, even in today's fast-paced society, many of us still consider word-of-mouth references to be the most trustworthy. Think about your own experiences when you have made a significant decision. Purchasing a home, for instance: Would you be more likely to use a real estate agent whom you found online but know little about, or someone whom friends and family have recommended?

In short, to grow your law practice, you need to cultivate a strong referral network. This guide will help you do just that, providing specific tactics on developing and maintaining relationships with referral sources, both clients and other attorneys.

** 2014 Properties Online Annual Report*

STRENGTHEN

your referral network

Having a great performance history isn't enough if you don't have a network that knows about it. A strong referral base is built over a period of time and is based on cultivating meaningful relationships with referral sources, both clients and other attorneys. Referrals are powerful because they come from a credible third-party source that has experienced firsthand the benefits of doing business with you.

This playbook provides five tactics for maximizing referral sources:

- 1 Deliver high-quality customer service
- 2 Nurture relationships with clients
- 3 Showcase your expertise
- 4 Cultivate your referral network
- 5 Diversify your online properties

These strategies might seem obvious, but attorneys often don't take advantage of them as much as they should. The goal of this playbook is to raise awareness of the simple steps you can take as an attorney to increase the effectiveness of your attorney referral network and, in turn, gain more quality leads and future business to help expand your firm.

“Super Lawyers has been a great asset in referral business, especially from lawyers outside my own state referring me business, and when I look for lawyers in other states for clients. I know that using Super Lawyers Magazine or the online directory will find clients the best in our business across the country.”

John A. Lentine
Sheffield & Lentine, P.C.
Birmingham, Alabama

1 DELIVER

high-quality customer service

Making a strong first impression and providing exceptional customer service are the first steps to engaging a potential referral. Responding to a prospective client within two hours as well as providing a free consultation will assist in building rapport for a trusting relationship. In addition, keeping an open line of communication regarding things like trial dates, fees, documents or progress will help eliminate confusion. One client may prefer an email while another may prefer a phone call. Whatever the case, be adaptable to the unique needs of each client.

Determine what the client wants to see happen and how they expect the attorney

relationship to work. While all clients hope for good news, it is important for an attorney to be realistic about their chances of success. Spending a little extra time communicating in the beginning can make for an amicable partnership.

Clients may not necessarily remember everything they heard when they visited your office, but they will remember how they felt. Providing top-notch customer service and showing that you're there to advocate on their behalf will lead them to boast about your services. Ultimately, asking clients for testimonials to use on your website or marketing collateral can reaffirm that your claims are credible and your services are legitimate.

TECHNIQUES TO HELP PROVIDE EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE:

DEVELOP A CLIENT INTAKE PLAN

A good intake process converts referrals into clients. It serves the law firm by managing issues like data collection and case qualification while also aligning with consumer values and expectations.

SHOW EMPATHY

Actively listen to clients when they are speaking and convey your understanding of the difficult situation they are in. Expressing a desire to help through thoughtful questioning will make a client feel more like a person and less like another case.

GET FEEDBACK

Exceptional customer service also means communicating once a resolution has been reached by sending out a client service questionnaire. This will give clients the chance to let you know how they felt about your service and suggest ways you can improve.



2 NURTURE relationships with clients

When it comes to generating new business at your firm, a productive strategy is to ask your current clients for referrals. Staying in touch with simple things like holiday cards, birthday cards, lunch outings, gifts or event tickets shows that you care about your relationship. Other approaches to sustaining referral relationships include inviting clients to an open house at your office or hosting seminars in your areas of expertise.

Yet another way to engage current and past clients is by sending out a monthly e-newsletter that highlights legal trends, spotlights new employees and provides updates to recent cases. An e-newsletter is not only an inexpensive way to stay in touch, but it is also a valuable place to showcase achievements that your firm has earned.

Whichever methods of outreach you choose, the most important thing to realize is that your current client base is a valuable source of word-of-mouth referrals—a source you need to maintain.

“My selection to the Rising Stars list has helped me start my own firm this year. The prestige of being selected has enticed clients and other attorneys, who recognize the honor, to reach out to me and our firm to refer business to them and collaborate on cases. When you are the new firm, this type of selection makes a big difference to your credibility.”

Jessica Sleater
Andersen Sleater, LLC
New York, New York

HEAR FROM OUR SELECTEES

When it comes to thanking clients, advisory board member Andrew L. Oringer, from Dechert LLP in New York City, takes a broad approach. From sending out T-shirts branded with his practice area (the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, or “ERISA”) to taking a client team to a Broadway show with his wife, he’s made lighthearted client interactions into a substantial part of his business.



Andrew L. Oringer
Dechert LLP
New York, New York

3 SHOWCASE your expertise

As previously mentioned, expertise and reputation is the number one factor when a referring attorney sends a case. Building a name for

yourself in the community or doing self promotion relevant to your practice can lead to an increase in visibility.

STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU PROMOTE YOUR EXPERTISE:

PUBLIC SPEAKING

If you're trying to get your name out there, there's no better platform than public speaking. Professional organizations like the ABA (American Bar Association) or NALP (National Association for Law Placement) often have public lectures in need of speakers. If the opportunity arises, it's important to show your expertise.

WRITING

Use social media, a blog or a magazine, to share your ideas and become a thought leader. Identify publications related to your field that accept submissions and send them an article you have written. It can be a great way to communicate your passion and bring new people into your network.



VOLUNTEERING

Taking time to help out local organizations provides an opportunity to cultivate professional relationships while giving back to the community. You may not provide everyone you meet with legal services, but if they know you're an attorney and trust you as a person, they will be more likely to give you a referral.

EXHIBITING YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Whether it's a recognition plaque on your wall or a framed certificate at your desk, be sure to exhibit your accomplishments for all to see. Showcasing these achievements establishes instant credibility with clients and builds a sense of trust that they've come to the right firm for their legal needs.

4 CULTIVATE your referral network

Clients aren't the only valuable source of referrals, of course. The study and practice of law has connected you to a vast network of professionals. That network can include former law school classmates, attorneys in different practice areas or members of a professional network in which you belong. All of these individuals can serve as strong referral sources. Your professional colleagues understand the value of expertise and client management, and the importance of setting expectations with the client. In fact, 79 percent of attorneys see their referral sources positively in terms of referring clients back.*

In the world of referrals, you get what you give. That means, first of all, that you need to be a source of referrals yourself. When you come into contact with prospective clients you cannot help, make every effort to refer them on to someone else. Secondly, many lawyers have clients who have needs that are outside their area of expertise or location. Being extremely clear about the type of services you offer through an integrated marketing approach can allow you to be identified by attorneys in different practice areas and help build your national reputation. Exposure in publications such as *Super Lawyers Magazine*, which is sent to all attorneys in the state bar and online attorney directories, is a key tactic in marketing your firm and its services.

46% of selected attorneys have referred a client to a fellow selected attorney four or more times in the past year*

At Super Lawyers, we take pride in our patented selection process, which produces a credible, comprehensive and diverse listing of outstanding attorneys that can be used as a resource for referring attorneys and consumers searching for legal counsel. We also provide a built-in attorney referral network that allows selectees to celebrate their achievement and to network with colleagues at our networking receptions. And our online directory offers selectees yet another way to broadcast their expertise and accolades.

*2015 Super Lawyers Attorney Referral Survey

HEAR FROM OUR SELECTEES

Kansas City criminal defense attorney Chris Angles takes a distinctive approach when it comes to keeping in touch with fellow attorneys. Once a year, he hosts a "fight night," where he invites up to 20 attorneys to watch a boxing match or mixed martial arts contest. "The business of being an attorney is all about making connections," says Angles. "Hosting events and socializing with people who refer cases my way keeps me top of mind for their future legal needs."



Chris Angles
The Angles Law Firm
Kansas City, Missouri

5 DIVERSIFY your online properties

Did you know that 87 percent of legal consumers who choose to contact an attorney end up hiring one? In fact, 72 percent of those consumers considered or contacted only one attorney before making a hiring decision.*

Getting referrals is one thing. But how easy do you make it for potential clients to contact your firm? Your online presence needs to make contacting your firm as seamless as possible, any time of day.

TACTICS FOR HAVING A ROBUST ONLINE PRESENCE:

KEEP AN UPDATED WEBSITE

People will be searching online for your firm, so make sure your website contains the most accurate, up-to-date information. Multiple pages of content highlighting practice area specialties, attorney biographies and ways you can help clients with legal needs will keep visitors on your site. To drive engagement and bring in a wider audience provide video about your legal services. Video is important: It has been found that the average user spends 88 percent more time on a website that includes video.**

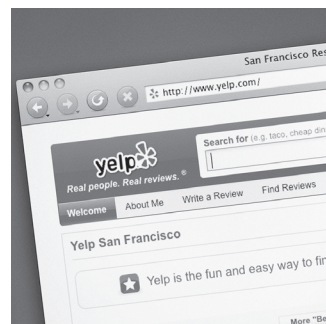


OPTIMIZE SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

Post content from articles highlighting current legal trends on your firm's Facebook page while providing some insight from your own personal experiences. Twitter is a solid resource to learn about upcoming seminars, locate potential speaking engagements and discover new opportunities. Also, use LinkedIn to focus on engagement with other attorneys. Even something as simple as answering a question or sharing a helpful link with another attorney can plant the seeds of another relationship.

MANAGE YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

Reputation management is yet another item in a long list of considerations you need to take into account when managing your online presence. If you want to be found and subsequently hired, you need to encourage people to talk about you. Oftentimes, the deciding factor for a potential client is online reviews. Ask your clients to leave reviews on sites like Facebook and Yelp about their positive experience working with you.



*2014 U.S. Consumer Legal Needs Survey – FindLaw

**2015 Mist Media

PUTTING it all together

The key to success in building your referral network is to integrate it into your regular business process. Dedicate some time each week to focus on growing your referral base using these five tactics:

1. Deliver high-quality customer service.

In doing so, your clients will spread the word about the great legal counsel they received.

2. Nurture relationships with clients.

Stay top of mind with current and past clients by keeping in touch with them on a regular basis.

3. Showcase your expertise.

Whether it is public speaking, writing or promoting your accolades, you need to highlight your expertise and build a name for yourself.

4. Cultivate your referral network.

Make sure to involve yourself in the legal community—your colleagues are a great referral source.

5. Diversify your online properties.

Your online presence matters: Keep your website up-to-date, utilize social media channels and add testimonials from clients and other attorneys to your Web properties.

TO LEARN MORE

about sharing the Super Lawyers honor with potential referral sources and to talk about advertising options to reach substantial audiences, **contact your Associate Publisher** directly or call **1-877-787-5290**.

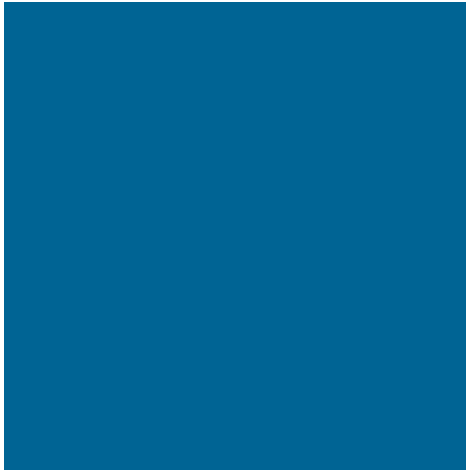
85%

of attorneys selected to a Super Lawyers or Rising Stars list referred a client to a fellow selected attorney in the past year.

At Super Lawyers, we take pride in our patented selection process, which produces a credible, comprehensive and diverse listing of outstanding attorneys that can be used as a resource for referring attorneys and consumers searching for legal counsel. But don't just take our word for it. Attorney Christopher Macey Jr., from Bell & Bell LLP in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, said this:

My selection assures referral sources that they can refer clients to me with a certain level of confidence that I will be an effective advocate for the client they referred. It also instills potential clients with confidence that they are receiving quality representation from me and the other attorneys at my firm who have also been selected.

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