

CHAPTER 4

# Marketing Starts Here

## **Nail These Big Three First**

When I build out business development plans for my clients, I always start with what I call the Big Three—the Big Three Musts.

Before you write your master business development plan, begin to create detailed inbound and account-based marketing programs. Start here.

If you don't get these three business development elements right... fuhgeddaboutit.

My must dos.

## **Make Sure Your Agency Is Findable**

Make sure you are where people are looking for your type of agency. Let's say a major health-care client is looking for a health-care marketing

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specialist just like you (this is the niche you've chosen). Will they find you in their search? If not, you are invisible.

Invisible does not work well when a potentially hot lead is looking for your agency's skills and expertise.

Put your client hat on and ask, "Where and how would I find a company like mine?"

Start here. Are you everywhere a client might look?

- Are you on the first page of a relevant Google or Bing search? A tough objective. If you're not listed there, audit and activate your SEO plan. Consider testing an ad to get on that first page. Find a message that breaks through the clutter.
- Are you listed in all related marketing services directories? Clutch? Agency Spotter? Winmo? The Manifest? Clients use these.
- Is your brand optimized on creative source websites like Behance or Dribbble?
- Are you on your regional or national agency club or organization lists?
- Have you optimized your LinkedIn presence? Do you review and manage all leadership and key employee profiles? Do you regularly post on LinkedIn?
- Do the major search consultants know you're alive? They want to know you—it's their job. I have a list of all advertising agency search firms on my blog. It gets serious traffic.
- Do you win awards? Being listed on the right award websites (from Webby Awards to Adweek's Best to AAF) is a good thing, a very good thing. Awards = awareness = third-party blessing = client interest.
- Do you attend and speak at marketing and client industry conferences? Write for industry publications to build out your authority?
- Do you have a managed brand that positions you as a category expert? Does the industry press know you're a go-to category expert who's always ready to give an educated sound bite?

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- If you are a solo resource (or a creative director looking for a side hustle), are you on Upwork and Behance?

Note that you will never be alone in a search for marketing specialists, so strive to be unignorable when you get found. Be that valuable expert.

Make this an ongoing question: Are you everywhere a client might look for an agency like yours?

## Goose Referrals

It seems that all agencies say they get most of their new clients from positive referrals. It is the default. This is especially true in geographic or defined-category markets where a personal recommendation is common.

This is great. Be proactive about getting referred.

A key to having a robust referral strategy is to make sure that your current and past clients are aware that you want referrals. Getting referrals from happy customers is one of the best ways B2B companies generate new business. Not a huge surprise. However, what is surprising is how few companies have a dedicated strategy for growing these valuable referrals.

Referrals lead as a sales generator for a couple of reasons: A referral is a white-hot lead. If we assume your happy customers are savvy enough to recommend you to the right potential customer, then you are well on your way to establishing a valuable conversation and a new business win.

Most marketing services companies do not run highly effective sales programs, so the most effective new business tool is by default referrals.

### *Three Wonderful Benefits of Referrals*

1. The closing ratio for referrals is high. It has been reported that the closing ratio of a referral is six times greater than for a potentially unqualified lead.
2. For the obvious reason that a referred prospect is generally a very motivated buyer, the referral-generated sales cycle can be as much as 75% shorter.

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3. A referral strategy is cost-effective and will reduce your sales expenditures. Less expensive is good.

### *Six Effective “Active” Referral Strategies*

I’ve generated referrals from existing clients and customers using the following set of strategies.

1. Start with an objective. Know what type of clients you want.
2. Determine which of your clients or friends might know the people or businesses on your prospect list.
3. Be proactive—go ahead and ask for referrals. Some referrals come because your client or buddy is specifically asked if they know of a good company in your business category. Some come because your customers love you so much, they actively “sell” you. Most need to be stimulated to think about how to help you.
4. Make it easy for people to refer you. Think incentives. Yes, a monetary offer like an Amazon gift card is kosher. Say “thank you” twice.
5. Make sure a potential referrer knows how to talk about you and your brilliant expert positioning.
6. This is not a one-time shot. Consider reminding your friends about your offer quarterly. Gently. Can you make this fun? Sure.

Referrals are nice, but one eventually runs out of friends with friends. How do you deal with this unfortunate fact? Yes, do marketing. Even stimulate internal marketing to existing clients.

## **Focus on Client Retention and Growth**

The most efficient, stress efficient business development strategy is growth from current clients. Like for referrals, an agency needs to have a clear client retention and growth strategy.

- This should not be random. Do not leave it up to untrained

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- account people. Have a conscious retention and growth system.
- Hug your clients. Give them new ideas. Challenge them. Deliver smart growth proposals. Nicely. A key reason clients walk out the door is that the agency is not idea driven. Be a relevant thought leader.
- If it is project account, make sure you have a preplanned agency plan on how to present new ideas and agency services. Not a list but a strategic approach to how to sell-in relevant services that will excite and create dialogue. These could be productized services like a branded SEM program.

The delivery of superior customer service is the rule here. Do not upsell—be value driven and upserve. Yes, upserve.

From Daniel Pink: “Anytime you’re tempted to upsell someone else, stop what you’re doing and upserve instead.”

I discuss the idea of upserving to grow current clients in greater detail in Chapter 19, “The Savvy Account Manager.”