Lawmatics

Referral Marketing for Attorneys: A Beginner's Guide

Growth tactics designed to help you secure a steady stream of referral-based business in today's cutthroat legal landscape.



A referral is the highest honor a business can receive from a client.



Referred clients are often the best clients for several reasons: They are more inclined to trust you, sign a fee agreement, and there's no pre-screening required since your referrer already did this for you. Furthermore, they are more likely to refer you to others in their network, effectively marketing your firm for you. Simply put, lawyers looking to expand their business should invest maximum resources into generating referrals.

Unfortunately, many law practices make two common mistakes when getting referrals. They rely on stellar service alone or only client referrals alone to pave the way for a steady stream of new business. But in a vacuum, neither will compel your network of clients or members of your local community to name-drop your firm when friends or acquaintances are seeking legal representation that aligns with your offering.

In this guide, we'll go over the best practices for referral marketing for attorneys. But first, let's go over why referrals are so valuable for your law firm.

You Should Know...

- *Clients acquired via referral have a 37% higher retention rate*
- *Over 65% of new business comes from referrals*
- *Reviews and referrals are sought by 82% and 81% of legal consumers*
- *Marketers rate referrals as the 2nd-highest source of quality leads*



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1 PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Hopefully, you're already striving to provide great service to your clients. However, you might want to start examining your overall client's experience and see if there's any room for improvement. The more satisfied you can make your clients, the more likely they are to refer you to their network. Though this should come as no surprise, the pandemic has certainly raised the bar of client expectations and thereby the standards that comprise a remarkable experience. Below are the critical elements of a client experience worthy of referral:

✓ Fulfilled Services

Ultimately your clients come to you because they need legal services. First and foremost, you need to fulfill your commitment by following through on the job you've been hired to do. This is the bare minimum.

✓ Valuing Your Customers

Customers immediately sense if you prioritize profitability over their well-being. The best customer experiences are the ones that make your customer feel like they're assets — not just revenue.

✓ Consistency

Far too often, legal clients have what they believe to be a fantastic consultation with a lawyer, only to find that the magic quickly wears off. As a result of inconsistencies in their communication, they quickly start to become disillusioned with the abilities of their law firm. Counter this by eliminating any bottlenecks and communication breakdown from fee agreement to case closed.

✓ Trust

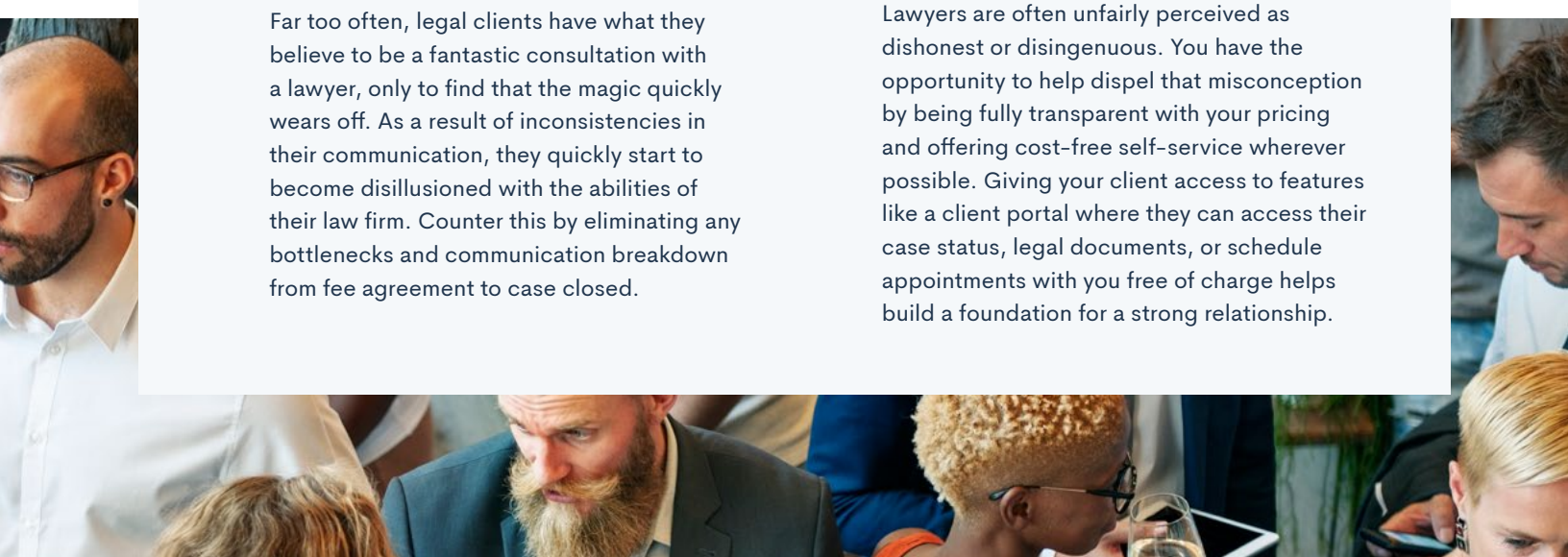
Your clients are putting their trust in your hands. Be someone they can depend on every step of their likely stressful situation. Honesty and transparency are key.

✓ Exceeding Expectations

When clients feel like they've been given just a little more than the average client, they're delighted. By throwing in extra effort in regards to convenience and flexibility, your customers will feel like your top priority, particularly during your intake process.

✓ Fairness

Lawyers are often unfairly perceived as dishonest or disingenuous. You have the opportunity to help dispel that misconception by being fully transparent with your pricing and offering cost-free self-service wherever possible. Giving your client access to features like a client portal where they can access their case status, legal documents, or schedule appointments with you free of charge helps build a foundation for a strong relationship.



How To Delight Your Customers Through Each Stage of the Client Journey

The best place to start when developing a plan for a positive customer journey is by putting yourself in your client's shoes. How would you like to be treated as a customer? What makes you tick as a client? The more you start to think about what makes you happy as a consumer, the better you'll start serving your clients.

Get to Know Their Preferences

Nothing says great customer service like tailoring your service to the needs of your clients. Take some time to get to know what your client's preferences are and how they like to communicate. Do they prefer in-person interaction or virtual? Would they rather hand you a check or pay online.

A one size fits all approach may have worked for the pre-pandemic era, but no longer. Personalization matters and gives your clients that white glove service feeling. You may be a law firm and not a health spa, but you're still capable of putting your clients at ease and making them feel pampered with the right approach and the right digital tools.



Think of your clients as someone you're courting. What does it take to win their heart?

Match Their Communication Style

It's great if you can determine as early on as possible what kind of communication style your client has. Some clients don't like to be bothered with much more than an email update here and there. Others would like to know what's happening with their case at all times in painstaking detail. Legal technology offers an easy way to give your clients direct access to their case details and provide them with updates or appointment reminders minus the phone tag.

Always Deliver Your Best

An attorney's day to day is loaded with to-dos. There are days when there's a lot on your plate — from catching up on memos from paralegals, to giving updates on pending cases, and preparing motions, all on top of the administrative work that it takes to run a practice — it's not always easy to hide your stress. After all, you were trained to practice law, not to act (probably). But here's the deal: a big part of your job as a lawyer is to provide customer service. The trick to creating happy customers is to treat every client as if they were your most valuable and treasured client whether you're swamped or not. But how?

When a client contacts you, you may not always have the answer right away or the time to answer in detail. Instead of being cutting or impatient, simply say that you're currently working on getting back to them with an answer, and you'll let them know as soon as possible. Always be friendly and never let your clients see you sweat. Above all, never seem too busy for your clients. This is where automation software can come in handy when clients need a response fast, but you're busy handling other matter.

Say Thank You

Whether you have just had a meeting together, a phone call, or you wrapped up the case entirely, a great way to go the extra mile for your clients is to thank them. Something as simple as a thank you text or email is a great way to nurture your relationship. The idea is to send a personalized message that shows you care about them as a client and that you're grateful for their business. Little gestures such as this generate loyal clients for life.



Be Responsive and Available

A recent study found that only 64% of lawyers get back to their leads and clients when contacted via phone. While this may seem like a shocking figure to some, it's no big surprise for firms that are still relying on pen and paper or their email inbox to run their law firm.

Legal software is a surefire method for following up on inquiries instantly. Email automation for law firms makes it possible to give your contacts the attention they need at every step of the intake and litigation process without frequent manual email sends or phone calls. Whether it's to confirm an appointment or thank someone for inquiring, following up has never been easier than it is with automated email workflows for law firms.

Be Transparent

Market research shows that poor fee transparency is a major barrier for legal consumers seeking legal representation. In addition, a legal marketing research firm conducted interviews concluding that clients feel "attorneys have very little empathy for their situation." This financial disconnect on the whole is a big problem for the legal industry. So much so that the fear of an astronomical and indisputable bill prevents many with legal issues from hiring an attorney altogether.

All of this can be solved with an open and transparent pricing system. Provide a clear breakdown of your pricing system from the very first consultation onwards, and stick to it religiously.



One of the biggest complaints that people have about lawyers is their lack of communication skills.

Offer 2-Way Communication

The more responsive you are, the more satisfied your clients are with your legal service. But, to be clear, this does not mean answering the phone for every client or replying to emails the instant they appear in your inbox — that's downright unrealistic. The most practical way to make each client feel like they're your only client is by employing legal technology like 2-way communication.

Offering your clients two-way messaging via a client portal or other legal software solution enables you to text clients directly from anywhere without using your personal cell phone while also allowing clients to respond back instantly. A central hub for you to send, receive and manage all of your client conversations in one place is essential for client referrals. The less they have to wait around for a response, the happier they are. Simple.

Digital File-sharing and Document Signing

Make it easy for your clients to send, receive, and sign important documents without the hassle of printing, scanning, or mailing. With legal file-sharing technology, you can send and receive files within seconds, ensuring a streamlined, error-free workflow. In addition, e-signature tools are a modern and convenient alternative to in-person signing, particularly in a global pandemic.

Using legal file request automation to get whatever documents you need from your clients and allowing them to sign from wherever they are using a client e-signature tool can significantly improve your clients' overall experience and skyrocket your referrals.



Asking your clients to drive to your office to sign something is no longer a necessity and therefore shouldn't be a requirement.

Use Newsletters to Stay Top of Mind

Don't make the mistake of assuming that your interaction should end when your clients' case is closed. Do stay in touch with former clients by keeping them on your newsletter mailing list. It may seem like a meaningless gesture, but delivering helpful, valuable content keeps you in a client's memory bank — particularly when that content isn't an advertisement or obvious marketing ploy.

Email automation tools are an inexpensive and easy way to streamline your marketing by delivering the right message to the right contact at the right time — in this instance, a weekly or monthly newsletter. Features such as audience segmentation break your contacts up into groups based on certain characteristics like client status or location and send out tailored marketing that resonates with each recipient.

Offer Payment Flexibility

The latest legal trends report shows that 65% of legal consumers prefer paying for legal representation online with a credit card. That being the case, it's safe to assume that many of your clients have the same payment preference. Rather than subjecting a potential client to an in-office visit each time they owe a balance on an invoice, make payments as quick and effortless as possible by offering e-payment.

You should also seriously consider implementing payment plans that allow your legal clients to pay by automated payments or transfers. Chances are that some of your clients have monetary constraints, so they'll greatly appreciate the offer to split payments up. By making payments as easy as possible for your clients, they'll be much more likely to return for repeat business, and refer you to their friends and family.



Why a Great Client Experience Matters For Referrals

Experiences Count

Since the onset of the pandemic, customers today expect more than ever. If you're performing a service without a stellar customer experience attached to it, word gets around, fast. That's why, in today's business world, more and more companies are pivoting towards experience-based business models in lieu of service-based models. People want to be wowed, and they want to share that experience with their friends and family.
Give them good stories to share!

Those most likely to leave an online review for your law firm or refer you to their friends are the ones that have either had a fantastic experience, or an abysmal one. The people who experienced "okay" service aren't likely to remember that you exist for long.

Positive experiences breed a positive reputation and a positive reputation breeds referrals, both in person and online. Because legal consumers value the opinions of other legal consumers, you'll want to ensure that only good reviews appear when your name and practice are searched for online.

A remarkable experience is the bedrock for client satisfaction, loyalty, and referrals.

Humans Crave Validation

Lawyers have a reputation for not having much time for clients and even lacking empathy, so it's not much of a challenge to exceed their expectations? People merely want to feel valued, appreciated, and heard.

Empathize with your clients and it will shine through in the service you provide. Getting to know your clients enables you to put your energy where it counts in their client journey. Focus on what you can do for them, not the opposite, and they'll be a loyal client for life.

Not All Clients are Alike

Clients are more than just numbers or demographics. They each have a unique set of circumstances and needs, so the kind of journey you provide should be tailored to that uniqueness. Developing client personas for your law firm is a great way to understand the preferences in communication, payment, and more for each type of client. Using that knowledge you'll be able to craft better overall experiences for clients of all kinds.

2 INCREASE BRAND AWARENESS

A key strategy for increasing your referrals is making yourself as visible as possible. Whether you're a smaller firm or a larger one, brand awareness breeds familiarity with your target audience. Familiarity is critical for fostering trust and making an impression on the minds of your ideal clients.

This isn't done by creating one simple online marketing campaign and calling it a day, either. You must be visible online and offline in a variety of locations so people start making an association with your law firm. A strong brand identity that people repeatedly see and recognize adds perceived value to your law firm and increases the likelihood someone will choose you over the competition.

74% of consumers say that a positive review on Google makes them more inclined to trust a business.





Maintain a Strong Presence in Google Reviews

A recent survey asked legal consumers what their steps were after searching for a lawyer on Google. Almost 30% replied that they would google lawyer reviews and read the reviews on a business's Google profile while just under 20% said that they would read a review on another website. This goes to show that Google is one of the most important places where you should have online reviews for your law firm.

Although there are many different review websites that legal consumers frequent after a referral from former clients or other attorneys, Google should be your primary concern.

Setting up a business profile on Google is totally free, and it can be a fantastic lead generation tool.

How Google Reviews Boost Your Referral Rate

People Trust Google

A good review on Google has the potential to sway even the most skeptical of potential clients. 74% of consumers say that a positive review on Google makes them more inclined to trust a business. Simply put, people look to Google as their one-stop final seal of approval after being referred to your law firm.

Google Customer Interaction = More Business Overall

Google bases your search ranking on how much you interact with your user reviews. So, before you think that you only have to respond to bad reviews, don't forget that you should also be responding to the good ones. Google is paying attention and recognizes active responses.

Get into the habit of visiting your Google business profile every day and responding to every single review. Do damage control when it's necessary and say thank you when it's called for. Think of your Google profile as a garden — you have to sprinkle it with customer interaction every day in order for it to blossom into a lead magnet and seal of approval to potential clients.

Trust

One of the most important things that people look for in a lawyer is trust. Vulnerable people are looking for someone trustworthy to handle a sensitive matter. Each time you get a great review, your credibility increases, making you look that much more trustworthy. If your law firm has plenty of reviews claiming how great you are, then it's going to reinforce their friend's recommendation to use your law firm.

Increased Online Visibility

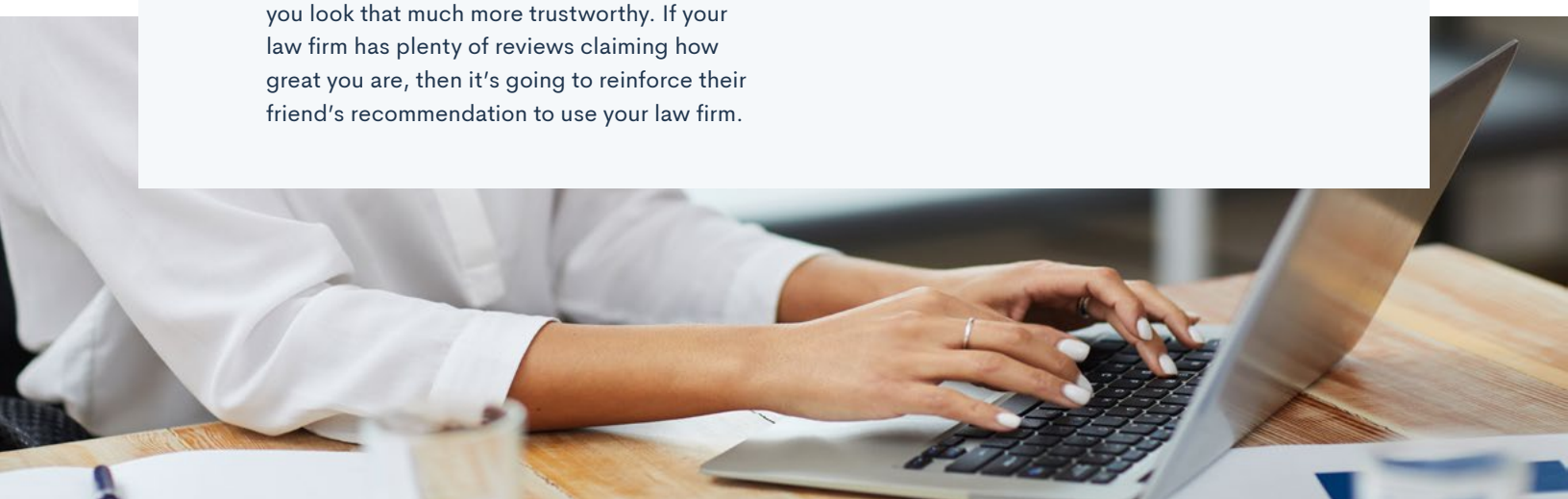
Google tracks your law firm's ratings and will boost your visibility based on how many ratings you have. If you can manage to get enough ratings, you can push your law firm to the top of Google search results which lists the first three businesses in the area that match a user's search query. This is known as Google local pack, and they come directly from the Google My Business directory.

Brand Reach

Encouraging your clients to leave you a review will increase conversation about your law firm. If customers are talking about you online, then you'll boost your online presence, and ultimately your ranking. So, encourage your clients to not only refer you to friends and colleagues by word of mouth but also leave a review on as many different review sites as possible, increasing your brand's footprint on multiple channels.

Dealbreaker

There are some clients out there who won't call a law firm that has no online presence even if they were a word-of-mouth recommendation. So, for those potential clients who need to see online reviews before they make their final decision based on a referral, you need to make sure that your law firm shows up first by producing a steady stream of online reviews.



3 KEEP A HIGH PROFILE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Unlike other one-sided marketing methods, social media doesn't just offer a chance to increase your law firm's visibility, but it uniquely offers clients an opportunity to directly engage with their favorite businesses, solidifying relationships, building trust, and encouraging referrals.

Best Social Media Platforms to Consider for Your Law Firm

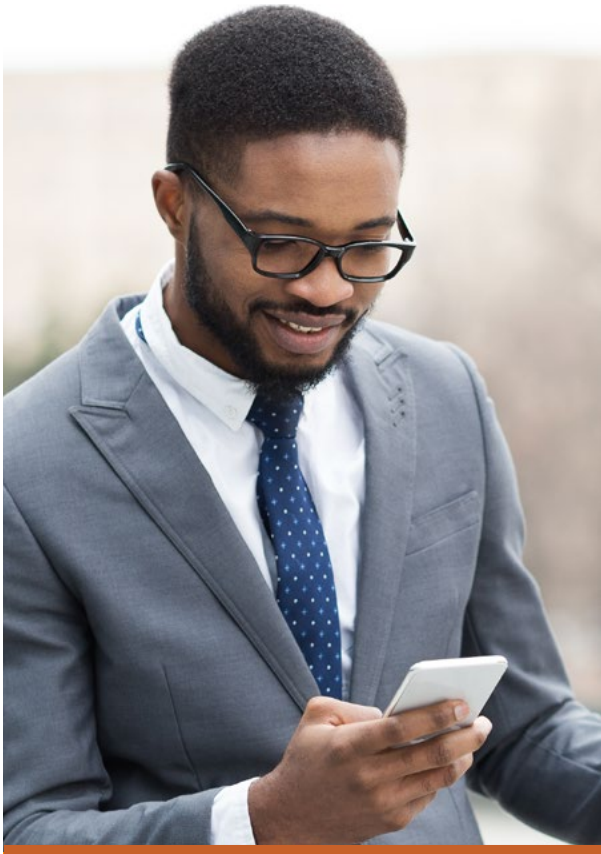
As more and more social media platforms emerge annually, it can be challenging to identify which are worth having a presence on, and which are not. Rather than spreading yourself thin across every major platform, narrow it down to those frequented by the largest segment of your target audience. Some social media platforms appeal more to certain target demographics. Let's take a look at some of the different options best suited for law firms and how to make the most out of each.

Facebook (Meta)

Facebook is everywhere; it's been a household name for over 10 years. With billions of active users, it's considered the most popular social media platform for a wide variety of demographics.

Due to its massive reach and sphere of influence, Facebook is the best place to start targeting customers. It's very effective for getting your law firm's name out there, and it's free! However, if you are willing to invest some of your marketing dollars, you can run Facebook ads that drive traffic to your website.

If you don't already have a business page on Facebook, make one. Remember, a page is not the same thing as a personal profile. You'll need to specify that you're a business and brand rather than a community or public figure. Once you have a profile photo and a cover photo with your law firm's logo and name, you can publish, and you've got yourself a presence on Facebook through which potential clients can find you.



If you don't already have a business page on Facebook, make one.



Instagram

The majority of law firms don't have a presence on Instagram. However, Instagram, which is owned by Facebook (Meta), has 500 million active daily with countless potential clients among them. It goes without saying that this is a huge opportunity for visibility and a chance to connect with an audience that skews slightly younger — many of which have abandoned Facebook following its rapid adoption by baby boomers and privacy controversies.

Unlike Facebook, which relies heavily on text-based content sharing, Instagram is a visual sharing platform that has exploded in popularity in recent years. You may not think it makes sense for a law firm to rely on a visual platform, but Instagram is a great place to make your practice appear approachable to consumers who are otherwise wary of attorneys. Instagram humanizes your business in a way that only photographs and video clips can. Behind-the-scenes happenings at your law firm for instance, are an effective way for people to see your personality, your staff, and your mission to help those who need it. You may choose to include photos of recent community involvement or footage of your speech at a conference. Beyond that, humorous and relatable content or even legal advice often strike a chord.

Before you dismiss Instagram, consider that a recent survey revealed that over 25% of lawyers use Instagram as part of their marketing strategy, and out of the top 20 law firms in the United States, over half of them have Instagram accounts. It goes without saying that Instagram can be a legitimate place to market your law firm.

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LinkedIn

Over 80% of lawyers are active on LinkedIn, per a recent survey. Because LinkedIn is an entirely business-focused social media platform, it's a favored destination for professional networking and a great way to promote yourself, share helpful content, and build connections or even referral agreements with other professionals.

Twitter

Twitter can be one of the most powerful tools you have for getting your message across and gaining insight about your customers. You can follow trends, spy on your competitors, and ultimately win fans with the right strategic approach.

Be warned, though — Twitter users thrive on immediacy. Educate yourself on Twitter best practices ways to hold your followers' attention in such a fast-paced environment. From abbreviations to hashtags, to trending slang, to figuring out your feed, there are many different components that go into a successful Twitter experience, so do your research.

Twitter can seem like a lawless wasteland at first and there are new concepts to grasp, but if elderly celebrities can do it, so can you.





YouTube

Video is by far the best, most shareable medium. A recent survey showed that nearly 75% of people admitted purchasing a service or product based on a video, so it would be a missed opportunity not to dip into this realm of social media.

Little known fact: YouTube is the second most popular search engine behind Google and therefore a fantastic mechanism of brand visibility. Video marketing can be useful for any industry; law practices included. In the legal industry, popular forms of video marketing include sharing valuable tips relevant to your practice area. One idea is to create a weekly video with legal advice that gives prospects shareable and useful information free of charge.

The great part about YouTube is that it hosts your videos for you, makes it easy to share your embedded content with a simple link on other platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

Video marketing can be useful for any industry; law practices included.

4 ATTEND IN-PERSON NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

In-person networking events are a wellspring of potential referrals.

Think about it: What better venue exists to engage in conversations, build your brand, and generate referral leads? Even though it seems like digital marketing dominates, old-school networking that involves meeting with others face to face remains effective and successful in all aspects of law firm marketing strategies.

- Pass out business cards, give away pens, and offer ample smiles to make an impression and encourage referrals. Just remember to nurture the new connections you've made well after a meetup or gathering has ended.
- If the event is local, take the opportunity to construct a referral relationship with other area law firms who may have staff in attendance.
- Summon your inner (or outer) extrovert to shake hands and mingle with your fellow lawyers who may be worth teaming up with. You should also attend community events to plant a seed with potential clients.



5 GET INVOLVED LOCALLY

Getting involved in local events or charitable organizations both in and outside the realm of law, is a great way to build connections beyond your immediate network. Active involvement in your community lets you rub elbows with more people, and sometimes even provides an opportunity for you to speak in front of an audience and command the attention of an entire audience. Think of it as local marketing.

Start by familiarizing yourself with local organizations and clubs that could benefit from your involvement. Building rapport and attending events digitally or in-person can increase your chances of generating referral opportunities, all the while creating brand awareness.



6 GUEST WRITE/BLOG

Believe it or not, blogging is a critical part of an effective marketing strategy regardless of industry. An online presence is a must in today's competitive landscape, and legal blogging is one of the best ways to stand out and be found online by potential clients.

If you've never blogged before, don't panic. No one is asking you to write the next New York Times bestseller but rather to share your expertise on a subject you're well versed in — law! The key is not to overthink your blog posts. As screenwriters often say, write what you know. The best way to attract readers to your blog and ultimately your website to hire you for their services is to post informative and engaging content. The more shareable your blog posts are, the more you'll start to build your reputation.

Odds are you probably don't have a ton of time to allocate to blog authorship given your workload. If possible, commit to blogging at least once a week, or guest blog once a month on another legal blog. Think about common questions that arise from clients or prospects in your day-to-day and focus on educating your audience on those. The idea is to write something which is in tune with what people are searching for on Google that has your law firm's name attached to it.

If you've never blogged before, don't panic.

7 ASK OUTRIGHT FOR REFERRALS

Many lawyers perceive that asking for referrals in fear of coming across as desperate or pushy. Yet, getting referrals is often as simple as asking for them. Be forthright, and clear about what it is that you're asking for. The more genuine you can be, the more likely you are to get the results that you want.

When your clients' cases are closed, keep the lines of communication open by asking them if they wouldn't mind referring you to their friends and family. If they've had a wonderful experience with your law firm, then referring you to other people in their network will come naturally.



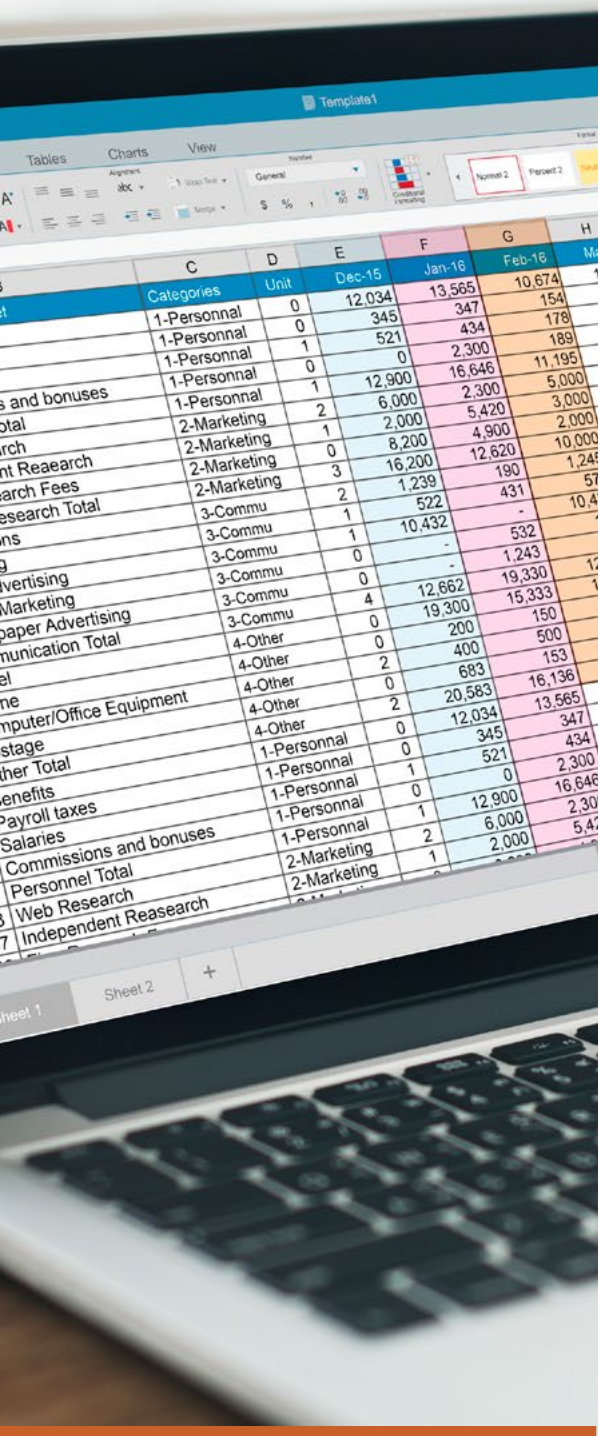
8 INCENTIVIZE REFERRALS WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Aside from current or former clients, you can turn to other legal professionals for referrals. Doing so typically calls for an incentive in the form of a mutual referral agreement in which you agree to help them grow their business in exchange. Whether you both earn referral fees or exchange referrals, incentive goes a long way in a manner that supersedes the incentive for clients.

Fellow attorneys who refer your firm are a wonderful way to develop your business and experience revenue growth. You might even want to meet with them to discuss law firm marketing strategies and examine their success.

Related industries to your area of practice can also be great places to incentivize referrals. For example, if you're a domestic violence attorney, you may want to team up with a local couples therapist, and incentivize sending clients your way. Don't be afraid to get creative when searching for referral agreement opportunities. Just make sure that you are aware of the rules of referrals and compensation for referrals. The ABA rules may prohibit certain referral arrangements.

Don't be afraid to get creative when searching for referral agreement opportunities.



Tracking your referrals is a must in order to measure how effective your referral campaign is.

9 TRACK CLIENT REFERRALS

Tracking your referrals is a must in order to measure how effective your referral campaign is. On a holistic level, you should track overall referrals while on a granular level you should track your top referral sources. Running reports with a legal marketing software, for instance, will shed light on which referral partners are bringing you the most clients, helping you identify where to allocate your efforts or marketing budget.

In addition, try to pinpoint which percentage of your clients come back for repeat business and how many referrals you're getting overall. This can help you determine whether your client journey needs to be ironed out. The more information you have, the better you can fine-tune the experience you provide for your clients and determine who should remain in your referral network.

Keep a High Profile and Stay Top of Mind With Lawmatics CRM

Successful referral marketing is contingent on a remarkable client experience and an effort to incentivize referrals by being visible and friendly with attorneys and non-attorneys both online and off.

By pairing this model with the right legal technology like Lawmatics, you can track your referrals, build strong client relationships, stay top of mind, and optimize your referral strategy. Lawmatics is recognized as the most robust all-in-one CRM, client intake, and marketing automation software. Come see how it works.



Grow your client base via referrals using Lawmatics!

Let Lawmatics Marketing Automation Software identify your top client referral sources and turn more referred leads into profitable work.

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