

# WHO YOUR FRIENDS ARE

MANY POTENTIAL CLIENTS ARE ASKING COLLEAGUES, CONTACTS AND FRIENDS WHO THE RIGHT ACCOUNTANT MIGHT BE. **JOHN TIMPERLEY** SUGGESTS WAYS YOU CAN GET YOUR CONTACTS TO RECOMMEND YOU

If you want people to refer business to you, or think of you when an opportunity arises, it's sensible at first to be clear in your mind why it is that clients come to you and what it is that you do better than your competitors. Now apply these thoughts to your contact base, taking in clients, colleagues, contacts in other professional firms, friends, and even family. Decide who could help point such valuable leads your way, then ask yourself two questions:

- Do these contacts know enough about me and what I do, to point business my way?
- What's in it for them to do so?

The most successful networkers keep in touch with their contacts and invest some credit in their 'bank' to stimulate reciprocity.

## DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

By keeping in touch, the trick is not to look as if you are permanently trying to sniff out work. Instead you should be developing and improving your understanding of what is going on in your contact's organisation, job or even life. The more up to date you are, the greater your chances of being able to give help just when it's needed. You can also use a few of those activities or 'touch points' to update your contact on client successes you've experienced, such as money you've saved clients, projects you've worked on to help their organisation grow, hassle you've reduced for them, and so on. If you can describe the benefits or outcomes the client has gained by working with you, the referrer will find it easier to spot similar situations in their contact base.

Using your knowledge and understanding of your contacts, consider ways to earn 'brownie points' – perhaps by sending them valuable information, by bringing a business opportunity to their door or by warning them of a forthcoming issue, and so on.

And don't forget to map out when your next point of contact will be. Otherwise, time will slip by in silence and, before you know it, a year will have passed since you were last in touch. With a time delay of this length, the contact will almost invariably have forgotten you, and you'll be faced

with the challenge of re-building the relationship, possibly from scratch.

When you've built up significant goodwill, why not consider our top three asking-for-referrals questions – adapting them for your own style, of course. Do remember though, you have to 'earn the right' to ask by giving first, in order to receive. The law of reciprocity applies.

■ When you've done some work that's been well received...  
*Thanks very much for the positive feedback on our work, we've really enjoyed working with you on the project ... is there anyone else you know who we might be able to help in a similar way?*

■ The flattery approach for a senior contact...  
*Can I ask your advice ... I know that you have excellent connections with key people in your area of work. Do you know of anyone else like yourself who might need specialists like us?*

■ The current trend approach...  
*We're finding that a number of clients are asking us to deal with matters like the one we've just undertaken. Have you come across any contacts recently that might be in a similar position?*

## SAY THANK YOU

You should also consider how you reward the individuals who send new business leads your way. The key here is to match the reward to the referrer and pick something they will really value. Not everyone will expect reciprocity. The trick is to find out the right reward by getting to know them and determining what it is they would like to receive in return. Build this intelligence into your referrer map so you never miss an opportunity to thank and impress those who bring you new business. Also, try and monitor the level and quality of referrals you are getting from different contacts over a period of time. After, say a year, you may want to adjust the reward to acknowledge the volume and quality of business they have sent your way.

Stimulating referrals isn't something that can be done at your desk. You have to go out and get to know your contacts, find out what would be valuable to them and help them achieve it. Oh yes, and don't forget to thank them!



John Timperley is a business development consultant at The Results Consultancy ([www.winningbusiness.net](http://www.winningbusiness.net))