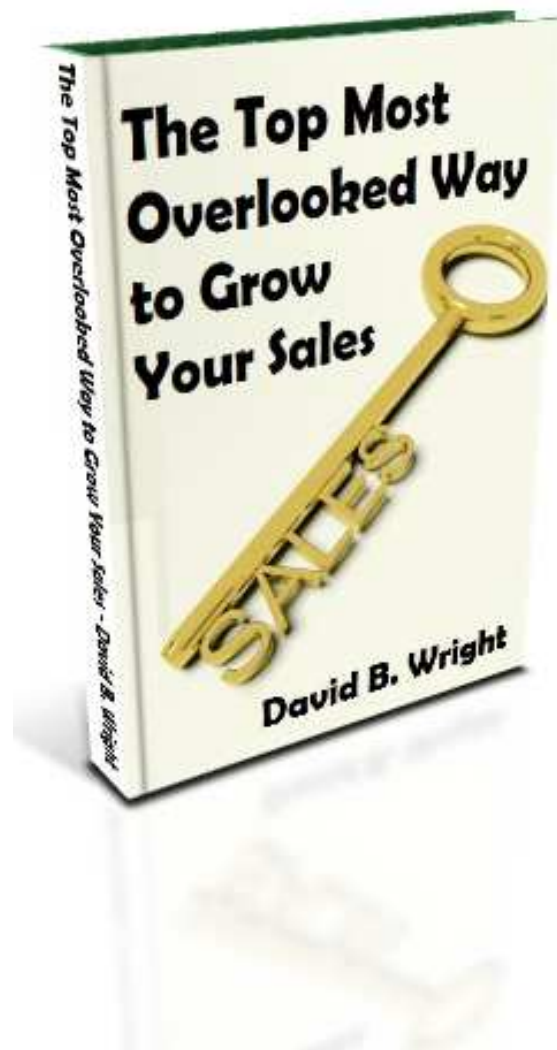


Special Report:

The Top Most Overlooked Way to Grow Your Sales



By David B. Wright, Chief Marketing Officer, W3 Group

In chapter four of the book, [Conversations with Experts](#), I wrote about the three keys to growing your sales online. Then I gave a bonus tip about selling more to your customers and selling to them more often. Many businesses are challenged by just how to implement this. This can take some creativity, particularly if you have one main product or service, and each customer is basically a one-time purchaser.

Now we'll go into the single most overlooked way to grow your sales, for almost any business.

Whether you've got one main service or thousands, the odds are that there's a way to grow your sales that you're just not doing, or at least not doing as effectively as you could.

So what exactly is the most overlooked way to grow your sales? Sit down for this one, because it's so simple you'll be amazed that you're not already doing this if you don't have this strategy in place.

It's pretty simple: ask your existing customers for referrals.



“Who do you know that could benefit from this service we’re currently providing for you?” is one way to ask, but that sort of puts the customer on the spot – and depending on your service, customers may be hesitant to refer you.

Phrasing the question differently, such as “what other middle managers do you know that have faced similar issues to the ones we’ve helped you solve?” or “You mentioned you belong to ___ (professional organization). When you think of people who have similar businesses to yours, do you recall anyone mentioning _____ (similar problems)?

Of course, first you have to make sure your customers are happy. So it’s worthwhile to make sure you have a plan in place to make sure they are, and that they feel like they’re as important to you as you are to them.

Assuming that they are happy, when to ask really depends on what type of product or service you’re providing to them. If it’s something where your client can quickly see the benefit

of what they're buying, then don't wait long to ask – ask them while the honeymoon is still in full swing. If it's something more complex or takes a while to implement – such as custom software implementation or a phone system, wait until the installation is complete, any bugs are worked out, and the customer has had a chance to appreciate the benefits of what you've delivered.

Especially if you're working with limited resources, it can be very effective to reach out to your most influential customers first. These might not be your most profitable customers, but they are the ones who others respect and listen to most. This can help you focus your efforts and have a better chance at generating high-quality referrals.

Seth Godin, as usual, offers some great advice here on how to get referrals:

http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2006/11/how_to_get_refe.html

This may seem obvious, but be sure to follow up quickly on the referral – not doing so sends the clear, if unintentional, message that you don't truly value the referral. If a customer

sends you a referral and doesn't hear back, or learns that you didn't follow up, the odds of their sending you additional referrals drops to zero pretty quickly.

So follow up with both the customer and the referral.

Be sure to follow up with the customer who referred you: send them a note thanking them for the referral. Make it personal, too. A handwritten note or card just feels like you appreciate them more than a quick email. In this day and age of instant electronic communication, something handwritten really stands out.



You may want to also send them a discount, coupon or some sort of gift to make the "thank you" more tangible. It doesn't have to be something that costs you a lot of money, time or effort as long as it has value in the customer's eyes. And a coupon, free upgrade or gift certificate can provide the double-whammy of thanking the customer AND getting them to buy from you again.



Following up makes them feel good about having sent you the referral, and makes them more likely to feel connected to you and more likely to do business with you again.



If you're a restaurant, you might offer a coupon for a free appetizer, dessert or beverage of their choice. If you're a car dealership, a free oil change or detailing would be a good reward. A wine shop might offer a free accessory, or a tailor might offer a free alteration or dry cleaning.

You might also consider offering the new customer a special deal as well – to help get the relationship off to a great start, and to show that you appreciate them. You've already got an average client acquisition cost (and if you're not measuring this, you should be). Since referrals are one of the lowest-cost ways to acquire new clients, why not leverage this low acquisition cost to do something that makes it far more likely for each newly referred customer to become a repeat client?

While we're on the topic of engaging with your customers to get referrals, there are other high-value ways to connect with

them and make them feel like they've got valuable (and appreciated) input into your relationship with them. You can survey them to ask how you can do things better, and what else they'd appreciate that you offered as part of your services. This can lead to ideas for new products to carry and a pre-engaged market of customers ready to buy them.

This can take many forms – if there are services they could use that you don't (and don't want to) provide yourself, what other businesses could you partner up with to make this a win-win? Another business that provides related services or products, that doesn't compete directly with you but does sell to the same types of clients could be leveraged in a way that increases both your sales.

For example, I have a car dealership client that doesn't have a service department. But they do regularly work with other companies that provide tires, major and minor body work, painting, windshield repair, mechanical and other services.

The referrals can go both ways: the mechanic can recommend the dealership if their customer is talking about

replacing their car, and the dealership can recommend a reputable mechanic – something that can be hard to find!

These types of relationships can also be with companies that provide very different services but to the same customer base.

For example, I know of a pharmacy and a dry cleaner in the same shopping center. The pharmacy owner approached the dry cleaner and offered to pay for sending holiday cards to the dry cleaner's entire customer list (something the dry cleaner was in the habit of doing anyway), made it look as if the dry cleaner was sending them directly, and enclosed a coupon redeemable at the pharmacy. The customers appreciated this and felt like the dry cleaner was going out of their way to help them save money – and the sales of both companies increased. Talk about a win-win!

Another way is to give before you receive – get to know your customers and how else you might be able to help them. This is especially powerful if your customers are business owners – but think out of the box and come up with ways you could help more of your customers. A doctor client of

mine gives out free prescription discount cards and has documented how much he has personally saved on his prescriptions. Particularly for patients without health insurance, or high-deductible plans, this can be a great way to help establish goodwill and show that he cares about his patients.

What else can you think of to help grow your business?

David B. Wright is a best-selling author and Chief Marketing Officer of W3 Group Marketing, a marketing company that helps businesses get more business. So if you need your phone to ring, need more customers to walk in your door, or need to grow your sales online, visit <http://www.AtlantaSEOs.com> and learn more about how we can help you get more sales, attract more customers, and earn more profits.