

SOCIAL PROOF

How to Get Glowing Testimonials
and Valuable Referrals



An eBook by
**JEFF
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and Valuable Referrals



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Chapter 1

Living in the Era of Social Proof

The sales manager got a lead on a nice piece of business. It was big enough of a deal that he assigned two sales reps to the account: Julie and David. Those two had worked together many times and had landed more than their share of big deals.

As expected, Julie and David did their due diligence before meeting with the prospect. During the first meeting, they asked questions and focused on what the client truly valued. After three meetings, it was time for the client to make his decision. Julie and David were confident. They'd really hit it off with the client. Everything "felt" right, so it was quite a surprise when they got the bad news: the client had chosen a competing company.

What happened? Julie and David did a post-mortem call to find out why they didn't win the business. "It was very close," the client said, "but the other company had a lot of testimonials."

Seriously?!?! They lost a multi-million-dollar deal because of some testimonials?

This is actually a true story.

Even in sophisticated, high-ticket-price transactions, winning and losing can actually come down to little things like references and testimonials.

It's called "social proof" and it's one of the most powerful tools in a sales professional's arsenal.

Robert Cialdini, author of *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* and the so-called "Godfather of Influence," believes that social proof is one of the most important components of influence. You are far more likely to persuade someone's thinking if you remember that "people follow the lead of similar others."

Cialdini cited a study in which researchers went door-to-door collecting donations for a charity. When people answered the door, the researchers showed them a list of neighborhood residents who had already donated to the charity. The longer the donor list, the more likely prospective donors were to contribute.

In another study, New York City residents were asked to return a lost wallet to its owner. The New Yorkers were highly likely to attempt to return the wallet when they learned that another New Yorker had previously attempted to do so. But learning that someone from a foreign country had tried to return the wallet didn't sway their decision one way or the other.



Simply put, social proof is why testimonials and referrals are so important in sales.

But why has social proof grown in importance in recent years? The Internet.

Prospective clients can access social media reviews of your company with the simple click of a mouse, which means it's getting harder to hide bad service and inferior products. But because so much information about companies and products is so readily available, buyers have come to expect social proof. Prospects want hard evidence that you're a safe choice.

Social proof can literally be the difference between success and failure in today's ultra-competitive selling environment. Make sure your sales tool box is stocked with the best tools available.

Finally, it's probably obvious but nevertheless needs to be said—you're not going to get many referrals if you don't do an outstanding job of serving your clients in the first place. Deliver superior products and service. If you do, your clients will become champions, the people who champion you and your cause. They love you and your company. They are your fans, the people who would run through a brick wall for you.

But champions don't just appear out of thin air. They are developed. To convert clients into champions, listen carefully to them and figure out exactly what they value. Then customize your products and services so that they satisfy that value.

Treat them with respect and build trust over time by being honest, putting their interests before your own and being consistent in your professional behavior.

As the old saying goes, "You can never have too many friends." The same thing applies to champions. It is easier to get testimonials and referrals if the person you are asking loves you and trusts you.



Chapter 2

How to Get Glowing Testimonials from Your Current & Past Clients

Allow me to lift the curtain and give you a behind-the-scenes look at the world of book writing.

You know those endorsements by celebrities, other authors and industry experts that appear at the beginning of a book and on the back cover? They are rarely written by the actual endorser. Instead, they are often written by the authors themselves or someone who works at a publishing company.

Here's how it works:

You write a book. You feel good about it. You understand that readers will be more apt to buy your book if respected people have endorsed it. You make a list of industry experts and other authors who have written similar books. You contact those respected people and ask them to write an endorsement or testimonial for your book. If those potential endorsers know you or have heard of you, they'll likely say yes.

But there's a problem. The endorsers are busy, which leads to a couple of scenarios: 1. They intend to read the book and write an endorsement, but they never get around to it; or 2. They ask you to draft the endorsement language and send it to them for their approval.

Scenario #2 is quite common, so authors write up a proposed endorsement and email it to the big-named endorser. If that person is comfortable with the wording, he or she will approve it, and presto! The book has an impressive endorsement.

The same thing happens every day in your industry.

As a sales professional, you need testimonials from past and current clients attesting to your outstanding service and product value.

A long list of client testimonials makes it easier to get new business. In an era of social media reviews, clients expect would-be vendors to have proof that they provide great service and high-quality products. One of the ways you show that is by providing glowing testimonials from highly satisfied clients. Strong testimonials make you a safe choice.



But be prepared; you might have to do much of the work yourself. Just like the book promotion world, your happy clients would love to write a testimonial for you, but they're stressed out and short on time.

What makes a good testimonial?

1. It's specific to you, your product and your company.
2. It's obvious who the testimonial writer is and why he or she is relevant.
3. It clearly states what problem you solved and what unique value you brought.
4. It shows that you deliver on promises, go above and beyond and get results for your clients!
5. It's not fluffy or overly wordy.
6. It shows how you made someone money, made someone look good in front of other people, made someone's life easier or reduced someone's stress.
7. It shows how you helped a client overcome adversity.
8. It puts the reader in the testimonial writer's shoes. Readers should imagine themselves benefiting from your products and services just like the testimonial writer did.
9. It's positive but not obnoxiously gushing.



How do you get testimonials?

1. Be prepared to write the testimonial yourself and ask if they would be willing to attach their name to it. Don't offer this right away because some people take pride in writing their own testimonials.
2. If they do want to write it themselves, stand ready to coach and guide them. Let them know what purpose the testimonial has in your sales efforts and what messages would be particularly effective for you.



3. Think of interesting stories you have experienced with the client and remind them of how you served them. Suggest they highlight one of those stories as part of the testimonial.
4. Ask existing clients a few questions about your products and services. If the answers are positive, you could say, “You know, it would be so helpful if my prospective customers could hear what you said. Would you consider writing a short testimonial for me that I could use in my future sales efforts?”
5. Send clients a written survey. Some of the responses could be material for testimonials. Of course, get their permission before you publicly quote them.
6. Don’t be bashful! If you are confident that you made the client happy, ask them to be bold and positive.
7. Give in order to receive. Write an unsolicited testimonial for your client and ask them to do the same for you.



Make sure testimonials are well-written and clearly show how you provide differentiated value. Then put them into your prospects’ hands. Publish them on your website and social media platforms and hand them out as leave-behinds during sales presentations.



Chapter 3

References



Some sales professionals prefer to provide reference names and contact information instead of written testimonials. Some clients would rather you simply list their name and contact info instead of writing a testimonial. This is analogous to the job references printed on your resume. If prospective clients want to know what past clients think of you, they can call the references. While testimonials are better, references are fine.

Go through the same process when gathering a list of client references. You might want to remind the reference what to say or emphasize if a prospective client ever calls. Make sure your references know how and why you will use their names and to whom you will provide their names.

Disappearing References

What do you do if you lose touch with your references?

That's a fairly common problem. We live in a mobile world in which people have unprecedented options and opportunities. Despite all the communication channels at our fingertips, it is still possible to lose touch.

Considering the importance of maintaining a healthy list of well-credentialed references, here are a few things to keep in mind:

Expect Some Shrinkage

Despite your best efforts, you will lose touch with some references. Businesses change. Lives change. Ultimately, nothing is permanent. Just as an outstanding company knows it will periodically lose clients to forces beyond its control, you must accept that nobody can maintain 100 percent of their relationships over the course of a career.

Numbers Game

Businesses anticipate they will lose a certain percentage of clients each year despite their best efforts to retain them. The same thing applies to references. Constantly build strong



relationships with new clients so you always have a large group of credentialed references upon whom you can depend.

Social Media

Connect with everyone you know on social media. As your references update their profiles on LinkedIn, they are essentially updating your “address book” for you.

Don't Be Bashful

While it is possible to become a sort of “professional recluse,” one has to work at it. In a Google-driven world, you ultimately stand a pretty good chance of tracking down the people you seek. Nevertheless, some sales professionals are hesitant to reach out and make contact with a reference who has gone “dormant.” Don't be bashful. Just because some time may have elapsed since your last contact doesn't mean the connection doesn't want to communicate with you.

Give Them Ownership

Make people feel like they are a key part of your success. Let them know they are important to you and that you see them as a key part of your sales efforts.

In the end, clients want social proof. Powerful testimonials and credible references get the job done.



Chapter 4

Referrals: The Best Way to Get New Business

In 2007, it took an average of 3.68 cold-call attempts to reach a prospect. Today it takes eight attempts. That's according to TeleNet and Ovation Sales Group. Some studies have indicated it requires 10 to 12 attempts to reach an executive-level decision maker.

No doubt about it, cold calling is getting less and less effective. Unless you have a referral or some other way to warm up a prospecting call, cold calling has now become an utter waste of time for most sales people.

Old-fashioned cold calling—the idea of picking up the phone and talking to a complete stranger who has no idea who you are—is incredibly inefficient. Fewer than five percent of cold calls lead to an appointment and a far smaller percentage lead to a sale.

Why is cold calling no longer effective?

For starters, clients are time-starved. They simply don't have the time to chat with salespeople on the phone, especially B2B clients. Additionally, it's hard to establish prospective client value on a cold call, which inevitably makes the experience feel “salesy” to the call recipient. That's ineffective because as the old saying goes: “People love to buy but they hate to be sold.”

So, what is an enterprising sales professional to do? How can you access decision makers and generate more business?

Have a referral.

Hands down, the single most effective way to cut through the clutter and actually get a busy decision maker to talk with you is to use a referral. In an era when buyers are jealously protective of their time, a referral from a trusted source is your ticket to the show. The higher up a prospect is in a company, the more important referrals are.

Reaching busy decision makers is not the only reason you should ask past/current clients for referrals. By asking for business leads, you could find out about prospects who otherwise would remain hidden from your view. There are essentially thousands of prospective clients out there who you do not yet know and who have not heard of you. A referral is your ice breaker, a chance to know someone who could someday become one of your best clients.



Additionally, referrals can get prospects thinking about making a change even when the thought of changing hadn't previously entered their minds. For example, let's say there's a client who is marginally happy with their current vendor. They're happy enough that they don't feel compelled to look for other options but they're not so satisfied that they wouldn't consider an unexpected solicitation from someone who referred you. A referral could be just enough of a catalyst to make them consider a new provider.

Despite the power of referrals, some sales professionals are hesitant to ask their current and past clients. Perhaps they are worried the request will be an unwanted interruption in the client's busy day. Perhaps they're worried they didn't do a good enough job for the client. Perhaps they fear "going to the well one too many times"—they already took time from the client when doing the deal, so they feel guilty taking more of the client's time now.

If you have done a good job of serving the client while at the same time building trust, you should have no fear of asking for a referral. In fact, you could make the argument that the referral actually strengthens your relationship with them. In other words, it's flattering when a vendor wants you to make referrals on their behalf. It shows that you were an important and prestigious client. Asking for a referral puts you and the client on the "same team" and creates more of a friendship feeling between the two of you. Furthermore, saying nice things about you to others reinforces and reminds your client why you're so awesome.

Some clients might actually be a bit offended if you *don't* ask for a referral. I once had a client with whom I worked a long time and built a nice friendship. After a couple years, I finally asked for a referral and testimonial. Her response? "I was wondering why you never asked me for that!"



Who Should You Ask for Referrals?

- A person whose name, title and profile make you look impressive
- Someone who will say great things about you
- Someone who is very pleased with your product or service
- Someone with whom you have mutual trust



When Should You Ask?

There's no set time in the sales process when you are supposed to ask for a referral. That said, it's probably best right after you have done a great job and your client is basking in your good work. Some sales pros are hesitant to ask a client from long ago. Don't fret if time has gone by.

Simply call and say something reminded you of them and how much you enjoyed working with them. Then ask for a referral. For some past clients, you can use the anniversary of the sale as an excuse to call and ask for a referral.

Managing the Referral Process

If prospects agree to give you a referral, the best option is to have the referral giver connect the two of you directly. They could make a coffee or lunch appointment for the three of you or perhaps send an email introducing you ("There's someone you NEED to meet!"). If this isn't an option, perhaps the referral giver could arrange a three-way phone call.

The second-best option is for the referral giver to send an email or make a phone call letting the targeted person know you'll be calling and why they should talk to you.

If the referral giver isn't willing to do either of the first two options, you will initiate the contact with the targeted person mentioning the referral giver's name. Before making this call, make sure you have explicit permission to use the referral giver's name.

Before you talk to referred targets, learn all you can by asking the referral giver about them and by researching them online.

Follow Up

Keep the referral giver informed throughout the sales process. It's simply a matter of courtesy and is especially important if the referral giver is due a commission or referral fee.

I once gave a referral to an affiliated office in a different city. The sales rep who received the referral was excited and thanked me profusely. I thought, "Well, I chose a great guy to do this deal!"

But that turned out to be the last time I heard from him.

Six months later, I ran into the client I had referred and he told me he ended up doing a deal in that city. I asked how the rep at my partner office did. My client's response was troubling:



“I actually never heard from him, so I used someone else.” I was incensed. I called the sales rep and asked what the hell had happened. He stammered a bit and basically told me he let the client “slip through the cracks.”

Needless to say, I’ll never give that guy business again.

He should have given the client extra attention simply because it was a client referred by someone within his industry. He should have sent me a short email each month during the deal keeping me up-to-date or at least notifying me each time the deal passed a milestone. I entrusted him with one of my precious clients, and he let me down.



Chapter 5

Conclusion: A Sacred Trust

Always be grateful for any referrals you receive. When clients allow you to use their names to seek business from their cherished contacts, they are putting their reputations on the line just to help you. That means you have an obligation to treat those referrals with the utmost care and respect. Caring for referrals is the closest thing to a sacred trust we have in the sales world, so take them seriously.

In the end, it takes time and effort to acquire testimonials and referrals, but the results are worth it. Social proof is now firmly engrained in the sales culture. If you're not embracing social proof in your selling efforts, you're sabotaging your success.



LET'S CONTINUE THE DISCUSSION



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