For a brand-new or growing law firm, tackling the publicity monster can seem altogether daunting. After all, how does a law firm in its earliest stages not just get awareness of its services out to potential clients, but assure these clients that those legal services are of the highest quality? In an increasingly social media-driven world, where individuals and businesses alike rely on popular opinion for affirmation (at best) and validation (at worst), peer references are more important for a rising firm’s reputation than ever. The power of referrals is one that can make all the marketing difference if harnessed effectively. Read on to see how you can maximize your rising law firm’s referral potential.

Why Referrals Change the Game for Lawyers

The more you rely on and reward happy clients, the happier your clients will be. Appreciated customers appreciate you, and they’re more likely to seek out your legal services again in the future, in addition to referring you business from other clients. Think of referrals as a cycle of endorsing customer satisfaction.
Who’s more likely to give you a call: the overwhelmed soccer mom who drives past your billboard while racing, 15 minutes late, to Brittany’s last game of the season, or the one who hears about your excellent service from Laura at the weekly book club? Plain and simple, referrals are the leads who are most likely to convert to actual clients for lawyers. A potential client looking for legal advice is more likely to trust an attorney with whom a friend, colleague, or acquaintance has had a positive experience. Think of a referral service as an additional form of certification for a lawyer, except instead of framing it and displaying it in your office, you’re implementing it into a means by which to generate more revenue.

Spend on certainty, not possibility: the more you rely on referrals (and the more of those that actually come in), the less reliant your law firm will have to be on alternate forms of advertisement. Instead of paying for ads that might attract clients and generate revenue, your referral system doesn’t dole out payments until a new client is secured, meaning you don’t spend any money until you’ve made money. Since about 65% of new clients come from referrals, on average, it’s a worthwhile campaign to invest time (and minimal funds) into.

**How to Run an Effective Referral Campaign**

1. **Know what your clients want**
   Let’s face it: your clients will probably only take the time to refer new clients to you if there’s something worthwhile in it for them in doing so. Be it free billable hours or a lower contingency depending on your practice, really think about what services you can provide as a lawyer in exchange for referrals that would be most worthwhile to your client base.

2. **Make it public**
   A plan is only as good as the extent to which people know about it. Automated email campaigns that automatically send out reminders to clients are probably the most worthwhile way to go about this. Plenty of campaign platforms, like MailChimp, have free versions that can certainly get the job of getting your message across done. By taking the time to plan out and implement a well-crafted email campaign, you’ll make sure your referral plan stays top-of-mind to clients. Next time a friend or colleague of theirs has a legal gripe, your name just might enter the conversation.

3. **Make it easy**
   It’s crucial that the process of referring new clients to you be as streamlined and user-friendly as possible for your existing clients. Consider dedicating a page on your firm’s website to your referral program, even including a landing page for newly referred clients to fill in their information along with the name of your existing client who sent them your way. Otherwise, attach a link in your email campaigns to a special landing page that current clients can send out to new referrals who need a lawyer. This landing page should allow the referred person to input the standard information you’d ask of any new client, as well as to specify who it was that gave them your information.

4. **Have a process in place**
   Once your referrals start to come in, be sure to have a streamlined means by which you’re tracking referrers, referees, and the monetary amounts being applied to each referral. This can be as elaborate as an ongoing matter in your practice management software, or a Google or Excel sheet that you update
manually. However you do it, make sure you’re never losing track of your referral expenses. After all, this is supposed to be as worthwhile for you as it is for your clients.

Conclusion

New clients become happy clients when the expectations set forth by an advertisement are met—or exceeded. Happy clients become happier clients when they feel appreciated. Your legal services are no doubt excellent, so the first part will take care of itself. As far as the latter, there’s no better way to make your clients feel thoroughly appreciated than compensating them in some meaningful way, whether it be through gift cards, time credits, or other tokens that might be resonant to them, for sharing their positive experiences with their friends and colleagues. A referral service could not just do wonders for the expansion of your firm to new clients, but for the reinforcement of your existing client relationships. A well-thought-out, resourceful referral campaign could easily be your law firm’s ticket to widespread success.

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