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# Strategies for awesome word-of- mouth referrals

**T**here's a question I've always asked in regards to fitness marketing: 'How do most of your participants come to you?' Most commonly, the answer is 'through word-of-mouth referrals.'

So, what system do you have in place, for generating word-of-mouth referrals? Do you even have a formal strategy?

Often instructors do the very best job they can to keep clients happy, and then they hope and pray that these clients will send them referrals. Now this might actually work, but doesn't it make more sense to have a system that will multiply referrals and actually ensure they occur?

There is no limit to how many ways and variations there are to promote your classes. The key is to implement the most simple techniques immediately, and then expand to the more sophisticated ones. You may find, however, that some of the simplest techniques are also the most effective.

In order to create and implement a successful formal referral program, it's beneficial to understand exactly how word-of-mouth referrals actually occur.

You provide a service. The client talks about it. The greater the level of enthusiasm, conviction and delight surrounding your service, the greater the chance that the person hearing about your business will want to check it out.

Of course, it may take that client talking about you five times, ten times or twenty times before someone picks up the phone and calls you, or plucks up the courage to attend your class, which is exactly why you want to ensure you have a formal system in place that make it as easy as possible, and as non-intimidating as you can, for them to come to you.

In essence, therefore, your job is to intentionally do whatever you can to increase positive and enthusiastic responses from our clients.

## Little things make all the difference

It's fair enough that our participants expect us to get the job done; they expect results, they expect good service and they expect us to keep our word. So, if you deliver all of these things you'll be giving them exactly what they expect. You can't offer less than this and expect to get word-of-mouth business, but if you actually exceed their expectations then, in response, you'll probably find that their levels of enthusiasm, conviction and delight become elevated, which typically results in more-word-of-mouth referrals.

So, back to the actual technique to obtain word-of-mouth referrals. The strategy to generate awesome word-of-mouth referrals is simply to give information away. And there are three simple, key elements to this:

1. Personalised exercise information
2. Hand written notes
3. Health and fitness handouts.

By this I mean providing each participant with fitness information (e.g., information handouts or fit tip posters) that is relevant to their individual goals or health status. Remember, Network Online ([www.fitnessnetwork.com.au](http://www.fitnessnetwork.com.au)) regularly provides you with information handouts for your participants as part of your membership!

Hand-written thank-you cards, notes, handouts, exercise cards, etc. are effective in generating more word-of-mouth business because they are unexpected and they make people feel acknowledged and valued.

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These tokens tend to show your clients you genuinely care and are thinking about them individually; it also suggests that you're organised and on top of details, which increases both your trust and affinity with the people in your classes because you are seen to have gone out of your way to do something for them. It also ensures your class participants take home something tangible to remind them of your services.

And the bonus is, that no matter what your budget, this sort of referral scheme is pretty easy on the hip pocket.

So, when should you give out cards, notes and personalised information? The answer is as frequently, regularly and systematically as you can. For it to work it shouldn't be something you do once in a while, particularly if you want it to become your central referral program. For example:

- **For regular participants** If you have regular participants, acknowledge them with a thank you note, postcard or greeting card. Bring it into class and give it to them. You may even include guest passes so they can give them to their friends or family members. Remember, the aim is to make it as easy as you can for them to refer you to their network.
- **When you get new business** If a regular participant does bring in a new person then be sure to thank them. Give them a free pass to acknowledge that the referral. Let your classes know that you do reward them for bringing in new participants.
- **When someone helps you** If someone gives you a resource, an idea, a compliment or some encouragement, drop them a note and express your appreciation!
- **When you meet a new person** In a business environment, when you meet someone new, write a note on the back of their business card so you can send a thank you note the following day.

By now, you might be thinking, 'that's a lot of notes' and you're right, but you want to make it such a habit that you do it almost instinctively; ideally, it could become not just a way of doing business, but almost a way of life. And after all, it's not an enormous ask; you can write a note, and address an envelope and stamp in about two minutes flat!

Generating more referrals and word-of-mouth business needn't be difficult. Commit to exceeding your participants' expectations by recognising their efforts via hand written notes and by giving them relevant and individualised information, and before you know it, your classes will be full to the rafters with referrals!

Good luck! ♦



**Rachel Holmes**

Rachel is the creator of the instructor dedicated web site [www.choreographytogo.com](http://www.choreographytogo.com) which contains choreography downloads, business, marketing and PR ideas and a free weekly instructor newsletter. To receive your newsletter go to the site and sign up!

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