Please take just a minute to read this...

I’d like to take just a minute or two of your time to explain how this book was created because I think it will have a big impact on how you view the material.

In February of 2014 I was working with Fortune 100 insurance company training about 500 of their independent agents on business excellence. One of the things I focus on for small and medium-sized businesses is the importance of “word of mouth” marketing through referrals and customer evangelists. I asked the group, “How many of you would say the majority of your new business comes from referrals?” Virtually every hand in the room shot up. I then followed up with this question, “How many of you currently have a written, thoughtful and strategic REFERRAL PROCESS that you use to take potential clients and turn them into referral engines and customer evangelists who drive lots and lots of new ideal clients to your business?” Only one person raised their hand. I then turned to the CEO of the company who was sitting in the front row and said, “This is shocking to me, every one of your folks just said that referrals are the major source of new business for them, but only one person in this entire room has a process to generate quality referrals. This is not good, and I can help you fix this, I’m going to dedicate the next two months of my life to reading every single book I can get my hands on about referrals and then I will boil everything I learn down into a brief, focused overview of only the very best ideas and tools that actually work.”

I then ended up spending the next three months reading every book I could buy from Amazon.com (that I had not already read) that had the word “referral” in the title. By the end, I read 31 books (roughly 9,000 pages), listened to several audio books, and researched the topic of referrals on Google like a crazy man. I then took all of the information I gleaned from those sources, as well as 20 years of running several businesses that depended 100% on referrals, and it put in his e-book for you. I have included only what I feel are the most valuable ideas, the things that really work, the information that will help you drive lots and lots of quality referrals.

I hope you find great value in the information on the following pages, I believe strongly that you take the information in this book and client with diligence you will see dramatic positive results in your business. I wish you every possible happiness and success – John Spence
Chapter 1 will be nice maybe for writing workshops to send back

Simple, but not easy!

There are lots of ways to attract new customers to your business:

- Delivering high quality products at reasonable price
- Delivering consistently superior customer service
- A highly professional and well-targeted website
- Superior search engine optimization
- Professional marketing and advertising campaigns
- Superb use of social media
- Hiring top talent and training them well
- Special offers, discounts, loyalty programs...

I could go on and on, and I will cover many of these topics later in the book, but here is the hard truth:

In order to get lots and lots of high quality referrals you and your business MUST be truly remarkable.

In other words, worthy of having people remark, talk about and promote your business. I know that sounds obvious, but the number one reason that most people don’t get lots of referrals, is that there not truly remarkable, they run an okay business, deliver a pretty good product, deliver satisfactory customer service...nice, but not special...not worth a referral. So, before we can even start talking about the referral process and all of the great tools, ideas and techniques on how to get more referrals, you must make you and your business referable.

For the last 14 years I have been a guest lecturer at the Wharton School of Business on the topic of strategy and strategic thinking. I can boil my entire class down to just one key sentence.

All effective strategy is simply...

Valued Differentiation x Disciplined Execution
To win in the marketplace you must deliver a unique product/service, which is *highly* valued by your target customer, and then deliver that product/service superbly...every single time – for every single customer.

**Go back and read that last sentence again, it is deceptively simple and exceedingly powerful.**

In order to be successful in any business you’ve got to be able to deliver a unique and differentiated product (hopefully it is a defendable differentiator) that your target customers are willing to reach into the their pocket and gladly pay five dollars, fifty dollars or fifty million dollars to buy and then you must deliver everything you have promised about that product...Elegantly! And it all starts with YOU.

**Be so good they can’t ignore you**

The first and most important step to getting lots of high quality referrals is that you have to be really, really, really good at what you do. As my good friend Joe Calloway would say: *you need to be a category of one.*

But how do you do that? Here is what I suggest: look around your industry and identify the top experts that everybody looks up to as the best of the best in your field. Once you figure that out study them intently, research their backgrounds, look at their website, ask other people in the industry about them and then create a checklist of all of the things that they get to become the best in your field.

**I will use myself as an example throughout this book because I want you to understand that I have successfully applied all the tools and techniques I’m going to be teaching you. This is not just theory, not just the stuff I read all those books, but these are ideas that really work.**

So in my case, I looked around my industry of professional speaking and business consulting and identify several key people who were considered the best in the world in that arena. Out of all of those folks I decided that I really liked what Tom Peters, the author of In Search of Excellence and many other great books, was doing. I liked his style, I liked his delivery, I liked his content, and at the time he was recognized as the world’s “Uber-Guru” on business excellence. So I went to school on Tom peters, I researched his background, I read all of his books, I watched a bunch of his videos, and I even jumped on a plane to attended several of his live seminar. I then created a very clear and specific checklist of all of the things that Tom Peters had done to become the best in the world at professional speaking and consulting on the topic of business excellence. Here is that checklist:
• Worked for top international consulting firm
• Fanatic researcher; constantly reading, studying and learning
• Did significant international work
• Wrote several best-selling books
• Worked for numerous Fortune 100 companies
• Worked side-by-side with numerous Fortune 100 CEOs
• Won numerous national and international “Thought Leader” awards
• Created a brand around himself that he turned into multiple products

I then spent the next 17 years of my life getting up every day and trying to check things off that list. Amazingly enough, it worked!!!!!! In just the past three years I have been named one of the top 100 business thought leaders in America, one of the top 100 small business influencers in America, one of the top 100 business thought leaders on “trustworthy business behavior” in the world and one of the top 500 leadership development experts in the world and most recently was named by Inc. Magazine as one of the top 100 “Great Leadership Speakers” along with…Tom Peters!! I do not say any of this to impress you, but to impress upon you that it is absolutely possible for you to be recognized as one of the very best in the world at what you do if you can determine what it will take to get there, focus on it with discipline and apply massive effort.

** By the way, when I say “best in the world” what I mean is; whatever world you compete in. It might be your local town, your region of the state, your entire state, the nation or the entire globe. In my business I compete with every other professional speaker and business consultant on the face of the earth, which means the bar for me to be recognized as one of the top people in the field is very, very high.

WORKSHOP

1. Make a list of the three or four people who are considered very best in the world what you do.
2. Study them carefully, Google them, go to their webpage, ask other people in the industry about them, find out everything you possibly can about exactly what they did in order to be positioned and recognized as the best of the best in your industry.
3. Based on what you have learned about what the top performers in your industry did to get where they are, create a checklist of what you would have to do in order to be recognized as one of the very best in the world in your industry.
4. Get up every day and do the things necessary to start checking things off the list.

***You can download the PDF of all the workshops and tools in this book at the “Learning Center” on my website: www.JohnSpence.com

The workshop above is really very simple and straightforward, but definitely not easy. I can tell you with great certainty that only about 5% of people that read this book are going to actually do those four steps...which why the other 95% will not get tons of high quality referrals.

**Talent = Success**

The next step in building a highly preferable business is to hire top talent and train them well. Let me make this extremely clear, for most of you reading this book this is an idea you should take to heart:

**The success of your business is directly tied to the quality of the people that you can get, grow and keep on your team.**

Traditionally there were lots of different ways to differentiate your business. When I studied marketing at the University of Florida we learned the famous “Four Ps of the Marketing Mix,” which were: product, price, place, promotion. Fast-forward to today and for most businesses the four Ps no longer exists as sustainable competitive differentiators.

**Product:** for the vast majority of businesses today your product can be copied very easily, or your competitor can come out with an offering that is so similar that to the customer there is little or no difference.

**Price:** customers now have almost perfect information on pricing worldwide. Competing on low price is the quick road to bankruptcy, because there’s always someone willing to drop their prices and go out of business faster than you. For most of you reading this book competing on low price is not an option.

**Place:** for many/most businesses location doesn’t mean a thing. I can order almost anything I want off the Internet and have delivered to my house tomorrow. If location is truly important your business, your competition can put a building right across the street. For a few of you reading this book location does make a difference, that it is not a total game changer.

**Promotion:** once again, as soon as you come up with a nifty, cool, and unique promotion – your competition will copy it within minutes. There is always someone willing to throw more money
at promotion than you, shamelessly copy your advertising and marketing, and aggressively use search engine optimization to nullify your amazingly cool website.

So to me, the only two sustainable competitive differentiators left too many, many businesses are: the quality of the people on your team – and the relationships they create with your customers. That means if you want to have a highly referable business you need to make talent acquisition, talent growth and talent retention a key strategic objective of your organization. You need to become a connoisseur of talent and turn your business into a talent magnet. You’ve got to be superb at finding the very best people, training them, and creating a culture of extreme customer focus where your people deliver consistently superior customer service and turn your clients into raving fans and customer evangelists.

***Because this is not a book about talent, culture or customer service I am not going to go into detail on exactly how to do this. If you would like to learn more in these areas go to the learning center on my website where I posted a list of the top 60 or so business books I’ve ever read and there will be several great ones there talent, culture and customer service.

**But I’m a solopreneur and don’t have a team**

Yes you do! Even if you’re a one-woman shop you have the opportunity to build an incredible team, it’s called your network and it operates two levels. The first level is the network of associates, friends, colleagues and mentors you create. One of the major secrets to success is creating a huge network of bright, sharp, smart, talented people who are interested in and invested in your success. People who are happy to share their ideas, expertise, contacts knowledge and advice to help you be successful - because you are willing to do the same for them. I learned a long time ago that even if you work completely alone, you need to have a huge network of people you can reach out to and ask for help. On the second level you have access to some of the smartest, most talented and most successful people in the history of the world through books, webinars, seminars, audiobooks, and the Internet. Never in the history of mankind has so much powerful information been available...for free.

**IMPORTANT POINT:** You need to build both of these networks regardless of whether you are a solopreneur or if you work in a company with 10,000 employees. These two networks will help you be much more successful in your career and will help build the foundation of your referral network.

**Summary**
- Before you can expect ANY referrals, you must...
- Be very, very good at what you do - one of the best in the world.
- Surround yourself with a team of top talent – employees and/or your network.
- Deliver high-quality products/services at a reasonable price (not the lowest)
- Deliver consistently superior customer service for every single client, every single time.
- Create a clear and focused strategy based on Valued Differentiation X Disciplined Execution
- Be truly remarkable!!!!!
Chapter 2

Referral Tools and Techniques

Build It Into The Agreement

One of my favorite ways to generate lots of quality referrals is to build it into the agreement during the early stages of working with a new client. Once we have agreed to do business together and I sit down with the client to set expectations for what I will deliver and build into those expectations that if I do a truly superior job, I’m going to ask them to give me several strong personal referrals. I think the easiest way to explain this is to give you an example of what I might say to a client at the beginning of the relationship.

Step One

Once we have agreed to do business together I always begin the relationship by taking enough time to clearly set expectations for success. I think one of the biggest mistakes that many businesses make is a failure to shape and manage the expectations of the customer. What typically happens is that because the business does not clearly describe exactly what they plan to deliver, the customer has a different set of expectations in their mind and even though you feel you’ve gone far above what you intended to deliver, their expectations were actually higher and they are disappointed. It is my strong recommendation that you become highly adept at sitting down with your client and spending the time necessary to create clear, specific, measurable expectations around exactly what you will deliver. Then the goal is to consistently deliver just a little bit more than they expect.

As an example, for me, it is typically the review sheet that attendees fill out after one of my speeches or workshops. The client and I will agree that the goal should be for me to get at least a 4.5 average score across the entire audience. If I can do better than that then I will have exceeded their expectations. For you the metrics might be something like:

- on time delivery
- agreed-upon pricing
- fit and/or finish
- works flawlessly once installed
- quality of product
- quality of service
- reasonable price
• solved the issue or problem the customer was struggling with
• delivered the agreed-upon ROI

There are many different metrics by which you can measure customer success and I encourage you to create a long list so that you can help your customer set clear expectations for what you’re going to deliver, create a way to measure that you have actually delivered what you promised, and ensure that you consistently deliver just a teeny bit more than they expected.

**Step Two**

After we have gained full agreement on the specific, measurable metrics and goals for success, I then say something like this to my client...

“I’m very excited to be working with you and I’m really looking forward to doing this project together. I’m going to work very, very hard to exceed your expectations and if I do, in addition to paying my fees, I would like you to agree to send out a minimum of 20 strong personal referrals to anyone you feel would find great value in the sort of work I do. I’m not asking for the referrals now, only if I absolutely deliver something that is truly superb...truly excellent. Does that sound fair to you?”

I have NEVER had a client refuse!

Then, after I have delivered the speech and get 4.85 average score, I gently remind the client that I’ve exceeded the metric we set and politely and professionally ask them to please send out the referral notes. Some don’t send out any, some send out 15 or 20, and some send out more than 200. This is an incredibly powerful referral strategy that can generate a significant amount of high quality referrals. The key though, is that you must create this agreement at the very beginning of the relationship, and make it clear that you are only asking for referrals if you deliver absolutely superior work.

**WORKSHOP**

What are some metrics or measurements that you could recommend to clients as a way to establish if you have clearly exceeded their expectations? Some examples could be on time delivery, quality, price, customer satisfaction scores, performance, experience, ROI, safety, reliability – think hard about a handful of metrics that you can easily measure and nearly always exceed.
THANK YOU

One of the very best to ask for referrals is right after a client says “thank you” for a job extremely well done. Whenever I walk off the stage or deliver workshop and my client rushes up to me afterwards and says, “Oh my gosh, that was the best presentation I have ever seen, our attendees are absolutely ecstatic, I can’t possibly thank you enough John!” I immediately follow up with something along the lines of...

“It is absolutely my pleasure; I’m extremely glad you are pleased and that things turned out so well. Actually, a very nice way to say thank you to me would be to send out a few strong personal referrals to anyone you know that you feel would find value in the sort of work I do. In 20 years of doing this I have found that 99.9% of my new clients come from happy current clients telling their friends and colleagues about my programs. If you really feel like I did a great job it would be awesome if you could let a lot of other people know that.”

I don’t always say it exactly like that, and that may be too wordy for you, but the idea here is to build a reflex in your mind that the minute a client says a huge THANK YOU, you respond right away with something like...

- Well, don’t keep me a secret!
- I hope you tell lots of other people that I did a good job for you.
- My pleasure and it would be great if you would help spread my name around your industry.
- Well, that very best thank you is lots of referrals.

This is a very simple strategy, yet it totally amazes me how few people do it. Like you, I deal with hundreds of businesses each year and often times I will give them a very heartfelt and enthusiastic “thank you” to which they respond...“No problem.” That’s a nice answer, and I’m glad that they were happy to give me such great service, but if they had come back with a really nice and well-worded request for referrals, there is a very good chance I would’ve gone back and plastered it all over my face book and twitter.

This is a very important point in this book

Often times when I’m teaching this idea in a workshop one of the attendees will say, “I don’t really like to be pushy, I just figure if I do a really great job that people will send referrals, I don’t want to have to actually ask them to send me referrals, it seems too aggressive.”
Here is what I can tell you, some people will send you referrals just because you do a great job. Like in my example above, there’s a chance that even if the business but not ask for a referral I still would’ve put something up on my Facebook or twitter. You can bet your business success on hoping that if you do a good enough job people will simply refer you out of the goodness of their hearts, but to me hope is not a strategy. If you want to double, triple or more the number of referrals you get you have to ask for them. If you are not comfortable with that then you should probably stop reading right now. However, if you’re willing to create a system for very politely and professionally asking for referrals after you have done a superior job and exceeded the customer’s expectations then keep reading because I am going to show you how to do that.

Also keep in mind that when a business does a really good job, delivers amazing service with a high quality product most customers want to refer them. They want to impress their friends and family by sending them to a great business, so that their friends and family call them later and say, “you rock, that place was awesome, thanks for telling me about.” If you do a stellar job in your business and don’t ask people to refer you, you are losing an opportunity for them to do something great for their friends, family and colleagues. People love to tell people about great businesses, so give them every opportunity to feel good about referring you, helping other people, and by default helping you be more successful too.

**WORKSHOP**

What are three or four phrases you can use to respond to a big thank you with a professional request for referrals?

**KNL**

An author I admire a great deal is Tim Sanders who wrote one of my favorite books, “Love is the Killer App.” In that book Tim talks about the three things it takes to build a world-class career, and I believe these are also three key things for being highly referable.

Knowledge
You have to be extremely bright, talented, and sharp at something that is highly valuable in the marketplace. You need to have ideas, skills, creativity and innovation that your target customer will happily pay you for. So the first step to referability is knowledge that is highly valuable to your ideal customers.

Network

Being really, really good at what you do is not enough; a lot of the RIGHT people need to know that about you. What I mean by “right people” is what I call Hubs...someone that, by the nature of who they are or what they do, sit at the “hub” of a huge network. If a Hub is very impressed with what you know and the value you deliver, they can tell dozens, hundreds, hundreds of thousands or millions of people about you. Let me give you an example.

When my book, Awesomely Simple, was released it was doing pretty good. It won a few awards. Was named a top 10 small business book of the year and was selling okay on Amazon but as far as bestsellers go, it was number 1,100 on the bestsellers list on Amazon. Then Guy Kawasaki, the former marketing director at Apple, was kind enough to do a very favorable review of the book. At the time Guy had 1.2 million followers and my book went from number 1,100 on the bestsellers list to number 11 and was backordered at Amazon.com for four weeks. That is the power of a Hub!

Love

But being really good at what you do and having a lot of the right people know that about you is still not enough, you need to have the third, and what I feel is the most important element: LOVE. If you are a kind, honest and loving person of integrity, and a lot of the right people know that about you, and they also know you are extremely good at something that is very valuable in the marketplace...you are highly referable.

So the three questions you must ask yourself every day are:

- What did I learn today?
- Who did I meet today?
- Did I live my values today?

The most expensive book I have ever bought

Several years ago a good friend of mine suggested I buy the book “How The Best Get Better,” by Strategic Coach Dan Sullivan. So I jumped over to Amazon.com and was a little surprised to
see the book cost $35, but my friend recommended it and I love books so I hit the one click and ordered it. A few days later I was shocked when I opened up the box from Amazon and realized that it was a small format book and only 30 pages long, with big type, lots of pictures and a few blank pages. The only thing worse would have been if it were a pop-up book. But I spent the money so I sat down and started to look through the table of contents. Immediately one of the chapters caught my attention, it was entitled: The Four Habits of Referability. I quickly flipped the pages to get to that chapter and here it said...

- Show up on time
- Do what you say you will do
- Finish what you start
- Say please and thank you

I could not believe what I was reading; this was so simplistic as to be offensive...until I thought about it for a few minutes realized this is one of the most powerful lists I’ve ever seen.

At the time I was reading Dan’s book my wife and I owned three companies together and were in the middle of building a custom home. I went to my wife and asked her this question, “Out of all the vendors we deal with in all of our businesses and everyone that’s climbing all over our property right now, can you name one that consistently shows up on time, does exactly what they say you will do, finishes everything they start, always says please and thank you?” Her immediate answer was NO. This list is not simplistic – it’s pure genius. So let’s go into it in a little bit more depth with some added commentary from me.

1. Show up on time

To me this is simply professional courtesy, respect and reliability. If you do not respect my time and the business that I’m giving you, then there’s no reason in the world that I would refer you to someone else and allow you to treat them that way too. One of my first managers taught me a great phrase, “10 minutes early as five minutes late.” People who garner lots of referrals are highly respectful of their customer’s time.

2. Do what you say you will do

This is all about integrity, honesty and credibility. If you want to get people to refer you to their friends, family and colleagues then you absolutely MUST always deliver on your promises. Customers today have a lot of choices, they can probably buy what you sell from dozens of
other businesses, likely at a competitive or lower price, so what differentiates one business from another? Their values, customer service levels, relationships with their customers and a large part how much the customer trusts you. Failed to do what you say you will do and you will destroy any hope of building strong customer trust.

3. Finish what you start

A lot of projects start with fanfare and fireworks only to end up in contention and anger when they are never fully completed. Businesses that enjoy high levels of referrals are the ones who start strong and finish strong, delivering what they promised on time, correctly and on budget. It is only when I know that your business is highly reliable that I’m willing to refer you to my closest friends and colleagues because I know they will be pleased with the entire process of doing business with you.

4. Say “Please” and “Thank you”

This is what I would consider professional courtesy and simply good customer service. It seems like a no-brainer, but I am constantly surprised by how often I will give someone a very large business project and not receive even the slightest courtesy of a “Thank You” or "we greatly appreciate your business.” Buy some super nice note cards and set aside 15 minutes of the end of every day to write thank you cards to your best customers, almost nobody else on the face of the earth does this and it will differentiate you in a positive way.

**And then I added a fifth...

5. Give a little bit more than they expect

Not a ton more, because that would likely kill your profitability and drive you in to bankruptcy, the goal is to consistently deliver just a little bit more than your customer expects. How you do this? By becoming an expert at managing customer expectations so that you know you can always slightly exceed the very clear and specific expectations you have set.

What these five habits demonstrate are competence, professionalism and respect. I cannot possibly think of three more important things to demonstrate to a client than competence, professionalism and respect. If you do these five things every time, with every customer, you will have tons of high quality referrals. Thanks Dan Sullivan!
Chapter 3

Social Media – The Future of Referrals

This is not a book on social media, there are plenty of other great books on how to use social media, and I strongly urge you to study as many of them as possible. However, I’d like to share with you just a few of what I feel are the most important ideas around how to use social media for generating high quality referrals.

In the last chapter I told you about the importance of the cultivating Hubs, and social media is the reason that Hubs have so much power. It used to be that if you were very well connected you had perhaps 200-300 names in your “Rolodex,” but as I look around the social media landscape today it is common to see people with several thousand to a million+ followers. Now, not every one of those people is hanging on every word that the people they follow put out on social media, but if 10 or 15% see a message, that’s still a lot of people. The goal then is to get those key Hubs sending out messages about how great you are, how fantastic your business is, and that everyone should be doing business with you.

There are lots of activities for online communications:

- Websites
- Blogs
- Email
- E-newsletters
- Mobile phones
- Tablets
- Gamification
- Instant messaging
- Videos
- Podcasts
- Webinars
There are lots of different platforms for social media

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google+
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- Vimeo
- i-Tunes
- Pinterest
- Udemy
- Klout

I could easily add another 50, but let me focus in on the ones that I have found the most useful for actually generating quality referrals. Before I go into the most useful channels and platforms let me help you understand something extremely important about how social media works.

The entire aim of social media is for you to add REAL value, give people truly useful information, post only pertinent content, and consistently surprise and delight your readers. Effective use of social media is much the same as effective networking, it is your job to give, give, give lots of REAL value and excellent content in order for you to build trust, credibility and a positive professional relationship. If people see that all of your social media is aimed at selling yourself, you won’t get many followers and the few that you do have will stop following you quickly. It sounds like a cliché, but it’s the truth: content is king. But how do you create great content?

Answer the questions that are important to the people who might be interested in your products and services. They need to see your social media outreach as highly valuable material that answers important questions that gives information in an area where they want to learn more. Let me give you a few examples:

If you are a financial advisor your readers would likely be interested in the stock market, investment strategies, insurance, retirement plans, funding college education, reverse mortgages, household budgeting, IRAs, taxes...

If you are a real estate broker your readers would likely be interested in current home values, how to prepare your home for sale, new properties that are coming on the market, how to take care of your current house, how to save money on your electric bills, how to landscape in a way that you don’t use a lot of water, how to deal with neighborhood associations...

If you owned a bakery your readers would likely be interested in new products you have out that are gluten-free, wedding cakes, birthday cakes, what sort of wines go with dessert, what
sort of desserts go with certain types of food, when you will have a baking class, using cookies
and other baked goods is a way to say thank you to your customers...

What is the very best way to figure out what content your clients and potential clients would
like to consume? Ask them. Send out a survey and ask them what they are most interested in,
listen carefully as they ask you questions on the phone or in client meetings, what are the
questions that come up over and over again – those are great things to answer on your social
media outlets. Would a how-to video be helpful? Would a demonstration video be helpful? Are
there other people in your industry or ancillary industries that could give you content that your
readers would find great of great value? Actually one of the very best ways to get great content
is to get from other websites or blogs. If you owned a car dealership you can post great content
from other websites on road safety, travel tips, new regulations on baby seats, how to check
the fluids in your car... if you own a dry cleaner you can put up tips on fashion and how to
reduce the chance of staining if you spill red wine on your shirt at a party... if you own a
restaurant you could put up a nutrition guide, fitness tips, cooking tips... think about all the
things that your customers are interested in, the things they would find fun and engaging.

There are lots and lots of ways to generate great content, but remember it’s only great content
if your followers think is great content!

The best channels for online communications

I really should have titled this section, “the channels I find most productive for online
communications,” because the type of business you are in can have a massive impact on what
communication channels will actually be best for your products and services. But for a majority
of you reading this book I’m going to suggest that email, websites, blogs and handful of select
social networks are probably the best channels for generating high quality referrals.

Email

Email has by far and away been the most successful channel I have used for generating lots of
high quality referrals. It may be built on the back of some of the other channels and platforms,
but it the end of the day most really good referrals happen when someone in your network
sends an email to a friend or colleague and personally refers you and highly recommends your
business. The key with email is to build a solid list of people who are truly interested in your
business. You can fill this list through people signing up for your blog or newsletter, people you
meet at networking events to give you the card and ask you to “stay in touch,” people who fill
out surveys or giveaways on your website, folks to connect you on LinkedIn and other social media websites and any other way you can think of getting email addresses from quality leads who match the kind of customers that you can deliver great work for. Once you’ve built up this list, and you continue to build it, the key is not to send too many emails to the list. As with all social media the goal should be to send 90% quality content with only 10% sales information. You want people to be very excited when they see an email from you because they know it will be something of value that it will not waste their time. Email is a very powerful tool for creating strong bonds with your customers, or turning them off quickly and chasing them away forever, it all depends on whether you use it to help people and give them great information or just pester them about buying something from your business.

Here Is How I Use Email

I have been building my list for more than 15 years and I haven’t divided into several categories. I have a general email list of several thousand people that I simply send a note to every time I write a blog, my goal for this group is to deliver quality content to them so that I can at least stay on their mind. If I want to try to sell something to them I do it in the blog as part of my article or video. I am very strict on keeping to the 90/10 rule here, almost all of my blogs and videos are about delivering value and I rarely use them to ask for business or referrals, but when I do, people usually respond extremely well.

I have another list of my past clients and super targeted potential clients, these are the people that I really want to connect with; they are the future of my business so I want to make sure that I deliver massive value for them. What I’ve done for the last 15 years is that I spend the first 20 minutes or so of every morning in my office scouring the Internet for something really cool, helpful, interesting and informative about business success, strategy, leadership, high-performance teams, organizational culture or delivering superior customer service – things that I know my target past and clients are very interested in. I don’t find something every day, but about once every two weeks I will find something truly remarkable and I will write up a little note to introduce it and then send an email with a link to that select network of key VIPs. In this way they know that every time I send them one of these private emails it is going to be something special and the open rate is nearly 100%. I have been sending an email like this to this group every few weeks for more than a decade and many of them have remarked how valuable and helpful those emails of been, as I often get notes that say, “Thank you so much John, this is exactly what I needed to hear right now and is going to help me a ton for our strategic planning retreat. Really appreciate you sending this to me.” With this list, perhaps once or twice a year I will send an email with a subject line such as, “need a little help,” and will tell them about a new speech or program I have and ask them to let other people know about it. This strategy has been the foundation of my referral process and has generated a large
portion of my new work, but again it all hinges on 90% adding real value and only 10% asking for referrals.

**Website**

Your website is usually your first point of contact and/or the main point of contact for most of your potential new clients. Whether they meet you at a chamber mixer, give a referral note about you or see you on social media, just about the first thing everybody does is go check out your website, so it better be good. How do you build a good website? To me there are a handful of key factors that make or break a website.

It must be 100% on brand, look highly professional, with outstanding pictures and very well thought-out copy.

It should immediately grab the reader’s attention with the clear statement of what is in it for them to look further at your website. Most people only spend about five seconds deciding whether to stay on a website or not, so you can’t mess around here, you have to nail it on the home page. To me the best way to do this is to simply ask a group of your top customers why, specifically, they chose to do business with you. Again, I’ll use myself as an example; a few years ago I sent an email to about 30 of my top clients around the world and asked them, “Why specifically did you choose me as the speaker/trainer for your event? What were the top three or four reasons that made you decide to go with me?” Nearly all of them said exactly the same thing:

**Research + Real-Life + Passion = ROI**

“John we don’t know any other speaker that studies as much as you do, you have read 100+ business books year for 20 years, nobody else does this much research as you. You’ve also been the owner or CEO of several companies and served as the CEO of a Rockefeller foundation at the age of 26, so we know this is not theory, you have actually been there and done that and worked in the trenches. It’s also easy to tell that you love what you’re doing and you’re deeply passionate about business excellence and helping teach people how to be better in business and their careers – and because of those first three things we always get a high return on investment from your programs, our business improves, we make more money and in relation to the amount of money we spend on bringing you in, it was a great investment. That is why we hired you.” So what are the very clear and specific reasons that your customers choose to do business with you? Once you understand that deeply, make it the main message of your homepage so that people can quickly see how you can add real value to them.
There are two more major things to keep in mind about your website, as I have stated above, make sure that the entire website is built focused on what is important to the customer, not what you think is cool. Everything should be written from the customer’s point of view and show them exactly how you will help them solve their problems. Lastly, make sure your website is super easy to navigate so that your potential customers can find all of the most important information effortlessly. If they have to spend any time looking around to try to find something, they will simply go to someone else’s website that makes it easier for them.

**Should I have a blog?**

The quick answer is only if you have time and the willingness to put in lots of effort to deliver super high quality content. If you’re going to be any good at blogging you’ll need to put up a blog at least once a week, better to do more, and every single one of them must contain content that is interesting, exciting, engaging and of high value to your customers. Blogging, done right, is a hugely valuable way to keep in touch with your contacts, add real value to them and increase your exposure broadly. Personally I have made it a practice to only post up a blog when I have something extremely valuable to share, which means I only put up a blog once every week or two. Admittedly this is not nearly enough, but I simply refused to put up anything that is not excellent. However, because I really try to put myself in my customer’s shoes and only post things that they will find engaging and of value, I get an extremely high click-through rate on my blog and it is shared widely among my clients and to their colleagues and friends. Doing a blog is simple, I use Word Press and it is very easy to use, but the discipline of sitting down to write and ensuring that you only put up super high quality information is a constant challenge. If you’re going to blog, take the time to sit down and think out 20 or 30 topics that your customers would find super helpful, and use that as an outline to start writing your blog’s. They don’t have to be long, a few hundred words is fine, and you can also shoot a video and embed that into your blog, which I found be very popular. There are lots of great resources available on how to blog, so if you decide this is a tool you want to use I strongly suggest you do a lot of homework first.

**The Big Five**

From a business standpoint, I have found the five most productive platforms for social media are: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ and YouTube.
**Facebook**

There are two types of pages you can have on Facebook, a personal page and what is called a “fan page” for your business. If you are someone that is closely associated with your brand, like I am, and you’re willing to share some of your private and family life with your customers, then a personal page that you invite your clients to join is a great way to create a very strong emotional connection. I have a little over 4,900 “friends” on my personal page, of which I actually am real friends with about 300 or so, but it amazes me how many people follow me on Facebook. I can be almost anywhere in the world and people will mention what I had for dinner the week before or where I was on vacation, it can almost be a little creepy but it does make them feel like they know me and are connected to me in a personal way. However, even though I’m fine with people knowing that about me, I’m still very careful about what I put up on my personal page. Another thing to keep in mind with personal page is that it is limited to only 5,000 people, so if you want to grow your brand you’re going to need a business fan page as well.

The fan page is designed to promote a business or an individual who is a celebrity at some level. There is no limit to the number of “friends” you can have on your fan page, and the best way to use it for business is to put up lots of great content, motivational quotes, information, and links that the people who follow you and your business would really enjoy seeing.

**Twitter**

Twitter is a wonderful way to find and broadcast information to highly targeted audiences. By tracking and using hashtags (#) you can get great information on things that are interesting to you, retweet the best information to your followers, and to send specific tweets out to your followers and target groups. For my line of business, a professional speaker who delivers keynotes and workshops, I have found that the very best hashtags are: #business, #smallbusiness, #leadership, #management, #SMB, #SmallBiz. I also post very targeted tweets to groups such as Meeting Planners International (#MPI), the American Society of Association Executives (#ASAE) because these are two groups that hire a lot of speakers and trainers. So what are the most valuable hashtags in your industry? The best ways to find this out is to simply go on Google and search “top hashtags for…” then insert the name of your industry or type of business. You can also go to twitter and search different hashtags to see how many people, and what kind of people are following a specific hashtag. If you decide to use twitter as one of your social media platforms I strongly recommend that you use a service such as HootSuite or TweetDeck in order to manage and schedule your tweets. As with everything else I’m talking about here, make sure that you only put out high quality content, things that your customers will find very interesting, and keep that 90% content, 10% selling ratio in mind.
Another key idea about twitter, really about all social media, is the idea of using key influencers – Hubs – to spread your message for you. Let me give you a quick example. When my last book came out, *Awesomely Simple*, it won several awards and was doing pretty good on Amazon.com – but it was number 1,131 on the “Business Best Sellers” list on Amazon.com - not exactly impressive! Then my friend Guy Kawasaki was kind enough to put up a tweet saying that he had read my book, enjoyed it very much and recommended it highly. I went from number 1,131 on the bestsellers list to number 11 and my book got backordered for four weeks at Amazon.com - because Guy Kawasaki has about 1.5 million Twitter followers. That is the power of Hubs, that is the power of social media. And I’ve got all of that, for free, from one tweet!!!

LinkedIn

To me, LinkedIn is really good for two main objectives: showcasing your experience and skills, and keeping in contact with your key contacts regardless of if they move jobs. If you’re going to use LinkedIn take the time to put together the best possible profile you can, fill in all of the important information, list all of your certifications, show all of your awards, use it as a place to demonstrate your competence. An important part of that is getting as many of your clients as possible to write positive reviews about you and your work and endorse you for critical skills, which is another great way to show potential clients that you know what you’re doing. I’ve also found that LinkedIn is superb for allowing me to keep in touch with key customers even if they change companies. Because most people keep their profile pretty well updated, if I’m trying to hunt down someone I haven’t seen in years I can go to their LinkedIn profile and find their email address and what company they are currently working at. Some of my biggest new clients have come from former customers who switched to a new company, and after I got in touch with them through LinkedIn, asked me to come in and help them at their new business. One more thing on LinkedIn, they now have a new feature where you can “publish” content on your LinkedIn page. If you write something really good, there is a chance that it will be picked up on one of the LinkedIn “channels” and broadcast to thousands or millions of people. I recently wrote an article on leadership which got picked up on the “Leadership Channel” which is accessed by roughly 10 million people on LinkedIn, again, amazing free marketing for my business simply by making sure that I was putting up the highest quality content I could deliver.

Google+

This is still a new and growing platform and I will admit that it is not my first priority, but because it is from Google it is highly indexed by their search engine and I simply thought that it would be foolish not to have a Google+ profile and at least share a little bit of my best content.
on it. I do not know that I have generated any direct business off of my Google+ page yet, but I
will say that it does get a lot of exposure and I can reach a large number of people using
hashtags, which Google+ also recognizes. I simply see staying somewhat active on Google+ as
an insurance policy and a way to increase my exposure on Google.

**YouTube**

I left YouTube for last because it takes a bit more effort to be successful on this platform. If you
have the resources to buy some minimal equipment and the willingness to learn how to do
video editing, YouTube can be an insanely productive way to generate referrals. I’m not going
to go into a lot of detail here, you can Google “how to do great business videos” or something
along those lines and there will be lots of information there on how to put together a quality
YouTube video. Here are the key things that I’ve learned:

- I have a $600 Sony HandyCam that shoots absolutely great HD video, so it’s not super
  expensive to get the camera.
- It is very important to get superb lighting, this doesn’t mean you have to buy expensive
  lighting kits, you just have to make sure you have enough lighting to get rid of shadows
  and light your face well. Google “How to light a video” and it will give you several great
  examples.
- You need to get either a green screen background, or a black or white background to
  shoot your videos against. You can use green velvet from the craft store and hang it on
  the wall, or you can order very inexpensive backdrops that will give your video a very
  professional look. I shoot my videos against the white background to give them a crisp,
  clean look.
- I use the Adobe Premier Elements program to edit my videos; it’s not very expensive
  and easy to use. I simply googled “how to do great business videos” and “how to do a
  green screen video and Adobe Premiere Elements” and there were a number of videos
  and tutorials for free.
- Practice, practice, practice – even if you have great content it will be useless if you don’t
  look good in front of the camera or lack the necessary presentation skills. Watch videos
  from other people in your industry, or other professionals and study the ones that you
  think are especially good. Then practice in front of the camera until you feel super
  comfortable and can deliver excellent content in an engaging manner.
- You can easily put together everything you need to shoot highly professional videos for
  under $2,000. If you don’t want to do this yourself, there are plenty of firms you can
  hire to help you with your videos, but it can be expensive.
Once you post a video to YouTube, you’re going to want to link to it and all of your other social media platforms to get the widest possible exposure.

YouTube has been incredibly helpful to me in generating lots of high quality referrals and several new big clients. When combined with my other social media platforms and my blog, YouTube videos are one of my most powerful referral engines.

*** As promised at the beginning of this chapter, I did not go into a great deal of detail about exactly how to use each of these platforms, there are other books that do a much, much better job than I ever could (I have listed some of my favorites at the back of the book). I have simply shared with you platforms that work well for me, the ones that I can look at and see real revenue that I have brought in through these social media channels.
Chapter 4

Do you have a referral process?

I want to make it clear the beginning of this chapter that nearly everything I am going to share with you is based on the work of my very good friend John Jantsch in his spectacular book: the referral engine. I think I’ve covered a lot of good material here so far, but if you want to learn even more about referrals I highly recommend his book, it’s the best I read on referrals the will give you a lot of other fantastic information on marketing and branding. With that said, one of the key things John focuses on his book is the idea of having a referral process, a set of specific, strategic steps to take potential customer and turn them into a customer evangelist. I have tweaked John’s process just a little bit, but here is basically what he has developed for turning your customers into... a referral engine!

Emotion — logic – Emotion

the first thing to understand is that everyone goes through the same process when making a purchasing decision, they start with an emotional desire, justify it with logic and then in the end make the final decision based on emotion. Whether you’re buying a Boeing 747 jet or candy bar everyone goes through this same process. Let me give you an example...

Let’s say your car is starting to get a little, it scratched up a bit and you’re having problems with the engine so you figure it’s time to get a new car – or maybe your car is in fantastic shape but your next-door neighbor comes home with a brand-new shiny red BMW... So you figure it’s time to get a new car. The first step in making a purchasing decision is the emotional desire that you are unhappy with your current state, yesterday your car was fine but today it is not acceptable and you have an emotional desire to get a new car.

Next, you go to the dealership and look for a car that meets your criteria: cost, color, air-conditioning, tinted windows, antilock brake system, airbags, great stereo system and a sunroof. Once you can find a car that meets all or most of your criteria, you have logically justified to yourself that you have done in the appropriate level of due diligence and found something that will logically meet your needs.

Lastly, you decide if you really love the car and if you like the people at the dealership. If the cars really close to meeting all of your criteria, and you really like the salesperson, then there’s a good chance you will probably spend a little bit more than you planned but you’ll be happy with your purchase. If the car meets all of your criteria, but the salesperson and the rest of the staff are rude, condescending and abusive, there’s a good chance that emotionally you won’t be able to justify the purchase because you don’t like the people there, so you’re going try to
find another similar car different dealership whether people will treat you with respect and deliver great customer service.

So it’s very important to remember that you’ve got to:

1. Understand the emotions behind why people buy from you.

2. Be able to help them logically justify the purchase.

3. Create a positive relationship because at the end of the day you will not get a referral if people do not also like you as much as they like the products and services you have sold them.

You probably knew most of the things I just told you, but my question to you would be, do you currently have a thoughtful and precise step-by-step process for taking a potential new client and moving them through all the phases of emotion – logic – Emotion in order to not only close the business but turn them into a huge fan who is excited about giving you lots of referrals? The answer is probably no.

So here is my version (very heavily based on John Jantsch’s model) of the six steps of the referral process.

**Step one: identify your “Ideal Target Customer”**

Here is where I began a little bit differently than other referral models, because it makes sense to me that if you go out and spend a lot of time, energy and potentially money to get referrals, then you should focus on getting the very best referrals you possibly can, referrals that meet your “Ideal Target Customer” profile. Now don’t get me wrong, and a pretty good customer walks in the door and wants to do business with me I’m not going to say no, I’m simply saying that if I’m going to try to bring in new referrals I want to try to bring in the best customers, the ones you find great value in what I do, can afford my products and services, are easy to deal with and no lots of other people who meet my ideal target customer profile.
Again, I’m going to guess that you already know about the idea of creating a profile of your target customer, but my question to you would be: Do you currently have a clear, detailed, specific and written profile of exactly what your best target customer looks? For many people reading this book the answer will be no, so let me help you create one now.

**Describe in detail what you “Ideal Client” looks like.**

If it is B2C list things such as age, ethnicity, family situation, gender, income level, education level, neighborhood, car they drive, schools attended, what do the read, what sports do they enjoy, what other sort of other products do they own – type of car, type of house – activities, interests, hobbies – how much do they typically spend with you, how do they pay (cash, credit, check, account) everything you can think that describes your very best customers.

If it is a B2B customer list things such as: type of business, total revenues, number of employees, key products and services, number of locations, major competitors, key decision maker, how long in business, how much do they typically spend with you, what other sort of things do they purchase on a regular basis – everything you can think to describe your very best clients.

As an example, here is my Ideal Target Customer profile. My clients fall into three groups.

- Any company – small to Fortune 500 - that wants a “Thought Leader” or highly respected expert to deliver a keynote or workshop at a major meeting – or a series of workshops / training programs for their employees.
- Any small to medium-sized company that wants advice, consulting and training programs to help take their company to the next level.
- Any association or organization that needs a keynote speaker or breakout session presenter for a large meeting.

My target topics are: business excellence, strategic thinking, leadership, high-performance teams, winning culture, change management and customer service.

The decision maker is typically the owner, CEO President, head of HR, head of talent development, sales management executive, or director of learning. Gender is equally divided between men and women, typically age 35 or older. They are most often college-educated and have had several years in their position.
I have top clients worldwide and have delivered programs in Japan, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and many other locations so geography is not a determining factor, but I prefer to either work at locations that I can reach within five hours from my home (Florida), or exotic destinations such as New Zealand, the Caribbean or Europe so that I can mix business with fun.

My B2B target clients range in size from 20M to 80B+ and have 100 to 100,000+ employees. They are typically used to hiring speakers/trainers and understand the process and general fee structure. They are looking for a TRUE expert that will have credibility with their people. They also want someone who will work with them as a partner and trusted advisor to help them build a world-class event/program.

Associations make up another large component of my target clients because they run multiple events each year and need high-quality speakers/breakout presenters to deliver professional and focused information for their association members. My target association is one that is large enough (5M+ annual budget) to comfortably afford a top level speaker ($20k+) for their keynote slot. Target associations are ones that hold major meetings in great locations where I can mix business with fun.

The best target clients have the ability to hire me multiple times for annual meetings, training multiple divisions, working with multiple business units. They also have a continuous influx of new employees/members so that there is always a fresh group of people who need training.

**WORKSHOP**

I could go on quite a bit more, but I hope this gives you a general idea of how to build an ideal target clients profile. The key is to put in as much information as possible, and the best way to do that is to closely study your current best customers. Look at your top customers, who spend a lot of money with you, are great to deal with, pay on time and have the ability to refer you to other target customers— and then build your profile based on the similarities across all of those top clients. For some of you this will be very easy, as your top customers/clients will be very similar and the profile will be highly focused, for others, like me, it’s a little bit more ambiguous because there are so many different clients that I sell to. So take your time and really think this through in great detail, as the better job you do of creating a really clear target customer, the better job you will do in the rest of the process in attracting those sorts of referrals.

Step two: get to “know” you
Once you are who you want as your ideal target customers, then you must examine and think through all of the ways that they get introduced to you. At this stage they know absolutely nothing about you or your company, they never heard of you before and you are now about to make your first impression. I hate clichés, but I have to say it, remember that you never get a second chance to make a first impression, so you want to carefully plan how you and your business are presented to potential target customers.

WORKSHOP

List all of the ways that ideal customers might find out about you and your business, some examples are:

- Advertising
- Website
- Business card
- Your building / trucks / signage
- Employees
- Associations/trade groups
- Involvement in local groups/charities
- Referral
- Newspaper stories
- Networking events

Now, rate each on a scale of 1-10 – with 10 being: I rock at this, I have it totally nailed, I am superb at this – and 1 being: I do not do this at all.

Then identify the steps necessary to be an 8, 9 or 10 in every area you feel is important for you to make an excellent first impression with your Ideal Target Customers.