

# ESSENTIAL TOOLS NEEDED TO GET RESULTS AND THRIVE FROM YOUR NETWORKING

## MODULE FOUR

## Module Four – Referrals Made Easy

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## **STOP!!!**

Before you go any further!

In many cases, people purchase an e-course, then they start to waver, lose their focus or become too busy to complete the reading and actions. Is this you?

You invested your money in this e-course for a reason. Remind yourself what that reason was and fulfil your dreams!

Make a note of what motivates you about a course and what makes you lose concentration. Perhaps it's how you approach it. Start to clarify ways in which you can approach it differently, perhaps even when you approach it. To get the results you need you have to try different methods until you get it right for you.

If you need anything clarified, or are in need of some support in relation to this topic, message me via Facebook chat, or via email on [Amanda@vact.co.uk](mailto:Amanda@vact.co.uk) and I'll help you.

### **Action:**

Make note here of why you are doing this course and, if you find yourself wavering, come back and read it again.

OK, now you can continue...

## The Art of Referrals for Business Growth: Mistakes VAs Make

An essential ingredient of your networking strategy is the referral system. This is the most powerful way of getting new clients and it is the most cost-effective way. We have discussed the importance of building relationships and that when people get to know you, like you and trust you, they will do business with you.

Here are some of the biggest mistakes many VAs make when it comes to this part of the networking strategy:

- They feel awkward about asking for referrals so don't ask;
- They don't always know how to ask for referrals;
- They don't invest enough time in building relationships first, therefore miss out on the referral system;
- They don't ask the right people for referrals;
- They're not always clear on what help and support they need, so people don't pass referrals on as they're not clear what the VAs are looking for;
- They're not always proactive in following up with referrals, therefore, not only do they miss out on business, but people feel less inclined to pass any more in their direction;
- They spend money on advertising which is a cold form of marketing, when it's the building of relationships that will get them the leads they need.

Does any of this sound familiar? If it does, please read on.

## Referrals are Based on Relationship Building

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***When you're given a referral, it's a message that someone else believes in you and your business.***

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I cringe at how many VAs have told me that when they started out they spent quite a bit of money on advertising. Sometimes as much as £500 for one quarter sized advert. They did this as they believed that they were reaching out and raising their profile to a large number of business people and therefore saving money! This is a huge risk and never guarantees you business, so if the advertising sales people tell you otherwise then they shouldn't be in that role. (Unless you have a budget the size of that of Marks and Spencer's then that's fine!)

In the previous sections I've discussed with you the importance of building relationships because people buy from people they know, like and trust. When they see an advert, it doesn't give any opportunity to build a relationship unless you are a frequent advertiser and building other activities on the advert to build trust in your brand. That can work out very expensive indeed. So, really, you want to build your client list on as low a budget as possible, don't you?

Are you aware that referrals are the best form of advertising? Think now to a time in the past when you have asked a trusted friend or colleague to recommend a service or product. Why did you ask them? Probably because you trusted and respected their judgement, knowing they would recommend someone that would provide a good, quality driven service or to save on cost.

The person they recommended did not have to do anything to gain you as a client (aside from their stellar customer service, of course), which meant no costs incurred on marketing.

Therefore, put the shoe on the other foot and imagine now that it is your service that someone has highly recommended. The person coming to you does not need you to influence and persuade them, because the person who referred them to you has already done that for you. This is the wonderful thing about referrals; someone else has already spent the time to build a relationship with another business person. They will have a mutual respect for one another's judgement. Therefore, when one refers you to the other, you are starting off that relationship at a higher level. People who have been referred to you will make the assumption that you must be good enough if you are being referred.

Of course, this does mean that you have to constantly ensure that you are building a professional reputation and if you are a new VA, then you can just inform people that you offer a money back guarantee which tells people how confident you are in delivering a great service.

Let me give you an example here, the courses that VACT offer are not the most expensive by any stretch to the imagination but they are not cheap either. But what VACT offers is an outstanding course and awesome support which has created many award winning VAs. So, you might look at one of our courses and go well I could get a similar course for less money over here, but in your research you talk to people who have done my courses and they are passionate about the course and support they get – you are more likely to choose my training course based on their recommendation than some swanky sales page and price tag.

Why is this important for you to think about; for someone looking for a VA, they will regularly ask their connections who are also business owners, perhaps in the same niche industry, if they can recommend their VA. Indeed, it could be that the business owner states how they've been able to achieve some great results in their business and much of this was due to the support their VA gave them.

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***If others want those same results, they're going to ask to be referred to that VA.***

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People like the ease of being referred to a VA as they don't always want or know how to choose the right VA or find one who will know how to help the business owner achieve the results they want.

They make business buying decisions based on a recommendation rather than a price. Which in fairness is a much nicer way to do business.

**This is why networking works!!**

## **Asking for Referrals Made Easy**

How do you feel about asking someone you know for a referral? Awkward or comfortable? Getting a referral is the highest compliment you can receive.

Imagine your business as a constantly growing network of contacts and that each of your contacts could potentially connect you with others in their own network, who in turn will have their own network. It's like a growing family tree. In order to receive any opportunities from these contacts, you have to be very proactive. Plant the seed.

If you feel awkward about asking for referrals then stop. You're not being pushy or sales-like. If people want to give you a referral then they will, so by you asking, and if you deserve it, the referrals will come easily for people.

This means being very clear with them the type of contacts you are looking for and how you can help those people. Look at ways in which you are genuinely prepared or able to support them in return.

Here are some low cost ways in which you can ask for referrals through your networking activity, not only with your networking community but with your clients too.

### **Reward Scheme**

You can let people know of a reward scheme, which means if a referral is converted into a client, the person who referred you to your new client can receive 10% of the first invoice (once payment is received of course) from you. Or simply send them a gift.

Personally, I try to send something I know they will enjoy – so perhaps a book, dinner or a personalized gift. (It doesn't need to be expensive but ideally something that shows thought has gone into it.)

## Client Referral Scheme

Another opportunity is to ask your existing clients for any referrals. It is a good idea to do this after you have had your first client review with them. Once your clients have started to see for themselves the positive impact you have had on their business, how you have solved their problems, and the positive impression you have made on them with your client management, you are in a stronger position to ask them to help you. You can ask who they know who would also want to achieve the same results, and who could benefit from using your VA services.

Some VAs also offer your client a referral discount; this means taking 10% off their invoice once the referral has become a client.

If you feel awkward about asking for referrals at first, why not do one of two things:

- If you are sending out a client evaluation form after the first review, you can add a final point mentioning to them that you value them as a quality client and that you are looking for new clients of their calibre, could they think about who they know that they would be happy to refer to you. Mention here about your reward scheme if you decide to implement one.
- Send them a letter asking the same question.

**Action:**

Create your own reward scheme and outline the process to clients.

## In Your Marketing

In your marketing material (on your website, email newsletter or online brochure) you can ask people to think about their connections who would value you being their VA and talk about an incentive scheme.

**Action:**

Make a list of your clients and dates they are due to have their next client business review consultation (imperative). Ask your clients that as part of their preparation for the review meeting, amongst the other actions, you'd like them to think about who they know within their industry who'd like to achieve the same results and would benefit from your services. This means they come armed with referrals there and then.

## Circle of Influence

A circle of influence is a strategic alliance. What industries serve the same client as you but do not compete with you? Who are the professionals you know in these industries? Keep a list - this list is meant to be a living document, a tool you are working with and adding to all the time. So if you don't know professionals in those industries, now is the time to create networking opportunities that will allow you to connect with them.

Your circle of influence is made up of people who may or may not become your direct clients. Your job is to turn them into raving fans who will refer your services. Your other job is to look for opportunities to help them. The best networkers look for what they can give to others.

## How to Build Your Circle of Influence

Start with the low hanging fruit, the professionals you are already connected to (i.e. your web developer, accountant, copywriter etc) Reach out with the intent to build a strategic alliance.

## Referrals from Introducers or Connectors via Affiliate links

Never bombard people for a referral - if they want to go away and think about who they know then let them come back to you in their own time. There is nothing more off-putting than someone who appears desperate!

Through using affiliate software, you can provide people with an affiliate link which they can use on their website under useful links. When a visitor of their website follows the link to your site, the affiliate software will automatically recognise the link so you can keep track. In return, you can offer the same or have their web links under their testimonials or in a Useful Links page on your website.

### **Action:**

Make a live list of people you would like to meet or be introduced to who can become part of your circle of influence and will connect you with your ideal clients.

Make a point of arranging to meet and get to know one another. Aim to do this within the next 60 days.



## Referrals from Your Service Providers

Think about the people you will be using for printing, stationery, book-keeping and accounts, web design, PR or marketing, business coaching etc and ask if they would be happy to provide your information to people they know. This could be done as a feature in their email newsletter, providing your business card or flyer in their office/reception area or when they next do a direct mail campaign (you may need to contribute towards postage).

**Action:**

Make a list of your suppliers and see how you can explore ways to support one another.

## Referrals with Other VAs

Yes, that's right.

Think about the prospective client who might not fit into your niche - they may have a particular need that you cannot fulfil, they may want you onsite and that doesn't fit with the way you work or they are not in your location. Whatever this may be, another VA may just be the perfect fit for them. Ensure that the other VA contacts the client in a short space of time for consistency and professionalism. The client will respect you for this and if they came to you for good reasons, they will trust who you recommend too. You do not necessarily need to charge a referral fee to the other VA as you would hope that they would reciprocate if the same opportunity arose to mutually support you.

**Action:**

Start building your VA community, identify other VAs who also work with your niche and/or other niches. Take the time to get to know them and, in particular, their skillsets.

## Questions to Ask When Receiving a Referral

Where possible, do what you can to give quality referrals to your contacts so that you show you are willing to support them in return. Ensure that you only give quality referrals otherwise your reputation will be affected.

Good practice when someone refers a contact to you, ask the following questions: -

1. In what capacity do you know this person? What is your relationship with this person? You want to establish if this is a lead or a referral.

2. Is it OK if I call this person direct or would you prefer to call them and make an introduction? Do you mind if I just check how you will be introducing me?
3. When I call them, is it OK to mention your name?

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***Through any of your networking activity both online and in person, who do you know who can offer you a referral?***

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## **The Etiquette of Receiving Referrals**

Everyone is busy, therefore consider this when someone takes time out of their hectic business or lifestyle to refer an opportunity in your direction. They value you enough to action this so ensure you value them back. You also have to consider that if you are building your profile in the community and trying to make a name for yourself, then it's a higher risk to someone else to pass a referral to you. Therefore, it's even more crucial to follow the pointers below so that you build a level of professionalism at a higher level with these people:

1. Ensure you acknowledge the person giving the referral and pick up the phone to say thank you. Email is a lazy way of saying thank you and all too easy. Make the time to action this as early as possible. It's no good saying thank you a month later.
2. Write a thank you card. There are so many great designs or you can have some branded ones printed. Buy in bulk (and stamps too) and this way you can't make the excuse that you've not had a chance to buy any. When someone sends me a handwritten card, I value that more than an e-card. Although, with the cost of post these days I appreciate you have to watch the pennies but it's worth it.
3. When you call the person to say thank you for the referral, ask how you can reciprocate. What help and support are they looking for? They'll probably tell you that they didn't have a selfish intention for sending you the referral, but it's nice to know you would like to reciprocate in any case.
4. I also like to mention the person on Twitter and Facebook, this way I am helping to promote them but also tell others that this person is great at supporting their networking community.
5. Ensure you make the effort to follow up on all referrals you've been given. It's very rude to ignore it, even if you've forgotten, by not following up you are disrespecting the person who gave it to you. Even if the referral isn't one you can see would create a business opportunity, still connect as you never know where that could lead to.
6. Once you have followed up, provide an update to the person who gave you the referral as soon as possible - it can even be to say that you've left a message and you're waiting for them to come back to you.

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***Sometimes a referral will come from a casual conversation with someone who then comes to your website and signs up for your newsletter, or they may start to follow you on Twitter.***

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In order to quantify your networking and marketing, track where referrals come from. Therefore, on the Contact Form or Enquiry Form on your website, ensure you have a question “How did you hear about us?” or remember to ask people when you speak to them.

Last year someone booked onto my VA Mastery Course as a result of speaking to a VA who I had never met but had highly recommended me. I got in contact with this VA and also sent her a referral fee of 10% of the course value as a thank you.

**Action:**

If not done so already, ensure that your website contact form asks how people have found you. Track this information – it will allow you to identify what marketing is working and where you should spend more time/effort moving forward.

## **Start as You Mean to Continue**

To avoid feeling awkward about asking your clients for referrals, start a new process with them right from the start of that client relationship, they'll start to expect it and will respect your ambition. They will respect you as a business owner and if anything, they should be doing something similar for their own business:

1. When you start a contract with a new client, I suggest that you send them a welcome letter to agree the new client consultation and explaining how you'll work together. Within this letter you can then ask the client if they are happy to recommend you.
2. State how you will reward your client for the referrals as mentioned above.
3. Be clear what type of referrals you are looking for, avoid saying you're looking for more clients as they won't recognise the opportunity as much as if you were to state “someone who is also a business coach looking to expand their business”.
4. Clients will only provide referrals if you've provided a great service!
5. When you are provided with a referral by your client, this is a great time to also ask for a testimonial to use for the purpose of your marketing material.

## Give and You Shall Receive

Become a giver and not a constant receiver. Show the spirit of generosity and you'll find people will want to support you in return, as mentioned before.

In any situation, when you can spot an opportunity to refer business to a fellow networking contact, or even introduce two of your clients together as you see a possible joint venture for them, just do it.

As you start to attend your networking group meetings more and more, and you start to get to know people, make a point of facilitating introductions there at the meeting. That is just as powerful a statement as giving a referral.

**One last thought: always thank someone who has given you a referral.** Send them a note, keep them informed of your progress and maybe even treat them to lunch, even if it doesn't lead to business.

Once you have given a referral, do make a point of following it up. If the person you gave the referral to has not made contact, then it's important to ask why as there may be a challenge you can help with.

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***Never give referrals to someone in the hope that they'll give you one back. You'll be disappointed. It doesn't work in that way at all. Be generous for genuine reasons only.***

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When I go networking, I use the same "Networking" notebook to capture what others are looking for – it means I can keep track what my network is looking for and, should I meet someone who my network needs, I can introduce one another easily.

### **Action:**

Look at who is in your personal and business community and start identifying people whom you can connect to others and start taking the action. If you are unclear what your business community wants, start arranging those 1-2-1 meetings straight away.

Review your networking from the past couple of months and see who you can connect. This may not be a referral of work but a good connection for them. Your network will remember you as a good connector.

## Make it Easy for People to Refer to You

1. **Inform clients about your outstanding service.** If you pride yourself with your great client management and what you do that your competitors don't do,

then let your clients know this. Make sure they are aware of what makes you unique.

2. **Be clear on what referrals you're looking for.** If you're not clear with them on the referrals you're seeking, how can you expect them to give the right referrals for you? Perhaps include this in the new client consultation or provide a profile document; outline clearly who your ideal clients are, how they can refer the contacts to you and what happens once you have received the referral.
3. **Seek out the connectors.** This is where having a niche market is so powerful. Seek out other people in your network who also work with, or who are connected to, your niche or ideal client and build your relationships with them. If you are all working with the same clients then you can create a powerful circle of influence where you are connecting one another to the right contacts.
4. **Be clear what you do.** If you haven't explained how your clients benefit from working with you and are not clear what makes you stand out from your competitors then you're going to make it difficult to refer business to you. Stop telling people that you're a VA and then try to explain how it works. Spend time defining what your client results are and how your client management is outstanding. When people are clear what you do and why people come to you, they're more likely to give you the right referrals.

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***Avoid saying you're 'professional' - everyone is saying that!  
Say something that makes you unique!***

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## Summary

- Referrals come when you take the time to build relationships and build trust. People need to feel comfortable that their reputation is not at stake by referring you to their respected contacts.
- Asking for referrals can be implemented into your day-to-day business processes and create a logical system which ensures everyone is rewarded. Asking for referrals should be part and parcel of your business marketing strategy.
- When a referral is passed in your direction, go through key questions to help establish the best way to pursue this opportunity. Keep the person who referred you involved or updated.
- Implement a referral agreement in your client contract and ensure your clients know how to refer to you. Make it easy for them.
- Givers gain, refer to others with the spirit of generosity,
- Let people know how and who to refer to you so that the referrals that come your way are the right ones to boost your business. Follow up and be consistent.

**Well done, this is the fourth of 10 modules... have you been taking the appropriate actions?**