

Two Events You Can Use to Get More Sales

By Colleen Francis

You will stand out, get noticed, and speed up sales if you organize client conferences and power lunches.

Why? Because hosting events that encourage clients and prospects to network with each other allows you to leverage current relationships to build new ones.

Let me explain how.

Client Conferences

Client conferences offer the chance for clients and prospects to interact with you as well as each other. Just keep in mind that “conferences” don’t mean only in-person events. They can be any gathering, in person or virtual that bring many people together in one space.

You can include banquets, holiday parties, summer gatherings, networking events, presentations, webinars, luncheons and multi day conferences. You could even piggy-back on an industry conference and host your own event before or after the show.

The type of event you hold isn’t as important as what is accomplished. As you plan the event:

1. First, keep in mind who to invite. Strategically choose the clients that are loyal enthusiasts and who share common elements with your most important prospects.
2. Next, set specific goals, of landing specific sales or building stronger relationships.
3. Finally, spark conversations between current and potential clients by seating them together at tables, making introductions and allowing time for networking or questions during the event.

For example, before they were bought, restaurant point-of-sales software company Posersa hosted six annual meetings across the country to train their best clients on how to use their system more effectively to generate more restaurant sales. The events were free and provided a chance for clients to interact with each other as well as with company experts to learn to use their systems more profitably. Further, these elite clients were also taught how to attract new diners and grow their business. Finally, in attendance were a small selection of key prospects invited by the local sales team. At these meetings they had the chance to interact with both the clients and the experts presenting.

Whenever you have the chance to introduce your best clients to your best prospects the result is an increase in sales.

Involve Your Clients

Getting your current clients involved in the event is a great way to highlight your services and show potential clients what you can do for them. You can leverage your current clients by asking them to give a presentation, which will allow potential clients to hear directly from your current clients.

Our team has seen some amazing results with this strategy. For example, a few years ago, Engage Selling Solutions began working with a small-business telecommunications manufacturing company. With our help, a senior executive within the firm spearheaded a bold initiative to create an event focused on bringing key clients and key prospects together. Doing so, meant confronting one of their biggest fears—that their clients would just use this forum as an opportunity to complain about what was wrong with their product!

Instead, three interesting things happened. First, the clients began offering suggestions about product features, leading to entirely new applications that had never been considered before. Second, the company suddenly and unexpectedly found themselves with a wealth of success stories as their customers began to share with them and with each other all the ways that they were using their product. Third, the firm's clients became deeply loyal, not just because they felt their input was valued, but also because they had a new sense of personal ownership in the new direction of the firm. And fourth, sales rolled in from the prospects who were in attendance because they were able to connect with clients directly and hear about their successes.

The outcome was ongoing. Referrals skyrocketed, leading to increased sales; and the sales continued to boom nonstop quarter after quarter for several years.

Power Lunches

Another, more intimate event, is a power lunch. A power lunch is not meant to benefit you directly, but to develop client-to-client sales and add value for your client. As you do this, your clients will be more willing to advocate on your behalf when you ask them to buy more from you.

A power lunch is as simple as taking two clients, or a small group to lunch so they can meet and talk about their businesses together. Where possible, try to connect peers who could benefit from knowing each other because they might be able to do business together. You will improve your relationships, which will lead to referrals. And, what could be better for building loyalty than when they credit you for helping them expand their business or find a new partner?

For example, an Engage client in industrial sales purchased a table for a local high profile fundraising event. He invited the CEOs of his seven biggest customers and prospects to join him at the table and they were able to network with each other. After the event he reported to me that it was a bigger success than anticipated because although they all were CEOs of local companies in similar markets, none of them had ever happened to meet personally. My client had created that opportunity. The connections made at the event strengthened the seller's community and led to direct referrals to many other—and wildly disparate—CEOs with whom these powerful clients thought he should be doing business with.

Another Engage client in the business products market makes it a habit to have lunch each week with two clients who don't know each other but should. By connecting his clients he creates a small

but powerful community that his clients can leverage to create more value in their markets and that he can leverage to create more referrals, more testimonials, and ultimately more sales.

These corporate peer connections are invaluable for business to grow. When you facilitate them among your best clients either internally among themselves or externally with prospects you create growth.

Power lunches have an added bonus: they get people talking about you. Look at power lunches as investments that will provide long-term benefits. When clients recognize your relationship as something valuable, they will be more likely to continue doing business with you and to turn to you when they have a need.

Your goal for client conferences and power lunches is to leverage your current client base to get more clients, which is a powerful way to increase your sales.

Smart, successful companies today recognize the power that results from bringing people together. They don't settle for sales teams who operate in isolation. They create client events and communities where everybody can learn from each other and gain from that expertise.