

Unexpected Strategies Proven to Get Sales

By Colleen Francis

The best Engage clients are always experimenting with new ways to attract the best new prospects. Hosting educational events and nominating your clients for awards are two of these experiments that have proven to be extremely fruitful.

Hosting Educational Events

An educational event provides value and teaches your clients about something related to the products or services you are selling. They can be webinars, or in person, small or large standalone events or attached to a bigger conference. Educational events can be as simple as a breakfast meeting, or as sophisticated as a multi-day conference. Pick the format that is right for your business and market. Also consider the fact that virtual events will only be their most effective after your community has had a chance to meet face to face. For this reason, host in person educational events first, and follow it up with virtual meetings.

The key is to have a mix of current clients plus key prospects so that they can interact and share ideas. Allowing prospects to hear directly from your current clients will bolster your standing with them, which will lead to more sales. And, because your prospects are more likely to be influenced by your clients' word than yours, these sales will close more quickly. As a plus, when clients are sharing success stories with your prospects, their loyalty to you is confirmed and improved.

A high profile and very advanced example is Salesforce.com's Dreamforce educational conference. Once a year, thousands of current clients, as well as prospective clients wanting to learn more about the product, take over San Francisco for this user conference that features best practices, and seminars. Dreamforce is the must attend educational event for the CRM community. Many potential customers attend as part of their research and due diligence because they know that they will be able to speak personally with current Salesforce.com customers and receive real-life examples. They're eager to learn whether or not the software is as good as the sellers claim.

This educational event works to convert prospects because they feel an increased level of control. They are able to learn about the software on their own terms rather than being sold to.

Regardless of the scale or scope of your event, try to implement three key practices from Dreamforce:

1. Discuss industry trends, problems, challenges and opportunities your clients face.
2. Show them how to use your products and services to the highest potential
3. Carefully decide who you will invite and choose clients and prospects that can relate to each other.

Another less complex example of an educational event is a road show where you and your clients speak to present case studies. You're able to demonstrate to prospects what you can do for them. You can also present this material via an interactive webinar where you ask your clients questions or have a panel discussion.

Giving away executable value in your market will enhance your reputation in any industry while cementing your reputation as an expert. These educational events act as a promotional tool that show potential clients that not only are you interested in their businesses, but you want to help them succeed.

I know it may seem counterintuitive, but offering a free educational event for prospective clients will increase your closing conversion rate. Giving people a sample of what you have to offer is typically exactly what they need to persuade them to work with you.

Nominating Your Clients for Business Awards

First, make sure it's OK with your client that you nominate them. Not all clients like the limelight.

This approach works because once a client is nominated, shortlisted and invited to the event, they will invite you to attend with them. At the event, they will introduce and promote you to their friends, family, colleagues and others in a positive light. After all, you nominated them for an award! These individuals can prove to be valuable referrals and connections which can help you boost sales in the future.

But, even if your client isn't invited to an event (or if there isn't an event associated with the award) this strategy will still benefit you. The client will be grateful for the gesture and you will be adding value for them. Doing so will help you retain their business and turn them into advocates when you try to sell more to them.

Your client will also most likely tell their colleagues, friends and connections about their nomination, which can lead to valuable referrals that will boost your sales.

We have seen success by nominating clients for awards on multiple occasions. Here is a personal example. A few years ago, a woman I nominated as the Female Entrepreneur Of The Year invited me to sit at a table with 6 other local CEO's at the gala dinner. At the end of the night, I had secured meeting requests from 4 of them.

At first blush, hosting educational events and nominating your clients for awards may not seem like sales strategies, but don't be fooled! These strategies offer a 1, 2 punch! You're enhancing your current relationships while putting yourself in a position to meet new prospects. Not to mention, when you put your happy clients and your ideal prospects together, you convert leads into clients faster than ever before.