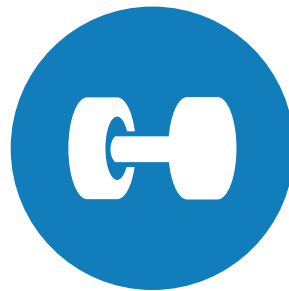
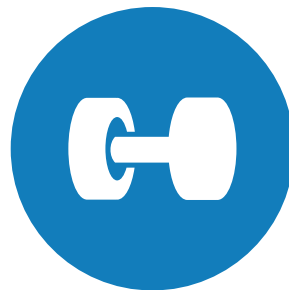


Marketing for Service Providers: Build a thriving business— one client at a time.

By Andrea Parker with Dr. Dustin Burleson

Infusionsoft®



Marketing any small business successfully can be a challenge. But for service providers, the rules of the marketing game change substantially. For example, you don't see your customers several times per week, like in a restaurant or coffee shop. Sometimes your services are elective, and people must choose if they want to spend their **fresh-from-the-recession** dollars on your services or something else.

Despite a trickier path, service providers still have ample opportunities to keep clients engaged, build relationships, and achieve marketing success.

Create a positive experience.

You may have heard that “your first impression is also your last impression.” This is especially true in the services sector. Your clients may walk into an office, spend a few minutes in a waiting room, interact with staff members and take in the scenery. From the moment a client walks through the front door, it's important that they feel welcome, perceive an air of professionalism, and aren't intimidated or turned off by the demeanor of your staff. You want your clients to have a pleasant experience even before you meet them face-to-face. When it happens, they'll feel comfortable with you and ready to proceed with your services.

Use marketing automation in a personal way.

Beyond meeting new clients for a consultation, you want to make sure their whole experience with you and your staff is entirely pleasant. At his orthodontics practice, Dustin Burleson, D.D.S. says that part of creating the experience is thoughtfulness and timing. He and his staff utilize **marketing automation** to send automated email greeting cards to their patients at key points during their treatments. There is usually a special gift attached, such as a voucher for a free smoothie, for patients who are getting their braces for the first time. Later, when the braces are removed, another email and gift card is automatically sent to the patient for a free caramel apple.



You have the chance to establish a rewarding relationship with your client by creating an experience that is unique and worthwhile.



Dustin Burleson, D.D.S.

Small tokens, gifts or messages that connect with your patient or client are a great way to let them know you understand and want to serve them to the best of your ability. These gestures mean so much more than the cost of the gift itself, or the few minutes you spent crafting your message. By creating a meaningful experience, you establish a positive feeling within the client, who will be more than happy to refer you to their friends, family and co-workers when the opportunity arises.

Talk with clients, not at them.

The way in which you communicate with clients is crucial, as well. Speak with them in a way that establishes trust and exerts your knowledge and expertise—without making them feel threatened or inferior. For example, you're not going to win new business by tossing around industry-specific jargon that only confuses your potential client. Remember to speak with them as valued individuals who are seeking your help and expertise. So, share it with them in ways they understand and appreciate.

Multiply referrals while lowering costs.

A certain amount of trust accompanies a **referral**, because it comes with a “stamp of approval” from a reliable source. The endorsement of a trusted friend can go a long way toward building your clientele, as many service providers can attest. When customers need outside services, it can feel a bit nerve-racking to them. They may not know exactly what they need, or where to find it. But if someone recommends a service provider to them, a calming effect takes place. Keep this in mind as you meet with new clients. Be sure to ask if they were referred and, if so, by whom. By keeping track of this information, you can contact the referring client and thank them. This puts you right back at the forefront of their minds, and they'll remember you when others need your services in the future. Always be gracious, and never miss an opportunity to thank clients for their business.



On average, over 76% of small business owners believe that good systems can give their company more time to deal with each prospect or customer individually.

From the 2013 study “The American Dream: What Really Motivates Small Business Owners.”

Exclusive offers and social media.

For many people, receiving a special offer is more important than the offer itself. The simple fact that they were included in an exclusive invitation can be a pretty big deal. It makes people feel special. Plus, people who weren't included, but hear about it, will want to be included—and fast! That's why exclusive offers, [involvement in contests](#), and giveaways are an excellent ways to get more fans, clients and customers.

Some service providers are using their social media influence to create more fans through contests, trivia, photo contests and more. When a Facebook friend or Twitter follower sees a friend “Like” or re-tweet something, this generates curiosity. If the service provider's message is strong and engaging enough, the likelihood of gaining more qualified fans and followers is higher. Making special offers to fans and clients makes it enticing for non-fans to take action. When a service provider clearly states that the recipient must be a fan to be eligible for tickets to the next big game, people are more likely to engage. More importantly, they'll remember you the next time they need your services.

Shake hands with B2B marketing.

A great idea for business-to-business (B2B) marketing is to be more personal. Allow other service providers to know your staff and [culture](#). Share some behind the scenes information, a personal story or two, and highlight aspects of your business that you might not otherwise share with a potential customer. Keep it casual and friendly, not overly professional or stuffy. Think of it as a handshake with another service provider, not a catalogue of your business assets or other typical selling points for prospects. That type of information is better suited for potential customers who are specifically seeking your services.



“Using a mutually beneficial referral system, each business can thrive...”

The idea of B2B marketing isn't lost on service providers. Two service providers, who are closely aligned, will often refer business to one another. Using a mutually beneficial referral system, each business can thrive without worrying about competing with the other. For example, if a potential client visits a law firm for an initial consultation, but discovers that they need a lawyer who practices a different kind of law, a recommendation makes perfect sense. In the future, when the roles are reversed, the law firm that made a referral earlier now receives one in return. Reciprocation works.

Segment and automate your messaging.

To **save a great deal of time** and effort with your customer and B2B marketing, consider your method of distribution and the messages you're sending. Also, find out if you're repeating the same tasks more than twice. If you are, you're eating into valuable, billable hours. By creating a marketing message system, then setting it up just once with **automation software**, you'll cut down on duplicate tasks, saving you an enormous amount of time. Plus, your emails can reach a much larger audience.

Customer relationship management (CRM) software enables you to keep track of contacts. It also lets you segment the email list for different types of customers and prospects. This is a smart way to be sure your emails are delivered, opened, read and followed up. It also prevents mistakes in the messaging sequence. You don't want to send an introductory offer to your long time customers, for example. They would be far more receptive to a thank you email or loyalty offer. Also, you never want a customer or prospect to feel slighted due to incorrect messaging. By segmenting your list, you can target your customers and potential customers with personalized messages that are relevant to them and their current situation. Relevancy and timing can make all the difference in the world for them, and for your business.



“Relevancy and timing can make all the difference in the world...for your business.”

About the Author

Andrea Parker is a Brand Journalist at Infusionsoft, and helps small businesses succeed by creating original content for and managing the Big Ideas Blog, as well as creating e-books and infographics for small business consumption. Andrea is an award-winning writer and former professional steeplechaser with a penchant for reading, tutoring and baked goods. You can follow Andrea on the [Big Ideas Blog](#) and on Twitter [@BigIdeasBlog](#).



Andrea Parker

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