



Get Repeat Clients for Your Mediation Business

By Victoria Pynchon and Joe Kraynak from Success as a Mediator For Dummies

In the mediation business, one of the best sources for new business is the clients you've already served, so keep in touch with them. You want to show your clients that you care about them and that you're more concerned about what you can do for them than what they can do for you.

Identify your best clients

Your best clients are your most dollar-productive clients. To identify them, look for clients who

- **Pay you what you're worth:** The best clients recognize that your time is valuable and pay you accordingly without trying to haggle.
- **Honor your boundaries:** You want clients who contact you when they need your services and are willing to hire you to provide those services. Clients who contact you only for free advice or ask you to mediate their cases for free are time wasters, unless they're an entryway into a particular niche in your market, such as upscale law firms or corporate legal or HR departments.
- **Provide referrals:** You want clients who not only need your services but also refer others who need your services to you.
- **Expose you to new opportunities:** Certain clients may serve as a doorway to markets or other opportunities you want to explore.
- **Challenge you:** Great clients demand excellence and let you know what you can do to improve.

Gather and use contact information

Retaining quality clients requires that you stay in touch with them, and staying in touch necessitates having their contact information. These are great resources for gathering contact information:

- E-mail
- Business cards
- Member lists from professional associations and organizations to which you belong

- Online networking communities
- Member lists or directories for teams, clubs, schools, hobby groups, churches, volunteer organizations, and so on

After collecting the contact information, organize it. You have a few options here:

- **E-mail program:** Nearly every e-mail program enables you to store information and keep notes about your contacts. Free programs, such as Windows Live Mail and Mozilla Thunderbird, are fine. Microsoft Outlook and Mac Address Book are more robust.
- **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is a great way to keep track of clients, assuming that most of them have LinkedIn accounts, because whenever they add or update information about themselves, you immediately have access to the new information.
- **Upload to a cloud:** *Cloud computing* is the practice of using web-based applications to perform tasks and access data. You can upload your contacts to a service like Plaxo or iCloud and manage them in the cloud with a bit more sophistication and ease.

One of the major benefits of cloud computing is that you don't have to copy files or sync devices; you can easily access contacts from your desktop or laptop computer, your smart phone, or any other electronic device wherever you happen to be.

- **E-mail marketing program:** Bring all your contacts into an e-mail marketing program like iContact or Constant Contact. In addition to functioning as a database, these programs enable you to launch and manage your own marketing campaigns, typically via e-mail and social networking.

If all you're doing is managing contacts, you're done. If you're using your contacts for online marketing, you have to complete a few additional steps:

1. Ask permission to add your clients to your e-mail list.

You can ask permission in one of the following ways:

- E-mail clients and request their permission.
- Provide an opt-in form on your website or blog.

Always allow clients to opt in to receive information, and always provide a quick and obvious way, in every automated e-mail communication, for them to opt out at any time. In addition to giving your clients a choice, allowing clients to opt in or out motivates you to provide content that's valuable enough to keep them engaged.

2. Develop your marketing campaign.

Online marketing programs have instructions or wizards to lead you through the process. Your program may even help you with the preceding step of requesting clients to opt in.

3. Launch your marketing campaign.

After you set up your campaign, launching it is simply a matter of clicking a button to give your okay.

4. Track the success of each campaign and make adjustments to improve it.

Online marketing programs include their own analytics to help you measure the success of campaigns based on client response.

Follow up with clients postmediation

One of the best ways to retain clients and generate referrals is to follow up with clients after the mediation has concluded. Checking in with clients about a recent mediation, whether or not they've successfully resolved their dispute, gives you the perfect excuse to contact someone.

Keep a journal (or spreadsheet) of every mediation that includes the names of the parties and their attorneys (if any), personal information (names of children, important occasions), a summary of the dispute, the party interests revealed during that dispute, and how the parties resolved the dispute or why you believe the matter went unresolved.

Sometime during the two weeks following the mediation, call the disputants (or their attorneys) to check in and see how everything is going. If the parties settled, has everyone performed as promised? If the dispute remains unresolved, how has it evolved since the mediation? If the parties are still struggling with certain issues, let them know that you're available to help.

Don't treat these as sales calls! Talk to the parties the same way you'd inquire about the well-being of a friend. For example, you can say something like, "I'm always available if you need me." That should be the extent of your promotional efforts.