



"I used your agreement form to contract a \$3,500 web site job. I had already proved that I was the right person for the job, but it was nice to not look like an amateur business person when it came to reducing the promise to writing." - *Matt Biskup*

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## Finding the Right Clients

BY PATTY J. AYERS

For a startup web design business, finding clients is at the top



of the priority list. I think we all wish there was just one effective way to make this happen, because we'd all jump on it. But of course there is no single right way; instead, there are lots of different possible ways. For each of us, there are methods that suit our personality and budget, and those are the ones to try. Following are the top 4 ways I have found clients.

**My own business website.** I keep it in good shape and pay attention to SEO, especially for geographical keywords for my local area. I don't need my clients to be local, but many of them want a local web developer, so it works. With a little studying, tweaking, and

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submitting, I've managed to get my business website placed well on some major search engines under localized key-phrases (like "web design Chapel Hill"). You may not think many people search on these phrases, but apparently they do, because I have gotten a number of jobs from people who found me directly over the web. In fact, the very first client I got after launching my full-time business found me via a search engine. I continue to get several calls a month from people who found me in search engine results.

**Referrals from existing clients.** These are solid gold, because the person has been prepared by his friend to think well of me and trust me right from the outset. And if I do get the job, I try to really give it my very best, because I want to please the client who referred them. So these end up being good experiences. I do encourage my existing clients to give me referrals whenever I have the opportunity, but there's only so much of that you can do. I don't think it does any good to offer them something in return for a referral, one of many reasons being that the referral is way more valuable to me than any little trinket or discount I can offer them! Instead, I try to keep it in mind at every stage of a client project; this person may only be my client for a month, but he could conceivably refer ten of his friends to me, if he ends up satisfied and impressed.

**Social media.** The use of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest, Instagram, etc.) for business marketing has sprung up only in the past few years, but of course is growing exponentially. In case you've been living in a cave and haven't noticed this, social media has rapidly become an extremely powerful force, in commerce possibly more than in any other way. If you are in business at all, you really cannot afford to ignore social media. But you cannot just sign up for a free account on several

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platforms and then just sit back; social media is something that you put time into regularly.

The reality is, in order to make use of social media, you'll need to get comfortable using at least one or two of the platforms. You don't need to involve yourself in all of them; it would be better to spend some good time and effort on one platform than to spread yourself thin over several. Remember, the point isn't just to have a row of bright-colored icons on your business website providing links to your social media accounts!

A lot has been written on this subject, and I'm not attempting to handle it comprehensively here. There are a lot of good resources available via simply Google-searching on the phrase "how to use social media to promote your business".

I personally use LinkedIn and Twitter for business purposes. Interestingly, I use Facebook only for personal purposes, but I have gotten some jobs through it anyway.

**A good business networking group.** I was fortunate to have found a fun and effective "leads group", which I attended weekly for several years. For those who aren't familiar with the concept, these groups are also often known as "business networking groups" and exist to introduce small business owners, entrepreneurs and sales people to one another, with the specific end goal of providing referrals to one-another.

In my first year with my leads group, 25% of the business I did came directly or indirectly from people I met there. It really worked for me. Almost as important, however, was the way the group provided support and helped me to grow as a business person. The small amount of public speaking I did every week at the meetings has been a huge help in growing my

confidence and my ability to explain clearly and succinctly what it is that I do.

Not every business networking group will have the same style as mine; many are rather stiff and dry and have lots of requirements which must be met in order to be a member. I offer this warning because I have recommended leads groups to people and had them come back asking why I sent them to such a boring and ineffective meeting! So please be aware that these groups are not all created equal. You may need to shop around to find one which you can actually enjoy and benefit from.

A good place to start looking is your local Chamber of Commerce. They may be less inclined to provide information on these groups if you aren't a Chamber member, but it's worth a try. And Chamber membership is usually a good idea anyway, so you may want to consider joining while you're at it.

**With marketing, perseverance furthers.** These are only my experiences, but all of these techniques are worth considering. The real key here is not necessarily to do what anyone else does, but to be active and assertive about marketing your business. Until you have enough business to keep you busy, make marketing your full-time occupation. Don't let a day go by without doing something designed to promote your business; this kind of persistent effort is almost guaranteed to get results.