

6 Great Times to Get Sales Referrals

By Walter McDonald

One of my most popular sales training sessions is on how to ask for and get sales referrals. Sometimes there is a little confusion between a “referral” and a “testimonial.”

A **testimonial** is a statement from a satisfied customer about the excellent performance of your equipment, your dealership or your people. *Testimonials* can be extremely useful, especially if they are application specific for equipment users in a particular area, such as underground directional drilling. **Testimonials** can add a huge amount of credibility to your sales presentation, offering proof that your equipment will do what you say it will.

A **referral**, on the other hand, is a potential sales lead given to you by a satisfied customer. Properly handled, a sales lead can be the most useful introduction to a new account.

In my workshop on asking for sales referrals, participants bring a list of 10 customers with their telephone contact information to their session. We discuss when and how to ask for referrals. Then, the sales reps break out for 90 minutes and make the calls. The average success rate is eight good sales leads developed by each participating sales rep.

Here’s how it works out in the territory

There are six really great times to ask for referrals from your customer:

1. He signs the order.
2. His deposit check clears the bank.
3. His machine is delivered.
4. You make the 30 day follow up call.
5. You make contact with one of the referrals he provided you earlier.
6. The one year anniversary of his purchase.

Your conversation with your customer goes like this:

Phil, I really appreciate your business.

Would you please give me the names of three people I might be able to help like I helped you?

The secret here is to stop, shut up and let him give you his three names. **DO NOT** get excited after the first one and interrupt his train of thought. **DO NOT** try ask for contact information yet. Just shut up and listen. You can nod and quietly say OK. Take notes. If you stop him after the first, you will not get the second or third.

Once you have all three referral names in your notes, then you can ask for contact information. Thank your customer and tell him you will keep him posted on your follow up with his associates. As you see in #5 above, you can then ask for three more.

Good luck and good prospecting.