



[window of opportunity]

# WO

strategies to grow  
your business

# touch POINTS

*Consistent client follow-up increases repeat and referral business—here's how to do it.*



By **Gayle Bennett**

## BY THE NUMBERS

The typical REALTOR® earned

# 20%

of his or her business from repeat clients and customers and

# 20%

through referrals from past clients and customers.

Source: 2015 National Association of Realtors® Member Profile.

Steve Epstein, CRS, with Epstein Partners, has lived in Santa Barbara, California, his whole life, and he's been a REALTOR® there for almost 30 years.

"I still run into people on the street who say, 'Oh yeah, you're in real estate. You know, I just bought a house last week.' And I think, 'You know I'm a REALTOR®. What didn't I do to continue to remind you?'"

Epstein, like other successful CRSs, continually has to find ways to remind people—particularly past clients—that he's here for their real estate needs, and those of any of their friends and family members. The goal is to consistently follow up with clients without being "that guy."

Here are five ways CRSs successfully maintain relationships with past clients—and encourage repeat and referral business.

## 1 Regularly send clients useful information.

Sending a card or email asking for referrals isn't going to cut it these days. "You need to touch clients with good, relevant information

that they deem relevant," says Frank Serio, CRS, with RE/MAX By The Sea in Bethany Beach, Delaware.

Linda Fuller, CRS, with RE/MAX Cutting Edge Realty in Macon, Georgia, sends all her buyers from the previous year a reminder in January about how to get the homestead exemption to lower their property taxes.

Jennifer Hunt, CRS, with Calcagni Real Estate in Southington, Connecticut, sends everyone in her database monthly items of value, such as market trends or energy-efficiency tips. She also lets them know that she's a good resource for vendors, such as painters, electricians or plumbers.

Epstein sends his clients information on new listings, recent sales or any other real estate activity near their homes. "Everyone wants to know what's going on in their neighborhood," he says.

## 2 Don't forget the personal touch.

Both Hunt and Epstein send past clients handwritten cards from time to time. Epstein will also call clients occasionally. "I'm always looking for a trigger, or a reason to get in touch,"

he says. "I'll call and say, 'I just drove by your house and was thinking about you.' Of course, it's great if they are painting or putting in new landscaping, and I can mention that."

Hunt will also stop by a client's home with a small gift for a quick hello. "They really like it," she says. "I even had a client give me a pop-by, with lilies and little Easter eggs."

### 3 Make yourself visible in the community.

Epstein regularly attends community events and fundraisers, volunteer days, sporting events and school-related activities; he's also on three or four boards at any given time. "Your face has to be out there," he says.

In addition, a few years ago he decided that he and his team needed to eat lunch at a local deli rather than at their desks. "We're just like a live billboard," he says. He does the same thing with his weekly team meeting. "We're interrupted [by former clients] constantly, and we can say, 'Hey, meet the whole team.' That's very powerful: Here we are working in front of you."

Because the community now includes online space, Epstein is active on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and Snapchat. "You really have to be everywhere, but you don't want to over-post," he says. He doesn't always post about real estate, either. "They want to see that you had a fun vacation. They want to see something real about you that makes you more human, and then you aren't just an ad."

### 4 Pay particular attention to your advocates.

Serio considers an advocate to be anyone who sends him at least three referrals in a year—regardless of whether they translate into clients.

He recommends giving these silent salespeople, as he calls them, personalized gifts. For example, Serio knew that one of his key advocates had become interested in wine, so he picked up a book for him in Napa on how to pair wines with food. "That was one unique gift for one unique client," Serio says. "You focus on the few, but be cognizant of the many."

### 5 Ask for referrals—and teach your clients how to give them to you.

Ed Hatch, president of Ed Hatch Seminars, regularly teaches CRSs how to ask for referrals. He emphasizes that both delivery and timing need to be appropriate. "You have to earn the right to raise the issue, and then you need to deliver it as if it was casual conversation. It shouldn't sound like a business strategy."

For instance, when a client lists a home with you, Hatch recommends bringing up referrals by saying the following: "I have a favor to ask. When someone says they need an agent, I want you to tell them about me and why you chose me. And here's the favor, but only if you are comfortable with it: I want you to tell them to expect a phone call from me within the next 48 hours, and then, with their permission, I need you to call me with their name and number so I can make the call."

Like everything else in real estate, proper follow-up that leads to repeat and referral business is all about engagement. "Once the engagement is created and ongoing," Serio says, "the referrals will be a natural byproduct of it because your client wants to see you continue to succeed." ■■

*Gayle Bennett is a writer and editor based in Washington, D.C.*



#### BY THE NUMBERS

# 41%

of buyers found their real estate agent through a friend, relative or neighbor.

Source: 2015 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers, National Association of REALTORS®

■ ■ Want more advice on building your referrals? Download the FREE webinar recording "Sure-fire Ways to Build Your Referral Business" on [CRS.com](http://CRS.com).

## THREE STEPS TO BUILDING MORE REFERRAL BUSINESS

Ed Hatch, president of Ed Hatch Seminars, and the instructor for the CRS courses "Building an Exceptional Customer Service Referral Business," which he authored, and "Exclusively By Referral—THE PROgram," has a three-step strategy he teaches to CRSs to help them grow their referral business.

**Step 1:** Realize that you have a wealth of repeat and referral business that remains untapped. "Agents need to run through the people in their database and put a check mark next to

anyone who has repeated or referred on a regular basis," Hatch says. "What they will discover is that 85-90 percent of their database is neither repeating or referring."

**Step 2:** Start raising the issue of referrals and teaching all current clients how to give you referrals. See the "Ask for Referrals" section in the main article for his tips on how to do this.

**Step 3:** Re-establish relationships with neglected past clients. For each past client, Hatch recommends sending monthly letters that contain valuable and relevant information, calling

them three times a year and inviting them to an annual client appreciation event. "Agents need to do that for a few months before they earn the right to raise the issue of referrals with those people."