

Ep #398: Must Have Referral Strategies for 2026

ROADMAP to REFERRALS



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Stacey Brown Randall

Stacey Brown Randall: Hey there! Do you love referrals but hate asking for them? Well, then you've come to the right place. This is the Roadmap to Referrals podcast, and I'm your host, Stacey Brown Randall.

Roadmap to Referrals with Stacey Brown Randall

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Each week I break down why you don't have to ask, pay, be gimmicky or network all the time to generate referrals for your business.

We take a science backed approach with our methodology, our frameworks, and our strategies. The goal is simple to help you take control of your referrals on your terms.

Alright. So for our episode today, it is one of my favorite episodes to do every year. And when I talk about usually in January, which this is, I'm talking about your must-have referral strategies for the new year.

Now, of course, I think all the strategies that I teach my clients are must-have strategies. It doesn't mean everybody needs every single one. Of course, that would be crazy. I teach over 20 of them, but I do believe that the strategies I teach are ones that you need.

But every year the landscape shifts. Things change, right? Clearly you can imagine when I was talking about must-have referral strategies in 2020 or 2021, looked different from what I was probably telling people in 2018. And 2026 is no different.

So what I'm going to focus on is not so much the strategy that you absolutely need to put in place. Right? But I'm going to talk about the changing landscape and how that impacts the strategies.

And from there we're going to talk about the must have things you got to be paying attention to. These are the things that you really need to be paying attention to and need to be leaning into.

Even if you don't know all of my strategies and you're not a client and you you're not like, you know, behind the curtain, you don't get to see how everything works from the perspective of being a client of mine and seeing and learning the strategies and putting them into place.

What we're going to talk about today is critical for you if you're even doing anything when it comes to referrals this year.

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So let's talk about this. I've got three must-have strategies for you, for your referrals for 2026. And I'm going to end with a little pro tip that you didn't even know what's coming.

Okay. Here we go. Strategy number one. It's a five-letter word. How do you make a strategy out of one word? You do when that word is trust? Yes, trust.

Trust building is not optional. Now, in fairness, being trustworthy and building trust has never been optional. But it is now more than ever, not optional.

Now, if you remember, everyone was talking about trust recession, right? You've probably heard that term before because everybody was talking about it in 2025.

I even did an episode on it, and that was [episode 364](#). We talked about the trust recession, but everyone started talking about it in 2025. But it started before that, right?

It always starts kind of quietly and then builds to a crescendo. And like everyone's talking about it. And there's lots of reasons why the trust recession kind of hit like a fever pitch in 2025.

I mean, with AI's growth, changing market conditions, economic environment, political environment, like all these things kind of came together.

But that's not what the conversation about people starting to lose trust in businesses. That's not where it started. Where it started was probably back in late 2023, and maybe back in 2022.

And you can see it how people were shifting their marketing. The more fake I feel like marketing gets, the more I know a shift is coming, right?

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It's like, oh wait, the tactics that used to work, you know, you'll hear, like all of the marketing gurus talk about like the tactics that used to work don't work anymore. You start hearing those shifts and tactics.

It's because the buyers something's going on with our buyers, right? Something's going on with our prospects. And that's the truth. Buyers and prospects are always getting smarter.

You're a buyer and a prospect for other businesses, and you have buyers or prospects for your own business. And we know they're always getting smarter.

We are getting smarter. And that means as buyers and prospects get smarter, they catch on to the gimmicks faster and they even catch on sometimes to our pattern interrupts. That's just reality.

Okay, so to put this in context, do you remember when the offer stack to show value was all the rage?

Like the offer stack being like, okay, you're going to buy this program and get it and it's valued at X, and then you're going to get, we're going to also add in this thing that's valued at Y.

And this thing that's valued at W, and this thing that's valued at A, and this other bonus that's valued at B and all these different things you get with what they're valued at.

And that comes to \$1 billion. But you can have it for 27 bucks. Right? The offer stack.

That is an example of how buyers get smarter, prospects get smarter. They sniff out things that don't sound right, and tactics that people have been using don't always work.

So when you think about your prospects for today, they are getting smarter. They are catching on to the gimmicks. They have no tolerance for clickbait.

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And quite frankly, they're seeing through your automations, and they can sniff out a juvenile use of AI in a heartbeat.

You know when you see a video that's too good to be true, that little puppy is too good to be true. Right? We're all like that.

But here's what's most important for you to remember with your prospects of today. They're tired. All of this coming at them, and then everything going on in the world and everything going on.

And, like, whether it's community based, regionally based, nationally based, the world based political environments. And yes, I'm in the United States. So I talk about this from the lens of an American.

But that doesn't change in most countries depending on where you are. There's some level of unrest going on, usually everywhere, or at least has been right over the last couple of years.

So what your prospects, what your clients, what your buyers are craving, what they want is trust. And they want a sense of what's real.

And let's be honest, we know it's not just buyers and prospects. It's also our clients.

But it's also showing up in our networking and our relationship building with other potential centers of influence. Right?

Other people out there in the world that we want to network and be in community with, it's impacting them.

So just to kind of show this from an example perspective of something that happened to me, I was connected to a business owner in which we serve the same target market.

So I was connected to this business owner, we serve the same target market, and we got on one of those, like Zoom calls, meet and greets,

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because we'd been connected and we were learning about each other. Figuring things out.

And I was telling him about a story of one of my clients. And then when he went to mention the client by name later on, like in talking about him in a different context.

When he went to mention my client, who I had told him a story about my client, it was about the results one of my clients had had and something that he was experiencing. And then he went to mention that client later on, he said to me or he said in his email to me, if that's his real name.

And I was like, oh, he thinks I could be lying. And I was like, nope, Phil's a real person. He's been on this podcast before.

He's definitely a real person, definitely a real client of mine. Definitely the story that I told was the truth because that's what I do. But I was like, oh, the skepticism is at an all-time high.

And we need to recognize that buyers, prospects, clients, referral sources, centers of influence vendors we're all craving trust.

And from a sales perspective, here's why trust is one of the must-have referral strategies for 2026. Because from a sales perspective, trust is at its highest, with prospects who are referred.

If you're running ads and you're doing online marketing and you're going to events and you're doing networking and you're joining leads groups, right? That's like all the things that you're doing to generate business for yourself, like clients and prospects for your business.

That's great. As long as you have a targeted approach and you know what you're doing, and you know the ROI that you're getting out of it.

And when you decide to layer in referrals, though, just remember, leaning into referrals this year matters because it's where when a referral is

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happening, the prospect is borrowing the trust of somebody else who trust you, and they're applying that trust to you.

And so it is at the highest it's ever going to be is with a prospect who is actually referred to you, not someone who clicks on your Meta ad, not somebody who just meets you once at a cattle call of networking events.

Obviously, there are things that you can do, no matter what your mechanism is for bringing in clients that absolutely allows you to get to the trust place faster, but it's already there on some level with prospects who are referred.

So if trust is one of the must-have business strategies for 2026, and it really should be every year. I mean, come on, like, let's do business honestly, right? Let's be trustworthy.

But leaning into trust is all that much more important this year. And referrals has it already a part of the equation.

Because when someone is referred to you, they are already on some level trusting you in a way that a cold ad or even a lukewarm prospect can never do, right?

The way that a cold lead or a lukewarm lead will never have the same level of trust that we know that a preferred prospect will. So lean into trust.

Okay, this brings me into the must-have referral strategy for 2026. Number two, relationships were always greater than the algorithm.

I'm not saying don't lean into your digital marketing. Don't lean into your social media. You see me, right? If you follow me on any of my channels, you know, we post on Instagram and we post on LinkedIn.

I mean, we have like three company pages now on LinkedIn. Okay, wait, two company pages and my profile. But I believe in leaning into other ways for people to find you.

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I believe the biggest piece of the pie, though, should come from referrals. Like practicing what I preach.

And what that means to me is that the relationships I'm building will always be bigger than the algorithms. And I need you to remember that this year.

Developing relationships takes time, and I know everybody is always looking for the shortcut or the easy button. Or do you have a hack for me on this? You can't shortcut genuine relationships. It doesn't work that way. You have to invest in them.

So when I have strategies in place for my clients and we have one that's a framework that's called the running five keeping warm. Like that's not like do it once and then forget about these people and think they're going to start referring you.

That's not how it works. Relationships will always be greater than the algorithm. And that also may mean you have to be willing to put the time and energy in as well. And that's another important piece you have to keep in mind.

So relationships produce great results. I think better results from an algorithm's perspective. I know there's tons of people who run their business on digital marketing strategies, and they're crushing it, right?

They have to generate a ton of leads to get the conversion they want, to get to the ideal clients they want. Referrals is like the opposite of that.

You usually need less to get to the conversion you want and the quality that you want. Like once you have the right systems and processes and procedures in place.

But relationships will always be greater than algorithms. But that also means you're going to have to learn how to invest in relationships.

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And if you are constantly looking for the shortcut or the hack or the easy button or whatever you want to call it, and you're like, hey, can I do this relationship building and a 12-email campaign?

My answer to you is no, that sounds ridiculous. And you know that, right? So focus on relationships this year. Lean into your relationships.

That doesn't mean the thousands of people you know, feeling like you get to lean into all those relationships and commenting on everyone's LinkedIn posts and showing up at every networking event.

But it does mean figure out the right relationships for your business, ones that serve you, the ones that guide you. Maybe the ones that mentor you also are the ones that can refer to you and lean into those relationships.

Define that before you worry about the latest and greatest tech change algorithm shift or whatever. Okay.

And the third must have referral strategy for 2026 is, this is very different than anything I've ever talked about. But I think it's something that everyone should do.

And you don't have to be working with me to do this one. You don't actually have to be working with me to do any of these three.

But you don't have to be working with me to do this one, and you can do it starting tomorrow. I think that you need to establish what I call a referral golden hour every week.

Now, depending on what systems and processes and strategies you have in place, maybe you can take that down to once a month. Maybe you're going to need it once a week.

But it's one hour every week, or maybe every other week, or at least once a month that you were setting aside to work on or referral-generating activities. One hour.

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Now I talk to my clients about other clients who do this naturally. They come into working with me and they've got to make space to like go through the trainings or apply something I've taught them, or build something out, or write some language to send to me.

So it's already a part of their to do list, and some of them it's just part of their to do list, right? And others of them, they set aside an hour or 90 minutes a week and they dive into referral stuff that week.

Like, and it's just on their calendar and they don't kick it and they don't ignore it, and they do it every week or every other week or at least once a month. And they kind of complete all referral-based tasks during that time.

So it starts with them setting aside that time to maybe learn the trainings, right? Or to go through a plan or to send something to me for review, but it continues with the execution and the implementation year after year after year.

I have a client that's been working with me since, I believe 2021, still in my Referral Master's program. So he went through a year with me at a VIP level, and then he came into my master's program.

Which is, my referral master's program is the like the extension program. It's like once you've finished working with me through one of my programs, if you want continual support, you can move into the master's program.

You can't get into the referral master's program unless you've worked with me through the Accelerator, the coaching program, BRB, or the VIP Experience.

And so he's been in that he's there every year has been for the last 3 or 4 years, whatever the math is on that, last 3 or 4 years, he has been consistent. Consistent.

And he says one of the things he's consistent about, in addition to being in the referral master's program, where he can talk to me whenever he wants,

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is that he doesn't actually call it a referral golden hour, he calls it a Stacey hour.

I don't actually recommend that. I'm flattered that's what he calls it. I think over time he did shift to calling it like the referral hour or the Stacey referral hour.

You don't need to put my name in your calendar, but the referral golden hour is a great way to call it. And it's that hour you're going to spend. And that's what he does.

He was like, I know Monday mornings I'm in referral golden hour. What do I have to do that is a referral in nature? I love this idea so much.

And I've been telling my clients, you guys should do this. Put set aside an hour at least once a month, but preferably a couple of times a month, or maybe even once a week.

Maybe you don't need the full hour every single week. Maybe you need a little bit more time other weeks. But put this in place.

I love this idea so much, that I've been telling my clients to do it, that now I'm like, you know what? I'm going to actually offer it.

And so I'm starting with my clients that are in my referral master's program, and then also those that are in my coaching program, and then those who are in the 90 days of their accelerator, and then my VIP program.

That they can show up once a month to this referral golden hour. And it's like a co-working time where I'm not teaching anything.

I will answer questions, but I'm not teaching anything. And we're all sitting and we're just doing the referral tasks that we have on our list.

Some people may be watching a training, right? The rest of us won't hear it. They'll be muted. But maybe they're watching a training. Maybe other people are writing thank you notes.

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Maybe other people are executing on one of their touch points, and they're doing whatever they need to do to execute on that touch point.

Maybe somebody else will be creating a checklist for their team to make sure their team understands when and where we plant referral seeds, and they're building that out.

But we're sitting there together. The referral golden hour, that's what I'm calling it. I think you need one to.

Now, if you don't know what to do during your referral golden hour, I have a couple of programs you could consider joining, and I would be happy to tell you what to do during that hour.

Starting out, though, you may need it more than once a month. For my clients, we're doing it once a month, but starting out you may need it once a week. So that's my third must-have referral strategy for this year.

Alright. I do want to end with a pro tip. Let me first do a quick recap of the three strategies. The must-have referral strategies for this year.

Number one, trust building is not optional. Number two, relationships are greater than the algorithm. And number three establish a referral golden hour where you get it done, my friends.

And here's a pro tip. This is just something I realized that I do every year that I'm like, oh, this may be helpful for you guys. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. Take it for what it's worth.

But a pro tip would also be, because it's January, this is a great time to prep what you can in advance for things that you're doing, either in your client experience or your referral source experience.

So if you're taking care of your referral sources, if you're taking care of your clients and you have client experience touchpoints or outreaches and things like that that you do that are happening in your client experience, I actually go through and I do all that in January.

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So like, for example, when you join my starter online program called Your Next Five Referrals, you get a bonus, or at least at the time of this recording, you get a bonus of these thank you cards that we send you with blank envelopes. And those are mailed out.

So we, okay, it's not always me. I guess I'm about to say we because, I mean, most of the time, I'm, like, corralling my children to help me at least 1 or 2 of them.

And they'll come out and they'll sit down and they'll make stacks of the bonus cards for the Your Next Five referrals. They'll count out the number of thank you cards. They'll stack them up, then they'll stuff them in the envelopes.

And then they'll put in the note that I've written, and then they'll put the return address on it, and it'll just have the blank send address for me to mail it to whoever then is coming in and making the investment in Your Next Five Referrals program.

I'm not creating that package on the fly. I'm just grabbing it off the shelf and sending it out the door. It's stamped, packaged, ready to go. So you can do that, right?

Maybe you won't make enough for the whole year, but maybe make enough for the first quarter, or do it by quarter, or do it by first half of the year, second half of the year.

Do this between now and June and then start it again in July and do July through December. If you know, on average, about how many people you're going to be working with, like we have goals, right?

We set like goals around, hey, we want to bring X number of people into the coaching program, X number of people into Your Next Five Referrals. Then we build out those packages in advance.

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I think about the BRB coaching program as another example. When people join the coaching program, they get this green welcome box. And I have my children, I probably I mean, I should be paying them probably more than I'm paying them.

But like we have these green welcome boxes that go out to welcome the BRB coaching members when they join the coaching program. Those boxes are made.

They sit stacked in a corner, and when a new coaching client joins, I grab the box and send it off. And so that's something you can do.

Another thing that you can do to prep what you need now is, you're going to need thank you cards. Even if it's not for referrals, because you're not doing the stuff that I teach, you're probably going to need thank you cards at some point throughout this year.

So go ahead and order your thank you cards now and get your envelopes with your return address already printed on them. Make your life easier.

Go ahead and use January to organize that stuff. Order that stuff, package that stuff. Put that stuff together and be ready to go. And you'll have it for the rest of the year, or at least the next three months for the next six months.

So that's just my pro tip. Prep in advance what you can, whether that's a client experience, touchpoint or referral source touchpoint.

The only thing you can't do this for is if you're doing anything edible, because you can't buy something in January and think it's still going to be good in November when you go to mail it out, because it probably won't. So keep that in mind.

Okay, so those are our three must-have referral strategies for 2026, plus a pro tip you didn't know that was coming. I hope that you definitely have enjoyed this episode.

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I hope that you will lean into these strategies, and that you will definitely think about how they will impact the rest of your year and helping you get the referrals that you deserve.

You can access the transcripts for this episode, and of course, any other information that we have mentioned on this episode, or during this episode, on the show notes page at StaceyBrownRandall.com/398.

Thanks for making it to the end. Until next week, take control of your referrals and build a referable business. Bye for now.