

Ep #413: Building a Client Acquisition Engine with Referrals



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Stacey Brown Randall

Stacey Brown Randall: Hey there, do you love referrals but hate the idea of asking for them? Well, you've come to the right place. This is the Roadmap to Referrals podcast, and I'm your host, 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, frameworks, and strategies. The goal is simple, to help you take control of your referrals on your terms.

Today, I have the pleasure of welcoming Jeremy Kanne to the podcast. He is a member of my Building a Referable Business coaching program, and he is an engineer-turned-fractional chief marketing officer.

The name of his company is Smart Yeti. You got to love that name and really give props to the marketing expert himself who came up with the name of his company.

You're going to hear him talk about, you're going to hear the engineer in him come through when he talks about what he's learning inside the BRB coaching program.

You're going to hear him talk about how that process-driven background and how what he's learning in the referrals program with me is he's really able to put those processes in place inside his business, which of course, with an engineering background, he certainly appreciates.

So you're going to hear that shine through as he talks about how he's growing his referrals in his business as he's putting these strategies in place. So without further ado, let's dive into the conversation.

Stacey Brown Randall: Jeremy, thank you so much for taking time to join me on the podcast today. I really appreciate it.

And before we go into the diving into all the things referrals, I really want to give you an opportunity to kind of explain to the audience what you do and what your business is.

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Jeremy Kanne: Sure. I'm a marketing consultant. I work for manufacturers, particularly in Minnesota and the Midwest, and I help them set and run marketing strategy.

There's a lot more context to it. I don't know how much you want me to talk about my business here. I could go on forever.

Stacey Brown Randall: No, you know, it's interesting. I think that's like a unique niche in terms of who you focus on, manufacturing, and then what you do for them. How did you get into that?

Jeremy Kanne: You know, I had been in the B2B marketing space for my entire career in marketing. I started as an engineer before I was a marketer.

So it's a little bit of an oddball origin story, but that's actually why I chose to go into manufacturing. I wanted to find a really tight set of people that I could serve that I was really excited to serve in marketing.

And when I got to looking at who I've worked with and who I want to work with, manufacturers really just became an obvious choice for me, part in part because of my technical background.

And I think it helps them feel better about working with a marketer who understands that things can get really technical and specific.

And I think it helps them understand that, you know, marketing is a process too, and I can help explain that. And I genuinely like manufacturers.

I've got a family history in it. My dad was a plant manager at a steel fabrication plant. I got to work at that plant for a while. So it's kind of always been coming for me.

And I've recently gotten to choose and work with manufacturers. So that's been really great.

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Stacey Brown Randall: Yeah, I love how you can marry the two things or multiple things that you enjoy into a business. I think that's the coolest thing about deciding to be an entrepreneur and becoming a business owner. It's just kind of like crafting that to work for you.

But also, of course, because it works for your clients as well. I think that's, I mean, I think that's really cool. I think that's why I only work in certain industries, right?

Like people are like, well, everybody needs referrals. I'm like, yes, but I don't teach my strategies to everybody because there's certain industries where it works better.

And like you were talking about, like the technical nature of what you do, like I'm sure not all of that shows up in your marketing.

But for a manufacturer to reach their ideal client that's going to see that marketing, there is a certain language that you have to speak.

And I think being able for the manufacturing companies to know that you understand that language piece and it comes out in your marketing and it's a process. I think that's really important. I see it the same way for me.

Like I do have people who be like, I would really like to work with you. I'm like, but I don't teach my strategies aren't necessarily taught for your industry.

And there's so much modification we have to do then that it's just not who I work with. So I applaud you for like sticking with, like finding the niche and then sticking with it.

Jeremy Kanne: Yeah, thank you, Stacey. It's been fun.

Stacey Brown Randall: Cool, okay. And you were referred to me by Claire Price. So that is how, yeah, that's how you ended up in my world. I try to tell people I do practice what I preach like.

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Jeremy Kanne: Yeah, it works. Referrals are good.

Stacey Brown Randall: Yes, I concur. I agree. Okay, so let's talk about referrals then.

So we know you're in a niche space, right? We know that you're doing marketing for manufacturers.

There could be some people who would say, well, that makes it really easy for you to get more clients because you are in this niche space and you are marketing for manufacturers.

But that doesn't mean you're the only one who does what you do. And so for part of that, right, in terms of looking at bringing on new clients, referrals you knew was an important piece of how you wanted to continue to grow your business.

So even though some would make the argument, oh, you're in a niche and you do something very specific and so you just must have clients falling out of the sky to work with you. We both know that's not how it works.

So what was it for you that made you decide, hey, you know what, referrals are, they're really important to my business and I'm gonna make sure that I understand how to generate them consistently. So why are referrals so important for your business?

Jeremy Kanne: You know, marketing can get a little bit of a bad rap sometimes. You know, there's some bad actors out there that over-promise, under-deliver.

And so recognizing that there was an objection within my target market generally, just this hesitation to talk about marketing or just a lack of urgency and priority for it was a core problem for me to overcome.

And I can hand wave it away, not treat it seriously, but it's still gonna be there. And I see and have seen referrals as a way to overcome this objection.

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I run into manufacturing businesses that have gotten very successful off of sales and sales processes alone. I love it and I see it all the time.

But there comes a time when they either hit a plateau or they stop growing as fast as they want to. And suddenly this hesitation or lack of urgency around marketing flips and it becomes the most important thing to figure out for their business.

And yet they haven't spent time investing in it, building processes, understanding what works, trying what works and what doesn't. And now they feel like they're behind the ball.

And now they wanna figure out how marketing strategy works for them. And that's where I come in.

Stacey Brown Randall: Yeah, and if you're referred in, right, it removes that objection, it removes that hesitation. And it makes it easier for you to start working with them because that need, right, as you said, I love how you said, like, it's flipped.

Like all of a sudden, marketing is important. And now they've gotta find somebody to help them do that. That's not a core strategy that they've had.

It's not a core competency that they've had because they've grown their business to a certain point based on other things, right?

Sometimes being the first to market or sometimes being the biggest or the longest in the marketplace or whatever, right? And then there's like, okay, we need to grow more. We need to pull another lever, right?

I say that a lot to my clients when they come to work with me. I was like, most people that come to work with me, their businesses aren't dying. They're doing well, but they know there's another lever they wanna pull.

And that lever for them is referrals. And you know that for your clients, that lever they now need to pull is marketing. But because there's bad actors in the world, right?

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There's a hesitation to like, am I gonna hire the right person? Are we gonna hire the right company? Are they gonna understand us?

Will they truly get it? What will be the substance behind the sales pitch? What will it actually look like?

And when you walk in the door and somebody else has referred you in, as we all know with referrals, that trust walks in the door with you and they automatically can lower their guard and have a true conversation with you about hiring you.

And so, I mean, that makes perfect sense to why referrals are so important. Can you think about a time when you were referred in to a manufacturing company that then hired you?

Can you think about like, like just compare that to a time maybe when you weren't referred in and you met somebody at a trade show or something like that. And then just the speed at which they said yes to hiring you.

Jeremy Kanne: Yeah, so I'm starting a marketing strategy project in a month with a local manufacturer. Got this business through referral and it was pretty, I was, this was a perfect storm of a great situation for everybody.

They recognized that they had a marketing problem, they knew they needed somebody, but they didn't know anybody that did marketing specifically for manufacturers. And so they were really hesitant.

We sat down, we had one meeting and they were very interested and understood that they needed to buy one of the things that we were talking about that was a good fit for them. And we're starting work soon. That's really exciting.

You know, comparing to going from, you know, no relationship, no referral and it's, it starts usually from a question of will marketing work for me rather

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than I want to understand how marketing works for me. And this is a very big gulf to bridge.

I have learned that that's just usually a disqualifier if they are not thinking about how to wrap marketing into their business strategy. Instead, you know, going, whoa, whoa, whoa. You need to prove marketing works in general.

Well, then that's, that means we're probably just not a good fit right now. And that happens a lot when we're not at that refer in point there. They've got their arms crossed.

They're trying to figure out what you're trying to, what snake oil you're trying to sell them. And I'm on the other side of the table going, well, these are the things that the business needs to do.

So I want to figure out how you can do them rather than, you know, I want to make money and run away.

Stacey Brown Randall: Right. You know, I think that's so true because that's one of the reasons why I spend a lot of time explaining to people the definition of referrals, right?

Because a referral is, yes, there is a personal connection. Somebody will refer you in, will make that connection in to that potential client for you so that you can walk through the door with that trust.

But the second part of a referral definition is, is that there's a need identified. The prospect that you're walking in the door to meet knows they're the prospect, knows they have a problem, understands that you are someone that has been recommended and vetted and that they can trust to solve that problem.

I mean, the entire first conversation is just different when you're walking through the door. And I always, I have people who'll tell me, they'll be like,

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oh, I got a referral, but the person they're talking to hasn't decided that's a problem they want to solve.

I'm like, you may have been connected. You were like introduced, but we don't actually know if there's a problem you can solve. And it's an uphill battle to get to that person to actually want to hire you.

So, right, I mean, referrals solve kind of all those issues when we're walking in the door. It's such a great point.

So, okay. So I want to ask you about some of the ahas that you've had with referrals and strategies and tactics and things like that.

But just some of the, like the general ahas you've had from our working together, you walked in the door and you knew, like you understood that referrals were important.

And obviously, you know, it wasn't like you hadn't gotten any before you started working with me, but you wanted that to be the next lever that you pulled in your business.

So sometimes I always find this, like people walk in the door to work with me and they have like, they're not, the referrals aren't foreign to them, right?

They're like, oh, I know what this is. I get some, I just, you know, I want more or whatever. I want better processes, better systems.

But there's always like an aha. There's always like a light bulb of like, oh, I didn't think about it like that. Or wow, I hadn't considered it like that.

Can you recall any aha moments that you had during your work inside the coaching program?

Jeremy Kanne: Absolutely. You already hit on the one that I was thinking of, which is specificity in defining what a referral is and isn't. I think businesses' processes live and die on specificity.

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Stacey Brown Randall: Yeah.

Jeremy Kanne: And for someone that has a long sales cycle, I'm six months minimum. Being confident in what my processes are is very important when it comes to managing that sales pipeline because it's so long.

So if I get something wrong, that means I got maybe four to six months of figuring that out and I did not want to waste that time.

So I knew when you had this really regimented set of definitions, that was a big moment for me because I was like, oh yeah, that makes sense. These are what I want to go for.

This is what an actual referral looks like, a productive referral looks like. And this is how I can actually really understand what it means.

And I can get the rest of them, but they are going to work towards a referral, not an actual referral. And that was really hard to see on my own.

I thought I would be getting connected and referred. And it's hard to make that definition yourself of why that referral worked well, and that one didn't. So that was great all in itself.

Stacey Brown Randall: It's funny. You will be shocked how many times that's the answer.

It's like very, very basic, but it shifts everything about how you look at referrals, which then means it shifts everything about how you are going to put different strategies and tactics and language into place within your business.

Like it literally just changes the game and it's a simple thing, right? Like it's a simple thing in terms of like, oh, it's just the definition, but it's the, like you said, you know, being very specific with it and having that crystal, like it's crystal clarity, right?

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Like in terms of this is what it is, really does change the game from that perspective. So I'm not surprised that's your answer. I get that a lot from that perspective. Are there any other aha's that maybe have come to mind?

Jeremy Kanne: You know, just the process. Once again, it comes down to like, I want to make sure that I'm doing something productive.

So wasted energy in a process is just abysmal and a business killer, honestly. So to have a long set of processes, you know, over the year, I'm not consumed by it, but I know what I need to do every month to keep it going. That's been really great.

That and the understanding that it's the way to think about how to get those touches along your year and thinking about it from an emotional standpoint.

You know, our relationships that we build or hope to build are all built on this foundation of understanding and emotional context.

And to be able to have processes that honor that and treat people like people and have it sustained in its effort was really valuable for me.

Stacey Brown Randall: I don't think I would have expected a different answer from you knowing now that you have an engineering background, how important the process piece is, but you're right.

I mean, at the end of the day of all the things I can teach you, your ability to form it into a process that you're then going to execute on is the only place where success lies.

Like the knowledge is great, but if you don't take action on that knowledge, right, it doesn't actually matter.

So yeah, that whole understanding, like it's a set bit of built processes that you implement on.

And you know this, there's a ton of trainings, there's a ton of strategies and stuff that are taught within the coaching program. And they're the same

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strategies are taught, whether it's my accelerator or it's my VIP, no business needs them all, right?

So it's really about figuring out the ones that you want that are going to work best for you. Like there's some that I'm like, these are non-negotiable, right?

But there's others that like people like you may not need that one and that's okay. And to make that discernment as a business owner, I think is really important to kind of understand that there's some things it's like regimented.

Like you just need to be able to do this. Like you just kind of need to track it, right? Like it's kind of important. And then other things that you can shift as you need to for yourself. So that's cool.

So now that you have your referral processes and strategies and the language pieces in place, they're deployed and they're operational, you're in execution mode.

What are you most hopeful about when you think a few years out or longer about your business when it comes to referrals?

Jeremy Kanne: So I'm actually thinking about this from the next 10 to 20 years. I think this referral engine is what will build my client acquisition processes for the long term. That's my hope.

And I think it's important to realize that your system isn't just a black box of processes. You've got to follow it exactly. And if you don't, it's not going to work.

It's more about teaching a man how to fish and giving them the tools. And I think of them as like little Legos.

I take a Lego and I put this here and it's up to me to figure out as I work through my processes, what Lego goes where. But I learned about what Legos I get to play with from you.

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Stacey Brown Randall: I just love that. That's an analogy, right? Not a metaphor. That's an analogy, right? That is awesome. I love that.

OK, I think every listener knows if they've been listening to this podcast for a really long time, that's still going to make its way into a social media clip because it's just awesome.

That's a great way to think about it. You get to determine you've got the Lego pieces, but now you get to determine where they go. I love that. OK, cool. All right.

So, you know, I always kind of ask folks this question and it's kind of a consideration for you in terms of what you want to share from a perspective regarding referrals and referral success.

Is there anything you want to share kind of like the metrics or the success or the results that you've had over your time inside the coaching program and like those shifts that you've seen happen?

Jeremy Kanne: So I'm in an interesting position where I've moved to a whole different business market. I was living in Chicago for 15 years. I had a longstanding network of networking there for nine, 10 years.

And then I moved to the Twin Cities. So for me, my success has been in building my new professional network in the Twin Cities, which is still working to drive business.

But using the same practices, I was able to network within my sort of tighter network up in the cities, my friends and family network.

And even though these aren't necessarily going to be referral partners that are ongoing strategic, just going through the process with you has made me realize that that is still valuable, even if it's compartmentalized.

And it's good to realize like, all right, well, I'm not here to go get another referral out of a family member that happened to know a company that they

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would refer me into, which is a real situation that happened. But I know who I am building.

And that's really exciting to have that network already feel really solid and have great partners in my list of people that I'm trying to keep up with, who I'm nurturing into referral partners.

And so it just feels like, all right, I'm on the track and we're going to the destination.

Stacey Brown Randall: Yeah, you know, it's interesting. I think that, you know, a lot of times we talk about we don't usually look at family and friends as potential referral sources, right? Or referral partners.

But you said something early on in our conversation about you come from a background, like a family background in manufacturing. It would be ridiculous if you didn't actually consider how those contacts can actually make other contacts and other connections and other referrals happen for you.

So like leaning into that, I think is really, really smart. I think it kind of shortcuts a little bit of it too because they're family and they already know, hopefully they like you, right?

But they know you and they like you. And clearly they trust you. And I think that's important. And you remind me of somebody else who's in the coaching program.

She is like newer in the program, but she is an attorney for, I don't know, like a decade or something, right?

But like in the Northeast. And then she moves back home to Florida. And she's like, I mean, I may have been a great attorney for a decade or so or whatever it was.

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She was like, but I am rebuilding an entire network in a state that may be home but isn't necessarily one where I have a ton of professional connections and professional relationships.

And that's one of the reasons why she came into the program. She was like, for me, it's about learning. Like you said, it's that process of knowing how to develop and cultivate and identify those potential referral sources.

And so sometimes the win is just getting a handful of new folks to start referring you because you do get some referrals that way, like you said. And you're like, I do know how to do this. I do know how to cultivate.

And when I meet someone who's not a family member, right? When I meet people that are in that professional network that could be referring to me, you have a process that you know how to follow to cultivate that person into a referral source.

And I think that's really like, I think that answer is like, and those results that you have had, where they may not be the, oh, yeah, I like quadrupled my referrals in a year, kind of flashy results that I love for my clients when they get those too.

And those are fun to talk about. But this is like a business fundamental for you that's going to serve you moving forward. And it's serving you because you moved and you were rebuilding a professional network.

And the fact that you now have the tools to know how to do that, it makes perfect sense that you're looking at what you've learned while you're in the coaching program with me is about now this is going to serve me for the next 10, 20 years until, you know, you get it to a point where you can sell it and then just go drink Mai Tais on the beach for forever.

Jeremy Kanne: Oh, love those Mai Tais.

Stacey Brown Randall: Always the ultimate, right? Every business owner. Okay, cool.

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So I end every podcast episode that I do with clients with the same question. So if you've ever listened to any, you know this is coming. But I think it's really important for those that are listening to this episode, right?

Not just because they listen to every Tuesday episode that I release, but they're listening to this episode because they know I'm talking to you, a business owner who's having success, who was a part of a program of mine, specifically the coaching program.

And like they're listening because they want to understand what it's like, right? They're trying to put themselves in your shoes and kind of understand what it's like.

And so I always think it's important for them to hear direct from you. If you were to refer them to me, what would you say as to why they should say yes to working with me?

Jeremy Kanne: Yeah, if you're in a market where say your B2B or all your best work has come from someone else telling you about you should talk to this person, you got referred into the business, but you've never been able to scale that or understand how it works.

I feel like Stacey, your program has done a lot to just have a good plan. And that comes with learning. So I would say if you're ready to learn and ready to maybe set ego aside for a second just to see how you can benefit from someone else's knowledge base, the coaching program is great for that.

Stacey Brown Randall: Awesome. Thank you so much. I really appreciate your time.

It is always a pleasure to get to spend some time with my clients in this format versus like, you know, when we have like a one-on-one or a Q&A where I'm just answering questions.

So thank you, Jeremy, for your time. I appreciate you being here.

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Jeremy Kanne: My pleasure, Stacey. Great to see you as always.

Stacey Brown Randall: I always appreciate when my clients take the time to come on the podcast and talk with me so that you have the opportunity as the listener of this podcast and of these episodes, all 400 and something of them, if you've been following along for years, you have the opportunity to hear from someone else.

A business owner who is in the trenches, learning, implementing, being consistent with generating referrals in their business and what it actually feels like and is like working with me.

Whether that's through my VIP referrals program or if it is in my referral accelerator or of course in our coaching program, the Building a Referable Business coaching program, which BRB for short.

So you can connect with Jeremy. We're going to put all the ways that you can connect with him on the show notes page for this episode.

And that show notes page is StaceyBrownRandall.com/413. So go to that link if you are listening to this.

And if you are watching this video on YouTube, of course, we will link to all of the connection links for Jeremy below this video.

Now, as you heard in the interview with Jeremy, he is a client inside our coaching program, which is officially titled the Building a Referable Business coaching program.

But we actually call it BRB or really sometimes just the referral coaching program on the inside. So that's what we call it for short.

If you'd like to join him, your first step, and it's the first step to working with me, no matter how you want to work with me, is to complete the application so you can learn more about what's going on in your business with referrals and what do you hope to accomplish and also make an informed decision if you are the right fit to work with me and through which program.

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The referrals coaching program, the one that Jeremy is in, is only one of the three ways that you can work with me at a higher and deeper level.

We also have a cohort starting on May 28th. So if you're really interested in the coaching program, you've kind of already checked it out. You know, that's the way you want to work with me.

Your first step is to complete that application so you can get accepted and then you can make the decision if you want to officially join.

And if you like the idea of joining a year-long coaching program with a small group of other humans, then joining by May 28th allows you to be a part of our next BRB cohort.

Now, remember, completing an application does not obligate you to working with me, but it is the next step for you figuring out if this is the right place for me to start really generating referrals and learning them in a way that will work for me.

Which, of course, my way is no asking, no incentivizing, no being gimmicky or promotional and not feeling like you have to network all of the time.

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