

Have travel business. Need clients

Top tips on making sales

Congratulations! You've taken the most important step in your journey as a #travelpreneur – setting up your own brand and business. It takes guts, trust and a will to succeed to get this far, as, being in charge of your own income means there's no guarantee where the next pay check will come from.

This is both exhilarating and terrifying at the same time, yet hopefully leans more to exhilaration as you're completely in control of what happens next.

Open for business

Armed with an idea, a name and either a website and/or social network channels, it's time to go and catch the clients. A good way to get started is to approach family and friends first. Perhaps you have an aunt who loves a luxury holiday or a niece or nephew who has just left the nest and is ready to explore the world. Find out what their travel needs are, then book their itinerary. While you could arrange a taxi to the airport, why not throw in some added value and take them yourself?

Make the circle bigger

After a few family favours, you'll start to build up some experience and confidence to approach clients outside of your immediate network. A great place to start is by using social media. Cheap to set up, you can create a business page on Facebook and target ads or boosted content to the type of clients you want to meet. Remember, while it is a marketing tool, Facebook is also a community so ensure that you balance the "sell" with the "tell" e.g. share a few sharable travel stories along with those hot #FlightSiteAgent deals.

With a newsfeed of posts ready to roll, lean on your friends again and ask them to "like" and "share" your posts. This will create engagement on your page as well as expose your brand to a larger online network.

Don't be shy to ask for a referral

Word of mouth remains one of the most powerful forms of marketing – even though it has spread onto social media and is now also called word of mouse. Whether in real life or online, an endorsement from a client is priceless; it's honest, authentic and credible. No amount of self-serving advertising can beat that!

Upon their return, ask your clients for a referral. Either they can write a short paragraph for you which you can post on your website or you can write it for them and just ask them to approve it. Testimonials create trust and are a valuable way of putting potential new clients at ease if they've not worked with you before.

Knock and drops

While online marketing is certainly a necessity, it is not the only way to promote your services. An old-school brochure or flier still works; just make sure the quality of the design and printing puts you in a good light. Also, as printing costs tend to come down the larger the order, avoid dating your material so that you can use them for e.g. six months without them becoming old.

Five-star rating

There's a reason Uber drivers ask for a rating – and will provide great service to get a five star; it creates trust among new customers that they will deliver the goods. Similarly, in the travel business where relationships are as important as gaining access to good prices, service with a smile is non-negotiable. Always go the extra mile, be on call in case your client contacts you with a question and ensure you, as a rule, respond to enquiries or emails within 24 hours. It may add more to your plate, but you'll reap the rewards later down the line.

The art of the follow-up

Everyone is busy. So, if a good-looking lead doesn't get back to you on sending your quote, do them the courtesy of following-up. Sometimes you'll find that the client has had you on their to-do list too but hasn't had the time to confirm; taking the initiative to follow-up first can sometimes be appreciated – and you could close the deal.

But, be mindful not to be annoying. One phone call or email a few days after your quotation is fair; anything more and your follow-ups will just be deleted and business never sought after again. Learn to take a hint and back off when it's clear the client isn't interested.

Never forget a name

Once you've built up a bank of clients, make sure you keep their contact details and personal information handy. Consider creating profiles for each person who has done business with you and include a photo, full names, mobile number, address (if you have it) and social media handles. If you've built up a really good relationship with your clients, keeping tabs of their birthdays is also thoughtful, but only if it's genuine and not a marketing gimmick. No one likes to be sent a birthday wish by their mobile operator; the same principle applies to your other service providers. Do it with intent or don't do it at all.

Show you care

It's a fact: People like doing business with people they like. So make an effort and show you really appreciate your client and their business. The little things often make the difference, so while it's expected that you'll provide them with a range of quotes or manage their travel bookings efficiently, what they may not expect – but will remember – is if you remember that they go away for an annual getaway each September or, that in May, they visit a family member in another city for their birthday.

At the end of the day, with the accessibility of the internet, it's not hard for your clients to book their own travel online. To add real value it's in your interest to get to know your clients' likes and dislikes, market your business and offering on a host of different on and offline platforms and be happy to go the extra mile to be a travel agent your clients will use again as well as refer on.

ENDS