



## **Keep in touch!: 7 tips for staying in contact with your clients**

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By Colleen Francis

Have you ever lost contact with a client and wondered why?

Maybe a client stopped reordering from you for no apparent reason. Or perhaps they stopped calling you or even returning your calls, and for the life of you, you can't figure out what went wrong.

The answer could be entirely out of your hands. The client might have changed jobs and forgotten to let you know. Their son or daughter may have started working for your closest competitor. They might have inherited a fortune from a long-lost uncle and decided to take up immediate residence on a private island in the South Pacific.

Or it could be that maybe you yourself broke the "contact chain," and allowed the client to drift away for good.

### **The contact chain**

Staying in contact with clients is an essential part of sales success.

For most of us, it's easy to remember to communicate with our family, co-workers and friends. After all, we tend to see or chat with them on a weekly or daily basis.

Your clients, on the other hand, aren't likely to be hanging out at the neighborhood pub or waiting with dinner when you come home each night. Your clients may not even be in the same time zone as you, let alone the same zip or area code. Because clients aren't an automatic part of our daily lives, it can be all too easy to take them for granted or let them slip our minds.

In my work as a sales coach, I have seen far too many of my clients lose contact with their customers because they assumed they would get in touch with them whenever they needed something. By not proactively maintaining their existing contacts and following up on leads, they run the risk of losing a lot of deals -- and a lot of business.

### **Client contact tips**

How can you stay in touch with your clients on a regular basis? Start by remembering some basic rules of etiquette. Then try incorporating the following seven habits into your sales regimen:

1. When addressing an email or letter, always begin with the person's name -- even if finding or remembering it is a nuisance. People respond best when they read or hear their name being used. Always say "Dear Name," "Hi Name" or "Hello Name" when addressing a client. Using "hey" or, even worse, no salutation at all simply does not cut it.

2. Plan regular contacts with all your customers. According to the American Marketing Association, people can handle up to 200 contacts per year. Even I think that might be a little overkill, so how about agreeing to contact your clients once every two weeks? This will help guarantee that your clients never get the chance to forget who you are or slip away unnoticed.

3. If a client contacts you first, thank them for getting in touch. In your next email or on the phone, start the conversation with something like: "Thank you for your note, it's great to hear from you."

4. Never multi-task when talking to a customer. I can't stress this enough. In the era of Blackberry's, cell phones and Bluetooth, we all think we can do a thousand things at once. If you're checking your email or updating your schedule while on the phone with a client, believe me -- they can tell! Whether you're with your client in person or on the phone, give them your full attention. Turn off the cell phone, email or PDA and stay focused on the person you're actually talking to. This won't result in you missing out on other opportunities. It will increase your likelihood of getting more business from the customer you're with!

5. Show your sincere appreciation. Every time a customer buys something from you, gives you a referral or goes out of their way for you, don't just sit back and expect that they will continue to do so in the future. Acknowledge what they have done and thank them for their business, assistance or generosity. Remember: reciprocity is, by definition, a two-way street. When people give you something and you don't acknowledge it, most of them will think long and hard before helping you again.

6. If you haven't heard from a client because they are out of the office, busy, sick, traveling or just plain ignoring you, don't stop trying to reach them. Keeping the lines of communication open will maximize the chances that you will get a response when the person is better positioned to give you one. If your usual methods of communicating aren't working, try something innovative, like sending a message by courier, fax or snail mail. Sometimes simply shaking up the way you communicate is enough to recapture a client's attention.

7. Last and most definitely not least, always think of your clients first and put their needs ahead of your own. This doesn't have to be a grand gesture or heroic act of self-sacrifice. The next time you read an article that you think might interest your client, just send it along to them with a little note (if appropriate) that says: "I thought this might be of interest to you."

If you're guilty of not following some of the tips outlined above, you could be about to lose more clients faster than you realized.

If that's the case, now is the time to get out there and start renewing those relationships. Because, in the end, it's always more profitable to sell more to your existing customers than it is to have to find new ones!

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