Lessons from the Wedding Mafia

By Caroline Jordan, MBA

One of my clients shared a story with me from his networking group, a chapter of BNI. Ivan Misner, the creator of BNI talks about what he calls “contact spheres”.

Here’s how it works: A group of related business owners work together to get referrals for each other. Here are some of Misner’s examples of contact spheres:

*Business services: printers, graphic artists, specialty advertising agents and marketing consultants.

*Real estate services: residential and commercial agents, escrow companies, title companies and mortgage brokers.

*Contractors: painters, carpenters, plumbers, landscapers, electricians and interior designers.

*Healthcare: chiropractors, physical therapists, acupuncturists and nutritionists.

*Weddings: the caterer, the florist, the photographer and the travel agent.

The story my client told me was about the last group which has been dubbed “The Wedding Mafia”. When one gets new wedding business, the whole group gets new wedding business. It makes it very difficult for anyone else to get referrals. It’s a tremendous business builder. I have a client in real estate who does this very well also. It’s one of the most powerful business building tools ever.

So, my client and I were joking around about me developing a “Small Business Mafia”—a small business consultant, an insurance agent, a financial planner, a printing company, an office supply company, a tax preparer, etc. The more we joked about it, the more powerful an idea I realized it was. And since I do business both locally and nationally, I could form numerous branches of my Small Business Mafia and then (insert evil laughter) I could CONQUER THE WORLD!!!

Whoooooaaaaa! Hold on. The key to success of any referral group like this is finding good people. The business owners you work with have to be people you feel completely comfortable in referring your valued clients to. Otherwise, your name and reputation will get dragged into the ditch. Once you’ve found people you love to refer, be sure they’re very familiar with your business and the types of clients you’re looking for. Give the group as much or as little structure as needed to ensure that referrals are flowing both ways. Then, go out and conquer as much of the world as you want.

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