



Want a larger client base and higher sales volumes?

Although everyone's case is unique and there are many ways to do this, the strategies listed below do form a good general basis for improving one's bottom line:

- ↳ Build upon what you already have
- ↳ Cold calling
- ↳ Partnerships
- ↳ A review of your existing advertisements

Build upon your existing customer base:

Word of mouth and personal references are the most effective means to sell your services. A good word from a satisfied client will always carry more weight than any self-promoting advertisement. If you have served your clients well, the chances are they will be more than happy to recommend you to their friends and colleagues. However, since they will invariably be attending to their own lives and businesses, they will need a little help from you to make the most of referral opportunities.

One place to start would be to give out two business cards the next time you call. Clients can then have a handy spare card to pass onto others needing your services.

You could also run a special promotion and create a flyer to announce it. This is a perfect excuse to touch base with your clients and, as you inform them of the promotion, you can also ask whether they know of others who you may contact.

Cold calling:

If the prospect of cold calling is less appealing than donning your neighbour's sweaty socks, you are far from alone. The truth is that no matter how overwhelming the idea is, cold calling is an essential business activity. An increased success rate lies in having an organized strategy, thorough research, a positive attitude and preparation. Your goal should be to establish a relationship and to let prospective customers know you're around. It is not to make a sale as it is rare that whoever you call will want your services immediately. During the call, you should ask permission to send prospective clients information or set up a convenient meeting time.

To start, gather a list of clients who are likely to want your services. If you don't "qualify" your list beforehand, you waste time engaging in conversations that lead nowhere. Worse, the rejections that are sure to follow will dampen your spirits and make you even more hesitant to continue. All this pain can be minimized.

Now, with list in hand, you are ready to make your call. Take a deep breath, all the while remembering that whoever you are calling is likely to want your services because you have qualified them.

Dial the number and smile as you introduce yourself and the name of your company. Ask whether this is a convenient time and explain why you're calling. If he or she is busy, ask when a better time would be.

If the person on the other end of the line is not interested, assess whether it is because they are serviced by another professional, or whether there's no immediate need (in which case, you're still in with a chance). Then thank them for their time, let them know you'll check back with them later and hang up.

Follow-up is important, if the person on the other line has indicated that next Wednesday at 4pm is a better time to call or that they require your services, but just not immediately, make a note and call back at the appropriate time. You've invested time in finding and planting the seeds of a relationship – nurture it.

There are many books providing in-depth details on how to prepare for and make an effective call. Do read up on the subject but don't procrastinate by overly arming yourself with knowledge. What is most important is that you get started. Nervousness is natural as well as some gaffes (and, alas, some rejections), and so is the fact that only by jumping in and gaining experience, will you perfect your technique.

Partnerships with providers of complementary services:

Some businesses such as automotive dealers, security companies and even competitors may require your specific skills. For example, a competitor may specialize in one area and not have the desire or the equipment to fulfill a project in which you specialize. In this win-win situation, the other business benefits by serving his/her customer through making the referral. You, of course, have gained a new client.

Find out what organizations are around that you could partner with and make them aware of your skill set and of your existence so they can refer clients to you.

Remember, partnerships mean just that. They are not one-way-streets. Find ways to support your partners and make referrals to them, where possible.

Review your existing advertisements:

If you have an advertisement in the Yellow Pages, look at it again and ask yourself whether it is effective. Consult your friends and, better still, ask a marketing professional. It could be that the Yellow Pages is a good way to reach potential clients, but that what you have visually, or how you have said it, is not as attractive or attention-getting as your competitors'. Alternatively, you may have the perfect ad, but are not advertising in a directory that the majority of potential clients are using. The answer to where and how depends on who you want to sell to and what you think they will read. If you have a niche clientele, research which print and online directories they are likely to access when they require locksmithing services.