

# Building Affiliate Incoming Business One Referral at a Time

THIS STEP-BY-STEP 27-POINT GUIDE TO EXPANDING YOUR REACH BEYOND YOUR LOCAL AREA EXPLAINS HOW CONSISTENT SERVICE AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL WILL WIN OVER AFFILIATES OF ALL TYPES.

By Linda M. Jagiela

**L**imousine companies nationwide have embraced the national booking concept.

At one time, only the large networks were farming business to affiliates. Today, even small companies are taking bookings outside their geographic area. If you have not done affiliate work, consider building this business through a referral network.

Remember the old Faberge shampoo commercials of the 1970s where you tell two friends and they tell two friends and so on, and so on? The concept is the same.

Neil Goodman, owner of Aventura Worldwide Transportation Service in Miami, says, if one of the company's affiliates recommends another company, then there is a level of comfort that make us more likely to use the referred company.

"When our clients are in cars, other than our own, it is important they receive the same standard of service that we provide and that they have become accustomed to," Goodman says.



PHOTO/ILLUSTRATION: RON RENNELLS

## What's Important to Companies Farming Business?

### SERVICE

- This is the number one most critical point that affiliates want. They need to be assured that their clients are getting the same level of service from you that they provide in their backyards.

### RESPONSIVENESS

- Most companies won't go back to an unresponsive operator. The reality of affiliate work is that you can receive up to five calls per job. To the affiliate company, the answers to these calls assure them that you are doing the job the way they expect you to.

### TIME AND CHARGES

- Most companies want a call when the job is over with a verbal confirmation of what tolls and parking will be and how long the jobs took.

### CLOSE OUTS

- These should be performed within 24 hours. Bills should be sent to the affiliate so they can bill their own clients. Many companies are doing this in real time so they cannot wait for you to invoice. If there are charges on your bill that they are unaware of, then either they or you will have to eat them as they already have sent the invoice to their clients.

### DOCUMENTATION

- Most companies will not do business with you until they receive an insurance accord naming them additional insured. They also may want a contract and an information sheet that includes fleet age and mix. Most will want your prices to them and they will ask for a discount.

### PROCEDURES

- Forget your system; this is about the client. The affiliate company is the client, not the person in the back of your car. If you want their work, you play by their rules. Are you prepared to only use typed, not handwritten signs with the affiliate's logo for every ride? This may be a requirement.

## How to Begin

### 01 INTERNALIZE

Are you ready to do this very demanding business? If you are driving and forwarding the phones to your cell phone, you are probably not. You need to have an infrastructure set up where you have someone answering your phones 7/24/365 who is empowered to act. That means no answering service. You'll need someone who can close out jobs and send invoices within 24 hours and jump on remote websites and take work down. It also means that you may need to wait to get paid. Can you float receivables for 30-120 days? The biggest roadblock to doing this type of work is often your own organization.

### 02 STRUCTURE

If you decide to plunge into affiliate business, you'll need to develop the "why should I hire your company?" pitch. National providers are more demanding than regular clients. Understand their needs and then tell them how you'll be able to meet them. See box on what national providers expect in affiliates.

### 03 SELL

The trick is getting the first company to try you. This takes work. Go to trade shows and network with your peers. Think about starting by doing work locally for your competitors. With downsizing, the demand locally will be greater as fleets are depleted. Recognize that every limousine company is a potential client. You would be surprised how much business some small operators are farming.

### 04 DELIVER

Once you score an affiliate job, overachieve every time. You are trying to create a raving fan who will brag about your company. Give them a reason.

### 05 ASK FOR REFERRALS

Ask questions such as, "Is there anyone that you know I should speak to about doing affiliate work? Can I use your name when I call them? Can you tell me what companies you think are farming work in my area? Do you work with them? Do you have a contact that I could call?"

Finding Affiliate Business



01 LCT BLACK BOOK

All of the companies mentioned in here are the bigger companies in their areas. More than likely they are doing affiliate work. Pick up the phone and call them and ask to speak to their affiliate's manager.

02 REFERRALS

Ask for a reference. Ask who else you should be speaking with. Ask who they work with. Ask for help. Build your business one referral at a time.

03 NLA DIRECTORY

Your membership is a goldmine in this book! Pick one or two cities a day and contact as many companies as possible.

04 TRADE SHOWS AND EVENTS

LCT Eastern Conference, International LCT Show, LCT Leadership Summit.

05 ASSOCIATION MEETINGS

Other operators locally are a great source of business. Association meetings bring operators together.

06 SOCIAL MEDIA AND BLOGS

Network with your peers on these. You will be surprised at the opportunities that open up as a result.

07 RECIPROCATING WORK

Companies are more likely to give work to companies who are giving them work. I once spoke to a large network and asked them why they had selected a particular operator. I was surprised to learn that he gave them a ton of work.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A PERFECT AFFILIATE FOR YOUR COMPANY?



**NEIL GOODMAN**, President and CEO, Aventura Worldwide Transportation Service, Miami: "When we work with an affiliate, it is so much more than just an exchange of reservations. We need to know

that it is a partnership. We are trusting the affiliate to represent our company, and we need to know that each client's special requests will get the necessary attention to make each trip seamless to the passenger. They must have a 24-hour operation with live agents answering calls, an upkept fleet of new vehicles, and customer service agents that are helpful and accommodating."

**MARC SHPILNER**, President, M7 Transportation Worldwide, Burlington, Mass.:

"It is so much more than a clean car and knowledgeable chauffeur. How the back office is run is equally as important. Open and honest communication is a huge factor. Are their phones answered quickly? Are reservations booked and confirmed accurately



the first time? Does the affiliate contact you immediately if there is an issue? Are they proactive with resolutions? Can they supply rates and invoicing in a timely and accurate fashion?"



**SEAN DUVALL**, Golden International, Detroit: "The perfect affiliate for Golden International does three things: Provide impeccable service to both our client in the car and me, and the customer

on the phone. VIP service for the client, fair discounts, and quick billing turn around are minimum expectations for impeccable service. With those minimum requirements met, I look for affiliates that pay on time, and if not, communicate with us any delays or issues. And finally, we look for affiliates that will give two-way service. Book with us if we are booking with you.

Asking for the Business

- 01 **THE ASK** — Write a personal email introducing you and your company. Make sure it answers the question, "Why should I hire you?"
- 02 **FOLLOW UP** — Make a personal phone call
- 03 **FOCUS ON YOUR ATTRIBUTES** — Don't put down other companies. If a company you call tells you they are using someone else, don't chew them out. This is a sure fire way to never get their business. Instead, ask them if they are happy with the other company and if they have a back-up company.
- 04 **ASK THEM TO TRY YOU** — If you are as good as you say, one try may be all it takes for them to switch.
- 05 **STAY IN TOUCH** — Out of sight, out of mind. Periodically call and keep your name fresh on their minds.

What Large National Providers Expect From Their Affiliates

- 01 **IMPECCABLE SERVICE** — Most large networks have a rating system for deviations which will tell them whether or not to keep the supplier.
- 02 **COMPUTER SAVVY** — Many national companies post their jobs on a web-based site. Operators must accept and take the work off of it.
- 03 **BRANDING** — National networks expect their brand to always be portrayed in a positive way. From signs to vouchers, you may need to stock an inventory of their branded materials to be used in their jobs.
- 04 **FAST CLOSE OUTS** — Most national providers operate in real time. They expect you to close out jobs within 24 hours of them occurring.
- 05 **RESPONSIVENESS** — Every person in your organization needs to be empowered to help when they call. **LCT**