

The Great Thank-You Note Debate

By Kristen Luke

June 15, 2010

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This blog post was inspired by Susan B. Weiner's post [How Should You Thank Clients for Referrals?](#) From March 12, 2010.

Sending a thank-you note should be a standard part of any referral follow-up process. Expressing gratitude to the referral source, whether it is a client or a center-of-influence (COI), encourages future referrals. The question is what is the best way to send a thank-you note to a referral source.

Fifteen years ago, sending a handwritten note was the only option. Technology has changed that, providing you with several options that make the choice more difficult. What is the right choice for your business? Here are three options to consider, depending on the demographics of your referral sources and the resources available in your firm.

Handwritten note card

The handwritten note card is the most effective of all the thank-you note options. Fewer and fewer people are sending handwritten cards to show appreciation, which makes their impact much greater. The downside for the high-impact nature of the handwritten note is the inefficiency of the process. To send a traditional card, you have to think of a personalized message to write, address and stamp the envelope and finally send the card through snail mail. This may not seem like that much work, but the process adds ten minutes to your already busy day. You can shorten this time by having an assistant write the note, but you have to worry that the recipient will notice the note is not written in your handwriting. If you have the time and your referral sources are of an older generation or are technology neophytes, the handwritten card is the best option for your business.

Electronic cards

Electronic cards (e-cards) will have the least amount of impact out of all the thank-you note options. E-cards tend to end up in junk mail boxes or are never opened because they require the recipient to click a link to view the message. In addition, the recipient may think you are too cheap or too lazy to send a traditional card. On the positive side, e-cards are quick, easy, inexpensive and eco-friendly to send.



I was recently evaluating which of these three methods I wanted to use to follow-up with my own referral sources when my assistant commented that some people might view sending a paper card as environmentally irresponsible. Most likely, only a small minority of people feel this way, but properly positioning your e-cards as an eco-friendly alternative to paper cards can make a statement about your business and save you money. The key to this strategy is to make it known why you are sending an e-card. Just as some email signatures now include the statement "Please consider the environment before printing this email," you can include a statement on your e-cards such as:

"We are committed to corporate social responsibility and have consciously decided to send e-cards to reduce the use of paper, ink, distribution, and packaging materials; all are key sources of carbon emissions.

You can also use e-card services that are specifically positioned as eco-friendly such as [SaveATreeCards](#) to further reinforce the environmental purpose of the e-card. This thank-you option will be more effective for referral sources to members of younger generations or environmentally conscious communities.

Automated cards

Automated card services like [SendOutCards](#) combine the ease of sending electronic cards with the tangible deliverable of traditional cards. By logging onto the website, you can choose a card, create a customized message and send it by mail to your referral source in less than a minute; all this without ever having to touch or see the card. Sending one card or a hundred cards takes the same amount of time since you can manage campaigns within the website, making this an attractive option for advisors who send large volumes of cards. Automated cards can also be managed by an assistant, enabling you to remove yourself from the entire process.

The downside of this option is that the recipient will be able to tell that you did not handwrite the card yourself, even if you purchased the personalized handwriting font. This may take away from the impact. The card will also be postmarked with its city of origin, which, in all likelihood, is not the city where your business resides. Whether you are looking to have a standardized referral follow up process throughout your entire firm managed by an administrative assistant, or if you are a one person operation trying to increase efficiency, then automated card services might be the option for you.

Which option should you choose?

The good news is that there is no correct answer. Any thank-you note you send will have some impact and is infinitely better than not showing gratitude at all. You should evaluate the preferences and mindset of your clients and COIs as well as evaluate your own capacity to implement the option, to make the right choice for your firm.



About Kristen Luke

Kristen Luke is the Principal of Wealth Management Marketing, a firm dedicated to providing marketing strategies and support for Registered Investment Advisors. Kristen works with individual advisors and firms to develop effective marketing plans and provides the back office support required to implement the strategies. For more information, visit www.wealthmanagementmarketing.net.

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