

14 Simple Ways to Get New Design Clients

Here's what i've included in this guide for you. My fellow designer.

Introduction - You need better clients.

Focus & Niche

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Introduction - You Need Better Clients

I know you do. We all do. Every designer i've spoken to does.

When I say "better" I mean ones that understand what you do well and pay you really well for it.

You didn't get into design to be slaving away on a computer day and night doing work you hate for organisations that don't care about quality design and communications.

Anyone will do at the start

When I started out twenty years ago, I remember literally taking anyone on as a client. I was so excited that I had announced to the world that i'm a designer that I just wanted to get work.

I also charged out my first few jobs at a lower rate to get the work in. Happy that people would pay me to do what I loved to do.

But that excitement didn't last too long when I found I was working way below minimum wage on work that was never going to end up in my portfolio.

So my journey started to work out how I was going to fix this problem. You may be in this situation right now. Or maybe you're doing well, but you can't help feeling that you could be doing so much better.

On that journey, there was one day that changed everything.

The day the lights came on

I was going through a phase early on in my freelance business where I would attend all sorts of networking events, seminars and trade shows. Anywhere I could go and get people to talk to about what I do.

One of these events was a sales seminar.

Now at that time, I thought that 'Sales' is something that people with brief cases do door to door and as a creative I don't need to learn any of those sales tactics and strategies. Surely the work would just come to me.

Right?

Wrong.

What I learned at that event and for the next few years of being mentored by top sales guys is that sales and marketing is a process and a skillset. In fact it's one of the most important skillsets you can learn as a creative if you want to stay independent. If you want to go from freelancer to agency, it's even more critical.

So i've been learning sales skills that compliment my creative small business for a long time and i've condensed down some of the best ideas into quick and easy ideas you can implement

How to get the most out of this guide

There's no way you'll be able to do everything i'm about to delve into for you. So read through everything first and then make a note of the strategies that really resonate with you and you'll be able to implement.

At the end of this guide i've created a page where you can do a quick 90 day plan. Complete this with the three main strategies, give yourself a timescale for each and just go for it.

Focus & Niche

If you really want to speed up the process of getting new clients on board then I would suggest you work out your niche.

You might have heard this before and thought "I don't want to limit myself by just doing one type of work or have one type of clients". I get that. BUT... you can always have more than one niche ONCE you get the first one working for you.

There are different ways you can niche your design business:

You can niche by skillset. For example, you could specialise in:

- Logo Design
- Brochure Design
- Packaging Design
- Illustration
- Web Design
- App Design Animation

Then you can also niche by industry:

- IT Companies
- Dental Implant Dentists
- Wealth Advisor / Financial Planners
- Divorce Lawyers
- Property Experts
- Mortgage Brokers
- Chiropractor

Essentially it comes down to two simple questions.

1. What do you want to be doing all day?
2. Who do you want to be doing it for?

There's a lot more I could delve into on niching. But we'll cover it at another point on the This Design Life [Blog](#) and [Podcast](#).

1. Building Your Referral Network

I'm starting with this as it has been one of my most successful ways of finding clients over the past 20 years and continues to bring me leads all the time.

To be clear, what I mean by a **"referral network"** is a group of people you know and trust that will happily refer people they know to you.

This works on two levels. Passive and active.

Passive - when you get a call out of the blue. For example just this morning I had a lady say to me "I was just chatting to a friend and they mentioned they need a website design, so I told them to speak to you".

Active - When you systematically contact people in your network and prompt them to send you referrals.

The way I started my referral network was to look out for people that I knew that were looking out for similar clients to myself.

For example my accountant and book keeper both work with medium sized businesses that are growing. It turns out that they've been able to pass me leads over the years.

Also, we have teamed up with other agencies and designers that can't do a particular thing that we can, so they refer to us and in turn we refer to them.

TASK: Write down a list of people that you know and have a decent relationship with that could refer clients to you. Then invite them for a coffee or just catch up on the phone. Then when you connect, spend some time getting to know them more and what they're up to and let them know the clients you're looking out for as well.

2. Building Your Portfolio

Whatever stage you're at as a designer, someone is always going to want to see what you've done for other clients.

It's one of your most valuable assets online and it will be constantly changing over time as your work gets better.

The most important thing I can say about your portfolio is that you **must** give context to your work and not just show your work.

As a designer, you need to show that you can solve problems, not just create great looking work.

Companies will hire you when they believe that you can create a solution to their challenges, not just because you can make great looking designs.

TASK: Create a case study of a project that you're really proud of. Start with the issue. What problem did they have when they came to you. Then explain the process you went through to produce the designs you did.

Finish off with the results that the clients got from working with you.

3. Showing off Your Portfolio

Back when I started, I literally had to print out my portfolio and take it round to prospective clients. In fact I think I still have it in my wardrobe upstairs.

Now you have many options, but here's the key things to do with your portfolio if you want to get noticed:

A: Add it your website

Make sure that your portfolio is easy to find on your website. Some designers make the whole website their portfolio, but you need more than just your work to get people interested in working with you.

B: Add it Behance

Behance.net is a fantastic site to show off your work. It takes time and effort to build your profile on there, but once you have you will get the attention of clients and other creatives, it will be worth it.

Here's some tips for getting more out of Behance.

#1 Show your best work

It's better to have a portfolio that's short and sweet with great work than a huge swathe of mediocre work. So find a few of your best projects and build case studies as we mentioned earlier.

#2 Craft a strong bio

Who are you? What's your story and why should we care?

If you can answer those questions, you will have a bio that people will remember.

#3 Choose good cover images

People will scan across your page quickly, so make sure your cover images are high quality and grab attention.

#4 Link to your other social media accounts

You can link your Behance page up to your other social media accounts.

#5 Appreciate other people's work

Don't forget that Behance is a community. As with any community, you do better when you connect, chat and encourage other people.

#6 Keep it up to date

This may all sound like a lot of work, but it's worth it for the exposure you get and the opportunities that come your way. So just remember to keep on top of it and keep it current.

TASK: Go through the points above for your Behance portfolio. Then show it to a few people and get their feedback.

Also, check out three other people's work today and give them some feedback.

4. SEO

Search Engine Optimisation is a HUGE topic and we will cover this in more detail on the blog. But in a very basic way, you want to get found in your area for what you do.

So for example:

"Web Designer Birmingham"

"Logo Designer Texas"

"Illustrator Manchester"

You get the idea.

In a nutshell, there are two main factors when it comes to SEO. The On-Page factors (what happens on your website) and the Off-Page factors (everything outside your site that links to your site).

On-Page Factors

Firstly make sure your **content** aligns with what you want to get found for. In your descriptions, headers, page content and image tags.

Make sure the **images** on your pages are also optimised and your pages aren't too cluttered. Google ranks sites based on page load speed now as well.

You can also have a **blog** on your site to give people something useful to link to. Include content on there that helps people understand your process and why design is important.

Your site will also need to be **responsive**. Meaning that it works well on desktop, laptop, tablet and mobile.

Include **internal links** to other pages on your site.

Off-Page Factors

Off-Page is all about getting good links to your site.

You can do this in many ways, but here's a few quick examples.

One is to create an article about design and send that to local websites to you. Maybe someone in your town runs one or your chamber of commerce. Make a list of sites you can send articles to and then get busy creating them and asking for a link back to your site.

Another idea is to create a really useful infographic. Being a designer it's easier for you to create these than the average business person. So do one and send them out to people who can use them and link back to your site.

We will do a full roundup of SEO tactics on a future blog post.

5. Networking

Now, away from your website and out into the real world. Networking is a great way to get new clients.

From interviewing a lot of designers though and being one myself, I know that we aren't that keen on networking and would rather be creating than chatting to people we don't know.

Here's what i've found works well if you're going to pursue networking as a way of getting new clients.

Choose your events carefully

There's a lot of options when you go networking. You can do really well organised events like BNI. You can do events by your Chamber of Commerce. Or can can look our for smaller independent events.

If you target a niche (as we suggested above) then you can go one step further and attend events specific to your niche.

In the past, I have targeted manufacturing companies. When i've attended specific events for manufacturers as a designer, there's no competition there and the conversations are very specific about what they want.

Don't sell to the room

Whenever you attend a networking event. You're there to make solid connections and build relationships. You aren't there to sell right away.

If you do try and sell your services to people there, you'll put people off and ruin chances of much more work further down the line.

Saying that, I have had work just from one meeting, but that was more of an accident and I went in the frame of mind that I wanted to help people and not sell to them.

Find the influencers

In most networking groups you have the "influencers". These are the people that are the most connected and once you get to know them and they trust you, they will refer you to the people they know.

These people normally take longer to get to know well. This is because people value their recommendations so they need to ensure you know what you're doing and you're reliable.

Meet between meetings

The best relationship i've built have been when I set meetings apart from the networking events. What I mean by this is that I arrange a coffee with people I know that are either influencers, know people directly I want to work with or are the people I want to work with.

This takes some effort in terms of keeping notes of who's who at the networking events and following up. But it's more than worth the time and energy.

Speak & Present

If you're feeling super brave then you could always put yourself up to speak at some of the networking events. This can be scary the first few times but it's a great way to boost your confidence and communication skills.

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The rest of this guide is coming very soon, but I wanted to get this to you asap.

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<http://www.thisdesignlife.net/newclients/>