



How to Generate More Referrals Automatically

blueleaf & **ADVISORYWORLD**
FINANCIAL TECHNOLOGY

Referrals are Great, but Tough to Grow Predictably

Keeping clients happy is smart business. It's 5 times easier (and less expensive) for an advisor to keep an existing client than to attract a new one. So why aren't you putting a majority of your effort on creating client relationships strong enough to drive referral?

Client relationships take time to mature and need regular attention in order to grow strong. Once they are developed, however, these relationships are a powerful way to grow your business. In addition to delivering the bulk of your current revenue, happy clients who feel valued and respected are also more likely to talk about your business and refer people they know.

Happy clients may refer someone they know, but it's unpredictable. We need to be in clients' consciousness when they recognize a need in someone else. Then feel excited enough about the value we've delivered to them in order to send someone to us. That can be a tall order, especially as we grow.

Creating and executing a repeatable, measurable system for client happiness & referral is hard. While sending your clients a note once-in-a-while is simple, sending every client regular communications that effectively develop your relationship is a challenge. It's difficult to know where to start. In this guide we'll talk about the problems with traditional approaches. Then we'll give you some new ways to think about these issues and a plan to get started with a repeatable, measure repeatable, measurable system today.

One to One Communications Are Not Scalable

As you know, client relationships can be built in a variety of ways: in person, on the phone, on your website, through your staff, through the mail and with email. The thing is, as you grow, you begin to realize that relying on these one to one communication methods becomes overwhelming. The only realistic way to stay in front of so many clients at once is to combine automated communication tools with a more strategic use of your one to one approaches. The simplest and least expensive tool you have to automate your communication today is email.

This kind of email automation is also known as a nurturing campaign. A nurturing campaign is a series of communications designed to develop a relationship toward a specific objective. In this case, the campaign will be designed to help you deepen your client relationships by providing content that **THEY** will appreciate and care about. Content comes in many forms. It can range from weekly updates on how their accounts are doing (which is handled automatically by Blueleaf as a built in feature), to a monthly newsletter, to a link to an interesting article, to a personal video from you explaining a financial concept that is important for them. The more relevant the content is to them personally, the more engaged they'll be and the more benefit they'll get from it. The more benefit they get, the stronger the relationship becomes over time, and the more successful your business will be.

12 Touches a Year Isn't Going to Cut It

In 2011, Morningstar conducted a survey of 980 affluent investors to understand how their clients prefer to be emailed. The survey found that 30.4% of clients prefer weekly emails from their advisor, 36.6% prefer them monthly, only 19.9% prefer emails quarterly, and a mere 9.4% prefer them annually. The research is clear. Clients want to be emailed, and often. Blueleaf's own behavioral data shows that over 60% of clients will open and read a relevant weekly email about their situation and almost 90% will open that same email once per month. In fact, we've found that advisors who are the most successful in growing their business will email their clients even MORE than once per week.

We spoke with Jason Wenk, Founder and President of Retirement Wealth Advisors, who runs a mid-size firm that's growing at a rate of more than 50% per year. He reported reaching out to clients at least 150-200 times per year. This translates into a minimum of 12.5 touches per month, 4 of which are handled automatically with his weekly Blueleaf email [[Learn why weekly Blueleaf emails are successful](#)]. Given that Jason's midsize firm is growing at this impressive rate, we know he's on to something.

How do advisors like Jason manage to reach all of their clients so frequently without becoming annoying? Well, remember that a touch can be delivered in various ways: in person, via email, phone, social media, or

traditional mail. By mixing push and pull methods like email and blogging and by varying client specific content with general content, clients will consume what they like and happily skip the rest. This kind of frequent contact with thoughtfully shaped messages that reflect clients' individual interests powerfully reminds client of your value even if some of the content is “ignored” by some clients.

The more clients feel you're delivering value to them, the happier they'll be. The happier your clients, the more likely they are to give referrals—which of course are essential to growing your business. Also, if you're not proactively reaching out to your clients, be aware that other advisors are. It's naïve to think that if they're in your book, they're your client forever. Once you've invested in a client relationship, you have to protect your investment if you want to prosper in the long run.

Of course the only way to deliver this volume of client touches is via automation. Let's talk about how.

Getting Started

The first step to running your own automated nurturing campaign is creating a communication calendar. On the calendar, plan out the types of content you want to send each month, so when a new month arrives, you're ready with a plan. We've provided a sample client communication calendar on the next page. [Click on the image on the next page to download your own calendar template file.]

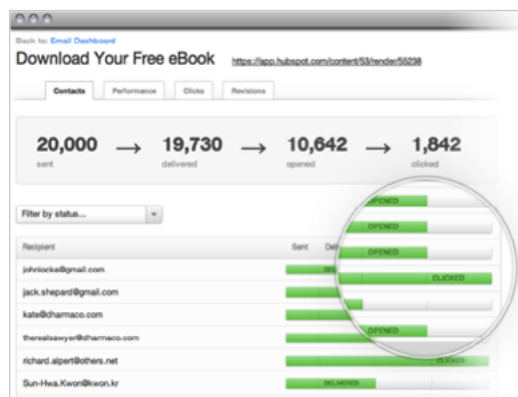
Content Calendar - 2013 - *Your Business Name*

Q2	April <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - article: something helpful about each client's hobby (use segmented lists!) - item - item 	May <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - Invitation: "Client Appreciation" event - item - item 	June <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - "Thanks for attending last month's event." Include link to article about topic that was discussed - item - item
	July <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - Invitation: Local art gallery opening - Encourage clients to bring a friend - item - item 	August <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - "Thanks for attending last month's event." Include link to helpful resource, encouraging client to forward it to the friend that brought. Include referral details and contact info. - item - item 	September <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - article: How to Teach Kids about... (topic that's relevant to child's age, i.e. saving their allowance, opening 1st credit card, etc) - item - item
Q3	October <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - Invitation: chocolate tasting at local restaurant, "an adult Halloween party" - item - item 	November <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - video of your staff giving a Thanksgiving message - article: "Reasons to be Thankful You're Saving for Retirement" - item - item 	December <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - mail small gift of appreciation to "A list" clients (i.e. non-fiction book with handwritten note inside) - item - item
	January <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - article: New Year's Financial Resolutions - item - item 	February <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - blog post: How to Communicate With Your Spouse about Financial Planning - item - item 	March <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monthly newsletter - Blueleaf weekly updates (x4, automated) - article: Tax Filing Tips - item - item
Q4			
Q1			

Don't feel overwhelmed by the volume of content. Thanks to automation, these campaigns will run themselves. This kind of "set and forget" system will allow you to focus on other efforts for scaling your business and simply add new clients to the flow as they roll in.

There are plenty of email systems available to use, like [MailChimp](#) (which integrates with [Redtail](#)) or [iContact](#), and there are also more comprehensive marketing systems that include email management, such as [Hubspot](#). All these tools will guide you in setting up a nurturing campaign. The systems work by delivering messages to your clients at regularly scheduled intervals. All you have to do is decide what kind of information you want to send and at what interval you want to send them, and the system handles the rest for you.

These systems also provide helpful information about what happens to your emails once they are sent. For example, in Hubspot you can see how many people open, forward, unsubscribe and click on a link in your email. By analyzing the results of your email blasts, you can quickly see what kinds of email subject lines and content your clients enjoy, and which ones end up in the trash. [Rule of Thumb: Generally, an open rate of 15%, a click through rate of 12% and an opt out rate of 0.19% is average for financial advisors.]



Personalize Your Emails with Segmentation

Okay, so what do you send in the emails? It is incredibly important to take the time to learn about your clients so you can send them emails that they care about, will appreciate and respond to. The easiest way to achieve this is by segmenting your clients into different interest groups.

A client list can be segmented by basic measures such as age, occupation, geography, gender, profitability, etc. These demographics can be useful sometimes, but don't really equip you to send financially relevant content throughout the year. Think about it, the fact that you're a 43-year-old male living in Connecticut doesn't do all that much to help identify your financial concerns.

The key is to approach segmentation with the mindset that you will want to identify content topics that are useful and relevant to them. For instance, clients with children entering or enrolled in college could be put into one list. These clients will appreciate content about student loans, tips for talking with students about responsible spending, etc.

Here are more examples of potential client list segmentation that would allow you to send targeted content:

- Life stage (mid-career, nearing retirement, retired)
- Risk tolerance (very conservative, very aggressive)
- Tax status
- Family situations (parent in nursing home, kids in college)
- Other assets (boat, vacation home)

While some advisors have this in-depth information about clients already, don't throw your hands up in defeat if you don't. Go out and get it! Begin to ask segmentation-type questions during client meetings and take notes in your CRM. Another option is writing a quick online survey (check out [SurveyMonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com)) for clients to do at home or on an iPad in the waiting room at your office. They'll be happy to tell you more about themselves, you just have to ask.

Want a quick way to play around with segmentation ideas? Research your clients online. Their public profiles on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com), [Google](https://www.google.com), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com) or [Twitter](https://www.twitter.com) are great sources to learn about clients' personal interests and help you understand how to segment them in meaningful ways.

The better you know and can segment your client base, the better you can shape an effective message. Once your client list is segmented, the next step is to decide the types of content you'll produce.

Use Multiple, Strategic Content Types

Another key to a successful nurturing campaign is using multiple, strategic content types. Think beyond a generic quarterly newsletter. Old-fashioned newsletters only deliver 4 touches per year. How about a funny comic strip about saving for college, a client satisfaction survey, a YouTube video about a new alternative investment, a helpful article about the importance of health insurance in retirement? All can be effective options, depending on the characteristics of your client base.

Here are some not-so-traditional content types that clients will love:

- Link to RSS feed you set up that streams relevant news
- List of Twitter accounts to follow
- Offer a Google Hangout or Skype chat
- Send a picture of your new office set-up that they'll see in person soon
- Link to a book on Amazon's kindle marketplace you think they'd enjoy
- Offer a weekly paper.ly
- Funny comic about sending your kid off to college
- YouTube video link explaining an relevant financial topic for them
- "Happy Birthday" e-card
- Infographic about explaining an economic concept
- Summary of your trip to a conference with picture
- Link to an archived webinar
- Client case study—a bad situation you helped them turn around

We're not saying that you should abandon all traditional client contact approaches. Consider ways using those tools in addition to your automated campaigns for specific clients. For example, some advisors keep track of their client's hobbies and occasionally send them books that match their interests or correspond with a life event such as planning for a wedding, welcoming a grandchild or celebrating a graduation. Birthday cards in the mail are always a nice touch as are other notes sent through US Mail. Just be judicious.

There are also a number of advisors that send birthday and holiday cards to their clients as well as to their spouses and children. Whether you take that approach or not, include the entire family in your automated nurturing program. By including the family, you build relationships with your client's family members and are more likely to gain or retain them as clients in the future.

The bottom line is to use as many methods to deliver your content as possible, but make sure you're delivering in ways that make sense for your client base.

At this point you're ready with segmented client lists, a content calendar, an automated emailing tool, and various ideas for content types. Now, roll up those sleeves and write some emails! Below we've outlined emailing best practices that will optimize your success.

Best Practices—How to Optimize your Email Success

3 top tips for writing emails to clients:

Stay true to your firm. Speak to your clients in your unique “voice”. Don't try to write like someone you're not. They know you, trust you and want to recognize your voice. Leave the 25-cent-words out, put in a consistent tone and use the vocabulary that reflects your personality.

Write in the second person. It's what we're doing here, and it makes your reader feel like you're talking directly to him/her. Use words like 'you' and 'your' and write as if you're having a conversation.

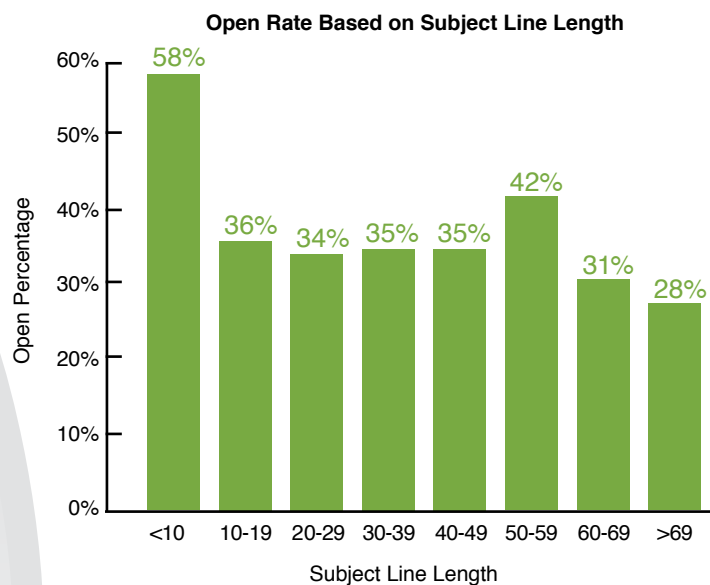
Keep it simple: Today's inboxes are overflowing with emails demanding our attention. Your emails should contain helpful content that is easy to digest. Use short sentences and avoid complex metaphors or 5+ syllable words.

Ready to rock? Let's walk through each element of an email.

When to Send: Research shows that emails sent in the morning will have slightly higher open rates. So mornings are a good time to send out something short, like a blog post, or invitation to an event that people can scan as they prepare for their day. The late afternoon has been shown to have higher click through rates, which means this is a good time to send out a survey, or a longer article. The idea is to think about your client's day and tailor what you send and when you send it to achieve optimal open and click through rates.

From Line: Try to avoid sending emails from a generic company email address (ex: info@advisor.com). The person an email comes from should be relevant to the person receiving it. When they recognize your name, they'll be much more likely to open the email.

Subject Line: The purpose of an email's subject line is to entice your clients to open it, a decision they'll make in less than 3 seconds. Your subject line should describe what's inside the email in a descriptive, compelling way. For example, a standard subject line may be: "Quarterly Newsletter". A better subject line is: "Advisor X's Q3 Insights for the Aggressive Investor". Word to the wise: There is such a thing as being too compelling, though, so be careful. Subject lines that seem "too sell-y" can make people think they're being tricked into opening the email. For example, subject lines that include your client's name like, "Bob, read this" are not opened as much as more descriptive subject lines. Test this by reading your subject line aloud and ask yourself,



"Would I open this if it appeared in *my* inbox?" You should also consider the length of your subject line. A recent study done by Informz shows that subject lines with less than 10 characters result in the highest open rate.

Have an engaging opening: The first few sentences of your email should actively engage the reader, making them want to read more. An easy way to do that is to open in one of the following ways:

- Ask a question
- Tell a quick story
- State a surprising statistic
- Use an analogy
- Start with a quote

Ask a question: When you read a question in a marketing message, do you always think of an answer? Probably not. But a question still registers on a subconscious level and creates engagement. For example, you could start an email by saying, “Wondering if you’ll ever be able to retire?” or “Worried about the rising cost of education?” or “Should you buy or rent?”

Use Other People’s Content: No one expects you to write like a Pulitzer Prize Winner. You’re an advisor who advises; let the writers write. As long as you give an author credit, feel free to summarize an article and link to it rather than write everything from scratch. Your clients will appreciate you sending them a helpful article and be happy that you spend most of your time managing their money.

Call to Action: End each correspondence with a call to action. A call to action could be many anything. Think about it - What do you want the client to do? Perhaps you want them to reach out and schedule a meeting, invite them to check out your most recent blog post, ask them to RSVP to a seminar you’re hosting, or [refer a friend to your practice](#). It doesn’t matter what the call to action is as long as it is clear and somewhat related to the content of the email.

Measure the Results: You’ve spent time and energy planning and running this nurturing campaign, so be sure to measure the responses you get! Watch how many clients open the email (effect of subject line or time you send it) and how many of them click on links (effect of your messaging or the content’s relevance to their individual situation). Again, a lot of this results tracking and reporting is built into the emailing tools mentioned above.

Sample Nurturing Email:

Subject Line: Top 5 Money Mistakes College Kids Make

Hi Bob and Ann,

How are you enjoying this beautiful summer weather? I recently got back from a trip to Cape Cod—My son and I did a lot of fishing which was great.

Despite the sunshine, we all know fall is right around the corner. With September approaching and students preparing to head back to college, I thought it'd be a great time to share this helpful article:

["Top 5 Money Mistakes College Students Make"](#)

(I have to say, I see these happen all the time! Particularly mistake #2.)

Feel free to forward this email on to a friend who may also find it interesting.

*Best,
Your Advisor*

There you have it: A step-by-step guide for building a KILLER email nurturing campaign of your own. All of your work and effort today will come back tenfold in the weeks and months to come. Trust the process, commit to [your content calendar](#) and get ready to reap the benefits! This is a recipe for success, setting you up to build client retention and bring more referrals to your business. Happy emailing.