

Small But Mighty Agency Podcast

Episode 115: Is Your Agency Missing Out on Referral-Ready Relationships?

Speakers: Audrey Joy Kwan

Audrey Joy Kwan

"Hey friends, I have a question for you: How many connections in your network are actually sending you high-quality referrals? Think about it for a second.

If your answer is "not enough," you're not alone.

Many agency owners believe that growing the size of their network is the key to getting more referrals. But here's the truth—it's not about how many people you know; it's about how well you know them and, just as importantly, how well they know you.

Today, we're breaking down a big misconception in the agency world: the belief that a bigger network equals better results. Spoiler alert—it doesn't.

What often gets overlooked is a huge opportunity for *agency-to-agency referrals*. But here's the common concern: Won't you step on each other's toes because your agency owners? And if one agency gains a client, doesn't that mean another loses?

Not at all. Collaboration, when done with the right intent, is far more powerful than competition.

In this episode, I'm diving into:

- Why a large network isn't the key to consistent, high-quality referrals.
- How to build deeper, trust-filled connections with other niche agencies.
- Actionable steps to create a referral-ready network that actually delivers results.

Let's rethink what it means to have a network that truly works for your agency! Tune in...

Audrey Joy Kwan

Welcome to the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. If you want to grow an agency to seven figures and beyond without working more hours in your business, you're in the

right place. I'm your host, Audrey Joy Kwon. I know what it takes to build an agency, including supporting an agency owner in selling and exiting. I also have a master's degree in communications, specializing in organizational development. My team and I have worked behind the scenes of multiple seven figure agencies and have coached and consulted with over 150 agency owners. All this to say, when you join us on the small but mighty agency podcast, you get real world experience and practical tips that help you work less, earn more, and lead with integrity. So let's go.

Audrey Joy Kwan

"Hey friends, welcome to the *Small But Mighty Agency Podcast*, where we explore practical ideas for growing your agency. If you ask an agency owner—and I've asked many—what's the one thing you want more of in your business, the answer is almost always *leads*. And the best leads? They're referrals from trusted friends and peers.

But here's what I often see: agency owners miss out on one huge opportunity—*agency-to-agency referrals*. And the common thought is, *how is that going to work? Aren't we going to step on each other's toes?* There's this unspoken belief that if one agency gains a client, another loses one. But it doesn't have to be that way.

When we think of business as a dog-eat-dog kind of world, it's hard to see how collaboration can work. And when your mindset is stuck there, no network—no matter how big—can fill the gap.

And here's the thing: the size of your network isn't always the answer. You've been to events, made connections on LinkedIn, and exchanged your fair share of business cards. But how many of those connections are actually driving high-quality referrals for your agency? If the answer is 'not enough,' you're not alone.

In today's episode, we're talking about why a large network isn't always a valuable one, and how building referral-ready relationships—especially with other niche agencies—could be the key to unlocking consistent, high-quality referrals for your agency.

We'll dive into why depth matters more than quantity, the hidden downsides of shallow networks, and actionable steps you can take to start building agency-to-agency relationships that actually deliver results.

Segment 1: Why a Big Network Isn't Enough

Let's start with a common belief: *if I just grow my network, the referrals will follow*. It seems logical, right? The more people you know, the more opportunities you'll have for referrals. But that's rarely how it works.

Why Quantity Doesn't Equal Quality

Here's why: referrals aren't about how many people you know—they're about the relationships you've built. Referrals are built on trust and understanding. The person recommending you is putting their reputation on the line. If they don't fully understand your niche, trust your expertise, or know how to position you, they're not going to send referrals your way—even if they like you.

This becomes especially true with agency-to-agency referrals. Unlike client referrals, these relationships require a deeper level of understanding. The other agency needs to feel confident that you'll not only deliver for the client but also respect boundaries and complement their work rather than compete with it.

For example, let's say you're a branding agency. Another web development agency might work with you to create a seamless brand-to-site experience for a client. But if they don't trust your expertise or worry about overlapping services, they're unlikely to make that introduction. It's not about competition—it's about clarity, trust, and mutual respect.

And that's why quantity doesn't equal quality. Quality takes strategically focused networking

The Hidden Pitfalls of Shallow Networks

So, **why do so many agency owners fall into the trap of building-wide but shallow networks? It's not intentional, but it's common.** Let's break it down further to three most common reasons I've come across, and see if resonates with you:

1. You've fallen into the Client Work Priority Trap
 - We all know client work pays the bills. When you're juggling deliverables, team management, and business operations, networking feels like a "nice to have" rather than a priority. It's easy to think, *I'll get to it later*, but later rarely comes. This means relationships stall at surface-level introductions without deeper engagement.
2. The Fear of Sharing Too Much
 - In a competitive industry, it's natural to think, *What if I give away too much? What if they take my clients?* This mindset can hold you back from forming genuine connections with other agencies. The truth is, collaboration is far more powerful than competition, but fear often keeps agency owners from opening up.
3. The Time Drain of Unproductive Networking
 - Have you ever gone to a networking event or connected with someone on LinkedIn, only to find that the conversation fizzled out? It's frustrating to invest time in connections that don't go anywhere. Without clear goals or

follow-up, many networking efforts feel like a waste of time, leading you to avoid it altogether.

If any of this sounds familiar, stick with me. We're going to explore how to shift from surface-level networking to building a referral-ready network.

Segment 2: Why Depth Matters More Than Quantity

What Does a Referral-Ready Network Really Look Like?

A referral-ready network isn't just a list of contacts—it's a group of relationships where everyone knows each other's strengths, goals, and expertise. Again, it's not about how many people you know; it's about how deeply those people know and trust you.

When your network lacks depth, it's like planting seeds without watering them. You might have the initial connection, but without nurturing, it never grows into anything meaningful. To create a referral-ready network, you need relationships built on trust, mutual understanding, and a shared willingness to support each other.

This Depth Matters So Much Because....

1. *Trust Fuels Referrals*

Referrals are built on trust—it's as simple as that. When someone refers you, they need to know that you have integrity. Trust comes from consistent communication, demonstrated expertise, and showing up when it matters. Without it, referrals will always feel risky, and those opportunities won't come your way.

2. *Understanding Your Expertise*

A referral isn't just about trust; it's also about clarity. If someone in your network doesn't fully understand who you serve, what you do, or how you deliver results, how can they confidently connect you? A referral-ready network knows the details of your niche and can clearly articulate why you're the perfect fit for a specific client or project.

For example, if you're a branding agency specializing in e-commerce, your network needs to know that you focus on direct to consumer brands, not just "any business needing a brand refresh." Being specific makes it easier for them to connect you with the right opportunities.

3. *Reciprocity Builds Momentum*

Relationships thrive when both sides give and receive. In a referral-ready network, reciprocity is the norm. When you actively contribute—whether through sharing resources, offering advice, or passing along referrals—you create a cycle of mutual support. This isn't just about being nice; it's about establishing a

dynamic where everyone benefits. And here's the magic: the more you give, the more likely others are to think of you when opportunities arise.

The Power of a Referral-Ready Network in Action

Let me share an example of a referral-ready network in action. One agency owner I worked with had a wide network but felt stuck because the referrals weren't flowing. We focused on identifying 20 key connections in their industry who aligned with their niche and started nurturing those relationships intentionally. Within six months, they were seeing higher-quality referrals and landed a collaboration project with another agency.

The difference wasn't in the size of their network—it was in how much depth and trust they built with a select group of people.

How Do You Know If Your Network is Referral-Ready?

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do my connections truly understand what I do and who I serve?
- Can I confidently say I've earned their trust?
- Have I been proactive about supporting and adding value to my network?

If the answer to any of these is “no,” it's time to shift your focus from growing your network to deepening it. Depth takes time and intentionality, but the payoff—a steady flow of high-quality referrals—is worth it.

By building a network that's rooted in trust, clarity, and reciprocity, you're not just increasing your opportunities—you're creating a system that works for you and driving growth in a way that's sustainable and rewarding.

Segment 3: Building a Referral-Ready Network

Building a Referral-Ready Network: Small Changes, Big Impact

Now, building a referral-ready network doesn't mean overhauling your entire approach—it's about making small, intentional changes that lead to big results. Let's break down the top three things that can help you focus on creating depth and results:

1. Clarify Your Niche

The clearer you are about who you serve and what you do, the easier it is for others to refer you. Niche clarity removes guesswork, helping others confidently connect you to the right opportunities.

- **Speak Their Language:** Think about how you describe your agency. Does it resonate with your ideal clients and potential referral partners?
- **Avoid broad descriptions** like “We do web development” for specifics like “We build fast, SEO-optimized Shopify stores for small fashion and lifestyle brands.” Instead of “We handle PR” be specific, for example: “We help clean energy startups secure media coverage in industry-leading publications.”
- **Highlight What Makes You Unique:** Make it easy for others to see why you’re the best fit for certain referrals. What’s your expertise? What results do you consistently deliver? The clearer this is, the more targeted your referrals will be.

When you have a clear niche, other niche agencies are incredible strategic referral partners because you have complementary or non-competitive expertise. For example, a digital marketing agency that specializes in tourism can strategically send connections to another digital marketing agency that specializes in dentistry.

2. Seek Purpose-Driven Communities

Traditional networking events can feel like a waste of time when they don’t lead to meaningful connections. Instead, look for groups that are designed to foster trust, collaboration, and deeper relationships. Look for...

- **Curated Communities Will Save You Time:** Purpose-driven groups, like referral networks are intentionally designed to bring together like-minded people who align in values and goals. These spaces remove the guesswork of finding high-quality connections.
- **Facilitated Groups Will Maximize Your Time:** As an agency owner, your time is valuable. Seek out communities where follow-up and relationship-building are baked into the experience. Facilitated groups often include structured conversations that make connecting more efficient, impactful and supports trust building.

3. Show Up With Generosity

Be the connection you’d want to have. If you’ve gotten this far in the episode, you are not an undercover taker, in other words someone who shows up with a take-first mindset. That’s not you.

Generosity builds trust, and trust leads to referrals. When you give first, you create a dynamic of reciprocity that benefits everyone involved. Ways to give include:

- **Share Resources Freely:** Did you read an article, find a tool, or learn something that could help someone in your network? Pass it along. It's a small gesture that can have a big impact.
- **And yes...Offer Referrals Without Expecting Anything in Return:** The more you connect others to opportunities, the more they'll think of you when the right client or project comes along.
- **Be Genuinely Helpful:** Whether it's advice, introductions, or just lending an ear, small acts of generosity build the foundation for strong, referral-ready relationships.

"But How Do I Find the Time?"

I know what you're thinking: *"This all sounds great, but where do I find the time?"* You're busy running your agency, juggling client work, and leading your team. You need to work smarter, not harder.

That's exactly why we bring agencies together in our referral-ready network, *Agency Together*. It's a purpose-built referral community where connections are curated, trust is prioritized, and relationships are nurtured with intentionality. You don't have to figure it all out on your own—we create the structure that makes building referral-ready relationships easier and more effective.

"If you want to learn more, join me in our free *Agency Together* newsletter, where we share tips on building referral-ready networks, insights on collaboration, and details about the next cohort of *Agency Together*—designed to help agencies like yours connect to other agency owners and grow with the power of strategic connections."

To wrap up, here's the key takeaway: it's not about the size of your network. It's about the depth, trust, and quality of your relationships. When you focus on building referral-ready connections—especially with other agencies—you're creating a network that fuels growth, not just fills up your LinkedIn connections.

If this resonates with you, take one step today. Reach out to another agency owner in your network, clarify your niche, or explore a referral network like our very own *Agency Together* where follow-up and relationship-building are baked into the experience to help you get more referrals and strategic connections.

Thank you for tuning in to the *Small But Mighty Agency Podcast*. If you found this episode helpful, share it with a fellow agency owner who could use more referral-ready relationships in their business.

Until next time, stay connected and keep building your small but mighty wins!

Audrey Joy Kwan

Hey, thanks for hanging out with me at the small but mighty agency podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, it would mean the world to me if you hit the follow or subscribe button in your podcast app and share it with a friend. I'll see you on the next one.