

# Getting Clients

**“I had such a great time at the society’s fundraising ball, and the dinner was amazing! How did you do it? I’m trying to plan our company’s annual awards dinner, and I can’t believe all the things that have to be handled.”**



**“My event planner is \_\_\_\_\_. I’m very happy with the job he did. Would you like his telephone number?”**

This is an example of the way many event planners find clients — through **word of mouth**. As you probably know from personal experience, a recommendation from a friend is perhaps the most powerful form of advertising that exists.

But don’t despair if you are just starting out. In this section of the guide you will find a variety of ideas to help you attract clients. And once you have done a great job for those first few clients, you can start attracting more through word of mouth.

## Choose Your Target Markets

Before you start trying to sell your services to prospective clients, you should decide which **types of clients** you want to plan events for. These are your “target” markets.

It can be tempting for a new event planner to say something like “I want to work for anyone who’ll pay me!” Avoid the temptation. It is **costly** and **time-consuming** to try to market your business to “**everyone**” and the truth is that some people will be more

interested than others in the services you have to offer. In fact, people are more likely to hire you if they see you as an “**expert**” who specializes in what they need.

When you are just starting out, of course you might take whatever business comes your way. However, you can focus your **marketing efforts** on the target markets you

most want to work with. Once you start getting more business, you may be able to give up work you find less rewarding, and spend your time on clients and projects you find most rewarding.

Your target market will depend on any **specialization** you identified such as meeting planning, special events, social events, destination management, etc. For example, if you want to plan special events, you might market to **non-profit organizations** or **municipal governments**.

If you want to plan meetings, you might focus your marketing efforts on **large corporations**, companies in a specific industry, or **professional associations**.



Even if you plan to offer **full-service** event planning, beginning with a specific market in mind can help you develop an effective marketing plan. For example, you might decide to focus on marketing your services to **private clubs** such as country clubs, golf clubs, faculty clubs, and yacht clubs. You could develop marketing materials specifically aimed at people who want to organize events at private clubs, and you could concentrate on developing relationships with the general managers of those clubs. (See the story on the next page of one event planner who developed a business by partnering with another company.)

This is also true for **social events**. For example, if you want to plan children's birthday parties, joining the Chamber of Commerce may not be as cost-effective for you as it would be for someone who wants to plan social events (such as dinner parties, holiday parties, etc.) for executives.

Once you have decided who your target markets are, you can prepare materials and plan marketing activities that will most appeal to those groups.

As you get more experience you may decide to go after new target markets, or your business may naturally evolve to focus on particular types of clients. However,

starting with some specific target markets in mind can help you focus your marketing efforts most efficiently – saving you both time and money.

## **Partnering with Another Company**

**Lynn Simpson**, now a self-employed event planner in Carlsbad, California, remembers how she first got into the business:

**I was working as a Jill of All Trades for a company that rents out boats as part of their floating bed and breakfast business. I scrubbed boats, cleaned rooms, crewed on the cruises, checked people in and took reservations.**

**Occasionally, the guests coming aboard would be spending the night for a special occasion an anniversary, birthday, something like that.**

**I started putting special packages together for them and adding special personalized touches.**

**Once a young man called to arrange a stay with a cruise in order to propose to his girlfriend. He was so sweet and wanted everything to be perfect — money was no object. I took on arranging the details to make it a Cinderella moment. I bought dozens of flowers (yellow roses — her favorite), iced their favorite brand of champagne, loaded the CD player with all their favorite songs, created a menu (all her favorite foods) with a local caterer, and went to the local chocolatier to have a special dessert created for them. Everything turned out to be magical — she said “yes” and I decided right then I wanted to arrange special events for many more people.**

**In the months to come, the charter/bed and breakfast company decided to buy the deli at the marina where their boats were moored. I became a “working partner” and started to do catering for local businesses and other charter companies.**

**Before long, I was taking on event planning jobs for all sorts of people — from intimate dinner cruises to corporate functions. It may have been an unusual way of creating my own event planning business, but I love the work and am happy to have found a way to start my own business.**

Like Lynn, you may find a steady source of clients by partnering with another successful business. It might be a private club, an attraction – even a charter boat company!

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