

Show Up Where Your Clients Are.

A practical guide to building real client relationships through in-person presence



There's a piece of advice I keep coming back to, whether I'm thinking about my own work or talking with firm owners who feel like something in their marketing just isn't landing:

Show up where your clients are. Keep the human behind what you're doing.

It sounds simple. But I've seen a lot of smart, hardworking people build their entire outreach strategy around digital tools and wonder why it only takes them so far.

The truth is, you can't reach people without really understanding them. And truly understanding your clients is where the best service, the strongest relationships, and the most sustainable growth actually come from.

This guide is about what changes when you stop relying solely on online marketing and start showing up in person.

The problem with staying behind a screen

For a long time, I leaned heavily on online marketing. It worked, to a point. I could reach people. I could get in front of them. But I kept feeling like something was missing.

I didn't fully see how my clients operated day-to-day. I didn't hear the nuance behind their challenges. And that made it harder to serve them in a meaningful way.

Online tools are efficient. But efficiency isn't the same as understanding. You can have hundreds of touch points with someone and still not know what actually frustrates them, what they're trying to solve, or what they need from you at a deeper level. That information rarely comes through on a Zoom call or in an email. It comes from being in the room.

That's the gap I was missing. And once I started closing it, everything shifted.

Stop bundling everything together

One of the biggest shifts for me was realizing how much context you get just by being in the room. You hear side conversations. You notice patterns. You start to understand not just what your clients say they need, but what's actually going on beneath that.

Before, most of my interactions were efficient, but they stayed surface level. After I started showing up in person, I was having real conversations. I could see how people thought, what they cared about, what frustrated them. I wasn't guessing anymore.

That kind of understanding changes how you work. It changes what questions you ask. It changes how you position your services. It changes the whole relationship. Because now you're not just a vendor. You're someone who gets it.

The mindset shift that makes it work

Here's the thing though. Showing up is not enough on its own. How you show up matters just as much.

If you walk into a room with a stack of business cards and a pitch ready to go, people feel it immediately. The goal can't be to get clients. The goal has to be to understand people.

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That shift changes everything. When I adjusted my mindset from going in focused on landing business to learning, I started asking better questions. I listened differently. I stopped filtering every conversation through the lens of "is this a prospect?" and started being genuinely curious about the people in the room.

The business came from that. Not the other way around.

And I will be honest: it takes more effort than posting online. It's easier to stay behind a screen. But nothing I've done has been more valuable than investing time in real, in-person connection.

Where to actually show up

This doesn't mean attending every event in your city. It means being selective about the spaces where your ideal clients already are.

The question to start with is simple: where do my ideal clients spend time in real life? What events are they already going to? What communities do they belong to? Are there conferences in their industry that they attend?

Once you know that, you have a few options:

01 Attend as a participant

Not as a vendor, not as an exhibitor. Just someone who's there to learn and connect. That posture alone changes how people engage with you.

02 Host something small

A happy hour, a panel, an informal breakfast. Small, curated gatherings tend to generate better conversations than large conferences. You set the tone, and you create the conditions for real connection.

03 Team up with other businesses

Whether it's an app partner or a complementary service provider, co-hosting something lets you split the cost while making a much bigger splash. Plus, it shows your clients you're actually part of their world, not just another firm trying to sell them something through a screen.

All of these approaches have the same thing in common: they put you in the room where the real conversations are already happening.

Why this is the best marketing you can do

I've been working in accounting for a long time, and whenever someone asks for that one marketing tip that actually moves the needle, my answer is always the same.

"HUMAN RELATIONSHIP. THAT'S IT. THAT IS THE BEST MARKETING YOU CAN HAVE. KEEP THE HUMAN BEHIND WHAT YOU'RE DOING."

Not because it's the easiest path. It's not. But because it's the most durable one. The clients who come from real relationships stay longer, refer more, and require less convincing. The understanding you build in person improves your service. The reputation you build by consistently showing up in your clients' world is something no ad campaign can replicate.

Online tools will keep evolving. Platforms will change. Algorithms will shift. But the value of a genuine human connection isn't going away anytime soon.

Where to start

If this resonates, you don't need to overhaul your entire marketing strategy. Start with one thing.

Set aside 30 minutes this week and work through this:

Exercise

SET ASIDE 30 MINUTES THIS WEEK

- 1 **Look up one conference or local event** that your ideal clients attend. Put it on your calendar and commit to going. Not to pitch, but to listen.
- 2 **Reach out to one partner about co-hosting** a small meetup or happy hour. It doesn't have to be big. Small and intentional is better than large and generic.
- 3 **Block 30 minutes to map where your clients spend time offline.** List the events, communities, and spaces they're already in. That list is your starting point.
- 4 **Commit to attending one in-person event in the next 30 days.** Just one. And go in with a single goal: learn something about the people in the room.
- 5 **Go into your next conversation, any conversation, focused only on learning, not pitching.** Notice what changes when you do.

You don't need to solve your whole marketing strategy at once. You just need to start showing up. Because once you do, consistently and with the right mindset, the results follow.

And that's what makes it worth it.