

Reward your users for referring their friends with Referral Factory

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Kirsty Sharman, founder of Referral Factory about simplifying referral programs, operating across multiple languages and time zones and converting high-quality leads.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Before starting Referral Factory, I spent years working in growth marketing, and one thing I noticed was that the businesses that grew the fastest were the ones that leveraged their existing customers to bring in new ones. But despite the obvious value of referral marketing, it was surprising how few companies were actually doing it, especially smaller businesses.

The problem wasn't a lack of interest, but more about accessibility. Most referral solutions were either too expensive, too complicated, or required technical expertise that smaller businesses didn't have. That's where I saw the opportunity. I wanted to create a product that would democratise referral marketing—making it easy, affordable, and accessible to any business, regardless of their size or resources.

Tell us about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Referral Factory is referral marketing software that allows any business, regardless of size or technical expertise, to launch their own referral

program in minutes. Our goal is to simplify the process of running a referral program so that companies can focus on what really matters: growth through word-of-mouth. We believe that every brand's best advocates are their happy customers, and we want to make it easy for businesses to harness that power.

We work with such a huge variety of clients, everything from multinational banks running fully-integrated referral programs to mom-and-pop style small businesses. The beauty of Referral Factory is that it's flexible - anyone can build a referral program without needing to write any code.

When it comes to reaching our customers, we've grown a lot through organic word-of-mouth and our own referral strategies (naturally!). But we're also big on content and education in the referral marketing space. We create educational resources, like blog posts and videos, to help businesses understand the benefits of customer advocacy and really teach them what works when it comes to driving referrals.

Ultimately, we want to make referral marketing accessible to everyone. If a customer, fan or affiliate wants to promote your brand, we're here to help you give them the tools to do so.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

Referral Factory has evolved quite a bit since we first launched in 2021, and I think that's a reflection of both the market and our approach to listening to our customers. When we started, the focus was purely on simplicity—building a tool that allowed anyone to create a referral program without needing to write a single line of code. And while that's still a core part of our offering, we've expanded a lot in terms of the features and flexibility we provide.

One of the biggest changes has been the introduction of over 200 reward types, so you can easily reward people for referring new business your way. We also focussed on adding more integrations so that businesses can connect and manage their referral programs using the business tools they already use — we integrate deeply with Stripe, HubSpot, Zoho, Intercom, Zapier and many more.

Tell us about the working culture at Referral Factory

With offices in Amsterdam and Armenia, we're a small but passionate team, all focused on helping our customers get more referrals and grow their businesses. Our sales and support teams operate remotely, spread across four continents, which allows us to cover multiple time zones and offer great support no matter where our customers are based.

What's really special is that most of our team has been with us since the beginning, and we come from a mix of different cultures and experiences. This makes for a really unique work environment—I love it because you're constantly learning new ways that people think, solve problems, and approach challenges. It keeps things interesting and always evolving.

One thing that stays constant, though, is that in the Yerevan office, we all eat lunch together every day. It's something we look forward to, but there's always a bit of debate about *what* we should eat! ☐



How are you funded?

We raised a small seed round in 2022, which helped us reach profitability by 2023. So, at this point, we're profit-led. We haven't completely closed the door on future funding, but we're not actively pursuing it. If the right partnership came along—something that could really help the entire industry grow and push adoption of referral marketing—then we'd be open to exploring it.

For now, though, we're funding our growth through profits, and I have to say, it makes you incredibly focused on customer happiness and their needs in the moment. That focus has really helped us build a great product over the past three years. We're taking a long-term view of the industry because we see a shift happening. With the rise of AI, there's

going to be more noise and more content than ever, which will make traditional impression-based channels less effective. That's why we believe there's a huge opportunity to tap into people as brand ambassadors—actively asking your customers, network, and fans to refer. That's the future we're building towards.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Scaling customer support across multiple languages and time zones has definitely been our biggest challenge. From day one, we positioned Referral Factory as a marketing solution for all kinds of businesses, but that meant we had to offer deep support across different regions right from the start. Managing this has been tough—we had to find talent in various regions and hire faster than we anticipated because training new team members took around three months. Balancing that while maintaining quality service wasn't easy.

There wasn't a single solution that fixed everything; it was really a process of trial and error. We made plenty of mistakes, learned from them quickly, and adapted. It was a journey of continuously refining our approach, but now we have a strong, well-trained team that we're really proud of. It wasn't an easy road, but we overcame it by staying flexible and owning up to our mistakes, then correcting them fast.

How does Referral Factory answer an unmet need?

Referral marketing is one of the most effective channels out there—you can easily triple your conversion rates and generate high-quality leads with minimal ongoing effort. But the catch has always been that setting up a referral program requires a significant upfront investment in terms of

time, technical expertise, and usually a developer to get it right.

What we've done with Referral Factory is remove that barrier to entry by offering a no-code solution. You don't need a dev team or specialised marketing skills to get a program up and running. This cuts down on the time and cost traditionally needed to launch referral programs. In just a few steps, you can *build, customise, and deploy* a campaign that's ready to drive results. It's all about eliminating the technical friction that often stops businesses from tapping into referral marketing in the first place.

What's in store for the future?

We've got some exciting things lined up for 2025! At the start of the year, we're launching new types of campaigns that go beyond just referral programs. One feature I'm particularly excited about is the ability to ask your customers and fans for reviews. You'll be able to track those reviews and automatically reward people who leave you positive feedback. It's a natural extension of what we already do—helping businesses leverage their biggest advocates—and we think it's going to be a game-changer!

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What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

I'd say the one thing that doesn't get spoken about enough is the need for resilience and patience. It's easy to get caught up in the success stories that make it seem like things happen overnight, but the reality is much different. The stats show that most startups take years to gain real traction, and many don't make it through their first few. So, if you're

expecting quick wins, you might get discouraged early on.

Building a business is a marathon, not a sprint. There will be days when things don't go to plan, and times when it feels like nothing is working. But if you keep at it and stay focused on your long-term goals, you'll eventually start to see the results. It's really about sticking it out when most people would give up.

Resilience is what separates the founders who succeed from those who don't. You've got to be prepared for setbacks and delays, and be willing to push through them. So, my advice would be: don't expect immediate success, and don't be discouraged when things take longer than you hoped. If you're committed and keep showing up, you'll get there in the end.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I'm usually at the office from around 10 AM to 7 PM, then I head home for dinner and some downtime. But like most founders, I tend to put in another shift from 10 PM to midnight—it's hard to completely switch off when you're running a business! That said, I've been making a conscious effort to take weekends off. I'm really trying to introduce a bit more work-life balance into my routine, especially after realising that breaks are just as important as the grind. It's definitely a work in progress, but I'm getting there! ☐

As for rules I live by, I wouldn't say I have anything set in stone, but since moving to Yerevan, I've been exposed to a whole new world of music that's really kept me going, even on tough days. Music has become a big part of my daily routine, and it helps me stay focused when things get

overwhelming. If you're curious, [here's my current Spotify playlist](#).

Kirsty Sharman is the founder of [Referral Factory](#).

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