

with columnist Robert Ciccone



Good testimonials are marketing gold

Use a three-step approach to find customers who will speak on your behalf

Every day, you are exposed to some 1,600 advertising messages – of all sorts, in all media. That’s the equivalent of viewing over 13 solid hours of 30-second TV commercials! The bad news for the advertisers who pay for them is that you pay attention only to 10 or 12 of those messages.

In addition, the media bombard us with mostly bad news, including product recalls, ads making over-the-top, unbelievable claims and too-good-to-be-true offers, plus outright consumer frauds.

Phew! No wonder the big question in all our minds is: “Who can we trust?” How can we be sure the product or service will be as advertised; how can we avoid being made to feel foolish or getting stuck with a lemon that can’t be serviced?

No doubt – we are in the age of skepticism. Therefore the question you must answer when creating your marketing and advertising messages is: How can you eliminate the fear of failure or fear of making a buying mistake? You must prove your case. You must develop credibility.

So how do you do this?

One way is through the proper use of testimonials. Testimonials answer the questions: “Who says so besides you? Who else buys it?”

In *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Robert Cialdini calls this “social proof.” He notes that people are strongly affected by the choices made by others they consider to be like themselves. Just look at the Facebook phenomenon, in which people are asked to tag items they like, or eBay, which offers buyers the opportunity to rate individual sellers. When my wife planned our family vacation, she spent hours on a site called TripAdvisor sifting through

countless hotel and resort reviews.

I’ve also heard it said this way: “When you make a statement, it’s a claim. When a satisfied client makes the same statement, it’s a fact.”

Testimonials can take many forms – letters or videos from happy clients; referrals directly from a client to a prospect; lists of companies or industries that buy from you; images of your product in use; before-and-after photos. All of those help you build and consolidate your credibility and help you prove your case.

In my experience, testimonials not only break through the clutter and reduce anxiety about buying, but, done properly, are especially effective at answering objections in advance. As well, testimonials help overcome the resistance that arises immediately before the sale – the point at which most sales are lost.

What is a good testimonial?

A good testimonial paints a before-and-after picture. Before I found (your product or service), I was fat ... lonely ... poor ... unhappy ... frustrated. Now I’m the opposite – fit ... happy ... lean ... wealthy ... popular.

Good testimonials should contain specific details. You should avoid using what I call *soft* testimonials, which lack specifics and effectively say nothing:

“Thanks for all your help; we are very happy with our new widget equipment.”

Good testimonials – I call them *hard* testimonials – give you plenty of details:

“I thought the price was too high, but after a year of lower maintenance costs, I realized the overall cost was actually 20 percent lower than last year. Thanks for helping me!”

That is much more powerful.

Getting good testimonials is not

difficult, but does take thought and effort. Here it is in three easy steps:

1. Think through every selling feature, fact, fear or question your prospect might have.

2. Identify a happy client whose happy experience could apply to one or more of the above points.

3. Simply ask. Usually the best time is when you know your client is completely satisfied with your work, product or service. Tell them you have a favour to ask, explain what you are trying to do, and work with them to help document their wonderful experience.

Try to get people to allow you to

list their full name, approximate address, and credentials to give their testimonials even more credibility. Also, get permission to use their comments in your materials.

Robert Ciccone is the president and founder of Success Unlimited Sales and Marketing Group (www.susmg.com). He is also the creator of the Marketing for Profit Program, a three-part results program that provides the marketing systems, tools and ongoing support to help participants effectively build, manage and operate a profitable business (www.susmg.com/MarketingForProfit). Robert can be reached at 604-535-2111 or rob@susmg.com.

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