

“Make yourself necessary to somebody.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson
Poet

How to Use Testimonials in Your Business

By Jay B. Lipe

What’s one very effective way to convert prospects into first-time buyers? Testimonials from satisfied customers. But how do you go about collecting them? And what should they say? Here are some tips and techniques on using testimonials in your marketing effort...

What testimonials do for your business

Build bonds of trust

It’s a fact of life that we do business with those we trust. But these days, tooting your own horn too much can submarine your marketing effort. Conversely, when a prospect reads a testimonial about your company, from a complete stranger, it’s considered objective feedback. And so, it’s more believable.

Improve credibility

A client of ours sells telecommunications services to Fortune 500 companies. Yet, nowhere in their materials do the names of these companies or people appear. This is a missed opportunity. Prospects, especially those in Fortune 500 companies, want to know you’ve worked with companies like theirs.

Now, I can hear a lot of you out there saying, “Why would I want to tip our competitors off to who our clients are?” The answer is that you risk more by *not* doing so. If prospects can’t find enough warm and fuzzies in your materials, they’ll take their business elsewhere. And, very likely, it will be to your competitor who *does* publish testimonials with names.

All things in marketing involve risks, but publishing testimonials from satisfied customers, is one well worth taking.

Demonstrate success

When you develop a head-turning testimonial, your prospect almost *feels* the success you’ve created for others. First-time buyers want to work with successful companies—hoping a little of that

success rubs off on them. Read this next testimonial and ask yourself if it doesn't make you want to do business with this company:

“XYZ Laundry Supply was there from day 1, all the way to completion. They took the time to teach me all I needed to know about this business. Now that my first coin laundry is open, I'm looking to open another and I feel like XYZ and I are on a mission together.”

The 2 Types of Testimonials—Unsolicited & Solicited

There are 2 kinds of testimonials—solicited and unsolicited. Unsolicited testimonials are those that arrive at your doorstep, without any effort on your part. The buyer took it upon himself or herself to contact you directly with their story. Here are some ways you'll receive unsolicited testimonials:

- Emails
- Snail mail letters
- Random phone conversations

Keep a file folder of these unsolicited testimonials. Then, when the time is right, break them out and sprinkle them liberally throughout your marketing materials.

Solicited testimonials are those you consciously pursue through devices like:

- Comment cards
- Warranty cards
- Post-purchase surveys or phone calls
- Website comment sections

In my work with hundreds of small and mid-sized businesses, I've found that 90% of your testimonials will be solicited. What this means is this: If you want testimonials, you're going to have to work for them (like just everything else in your marketing effort).

Who writes them—you or them?

I get asked this question a lot and the answer is you should write them. Because, if you leave it up to the satisfied customer, it won't get done. You should write two different versions of a testimonial (or two altogether different testimonials) allowing the client to choose which one they prefer. Then, include a section called “I Can Do Better Than That” and leave some blank space underneath it for them to write their own. Put both of these on one single-sided sheet of paper and send it to them. It might look like this:

- I like this one:

“Every time I pull a pair of Fasthand Drum Sticks out of their sleeves, I know they’ll perform exactly like all the others I’ve used.”

OR

“Because these Fasthand Drum Sticks are durable and light, I give my best performance night after night.”

- I can do better than that:

Signature _____

Using a format like this, if the customer likes what you’ve written, all they do is sign and return the form to you. But, if they feel moved to write their own testimonial, then they can do that on the same page. One important note: Whenever satisfied clients have written their own testimonials, they’ve *always* been better than those I wrote.

Another thing, if you have direct sales reps in your company, get them involved in the process of obtaining testimonials. They’ll cherish the opportunity to re-connect with satisfied customers, and may draw out things that would otherwise go unnoticed.

What should they say?

The best testimonials communicate one central idea. That idea should highlight a specific aspect of your business (or product/service), and nothing more. Here are some examples of testimonials that concentrate on one central idea:

“How does XYZ help me? They improve my store image by keeping my machines up and running. Nothing hurts your store image more than broken machines.” (Company specific)

“Phil Jones was Johnny-on-the-spot. Every time I needed help, he was either on-site in less than an hour or he counseled me over the phone.” (Person specific)

“We’ve had U-Clean-Em’s for over 15 years. Pound for pound, they’re the best machines on the market.” (Product or Brand specific)

“One Friday at 5 pm, I called Spritz Cleaners in a panic. Not only did they answer their phones, but also they got a service truck out here within 15 minutes. You can’t beat service like that.” (Service specific)

The 4 qualities every great testimonial has

1. A person attached to it

The more your testimonials have names attached to them, the better. They’re just more believable this way. Plus, there’s an outside chance the reader of the testimonial knows the person who wrote it. This has happened several times for our business and the ensuing behind-the-back conversation between the two establishes instant credibility.

2. Brevity

3 sentences or less. No more. And no sentence should have more than 15 words.

3. An emotion.

Which of these does a better job?

“Wow, was I surprised. I never thought I could get my accounting questions answered so fast”

OR

“I got my accounting questions answered very fast.”

You’ll agree that the first one, because of the emotion in it, captures a reader’s attention better.

4. A definable benefit

The reader must see a true benefit to what you offer. Otherwise, the testimonial doesn’t demonstrate a solution to the reader. For example, it’s not enough for a testimonial to say

“He really knows his stuff”

Instead, the head-turning testimonial would say

“He knows his stuff so well, he saved me at least 20 hours of my own time”

This second one points out the tangible results, and therefore makes for a more attention-grabbing quote.

Now, which of these is more impactful?

“XYZ’s service helped us launch three new initiatives and save a week’s worth of management time”

OR

“They really helped us a lot”

Remember...

Testimonials are one of the most powerful tools in your marketing toolkit. Use them when you want to establish credibility, gain trust or generate word of mouth for your business. The right testimonial, placed strategically will go a long way towards closing business.

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