

The Cure for Hype

Overview

Hype-bites are everywhere these days...Yep, the old BS meter is over-the-top on a lot of sites these days. Honestly, with money tight these days what customers want to know is—if it looks like a duck and you tell them it quacks like a duck are you really selling them a duck?

Customers have become so skeptical of corporate speak telling them how great the product is and why they absolutely must buy it now... the FTC has changed the rules on testimonials.

But wait there's more....

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Testimonials That Work

NOTE: The FTC has revised the customer testimonial guidelines. This new rule is a significant change. In short, NO more hyped results!

The disclaimers that “results are not typical” or “results may vary” no longer provide a legal relief for claims and expectations of performance, the marketing may now only disclose what the typical results are in depicted circumstances, for all customers.

The FTC recognizes that there will be industries where a marketer cannot make performance claims anymore, because they will only be able to rely on satisfaction testimonials, unless the marketer develops and uses a strict scientific methodology with representative and substantial groups to determine what are the typical results a customer can expect.

The FTC takes the position that one person’s results have no bearing on what another person can expect from a product. The technique of using best case examples are now considered misleading, regardless of the “results are not typical,” or that “results may vary” disclaimers. You can find more on the new FTC guidelines on the FTC website:
<http://www.ftc.gov/multimedia/video/business/endorsement-guides.shtm>

Sell value not hype and hope.

One way to show value is to have your customers do the talking for you through what marketers call social proof. Social proof aka testimonials do work and they are a compelling way to seal the deal on a positive note. It can be hard to sing your own praises, and it rarely works when you do. Often it sounds like hype or corporate speak.

Let those that use your great products and services speak for you. Often they can speak to what you might not be able to or express as well as a testimonial. They know what questions and concerns your customers have before they buy. They were right there not too long ago, having the same questions, beliefs or objections about the product or service.

Why Testimonials Work

- Testimonials Provide Social Proof
- Testimonials Foster Trust
- Testimonials Eliminate Customer Fears

Real words from real people carry more weight than slick marketing copy. Usually my clients say something like feel free to edit me testimonial... resist the temptation. Unless there’s a glaring error the more authentic a testimonial sounds, the more believable it is.

Never fake it. Testimonials do work, but it’s not worth the risk to your reputation to fake them. Most people have well-trained BS detectors that can smell a fake a mile away

Four Tips for Making Good Use of Testimonials:

1. Use testimonials that fit. Use appropriate testimonials with the point that you are trying to make. The most powerful testimonials aren't about you—they're about how someone much like the person reading the testimonial benefited from your company, product or service. So the more real the testimonials the more power they are.
2. Use testimonials to address specific objections. If a customer's testimonial addresses the worries they had before they bought, it can help address the reader's possible worries.
3. Be specific as possible. Ask for the details and be able to prove the data the customer gives. The disclaimers that "results are not typical" or "results may vary" no longer provide a legal relief for claims and expectations of performance. Marketing via results may now only disclose what the typical results are in depicted circumstances, for all customers.
4. Always ask to use the complete identification; J.T. in Oregon just doesn't cut the reality test anymore.... To ensure credibility, include their name, title and business or organization if relevant.

How Do You Get Testimonials

The easiest way is to ask for feedback. Follow up regularly with clients, volunteers, donors, and others, asking for feedback. When you receive positive feedback, ask if you can use it as a testimonial. How do you ask for feedback:

- a. Add to the email signature line requesting feedback.
- b. Add to an autoresponder series.
- c. Create an "Ask" campaign or a survey using software e.g. Survey Monkey
- d. Offer free samples and ask for a product review.

Follow up as soon after your interaction with your customer as possible, while the experience is still fresh. Ask for one or two sentences describing the value of the experience. Try to focus testimonials to shine a positive light on an objection prospects might have.

Any feedback you receive, whether positive or negative, is valuable. Sure, you want it to be positive, but even negative feedback will help you to improve your product. Thank everyone who gives you feedback, both positive and negative.

Note: Unless you know your customer well don't blatantly ask for a testimonial—request "feedback." If you know your customers well, sometimes it helps to provide an example to make it easier for your supporters to craft a useful statement. Many times, they want to provide one, they just don't know how.

Another way is to watch for positive comments on your blog or other forums and product review sites. Set up an alert notification such as Google Alert with your company or product name.

What Makes Good Testimonials

A good testimonial contains:

- What was the problem before you read the book or we worked together?
- How did our work help you?
- By what ___% percentage did your life or business or issue improve?
- What will life be like down the road? 6 months? 1 year?
- Would you recommend this work to others?

How Do I Use Testimonials

Important: Always request permission to use the testimonials in your marketing. Then, sprinkle them throughout your communications, both online and offline. Testimonials throughout your website or brochure has greater impact than concentrating them on a single page. By spreading them out they are more likely to be seen especially online.

Make sure to refresh your testimonials so they reflect current products and services.

SAMPLE REQUESTS FOR FEEDBACK

Feel free to adapt these templates for your own purposes.

Sample Testimonial Request Email 1

Hi {Customer Name},

We hope you enjoyed the {Product Name} you purchased from us last month. As promised, here's the survey we said we were going to send you. We'd love to hear your thoughts. Your feedback is truly valuable to us.

We'd love to hear your opinions on the following:

1. What did you feel was the main benefit you gained from {Product Name}?
2. What part of {Product Name} did you enjoy most and why?
3. What part did you enjoy least and why?
4. Have you had any interesting coincidences or events happen in your life since you started {Product Name}?
5. Would you be able to provide us with a quote or story that we can share with other readers about your experiences {Product Name}?
6. May we use your name and company name?

Please send your reply to: info@yourname.com Thanks for your commitment to {Product Name} and for sharing your feedback with us.

We truly appreciate it!

Sincerely,

Sample Testimonial Request Email 2

Subject: Tell Me What You Think

Good Morning {Customer Name}

Checking in to make sure all is well with {Product Name}

What would you like us to know about your experience?

If you could, what would you tell others about your experience with us?

1. What was the reason you chose {Product Name} and how we were able to help?
2. Was there an {dollar amount or percentage} improvement?
3. Would you recommend us to others?
4. May we use your comments, name and position in our marketing?

Thank you for your time and it has been our sincere pleasure to work with you and look forward to many more successful projects in the future. Please send your reply to:

info@yourname.com Thanks for your commitment to {Product Name} and for sharing your feedback with us.

We truly appreciate it!

Sincerely,

Sample Thank You/Follow-up Email

Subject: Thank You For Telling Me What You Think

Good Morning (Name)

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts on (project name). We enjoyed working with you and sincerely appreciate your (comments, feedback, testimonial). We know the time you took to answer our short survey is valuable. Watch for a Starbucks card with our compliments. We look forward to many more successful projects.

Sincerely,

Now, go get 'em!

About the Author

Sharon Sayler, MBA is a Communication Success Strategist for Impression Engineers. We build quality online and offline brands. We help you leverage your brand and boost your credibility through positive communication to build your business through sending the right message! Sharon is the author of “Beyond Marketing Building Relationships” and “Life’s Short Live Passionately,” a practical yet inspiring guide to live a life of choice, passion and joy and is working on her latest manuscript for the publisher John Wiley and Sons. The book What Your Body Says (and How to Master The Message) is due in bookstores in June 2010.

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