

## How to Get Testimonials That Boost Your Credibility

By  
John Graham

### **The unspoken question in every customer's mind**

*"I want to believe you, but I'm not sure I trust you"* is the unspoken question customers ask salespeople. The devil in every sale is customer doubt. Specifically, a salesperson's lack of credibility. Slow down. Forget about "updating" your "professional profile." Why? To put it graciously, too many are being "massaged" by salespeople who think they need a "enhance" themselves. But, customers aren't fooled; bad experiences make them suspicious and they back off from saying "yes."

The tool that helps bridge the "credibility gulf" is the customer testimonial. But wait a minute; don't roll your eyes and stop reading just because testimonials haven't worked for you. Here's why: all testimonials aren't equal; most are lacking credibility. The Internet is swimming in phony testimonials that are signed "A longtime customer," "Ben C.," "Does a great job," or "We love that company." They are exactly what they appear to be: nothing more than thinly veiled fakery.

Even though some testimonials may be genuine, they're dull, boring and lack impact. In other words, they're ineffective. Let's face it, most of those who are asked to provide a testimonial don't know what to say or how to say it. So, unintentionally, they botch the job!

For testimonials to do the job of enhancing someone's integrity, they must tell a compelling story (not make a sales pitch) in a few carefully crafted words. They must be little jewels. And this takes skill.

Here's how to go about obtaining testimonials that are believable and enhance credibility:

### **Step #1. Selecting testimonial candidates**

Forget about your sister-in-law or your best friend. Be selective about who you ask for testimonials. Choose situations where you've made a difference or saved the day. These are testimonials that resonate with prospects.

For example, it was during a review of a prospect's business insurance program that a broker discovered several gaps in coverage that could do serious financial damage to

the company should a loss occur. When the agent was awarded the account, he asked the owner for a testimonial. Needless to say, the new client readily agreed.

Powerful testimonials often come from using a PSR or Problem-Solution-Results format. Present the problem, followed by your solution, and then drive the message home with the accrued results. Whether it's a testimonial or a case history, identify people with their full name, business, and location. Otherwise, it isn't credible.

Here's the key: The right moment to ask for a testimonial is not when you want it, but when you have demonstrated your competence—it's your performance that makes testimonials compelling. Read: believable.

### **Step #2. Obtaining testimonials that have value**

Asking someone to write a testimonial can be a major mistake. If you do, the chances are you won't get what you expected—or wanted. It's likely to be something that's weak, cobbled together, and unimpressive. For example, "We've been doing business with The Zoomfast Company for 12 years and they always do a good job. Their people are friendly and know what they're doing." How many times have you seen testimonials like this?

Most people want to be helpful, but they don't know what to say or how to say it. So, they fall back on trite words and phrases that fail to convey a meaningful message. Or, they tell the person asking them, "Just give me what you want and I'll sign it." Either way, the results are less than inspiring.

A more successful approach is having someone who can ask questions that get a person talking to conduct a phone interview and write up a concise and compelling narrative. Then, have the person interviewed review it and make any changes and approve the final content. They will appreciate the help in giving it a professional touch.

Here's an example of what we're talking about. A client asked a marketing consultant to interview a customer for a testimonial, who was a co-founder of a construction company, for a testimonial. The "Why do you think they wanted you to do this?" was the first question. And the answer was an instant grabber, "He saved my business." Then, he went on to tell how he was about to lose a large contract but was able to keep it thanks to the client's knowledge and quick action. The resulting testimonial was short and powerful.

### **Step #3. Putting testimonials to work**

Once you have a portfolio of several testimonials, what are you going to do with them? How are you going to make them work for you? Take this seriously. There is nothing more persuasive than having a customer tell your story.

Here are ways for to get the most out of testimonials:

- Include in newsletters
- Showcase on websites and in videos
- Feature in sales letters
- Turn into handouts for meetings and events
- Highlight on social media
- Send when asked for references
- Display on banners at trade shows
- Make seminar presentations

Obtaining interesting and captivating testimonials is exciting. But there's one more step: Obtaining permission to use them. In fact, tell those interviewed you will send them the proposed wording, along with a testimonial release form (ask a lawyer to make a recommendation). Don't use a testimonial until you have a signed release in hand.

Testimonials can be one of the most powerful influencers available to marketers and salespeople. But get them right and using them effectively to maximize their benefits takes thought, planning and expertise.

John Graham of GrahamComm is a marketing and sales strategy consultant and business writer. He is the creator of "Magnet Marketing," and publishes a free monthly eBulletin, "No Nonsense Marketing & Sales Ideas." Contact him at [jgraham@grahamcomm.com](mailto:jgraham@grahamcomm.com) or [johnrgraham.com](http://johnrgraham.com).