How to gather and use quality testimonials

By Pam Lontos

Editor's note: A happy installer customer's endorsement can go a long way for a rebuilder courting other on-car shops. In addition, if an installer's customer writes an endorsement of your rebuilt product, it can only mean more business for you.

Which are you more likely to believe: a company representative telling you how great their product or service is, or a recommendation from another person about how it worked for them? If you're like most people, the words from a fellow consumer pull more weight than even the best written ad copy. That's why no matter what product or service you're selling, you need to use testimonials from satisfied customers in every ad and marketing piece you create.

One of the main reasons people don't buy something is that they're fearful of making the wrong decision. So when they see that a product or service is endorsed by someone else—someone in their same situation—that fear is minimized. Therefore, testimonials are a great way of influencing others to feel comfortable about buying your products or services.

Unfortunately, few business professionals actively seek out testimonials from their customers and clients. They mistakenly wait for people to give them testimonials, and when they do get them, they don't know how to use them effectively. In reality, getting and using a list of strong testimonials is easier than you think. The following tips will help you get testimonials to increase your profits.

How to get them

- Choose satisfied customers who represent your target demographic. The best testimonials are written by people who are similar to your ideal customer. Therefore, be specific about who you solicit a testimonial from. Look over your customer files and choose the people who exemplify the best case scenario for your product or service. Say to them, "I'd love for you to share your experience with Product A. Would you please write a short testimonial?" Most people will cheerfully say yes. Since you want more happy customers just like these, let their words sell for you.
- Offer to write the testimonial for them. Often, if someone declines your request to write a testimonial, it's because they're too busy or feel they don't have adequate writing skills. In that case, offer to write the testimonial for them. Simply say, "I'll be glad to write the testimonial for you. Just tell me what you'd like to say about the product. You can review what I write and we can use it as is or you can change it." Most people will leave the testimonial as is, happy they didn't have to take the time to write it.
- Chances are you're sitting on a pile of testimonials and don't even know it. Go back through your past emails and correspondence from customers and clients. Are there a few nice sentences in some of those messages? If so, ask the person if you can use their words in your marketing materials. They'll often agree.

How to write them

- Show results. Whether you write the testimonial or your customer does, it needs to specifically show what results the person experienced from the product or service. A testimonial that simply says what a wonderful company you have or how nice you are is not saying anything meaningful for the reader. A specific testimonial will speak to results, for example: "Dr. Smith's treatment ended my 20-year battle with migraines." "Joe's contracting remodeled my kitchen for $2,000 less than other bidders." "Jones and Johnson CPA Firm reduced my tax liability by 30 percent." The more specific a testimonial is, the stronger it sells for you. Specific testimonials take away the fear of making the wrong decision and help people feel safe about making the purchase.
- Keep it short. Each word of the testimonial should have value. Therefore, if someone writes you a page-long testimonial, edit out any words that don't directly address the end result he or she received from your service or product. This doesn't mean you change the meaning of what someone writes; you simply edit out the parts that don't contribute to the meaning. For example, if someone writes a page about everything your company did to help them save 30 percent on their heating and cooling bills, you can condense it to one sentence, as in "As a result of ABC Company's inspection of our home, we saved 30 percent on our monthly utility bill." Often, the more words you take out, the stronger the testimonial becomes. Also, it's easier to read and will stand out more.
- Include a name and title when possible. Rather than attribute your testimonial to "John S., Nebraska," use the person's real name, company name, title, and/or location whenever possible, as in "John Sanders, salesperson at Acme Company," or "John Sanders, Omaha, Nebraska." This makes your testimonial more believable. Most people will be happy to include their full name and other information, because the strongest human desire is to feel appreciated and recognized. Getting their name in print somewhere fulfills that need and is often perceived as fun.

How to use them

- Include a testimonial or two in your ads and marketing pieces. Whether you're doing a print, online, radio, or TV ad, be sure to include some testimonials. For print, it's best to have testimonials stand alone from the text rather than try to weave them into the ad copy. For radio and TV, either the announcer or an actor can recite the testimonial, or if your customer is agreeable, have him or her appear in your radio or TV spot to give the testimonial personally. Other marketing pieces that should feature your testimonials include your website, brochures, direct mail pieces, postcards, billboards, newsletters, and even social

media updates.

- Create a book of testimonials. Each time you receive a kind letter from a customer or client, highlight the key parts (the parts that state benefits to the customer), put the letter in a clear plastic sleeve, and compile it in a big binder. Keep this book or binder of testimonials in your store or office for customers to browse through while they're waiting. Or, if your business is online, create a page where you feature all your testimonials. There's no limit to how many testimonials you can include in your book or on your page.
- Frame your best testimonials. If you have a store or office, frame some of your best testimonial letters and post them on your walls. Again, highlight the best parts so your customers can easily see the benefits. If you don't get foot traffic (or if you go to your customers), put the best testimonial letters in your "leave behind" kit—the package of information you leave behind for the prospect.

The next time you're writing copy for an advertisement or marketing piece (and struggling with what information to include) simply go to your past testimonials. It's always better when someone else sings your praises, so let your customer sell for you. The sooner you start using testimonials in every marketing message you create, the sooner you'll realize that testimonials really are the ultimate sales tool.

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