



How to Use Testimonials

I am continually astonished at the number of mailings and ads I see that fail to contain testimonials from delighted customers.

Testimonials are a strong lift element in a mailing or ad. Your claims are more believable and prospects feel good about doing business with you. In the words of the late advertising legend, David Ogilvy, "If one testimonial tests well, try two. But don't use testimonials by celebrities, unless they are recognized authorities, like Arnold Palmer on golf clubs." Ogilvy was talking more about spokespersons than testimonials from happy users.

Customer Acquisition

The generally recognized sequence of events in marketing is (1) find a suspect; (2) make the person a prospect; (3) turn that person into a customer (or donor); (4) convert him into a renewer, multibuyer or regular customer or donor. Nirvana is (5) the person becomes an advocate—likes you so much that he gives you a testimonial and referrals.

A Copywriter Gets Nailed

In January 2006, as part of settlement for allegedly false and misleading advertising for a dietary supplement, copywriter Chase Revel was ordered by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to "post a \$1 million performance bond before advertising, marketing or selling any food, drug, dietary supplement, device or health-related service. As part of the settlement, he also will pay \$27,500 for consumer redress."

"Consumers have a right to expect the ads they read to be truthful," said Lydia Parnes, director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. "Anyone who cooks up false or misleading claims in an ad—from those who write them to those who sell the product—will be held accountable."

Quite simply, in an ad or a mailing, if you promise people that they can eat all they want of everything they love and lose 30 pounds in 30 days, you likely will get into trouble with the FTC.

However, if you can get a testimonial—a customer to say she used your diet system, ate like a pig, drank like a fish and lost 30 pounds in 30 days—it's legal. That's because the First Amendment guarantees the right of free speech.

About Testimonials

When Don Jackson and I created "2,239 Tested Secrets for Direct Marketing Success," we wrote 750 direct marketers and asked them to share the secrets and rules they had discovered over the years. Among the topics: testimonials. Here are some tips.

"There are too many cases of testimonials being used in direct marketing campaigns without prior knowledge of the client/customer."

—Bob Martel

"Always respond to a testimonial immediately with a thank-you note, phone call or e-mail. And ask permission to use it, and if you should use the name or initials."

—Denny Hatch

"For testimonials, send the customer the text and have them type it onto their letterhead."

—Bob Wells

"Always be clear about what you are going to use the testimonial for, and get their permission and ask them not to date it; that way you can use it for quite awhile without anyone asking what has he/she done lately."

—Donn Richardson

"Real testimonials have a genuine sound to them that's very hard to reproduce; maybe the grammar is ever so slightly off, a peculiar choice of word usage, a point made that no professional copywriter ever would have considered. Try to use these real raindrops wherever possible, before you start seeding the clouds. Back in the days when silver dollars were common currency, bartenders, store clerks, etc., used to drop the dollar on the counter and listen to the ring ... because it was distinctly different from the dull sound made by lead counterfeits. I've found the same to be true of testimonials. People can spot the real ones from the made-up ones a mile away ... I'd be very careful about doing too much rewriting, suggesting and editing."

—Richard Armstrong ■

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