

When Using Testimonials, Avoid this Big Mistake

If you know anything about marketing, you know that you need testimonials. This article won't focus on how to get testimonials from your clients (though I've included an innovative tip from John Jantsch), but instead on how to refine them.

One of the biggest mistakes I see in testimonials is using them "as is." Let's face it, not everyone communicates well in writing, and their initial testimonial may be too long, awkwardly written, or contain typos. As long as you're not changing the meaning of the testimonial, don't be nervous about cleaning it up. A testimonial is just like any other type of marketing copy; if you're going to use it on your website or brochure, it had better be fabulous!

The best testimonials are:

- Specific rather than general
- Short rather than long
- Unsolicited rather than solicited

Specific Rather Than General

A testimonial that emphasizes benefits a prospect can relate to is more rewarding to read than a testimonial that drones on and on about how "great" and "helpful" a product or service is.

An Okay (General) Testimonial	A Great (Specific) Testimonial
"We've found the Taxta Technology team to be very supportive and easy to work with. Our relationship with them has quickly moved from a supplier to a partner, and we look forward to gaining more value from their business service management experience."	"In the two years we've worked with this technology, it has been remarkably stable. We've had only a handful of software crashes. This is in contrast to other products where we'd see dozens or hundreds of errors during product development."

Short Rather Than Long

Be considerate of a reader's time (and attention span). If you can't bring yourself to edit down a testimonial that's several paragraphs long, develop it into a case study instead.

Before – 87 Words	After – 57 Words
"Best Tech is delighted with the quality of employees we've received from Zip Technology Staffers, and we have hired excellent personnel through them. In this industry, it is sometimes very difficult to find candidates in very short time frames, but you found us excellent staff at sometimes very short notice. Account management is also very well handled, and turnaround times are very quick. We have found their customer service excellent. We would definitely recommend them as an agency and look forward to continuing to work with them."	"We're delighted with the quality of the candidates we've hired through Zip Technology Staffers. It's often difficult to find qualified candidates in this industry, but Zip found excellent staff on short notice. They handle their account management well, their turnaround times are quick, and their customer service is excellent. We look forward to working with them again."

Unsolicited Rather Than Solicited

My reasoning for this is that solicited testimonials have an awkward, self-conscious tone. They also tend to be written in second person point-of-view, when in fact it's easier for the reader to relate to third person point-of-view.

Before – Second Person POV	After – Third Person POV
"You were so helpful and did a great job on the McDougal project!"	"Terralo Engineering finished a crucial project ahead of schedule and under budget."

Solicited testimonials aren't unusable – they just need to be cleaned up as shown in the before/after example above. In fact, one of my clients solicited testimonials by sending out an email questionnaire to his clients. I then edited the responses into succinct testimonials.

Thanks for subscribing to my newsletter. I hope you've enjoyed it and learned something new. If you have any ideas for future newsletters, please let me know. I'd love to provide you with information that helps make your marketing writing easier.

Regards,
Mary

Tip: Effortless Testimonial Harvesting

John Jantsch (<http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/>) has a great way to get testimonials without even asking for them. When you provide a list of references to a promising prospect, urge them to contact each one. They'll usually check these references by email, which can result in glowing testimonials that the prospect almost always forwards on to you. Viola! Instant testimonial! (Just don't forget to clean it up before you show it off.)

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