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25 Ways to Build Trust (and Sales!) With Customer Success Stories

by Casey Hibbard

A major survey on corporate trust just came out, and the news isn't good.

Of people surveyed in 20 countries, 62% say they trust corporations less now than they did a year ago (2009 Edelman Trust Barometer).

People do business with people they like and trust, so how can you inspire trust during the current crisis of credibility?

Buyers are increasingly turning to real experiences to give them the confidence that products, services, and people deliver what they promise. In the age of Amazon.com reviews and eBay feedback, prospects are looking for anecdotes from other happy customers.

Capturing the experiences of your most successful customers not only boosts your credibility but also educates buyers and shows them the payoff of your solutions.

Here are 25 ways to use customer success stories in your sales and marketing to increase buyers' trust.

- 1. Web sites:** Your site is often a buyer's first impression of your company. Start building the relationship on a foundation of credibility by highlighting your successes right from the homepage and anywhere on the site where you talk about the benefits of your solutions.
- 2. Newsletters:** Run customer success stories in newsletters that go to prospects, customers, employees, and partners.
- 3. Blogs:** When making a point in a blog post, use a customer success story as an example.
- 4. Direct marketing:** Highlight a customer's success in a mailer, either as a full story or an overview, to prospects and customers.
- 5. Email:** Capture the attention of prospects and customers by using a compelling customer story in an email campaign, or as a one-off to a hot lead.
- 6. Advertising:** Showcase a customer's success story as an advertisement in a key industry publication or online.

- 7. Webinars:** Feature a successful customer on a webinar for prospects or customers.
- 8. Live events:** Invite customers to tell their stories at industry conferences or other events.
- 9. Training sales reps:** Integrate customer successes into sales training to educate and excite reps about the value that your company's products and services deliver for customers.
- 10. PowerPoint presentations:** Add slides into sales presentations, summarizing a couple of customer successes.
- 11. Sales letters:** Get the attention of busy prospects by kicking off a sales letter with a concise customer success story.
- 12. Sales conversations:** People listen more closely when someone starts telling a story. Engage prospects in live or phone conversations with a relevant example of a successful customer.
- 13. Voice mail:** When leaving a voice mail for a prospect, mention a specific result a customer experienced. Mention another key result in the next voice mail.
- 14. Proposals:** Include a couple of customer stories in a proposal for new business.
- 15. Venture-capital proposals/presentations:** Emphasize customer success stories when making your case for investment capital or loans.
- 16. Case-study booklets:** Create booklets that highlight several of your key customer success stories.
- 17. Press releases:** Catch the attention of busy editors with a "story press release," one that recounts the success of a specific customer.
- 18. Pitching stories to the media:** Make an email or phone pitch to a targeted media contact with a compelling customer success story as the angle.
- 19. Contributed articles:** Submit an article featuring a customer's success to a publication or website targeted to your audience.
- 20. Industry-awards submissions:** Include full or summarized customer success stories with awards applications.
- 21. New-employee orientation:** Use customer success stories to educate new employees about the organization's value to those it serves, and keep telling employees those stories.
- 22. Fundraising appeals/grant proposals:** Nonprofits can weave success stories into every printed, verbal, or other appeal for support.
- 23. Annual reports:** Bring life to an annual report by showcasing the people and companies behind the numbers.

24. Online communities: When engaging in conversation in online communities, reference a successful customer's results when it's relevant to the conversation.

25. On-hold message: Play audio of a customer telling his or her story on your phone-s on-hold message. As callers wait, they'll learn about the value your company delivers.

What would you add to the list? Get creative in leveraging your powerful customer success stories in all your internal and external communications, and trust will follow.

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