

Look Who's Talking: Three Ways to Capitalize on Satisfied Customers

Christopher M. Lake, 10 July 2006

Nothing beats a good reference. Answer these three questions:

- Where do you get your hair done?
- Who's your mechanic?
- What's the best pizza joint in town?

Chances are you were referred to each of those places, or at least have referred someone else to them. Now ask yourself this: do your customers refer business your way? Maybe you need to ask them what they think. Use the three steps below to make the most of the goodwill you're building.

Step One: Gather Testimonials

Your customers are your best salespeople. Success stories from satisfied customers are believable, compelling, and build trust with your prospects. How do you get winning testimonials? Strange but true, a third party will usually get the best information about the customer's experience. An outsider can interview your best customers—the ones who are sure to praise your products and services—and distill their words into effective testimonials. You can use these short quotes everywhere in both external and internal communications:

- Implement in a random or rotating block on your Web site
- Sprinkle liberally throughout your annual report
- Deliver in a monthly company-wide motivational email

- Add to sales letters and proposals
- Include a full page of testimonials in direct mail packages
- Integrate the best stories into your catalog
- Use in your on-hold voice-over scripts

Step Two: Develop Case Studies

Make your testimonials even more effective. You know how convincing a satisfied customer can be. Why not take the best testimonials and develop case studies that explain how you made that customer so happy? A good case study describes the customer's original problem, the analysis and decision-making process, the implementation of your product or service, and the measurable results (your "happily ever after"). Use your case studies to support your other marketing tools:

- Add to your Web site to help prospects self-qualify and pre-sell themselves before contacting you
- Include with your catalogs—or better yet, build the case studies into your next issue
- Use for sales call leave-behinds that reiterate proven, tangible benefits of your product or service
- Integrate into direct mail packages to develop credibility and motive to response
- Increase the value of your newsletters (for both external and internal audiences)

Step Three: Publish White Papers

Once your case studies begin generating inquiries, many prospects will ask for more information. What will you send them next? Try a white paper. With more space to work with (a case study is usually one or two pages, four at the outside, whereas a white paper has no space limitations) you can describe the success story in broader contexts, including industry background, market analysis, competitor profiles, and alternate solutions. Imagine your credibility when you deliver a

thick, spiral-bound report to your prospect (including some of your best testimonials, of course).

White papers fit into your marketing plan where case studies do:

- Add to your Web site to establish credibility and expertise
- Bring to sales calls with hot prospects to help close the deal
- Use as a direct mail reply premium—a “free report” to those who respond

Step Four: Act Now

A freelance writer can deliver all three of these projects with a minimum of supervision. By definition a freelancer is a third party perfect for gathering testimonials. Those interviews will establish the groundwork necessary to write case studies. Several case studies will point to the key issues to be covered in a white paper (or maybe even a series of papers). It makes sense to assign these projects to one person who can become your success story expert.

Call 480.229.8207 or e-mail me (cmlake@cmlstudios.com) to get started writing your success stories. Don't be bashful or modest—every once in a while you have to toot your own horn.

Looking forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Chris Lake

cmlStudios

Three Ways to Capitalize on Satisfied Customers

Testimonials

Case Studies

White Papers