

The Power of Testimonials

How to let happy customers sell for you

Editor's Note: In this column space of *Vet-Advantage*, we will give you insight into both basic and advanced tactical selling techniques that will help you serve customers better than ever before. But let us preface this with a warning. The material in these articles is not for salespeople who are not ready to push themselves harder than ever before. It is for the professional who seeks constant improvement, fresh ways to serve customers, and constant learners who are never satisfied with being average. If this is you, it's great to have you on board. Now let's get to work!

Think of a recent vacation you planned. If you are like most, as you did your web research on your possible destinations and places to stay, you were heavily swayed by the customer reviews posted about potential vacation locations. Next, to prepare for some good reading while on your trip, you stopped by Amazon, checked out the book description page and quickly went again to customer reviews.

We trust the opinion of the customer over the opinion of the seller. And guess what . . . your customers feel the same way. But if the only opinion they ever get about your product and service comes from somebody who is paid to say how great it is (YOU!), then you risk delaying or preventing a ton of orders. In short, prospects want to know what others think of you and your solution. So the question is, "What are you giving or showing them that will convince them that what you are saying is really true?" If you said, "Not much," don't sweat it. But it's time to fix it!

A testimonial letter is a tool that can increase the number of sales you make as well as decrease the time it takes to get the order.

What is a testimonial letter?

A testimonial is a brief summary, note or letter of positive customer comments that become a regular part of your sales process.

How many do I need?

To power up your sales presentation, you need to be armed with at least five testimonials from customers who are happy they have you as a business partner. But don't stop at five. There is no downside in having a presentation binder or a folder full of



By Brian Sullivan

different types of decision-makers addressing specific benefits they found most value in.

How do I get them?

Let's get this straight: Customers are not going to be chasing you down the hall of their business throwing unsolicited testimonial letters at you. Which means the only way to get them is to ASK!

Why would they offer one?

The short answer is . . . because you asked! But you can only ask if your product has done what you promised and your follow-up service is even better than the product you sold. It will be your five-star service that has earned you the right to ask for help.

How do I ask?

"Mr. Customer, I always like to check in to make sure you are satisfied with our solution and the service we are providing." Assuming you get good feedback, follow with, "I was wondering if you would be willing to help me. I frequently have potential clients ask me for referrals or third-party opinions about my company and me. Would you mind if I put some of those positive comments you just shared with me into a short note and if you agree, allow me to share them with interested customers?"

Notice how it will be you writing the letter. All they have to do is approve what you write. The good news is that you will do an even better job than them at writing it. The outcome is a great testimonial letter that they don't have to spend time writing.

Isn't that too pushy?

No, it's not. Great service is rewarded. Asking for a testimonial letter should be easier than asking for the order...because you have already established a trusting relationship.

How do I make asking a habit?

It is not expected that you get a testimonial from every happy customer. But as with sales goals, you DO need to set a testimonial letter objective. For example, for every three new customers you get, you need to get at least one new testimonial. By making asking a habit, you will have a binder full of comments that can be used in many sales situations.

Where do I use them?

The positive comments of a testimonial can be used to support a key feature or benefit while delivering your presentation.

For example, let's say you were discussing a timesaving feature of your product. You then open your testimonial binder or folder and quickly show three customer letters about how your solution saved them a ton of time. They will be more interested in those "reviews" than they will be in that fancy brochure you are holding.

If you are in phone or inside sales, include either full testimonials as attachments in an email or cut and paste a few comments in the body of your message. Remember, people are not only used to "reviews" but are now in a habit of making it an important part of their decision-making process.

Now here's the good news. Most salespeople reading this article still won't have even one testimonial letter six months from now, which means you have a real opportunity to separate yourself from the pack. And when customers sit down in their office to review your proposal and the proposal of your competitor, one pile of information will have a brochure and pricing, and your pile will have a brochure, pricing and a bunch of great trust-building comments that add credibility to your story. Those comments will not only land you the order, but only a few short weeks later, you will have yet another happy customer to grab a testimonial letter from! ■

President of Kansas City-based PRECISE Selling, Brian Sullivan, CSP delivers seminars and internet training programs on sales, customer service, leadership and presentation skills to companies of all sizes. To make your next sales meeting one that results in more sales and higher margins, reach out to him at bsullivan@preciseselling.com.