

Advanced Case Study Tips

By Jonathan Kranz

It's August, and you would think our attention would be focused on beaches and barbecues, but I've received tons of inquiries lately about case studies. Why the sudden interest? I don't know.

But consider this quote from Seth Godin: "There's only one thing that matters when you're selling professional services. Only one. Does the person who is buying from you (and her boss!) trust you?" (From RainToday.com's [The One Piece of Advice You Can't Sell Without](#).) And the advice is as true for any complex sale as it is for professional services. By combing the first-person credibility of the testimonial with the memorable narrative structure of the story, the case study is a powerful tool for building trust.

You can read my article on [the basics of case study writing on MarketingProfs.com](#). Here are a few extra pointers I'd like to add:

Don't blow your horn (too much)

Your goal is earn trust, so let the content of the study speak for you. If your company's name is "Burnco," resist the temptation to write a headline like "Burnco Helps Yagoo Trim Inventory Costs." Instead, focus on the facts of the matter and let your client take center stage: "Yagoo Cuts Inventory Costs by 23% in Six Months." In the body of the study, of course, you'll introduce Burnco as the very reason Yagoo achieved its goals. But let the headline acts as a credible lure that draws readers into the story, first.

Push back for better quotes

Your clients mean well, but often when you ask them for a quote about how you helped them, they'll come back with something like this: "Burnco was terrific to work with and really helped us a lot." Sure, it wins points for being positive, but it's too vague to be meaningful. Remember, your goal is to paint a crystal clear picture – a window for the reader's imagination. You need specifics. When you get a vague quote, gently push for the particulars by asking questions like these:

- "What exactly did Burnco do for you?"
- "How did the [PRODUCT/SERVICE] work?"
- "What were the results of using the [PRODUCT/SERVICE]?"
- "Can you quantify the results?" (That is, provide objective numbers or statistics.)
- "What features of the [PRODUCT/SERVICE] were most productive or effective?"
- "What impact do you think the [PRODUCT/SERVICE] will have on your future?"
- "What did you like best about working with Burnco?"

Keep it simple

I usually recommend a basic challenge/solution/results format, though I recognize that there are alternative approaches that can work just as well – as long as the root story

remains clear. But I will always argue for brevity; in most cases, one page will do. You may think your story is so compelling, it merits two pages or more. And there are times when you may be right. But most of the people we're trying to reach are hard pressed for time. If your study looks long, they'll simple skip it. Make their lives easier (and therefore, yours too) by doing your best to confine your study to one easy-to-read page, or at least no more than two.

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