

Let THEM Say It For You – They Can Do a Better Job

By Dan Kennedy

WHO SAYS SO? is the great question in the prospect's mind. People instinctively distrust advertisers and advertising, and need a lot of reassurance to believe a proposition they'd very much like to believe.

One means of replacing skepticism with trust that every sales pro, marketer and copywriter is well aware of is social proof, most frequently presented via customer, client or patient testimonials. But knowing about this and doing it, doing enough of it, and going to extremes to get it right, well, these are two different things. Whenever you spot a fat doctor who smokes, it's not 'cuz he doesn't *know*. He didn't miss class that day. He got the memo.

So I know you know about testimonials. But I also know, you're probably not using them on your clients' behalf to the fullest extent of their power.

If you find yourself trying to beat a 'control,' you can often win if all you do is inject, add, improve on the use of testimonials. If you take on a client who hasn't been using them or is using them poorly, you can usually get improved results just by adding them and using them well. So from a copywriter's perspective, getting this right is very important.

I've lived in the worlds where testimonials done right are critically important for more than 20 years. In the writing and production of TV infomercials, for example, there may be from \$200,000.00 to nearly \$1-million put at risk on a given show, so the stakes are very high. The odds of success are abysmal. And, usually, things are being sold with preposterous, hard to believe promises and assertions to the bleary-eyed, bringing no pre-conceived interest to the process.

I've been integrally involved with over 150 of these shows, had a 20-year relationship with the leader in the field (Guthy-Renker, known for Pro-Activ, Victoria Principal/Principal Secret, Tony Robbins, etc.), and independently produced the show with the record for longest run in its category (8 years). Each 28-minute infomercial is usually so reliant on testimonials for making its case that as much as 60% to 70% of the time is given to them.

In the industry, there are "specialists" who are exceptionally skilled at just interviewing candidates to find the customers with the best stories who are likely able to tell them on camera, others who do nothing but interview and tape the testimonials. We take this very, very seriously.

In another world where I live, the writing of copy to sell completely intangible information-products that can't be demonstrated – like home study courses or newsletters – customer testimonials are vital.

Finally, in the health field, dealing with diets sold to repeatedly disappointed dieters, chiropractic care sold to chronic pain sufferers who've already tried and given up on other treatments, hearing aids sold to people embarrassed about needing them, I've learned to rely on the customers' testimonials. Not just use them as an oh-by-the-way, but *rely on them*. And, incidentally,

it's a mistake for the copywriter to get too caught up in his own display of writing brilliance, when the person reading the copy will be much better persuaded by what real people just like him have to say.

So, here are some of my best tips concerning testimonials ...

1. **Assemble the best, and refuse settling for poor ones.** If your client has been lazy, negligent or ineffective at securing persuasive testimonials, don't use his junk; *you'll* pay the price. (By the way, fixing this "hole" for the client can offer additional fee opportunity.)
2. **Use testimonials most credible to the prospects the copy is written for.** For example, if selling weight loss to women, a good testimonial from a Registered Nurse trumps either a user-testimonial or expert endorsement from an M.D. – the nurse rates higher in believability. In the post 9-11 world, first responders; police, fire, rescue workers have elevated status and are at the top of the list of desired testimonials for money-making opportunities. In direct-mail to people in middle America, testimonials from the east coast's major cities are least useful. And so on. When I wrote copy for the Catholic Life Insurance companies, I hunted down a great testimonial for a professor at Notre Dame and got a photo of him with the famous gold dome in the background.
3. **Properly identify the testimonials.** Using initials is dumb, dumb, dumb. Zero believability. You at least need full names and cities and states. But more is better, again in ways meaningful to the market. With hearing aids, age, occupation, if have grandkids, their names and ages. If selling to prospects with college educations and advanced degrees, the schools the testimonials graduated from and whatever alphabet soup each has to put after his name.
4. **Have the testimonials answer the most common objections** – and don't waste time and space with a lot of redundancy. If there are eight chief reasons people don't buy, I want testimonial #1 tackling objection #1, testimonial #2 tackling objection #2, etc., each doing heavy lifting of one thing.
5. **Use meaningful specifics not vague generalities.** People want to know that giving up bagels, not just baked goods, was the only hard thing Mary had to do on the diet. That Jeff drinks Budweiser® (not beer) and prefers playing catch with his 9-year-old son under the big oak tree in his backyard to couch-potatoing in front of the TV (not just that he has a son or is a "devoted father"). Details make people real. They also want to know that Bill made \$4,716.37 his 3rd month using the E-Bay To Riches System, not just that he exceeded his salary at the bottling plant after 23 years there – although that's meaningful too.
6. **Prove the testimonials' statements** with photos, copies of checks, bank statements, tax returns, note from her amazed doctor about the weight she's lost, her troubled son's report cards, before with the F's, after with the A's.

There are more – 25 in all, on my personal checklist, but hey, you aren't going to get the whole farm from me *here!* What you should take away is the principle: that there *is* a much more thoughtful, strategic and sophisticated approach to using testimonials than most marketers or copywriters "bother with."

Published: June 20, 2011

Related Content:

- [How to Choose Your Writing Niche](#)
- [How to Choose Your Writing Niche](#)
- [Why Detail-Oriented Writers Succeed](#)
- [The "Heart" of Every Company](#)
- More from [The Golden Thread](#)

1 Response to "Let THEM Say It For You – They Can Do a Better Job"

After all I've read about testimonials in the Six Figure AWAI course and online, this article still gave me a half-page of notes. Great piece, thank you!

Guest (Gina Ritter) – over a year ago

Copyright © American Writers & Artists Institute(www.awai.com)

American Writers & Artists Institute

220 George Bush Blvd, Suite D

Delray Beach, FL 33444

(561) 278-5557 or (866) 879-2924