

Compelling Case Studies Motivate Buying Decisions

Peppered with quotes from real-life reference customers, case studies deliver the proof your prospects will trust when the time comes to make their buying decision. No matter what industry you're in, case studies are valuable marketing tools that help close new business.

If you are just venturing into a reference customer program, the first step is to establish a template for all of your company's case studies. I prefer to kick off the story with a compelling benefit statement attributed to the customer in the form of a quote. This is the hook that whets the reader's appetite. From here, navigate the reader through the problem, the solution, and the benefits. Compelling benefits are gold to your readers – stay tuned for more on this later.

Pre-work sets the foundation for a compelling story. Before talking with your customer, take time to plan the interview. Ask yourself and your internal subject matter experts a number of questions.

- What is the goal of the case study?
- Which of our company's brand attributes should be reflected in the story?
- What are the key messages?
- What is the value proposition of the product or service the customer is using?
- What quantitative and qualitative benefits has the customer realized?
- How will I make this customer's experience resonate with the industry at large?

Answers to these questions are woven throughout the story.

Effective and efficient interviews. During the pre-work stage, make a list of each question you need to ask the customer in order to tell the story.

Customers are thrilled to receive this 'Discussion Guide' a few days before the interview. It sets their expectations and they join the conversation well prepared to provide the data you require to write a thorough case study.

The benefits your customers are achieving by way of your product or service are by far the most compelling data to prospects who are considering buying from you – or from your competitor.

Quantifying the benefits can be difficult – often because reference customers haven't measured current performance against past performance.

Via the Discussion Guide, include some phrases they can fill in; such as, "Over six months, my company saved \$ using product x" or "In our first year using product x, we saw a % improvement in employee productivity." If you cannot quantify benefits, all is not lost – qualitative benefits can be compelling to readers as well.

Bring the story to life. Now is the time to turn words into phrases that communicate powerful messages about your product or service. It must be an informative yet enjoyable read. Socialize the draft and, once you have internal sign-off – not before – send it to the customer for their approval.

About the Author

Irene Crosby, Founder and Principal of Target Insight, is an accomplished marketing communications consultant located in Ottawa, Ontario. Services include marketing communications strategy development; hands-on implementation of marketing communications activities; website planning and project management; and copywriting. Irene works with CEOs, VPs, and marketing managers to develop and executive communications plans that resonate with target audiences, engage customers, and drive business. Her 20 years of experience span high tech, life sciences, education, health care, insurance, financial services, and the public sector. Irene is adept at managing projects and keeping clients up-to-date every step of the way—no surprises. *You and your customers deserve insightful communications.*

Build strong customer relationships. The key to working with customers is to use the least amount of their valuable time as possible. The Discussion Guide does this. An organized interview does this. Asking them to read and approve only the final copy does this. Now show them you appreciate their effort. As soon as the case study is available in PDF format, send them a brief thank you by email and include the PDF. Most customers are so pleased that they pass the case study along to colleagues.

Leverage your investment. Your work isn't over yet – optimize your investment. Do you have a newsletter? Include it in the next issue. Do you need to nurture prospects in your database? The case study is a valuable asset, so build an email campaign around it. Be creative – there are many ways to leverage your investment in every case study you produce.

How to find time to craft compelling case studies that motivate buying decisions? A personable and skilled freelance writer can make the difference in delivering effective case studies that achieve your customer reference program goals. Customers are important to your business, so only work with writers who will represent your company appropriately. Ask for samples of their work and references, each of which should be readily available to you.

TIPS

- Provide your customer with a Discussion Guide before the interview so that they come prepared
- After the interview, thank your customer for his/her time and document any promises made during the conversation. Set and manage their expectations.
- Rather than ask your customer to write their quotes, write the quotes for them. Customers appreciate this approach because it's less work for them.
- Some readers focus on titles and subtitles and skim chunks of content, so use action verbs and emphasize benefits in titles and subtitles
- Text chunking is important in a content-rich piece. For visual interest, vary the length of paragraphs.
- On the front page use a sidebar (like this) to give the reader a snapshot of what they'll learn by reading the case study. Limit the data to a concise blurb on the problem, the solution, and the top three benefits.
- 2-3 pages, including a visual and plenty of white space, is a good length for a case study
- You're telling a story, so keep it interesting!

LEVERAGE YOUR INVESTMENT

- Publish case studies on your website
- Include case studies in your regular newsletter
- Provide PDF case studies to your sales team
- Include case studies in article pitches to the media
- Offer joint case study development as a no-charge benefit to your channel partners

CHECKLIST

Please visit my website, www.targetinsight.ca, to get "Checklist | Compelling Case Studies Motivate Buying Decisions."

Learn More

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