



Client Testimonials

Power Tools in Your Marketing Toolbox

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When I think of testimonial advertising, a few good ad campaigns come to mind. One of the more memorable, recent campaigns features Academy award-winning actress Sally Field pitching Boniva, a drug that works to slow bone loss, so the body's natural bone production can pull ahead. The drug's makers, Roche and GlaxoSmithKline, launched the "Rally With Sally" for Bone Health campaign in 2006 and believe direct to consumer advertising is important because it encourages patients to talk to their physicians about their condition and possible treatment options. According to Roche's 2007 annual report, the drug's market share increased to over 15% and sales to \$ 885 million, an 85% increase over the previous year.

Right now you're probably thinking, "What do *Boniva* and Sally Field have to do with professional service firms?" Not much, except to prove the point that some of the simplest and most powerful tools in your marketing toolbox can be client testimonials. Why? Because they work.

Testimonials build credibility into your marketing program and make your message more convincing to clients and prospects. Case in point. We are bombarded with marketing messages all day from the time we wake up in the morning until we go to sleep at night. We expect businesses to say good things about themselves in their marketing messages and, after awhile, the messages become unconvincing. When a client gives a testimonial, and they have absolutely nothing to gain from it other than they genuinely want to help your firm succeed, you become believable and create that relationship of trust between you and the prospect. In other words, you gain a lot of credibility.

In a professional services firm, testimonials can be used in a number of ways:

- **Advertising Messages.** Testimonial advertising can be very effective in building brand awareness. When clients have good things to say about your firm and they directly relate to your brand promise, it sends a powerful message to your audience. Testimonials also work well in vertical markets. An example of this would be producing an advertising campaign geared toward a particular industry niche, physicians and group practices for example, where you are featuring testimonials from physician clients, doctors' office managers who, more than likely, are dealing with your staff, and your own professionals. The ads could be placed in a local medical journal read by members of your county medical society. The campaign is designed to build credibility for your physician practice niche in your geographic markets.
- **Recruiting.** Testimonials from your interns and younger staff can be used for the Careers section of your website to promote student internships and careers at your firm. They create credibility for your firm and make your staff feel good about themselves and the careers they've chosen.
- **Marketing Training Programs.** Bring clients and referral sources into training sessions to give in-person testimonials to your staff as to why they hired your firm or why they refer business to you. Hearing the message in-person from a client or referral source as part of a marketing training session can drive home your marketing message. When it comes from the client, rather than the marketing director getting on his or her soapbox, it means more.
- **Calling on Prospects.** If you have a prospect who, through due diligence, has a relationship with one of your "A" clients, call that client and ask them to make a personal phone call to the prospect on your behalf. Most clients are more than happy to do this.

- **Client Profiles In Proposals.** In your industry niche templates, for example, have a dozen client profiles on hand that you can choose from to include in a proposal depending on the type of prospect. Pick and choose from those profiles or include them all. Make sure all of these clients have given you permission to use these profiles in your proposals and have given you permission to have the prospect call them. The client profiles are put together by interviewing the client service team and researching the client company's background.
- **Seminar Brochures.** Glean testimonials from your seminar evaluation forms and use them in future advertising for firm-sponsored seminars.
- **Niche Brochures.** Gather client testimonials and feature them in niche brochures along with the brochure copy.
- **Case Studies.** Use testimonials in case studies that are put together by your marketing group. Interview the client and obtain quotes, information on the project, the company background, and how the project benefited them. Include them in your printed marketing materials and post them on your web site. On occasion, include them in your client newsletter.

Most of us don't have celebrity clients to endorse our firms or money in the advertising budget to hire them. But it doesn't cost a lot of money to gather testimonials from clients. Studies have shown that most clients would give a testimonial for a firm but few firms take advantage of this and ask for it.

Testimonials can be gathered in a variety of ways:

- If it is for a specific purpose like an industry niche brochure, work with the niche champion and select the clients you'd like to ask. Have the niche champion call the client to gain permission and offer the marketing group's help in creating the testimonial.
- When you hear a good testimonial from someone in conversation, ask him or her if you may use it. The ideal time to get a testimonial is when a client is ecstatic about the engagement results. Train your staff to listen for testimonials and forward them to the marketing group for follow up. If you receive letters from clients, unsolicited, ask to use them as testimonials. Reward your staff for forwarding testimonials to the marketing group.
- Testimonials can be gathered in client advisory board meetings. In many instances, you can take what the clients are saying and use it in general copy in your ads and brochures. Great differentiation material can be gathered from your client advisory boards on what makes your firm unique compared to other firms.

Now, getting back to my point about Sally Field and *Boniva*. We could all argue that Sally Field got paid to do the *Boniva* campaign so she did have something to gain from providing a consumer testimonial for Roche and GlaxoSmithKline. But, some of us grew up with Sally— she's made us laugh for decades with her television roles in *The Flying Nun*, *Gidget*, and later in film with *Steel Magnolia* and *Forrest Gump*. Her portrayal of a strong woman in her Academy award-winning performances in *Norma Rae* and *Places In the Heart* has created a relationship of trust with an equally strong target market—a generation of female baby boomers that started turning 60 in 2006. So, her message is extremely believable and it also creates a sense of security for those who are already using the product.

Translate that to a professional services firm. If you are a practicing physician and you read a series of testimonial ads in a medical society journal from trusted colleagues who are recommending a certain professional service firm, would their messages be believable? If you were already using the firm, would you feel good about the relationship?

Testimonials are one of the simplest and most effective ways to building credibility into your marketing initiatives. Putting them into your marketing toolbox is smart marketing.

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