

How to Effectively Use Testimonials

By Derek Gehl

What do people who've actually purchased and used your product or service think about it?

Answering that question is one of the most fundamental tasks your website needs to accomplish--and it's as simple to do as it is important.

By using testimonials (reviews and comments from your satisfied customers) in text, audio or video format on your website, you not only answer the question, you also transform your sales pitch into a credible, unbiased recommendation for your product.

Overcome Buyer Skepticism

Adding testimonials is probably one of the easiest ways to improve your website, and a good one can generate more selling power than some of the best sales copy out there.

So why are testimonials so effective?

- ✚ Testimonials build trust. Whether your customers are raving about what your product has done for them or about the great service you gave, they're telling your visitors first and foremost that they had a positive experience with your products and company.
- ✚ Testimonials aren't "salesy." Because testimonials aren't written in your "voice," they stand out in your copy as candid and unbiased accounts of how well your product works.
- ✚ Testimonials overcome skepticism. A good testimonial has the power to convince even your "tough sell" visitors that your product or service really made a difference in your customer's life--and can help them, too.

How to Choose the Right Testimonial

When you're choosing testimonials, there are a few key ingredients to look for that make the difference between an ineffective testimonial and one that sells. Here's an example of a glowing, but ultimately ineffective testimonial:

"I love this product! I can't get enough! I'm so glad I bought your stuff and I'll definitely be back to get more!"

What could be wrong with that? It sounds like you have a happy customer on your hands!

But what does this testimonial really tell your visitors? Does it prove the product works, or explain exactly how your customer benefited from using it?

While the feedback is definitely positive, the testimonial doesn't provide enough detail to have any real impact on your visitors.

Here's an example of the kind of effective, benefits-driven testimonial that'll turn a visitor into a customer:

"I used the methods you told me to use, and for three days my phone's been ringing! I sold over \$3,500 in goods and services in three days! It's the first time in five months that anyone had really purchased anything."

What makes this testimonial so powerful?

Let's break down the elements of an effective testimonial in more detail:

- ✚ A good testimonial is filled with benefits. A comment like, "This product is great!" is nice to hear, but it doesn't tell visitors what your product can actually do for them.
- ✚ You want the benefits of what you offer to be front and center in every testimonial: "This product doubled our profits in a month!" or "This product made the pain in my back disappear completely--and did it fast!" or "We've never seen any product that could get the rust off our car without damaging the paint--until now."
- ✚ A good testimonial substantiates your claims. If you say your product can do something, your testimonials should back up your promises, complete with actual facts and figures. How much money did your customers save by using your product? How much time did they save by using your service? How did it solve their problems or improve their lives?
- ✚ A good testimonial is from someone your audience can relate to. You want your visitors to see that your product helped someone just like them. Make sure your testimonials come from someone with whom your target market can identify.
- ✚ If you sell primarily to seniors, for example, ask your customers if you can include their age along with the testimonial. If you're selling to moms with children, ask if you can mention how many kids they have or include a photo of their family.

- ✚ A good testimonial is credible. Accompany each testimonial with the first name, last name and hometown of each testimonial-giver to show that your endorsements come from real people. Always try to include a photo as well.
- ✚ And if you can, take it to the next level by including audio or video testimonials for maximum effect. Do anything you can to help your visitors connect with your testimonial-givers on a personal level.
- ✚ A good testimonial endorses the key benefits of your product. It is fun to hear that your super-duper floor cleaner smells nice or that the bottle doesn't drip-- both things that matter to people who would consider using your product. But have you established that it cleans their floors well?
- ✚ A good testimonial is comparative. Did your customers try another product that didn't work before they found yours? You want your visitors to know what your product can do that the other product's can't. Choose testimonials that set your product apart from your competition.

Now that you know what you're looking for in a testimonial, how do you actually gather the reviews you need from your customers?

Getting Great Testimonials--Even if You Haven't Sold Anything Yet

If your customers have given you positive feedback on your product already, then you may already have some great testimonials to add to your site. However, if your customer response is a little scarce--or if you're just starting out--getting testimonials from your buyers might take a little more effort.

So how do you collect the testimonials you need and keep them coming as you grow your business?

One easy way to collect testimonials is to include a link on your site with a form that allows your customers to give you their vote of confidence: "Tell us how this product changed your life!" or "Click here to let us know what you think!" Put this link next to some testimonials that you've already gathered to give customers an example of the kind of feedback you're looking for.

A more effective method is to create an auto-responder that contacts your buyers after they've purchased your product to ask how they're enjoying the product, as well as giving them a chance to offer feedback on their experience with your business.

And, of course, anytime you receive a great letter or e-mail from a customer, ask them if you can use their comments on your website to recommend your product to others. If they were happy enough to let you know, they're bound to want to spread the word.

If you haven't yet begun selling your product and have no feedback yet, offer your product or service for free to a select group of customers in exchange for their thoughts on the product or some details on their experience with your site. The impact that testimonial will have on your bottom line will be well worth the initial expense.

Strategies to Use Your Testimonials Effectively

- ✚ Once you've got some testimonials to share with your visitors, you need to make sure you're putting them to the best possible use on your site. Always make sure that you:
 - ✚ Include your best testimonials front and center on your homepage, like in your sidebars, or even above your headline.
 - ✚ Place some testimonials right in the middle of your homepage sales copy to keep your readers focused on your credibility as you outline the features and benefits of your product.
 - ✚ Set up a whole page dedicated to your glowing testimonials, as well as including snippets of their comments throughout your site. Be sure to put a link to your testimonial page next to each of those snippets.
 - ✚ Include testimonials on each and every page of your website. No matter where your visitors click, you want them to find a positive customer review of your product or service.
- ✚ Now let's look at a few mistakes to avoid when using testimonials on your website:
 - ✚ Don't edit your testimonials to exclude a comment or add information you want to hear! If you can't post a comment "as is" and feel comfortable with it, it shouldn't go up.
 - ✚ Never use a customer testimonial without permission.
 - ✚ Never, ever invent testimonials! This is fraud, plain and simple, and lying never results in a positive impact on your business.

Final Thoughts

If you're not using testimonials on your website, you're missing out on one of the most powerful, easy-to-use and cheap marketing tools available to you.

Most of us would rather act on a referral from a friend than make a purchase based on a sales pitch alone. We want to know that the product actually works before we take the leap to buy, and we're bound to put more trust in someone who has already used the product successfully than the person trying to convince us to buy it. Using glowing, fact-filled testimonials on your website will let your visitors know that you're worthy of their trust.

