

Your TurningPointe

Client Testimonials with a Twist

Your Monthly TurningPointe Newsletter, March 2006

Testimonials are a great way to draw potential customers to your services. People are positively influenced by someone else saying great things about your business and what you have to offer.

In my recent interview with Linda Furiate of Portraits in Determination, we discussed testimonials, why they're integral to your business, and how to go about getting great ones.

Kelly: Why should we take client testimonials into consideration when it comes to marketing?

Linda: I feel the main reason would be "credibility." Before you hire someone, you typically want to know what others have to say about their experience with this person or company. Especially if they're people like you, with similar needs or problems. Even though you're only going to get positive testimonials, if you can relate to what they're saying, you'll feel better about making the decision to buy.

For example, you may be looking for a builder to build your next office. If client testimonials constantly reiterate that the builder "did a professional job, finished on time and was below budget," that's pretty powerful stuff. Who doesn't want the opportunity get their product delivered on time and save money?

It really matters to pay attention to the client testimonials because each of us works best with a certain type of person or personality. You can get a real feel for what this person is like and if it's someone we feel we can trust. When I am giving someone my money, I want to be able to work well with them.

Kelly: So client testimonials can have a big impact on our brand identity...

Linda: Yes, when a consistent theme comes up in client testimonials, it has a way of branding your services. You become the "loyal banker" or "honest accountant" or "trustworthy builder" because your customers say so. Use those same buzzwords as a true reflection of what is being said about you in your marketing materials.

Kelly: So what advice do you have for how to use client testimonials in marketing materials? Where and when does it matter to pay attention to them?

Linda: The best place is on your website because that is really where most people go to find out about a company. Some of my clients dedicate a whole page for testimonials while others may have them appear randomly throughout their website. The later is

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especially nice for those who choose to use audio testimonials.

Client testimonials should be fairly brief, consisting of a short paragraph of no more than 5-6 sentences. If you're doing testimonial letters (on client letterhead!), keep the letter to about one half to two-thirds of a page. For audio testimonials, 5 minutes or less is best. The key in all of these formats is to be brief and concise.

Also, you normally get a testimonial when you're finished (or underway) with a client...but ask before you *begin* your work. This will ensure that you do a great job for them, plus it will be a lot easier when the job is done to get the testimonial since you already asked for it.

Kelly: Why should I use a third party to obtain a testimonial?

Linda: There are numerous reasons to use a third party, such as a marketing or PR company, to obtain testimonials. People love being interviewed and will be inclined to be much more open with a third party than if you called them yourself. Testimonials can be more powerful and credible if someone else does the interviewing and the writing. Also, your time is valuable – so let someone else track down clients, draft copy, edit, and get final approvals.

Lastly, one important reason to use a third party to obtain the testimonial is because it's almost impossible to get a client to write it on their own; a little help from a marketing professional who understands the value of a well written testimonial can go a long way.

Kelly: What's the one thing you wish your clients would do that would make it easier for you to help them when it comes to client testimonials?

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Linda: When working with a client I ask that they initially contact the people they want me to gather information from and explain to them what they hope to accomplish by obtaining their testimonials. It is a wise idea to let the client know why you are gathering this information and where you plan to use it. I like when people are anticipating my contact and have thought about what they would like to say in the testimonial. This helps me to establish a rapport even before I make contact, plus I don't want my contacting them to come across as a sales call.

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Kelly: You know, you're making me realize that you can "systematize" this process. For example, we could create a policy that, for every new client, we'll tap a third party like yourself to interview and write up a testimonial within a certain amount of time.

Linda: Absolutely. And then you don't have to worry about it. As soon as we get the background information and green light to move forward, we take it from there.

Kelly: I just love systems! Okay, do you have a story or example you'd like to share that illustrates what we've been talking about...maybe a client success story or surprising outcome?

Linda: Recently I worked with an executive coach who wanted one of her clients, a construction company, to update their website to include client testimonials. Talk about the power of testimonials! After interviewing 15-20 of the construction company's customers, I was ready to move clear across the country to have this man build me a house – people just loved him and it was so apparent with the way the customers expressed their thoughts and feelings. Beyond building their office or hospital, he built a relationship.

Kelly: Where can people go to learn more? Do you have any favorite websites or resources?

Linda: One of my favorite resources for understanding the importance of testimonials is Robert Middleton's site at www.actionplan.com – check out his toolkits. If someone wants to learn more about how I can help them get great client testimonials, contact me at Linda@portraitsindetermination.com or call (410) 964-1303. I will be happy to answer any questions they may have.

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