

## Developing Customer Testimonials

The best marketing communications often don't come from the company who's selling the product or service but from the company's customers. Companies can gain invaluable insight that help guide their decisions by gathering their customers' thoughts on why they choose to do business with them.

Getting a customer testimonial is not as simple as asking the customer to send a letter saying wonderful things about the company. Find out why customers continue to do business with your company. This extra work will unearth the company's strengths and weaknesses, and true value proposition, in "real time" without costly marketing research.

Asking the right questions and listening objectively to the responses help produce bottom-line results—this process reminds customers why they choose your company and helps keep competitors at bay.

### Five key skills

1. Interviewing ability; specifically with business leaders and decision makers who have limited time
2. Ability to quickly generate trust
3. Storytelling ability; capture your interviewee's authentic voice and word usage and modify where needed to help them convey their intended meaning
4. Discernment; this is the ability to quickly process information, make connections and see which questions to ask in the moment, which also requires background work before the interview and attention to everything that occurs during the interview
5. Sense of timing; guide the interview so that you get the best story and respect the time allotted

### Do your background work

Talk to the person who manages the customer relationship. Find out the strengths of the relationship and the areas that you shouldn't discuss.

Visit the interviewee's company web site, read marketing materials, conduct an internet search for articles written about the company. Look for information that tells you the company's mission, values and goals. Read their blog. What matters to them?

Craft your list of questions based upon your research before the interview and have someone else review it who knows the interviewee well. There may be questions that you shouldn't ask or additional questions that you hadn't thought of.

Be on time. If you're meeting others who will accompany you in the interview, try to meet them a few minutes ahead and walk in together.

Provide the interviewee a brief overview of why you're there, the process and the timeframe involved. Let the interviewee know what you will be delivering for their review and when, and keep your commitments!

If you have the opportunity, tour the interviewee's facility with them. Walking and talking can create a less formal environment and spark questions and conversations that will produce better work.

### Deliver a great story

And, most of all, write a great narrative and complete your follow-up in the timeframe you've promised. This may seem obvious, but always deliver the work product to the interviewee for review and approval prior to distribution or usage.