



## Terrific Testimonials

Chris Bachman | November 26, 2013

Testimonials can be an excellent piece of content to use in your marketing if you know how to use them correctly. After all, you can say you have a great product, but if Sam and Linda and Fred and Julie all tell me, then I might begin to believe it. Testimonials add credibility, they give people peace of mind that comes from knowing someone else has gone where they are considering going and sent back word that it is OK, essentially a “*c’mon in, the water is fine!*”

### Purpose of a Testimonial

**Gain feedback** – the first neat thing that a testimonial does is to provide you feedback from your clients and customers. Granted, it may lean towards the positive side, especially if you have asked for it, but it is feedback nonetheless and you can usually get a feel for what people like, sort of like and, by the absence, what they may not be too thrilled about.

**Identify problems** – Unsolicited feedback is often where problems first appear. Another area is if you notice a conspicuous lack of comments about something or the references to a product or service are way lacking when compared to your other products or services. Example: “*Their new XYZ widget was OK but I really miss the old days when they had the original line of YZ widgets. Man, those were the best!*” Hmmmm...maybe you should be asking why...Why did they like the old one so much more? Why do they think the new one is just OK?

**Support Marketing** – Nothing adds credibility to a marketing piece, online or off, like real, honest testimonials. Add them to your brochure, sprinkle them around your website, put your favorite on the back of your business card, add one to your email signature....

### Soliciting

**Spontaneous** – These are the ones that arrive on your desk in the form of a letter, or nowadays, in an email. You didn’t ask for it but there it is and for a moment or two you feel good. Somebody appreciates you or your business and took the time to tell you. Wonderful! Immediately reach out to that person and thank them sincerely for their comments. This is also where you ask permission to share their comment or comments with others. Most likely they will say sure, everybody is in a happy moment and the love is everywhere; of course they will say yes. Always good to include in your request for permission a mention of where you would be using it; i.e., “..in our marketing materials”.

**Requested** – Go back through your correspondence with clients and read their comments. Oftentimes you will find snippets like “...so happy we found your business”,



“Your crew was great to work with and answered all of our questions, sometimes before we knew what to ask!”

Or, you can just do a blanket request to everybody. In this case I prefer to ask for their opinion rather than a testimonial. It seems a little more neutral and the results seem a bit more open. You can ask their opinion of the work you did now that they have had a chance to live with it. Ask them what they liked or didn't like. What did they like the most? These are open ended questions that will help get them talking.

**Release** - Be sure to ask them for permission, or at least indicate your intent, to use their statement in your business evaluations and marketing. Even if they forget to give it to you specifically, you will have at least set forth the intent that you want to use the responses. If they are good opinions you shouldn't have a problem anyway.

**Online Reviews** – Have you checked how your business is faring in the online reviews? Places like Manta, Merchant Circle, Yelp and many others allow for reviews by people who have done business with you. Since these are already public, you don't need to ask permission to use the statements. Just copy, paste, and give credit where due. This is also where you are likely to run into your first negative reviews. These can hit you like an iron ball in your stomach and leave you reeling or angry. Please, remember not to react impulsively to these negative reviews. First, do some reading about how to respond and practice it a bit before you post something for all the world to see. If you need some help with [reputation management](#) there are plenty of companies ready to help. BTW – keep in mind that reports are showing us that upwards of 30% of online reviews are phony. Keep that in mind.

### **Better – Best**

**Long vs. short** – The length of the testimonial is often dictated simply by how much room you have. I have designed brochures where 6-8 words was all I had room for and I have created website pages that allowed for testimonials that were several paragraphs in length. Personally, I prefer testimonials of at least 2-5 sentences in length. These give a feel for the true nature of the testimonial and yet are short enough to encourage browsing through more than one or two. Super short ones like “...*really great, loved it all...*” I tend to avoid if possible. They almost seem like they could have been taken out of context. The rest of the message might have been totally negative and abusive and that snippet actually meant sarcastically.

**Detailed** – People know that shorter ones are easier to fake, while longer allows personality to show through and gives the statement a level of authenticity you don't get with short ones. Detail as to what part of your product or service someone really liked and specifically why they were impressed is more simply more believable. Imagine you are standing outside a movie theatre and wondering about a show. You ask a fellow who is just coming out of it what he thought. He says “..um, great”. How does that compare to the next person you ask who immediately launches into a minutes long review of how



“...wonderful the movie was and the parts she liked especially well and how she cried at one point and loved the main character and...” Which would you believe?

**Real** – Don’t fake testimonials. People can tell. And, if you ever have a request from a prospect to talk to some of those references, what are you going to do?

**Full name vs. initials** – If you have permission, and the statement is real, by all means, use their full name. If it is a person you might want to leave out the city or something, they probably don’t want unsolicited calls from your prospects. If it is a business you are on much better grounds as to using their full name and business name. If your business demands a level of privacy, then yes, certainly drop back to using initials for one or both of their names.

In the long run, full disclosure such as first and last name, city, state, business, all of these add credibility to the testimonial.

## Using

**Website/ Print** – These should be everywhere. Have either a Testimonial page or sprinkle them around. Sometimes they can be subtle notes at the bottom of each page, sometimes they should be highlighted in color and hung in plain sight. If you can relate a testimonial to a page that pertains to the topic of the testimonial, so much the better. A statement praising the virtues of your new XYZ Widget should have a prominent place on the page about XYZ Widgets.

**Provide to PR and Copy writers** – Think of everyone who has a chance to influence others about you. Copy writers, editors, publicists, media brokers, agents, reviewers, website developer, interviewer, sales manager, department head, etc. Again, it is going to play out better for you if these are real testimonials rather than fake ones.

**Summary** – At [ProClass Web Design](#) we handle questions and problems relating to testimonials, reviews and reputation management on a daily basis. If you need some answers or perhaps some professional help regarding implementing testimonials or how to handle online reviews, give us a call at 888-434-8728 or [email](#) us to set up a discussion.