

Time to give Case Studies top billing

by Inge Fuglestved

One thing is for sure, 2009 isn't going to be the same old, same old. Things have changed profoundly and for a while, business is going to have to do more with less and think of ways to stretch their marketing dollars. It's more important than ever to stay in touch with your customers and give them relevant and useful information, but the budget for big-ticket items like advertising and promotions is now limited. So, what to do?

Enter the case study.

Case studies, testimonials or user stories, are a highly versatile marketing tool because they can easily be re-purposed for use in different media. You can publish them online or in print and include them in face-to-face presentations. The content can be used for websites, online interviews and as click-throughs for eDM's. Case studies can be included in brochures, newsletters, internal communications, press releases and as proof-elements in seminars and product demonstrations. An investment in a case study is an investment that keeps on giving.

And they have great credibility. Why does media coverage work harder for you than advertising? Because it's someone else saying something (hopefully positive) about your company, your products or your services. Case studies are testimonials by your customers about how they have used your solutions to achieve a better outcome for their business. This makes case studies credible and interesting to prospective customers, hopefully providing both inspiration and new ideas – a powerful tool indeed.

How to create a good case study.

Start by talking to your sales people. Find out who your happiest customers are or the ones with the most interesting use of your products. Want to sell more widgets to small business? Find a happy client in that market. Want to get media coverage for a particular product? Find a customer who's doing something really interesting or unusual with it. It's worth putting some effort into thinking about what you want to achieve and who has the best story to tell.

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The next step is to find someone to write it and the most cost effective way is to outsource the job to experienced freelance writers. There are lots of do's and don't's associated with writing an effective case study and the first step is to prepare a good brief for the writer. We have developed a simple briefing template for copywriting work, which will help make it easier for you to provide the background material needed. So, if you don't already have a template of your own, grab a copy of ours. Simply download it here — it's free, no strings, with our compliments.

The best case studies answer three simple questions:

1. What was the problem?
2. How was it solved?
3. What were the resulting benefits?

Describe your client's business and their situation, the challenges they were having and how it was impacting on their business. Use direct quotes by relevant people in the company. This makes the story come alive and gives it an emotional quotient, which helps the reader connect and identify with the situation. It also makes the case study easier to read.

When you come to the solution provided by your company, it's helpful to give details of exactly what was provided. Again, let the client speak and explain how the process worked, how they worked with your company, what was done and how long it took.

The final section is the most important. A good case study should include results and benefits achieved from your solution. Try to quantify it – are they doing things twice as fast? Have they been able to cut costs by 25%? Are they able to answer ten calls an hour instead of 6? And don't forget any benefits such as staff being happier or less stressed or being able to work differently. The more specific you can be about the outcome, the better and more impactful your case study will be.

How to optimise your marketing ROI.

Once you have had a good case study prepared, make the most of it. They are excellent sales tools, so make them available to your sales people in printed form and as a downloadable PDF file on your website. You can also use case studies as they are, in summary or in part for brochures, DM's and as website content. Next time you hold a seminar or sales presentation, consider inviting a representative from the company in your

case study to talk about their experience with your company and the solution you provided. There's almost no limit to the use of case studies, so if you make the most of them, you should get a very good return on your marketing investment.

Examples

Three different case studies that all work well:

1. IBM Australia (The Reject Shop)
[New Web Portal Boosts Efficiency at The Reject Shop](#)
2. Sydney Water (Continental Carbon)
[Saving Water, Money and the Environment by Using Stormwater](#)
3. Optus (Tennis Australia)
[Game, Set and Match](#)

In a nutshell

There are many effective strategies you can implement in a downturn to help you reduce your marketing spend and maximise impact. The reason case studies are such an effective tool is they are interesting, believable and easy to re-purpose. Pick a good customer story and have it written by a professional. All you need then is the delivery mechanism, say a brochure or website, and you're ready to go.

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