

BOOSTING YOUR BUSINESS

Testimonials: Letting satisfied clients tell your company's story

By Jeff Zbar

At the end of every successful new website project, Peter T. Boyd sends clients a wrap-up questionnaire. He is looking for client commentary and suggested improvements.

But, he's also looking for kind words he can use on his website, social media and other marketing materials.

"We use testimonials on our website. We blog about them as a case study or special project. We post really good testimonials on Facebook or Twitter," said Boyd, principal with PaperStreet Web Design whose forthcoming site will include a page of such comments. "We do so in a manner that does not scream self-promotion by focusing the post on the client's new site and business."

Kind words from satisfied clients can work wonders in telling the company's tale, or convincing prospects that the product or service is worth the investment. Once gathered – whether solicited or not – various companies use them in printed or online materials, for social media, in video or audio recordings.

"Like with public or media relations, client testimonials can offer credibility and third-party advocacy that serves as the gold standard in marketing and PR," said Tadd Schwartz, principal with Schwartz Media Strategies.



Schwartz

Different companies use testimonials in various ways. Client testimonials are on the homepage at Think Education Services in Coral Springs. When executives with Kreps DeMaria Public Relations & Marketing built their new site, they solicited comments and testimonials from executives from high-profile clients – including Ron Shuffield, president of EWM Realtors, and Dean Colson, managing partner of Colson Hicks Eidson in Coral Gables – "each from various industries to showcase our breadth of clients," partner Sissy DeMaria said.

Tom Murphy, chairman/CEO of Coastal Construction in Miami, seeks out testimonials from famous or high-profile clients. He then binds the comments, letters of recommendation or commendations in a book he leaves with prospects. Partners at Miami-based accounting firm Kaufman, Rossin & Co. are reminded to identify clients whose businesses could benefit from the exposure, said Janet Kyle Altman, marketing principal.

REACHING OUT THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Nova Southeastern University in Davie reached out to students across campus via Facebook and other outreach, asking them to tell their stories, said Jim Flanagan, president of Tinsley Advertising. Working closely with NSU administrators, ad executives shot video of students, keeping the testimonials believable by making them as "spontaneous and fun as possible," Flanagan said. The national Educational Advertising Awards honored the campaign.

Testimonial-backed advertising is called “documericals” for clients like AvMed Health Plans, SunPass and South Florida Commuter Services at Miami-based Beber Silverstein Group. For Florida Power & Light Co., documericals drove brand awareness, Senior VP Mike LaMonica said. “Bob From FPL” spoke with hundreds of FPL customers and employees. Key measurements rose for FPL being perceived as a warm, caring and knowledgeable company, he said.

Effective use of testimonials should include written and spoken comments, said Owen Frager, principal with Frager Creative in Boca Raton. He tries to create client websites with written or videotaped comments in rotation on every page, he said. He’ll also use testimonials in e-mail and direct mail campaigns.

Frager suggested marketers invite clients to comment – and be recorded – during telephone conversations, or be openly videotaped discussing their impressions of the product or service. Distribute client surveys with open-ended questions – or those that cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no.” Lengthy responses can be edited for length, he said.

At Max Borges Public Relations, executives may give clients topics or themes to be discussed in the testimonial.

Regardless of the format or distribution, attorneys advise getting signed releases from those providing testimonials, especially if names will accompany the comments.

Distribute testimonials beyond the website or print. Place them on social media, like the company’s Facebook page or Twitter feed. Put videos on the company YouTube channel and post them to the company blog. Get client connections on LinkedIn to post recommendations or testimonials.

“Just make sure the testimonials are not over the top or canned,” Schwartz said. “This is a common mistake most marketers make when using testimonials. Like with any promotional material, the more organic, natural and humble, the better.”