

Successful case study writing.

Case studies, customer stories, application articles, success stories – whatever you call them, a well-written story is probably the most powerful piece of marketing any organisation can produce. But what does it take to create a great case study? And once you've got one, how can you make the most of it?

Source

Often a good place to look for a potential case study is your sales or support team. Encourage them by giving them the responsibility of putting it all together, you could even offer an incentive to anyone who provides a lead which is later published. The same applies to the client or customer. Most won't turn down free publicity but if they need enticing, you could offer them a discount on their next purchase.

Plan

Always pre-qualify your leads – make sure that you know everything about the client or customer, what the relationship or contract entailed and most of all ensure that the client was happy with the result. Approach them gently, explain the process and the benefits of featuring in a case study, where the story is likely to be published, that it will only require an hour or two of their time and always get their permission and/or approval.

Think

Before you start, define your message, purpose and audience. Case studies are 'good news' stories aimed at telling similar organisations what you could do for them. Picture the person you're selling to and find out what makes them tick – what they like and dislike, what they do, what they want and their level of understanding. This should give you a clear indication of what tone and style of language to use.

Structure

There's nothing worse than a case study which is badly structured and written. You're telling a story, so typically it should be between 500-750 words and be organised into several sections – client or customer background, the issues they faced, the challenges you faced, the solution you provided, its implementation and finally, the results that were achieved. Facts and figures are important, so use any relevant images, data or graphical material.

Focus

You're not the only one vying for a piece of the action, so your case study should stand out from the crowd. Concentrate on the benefits – you're not selling life insurance, you're selling peace of mind. You're not selling a piece of machinery; you're improving their productivity and bottom line. This is your opportunity to show a prospective client that you have delivered in similar circumstances.

Credibility

Credibility is everything and if you've got a third party singing your praises there's really no need for any sales guff, although a few strong quotes from named people always adds kudos. And believability is everything. Very few projects run smoothly without any hiccups, so be honest about overcoming minor teething troubles, explaining what the issue was and how you overcame it.

Frequency

Create good news stories continuously – don't expect one or two to do the job. A small to medium-sized company should send out perhaps 8 to 12 case studies each year, ensuring that each part of your business and each product or aspect of your service is promoted in every sector and part of the world you operate in. You might consider translating the case studies into other languages depending on which countries you work in.

Utilise

Most case studies are not used to their full potential. A success story can be turned into a whole range of additional promotional material such as a press release, a trade magazine article, a tool for the sales team, on your website, in a company newsletter or eZine, as a free giveaway at trade shows or as a testimonial,