

The Stories your Customers need to Tell

The case for Case Studies, Customer Profiles, and Client Success Stories

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Want some significant bang for your marketing buck? Consider the case study — and let your customers do the talking for you.

What are case studies?

Case Study. Client Profile. Customer Success Story. They're all essentially the same marketing device — **a well crafted, compelling narrative that tells the story of how your product or service provided a solution to a customer or client's problem.** From one to three pages at most, case studies are a great opportunity to demonstrate a unique competitive advantage or USP. They are a powerful addition to your overall marketing communications effort.

Why do you need them?

Case studies offer real-world “proof” of your claims. Presented from the customer or client perspective, they enhance credibility for prospects, customers and investors. Think of them as showcasing your best successes.

Case studies not only document what you do well, they are also a vehicle for educating prospects on complex, not easily understood products or services.

In down economies and highly competitive markets, prospective clients and customers seek an immediate indication of trust. Case studies convey and build that trust for you.

Case studies are versatile and high-mileage. You can utilize them to:

- create a press release
- collect shorter testimonial quotes to utilize elsewhere
- suggest a topic for speeches and presentations
- begin to build an ad campaign
- add “real life” depth to your web site
- write a newsletter article
- craft a direct mail message
- develop blog content
- arm your sales team
- distribute at trade shows
- set a foundation for pod casts or longer video productions
- and more.

Well-leveraged throughout sales, marketing, advertising and public relations, case studies yield a solid ROI.

How are case studies produced and structured?

Developing an effective case study is a multilayered process. First you identify a product, service, or aspect of either that you want to highlight, and target a customer whose experience will best demonstrate it. You can start with either to identify the other. Then a process of research, interviewing, and writing occurs. Releases from customers and various internal approvals must be factored in, too.

Some of the most compelling case studies are written feature article-style. They follow a traditional story arc that reveals setting, characters, challenges and the hero (you) who conquers them and saves the day. When client stories have unique angles, the feature-style case study allows for creative flexibility. The end product is often more inviting to a wider net of readers.

A more conventional case study structure includes a snapshot of the customer, a statement of his problem, options considered, the solution you provided, and measurable results. Other viable formats include Q&A and first-person accounts. All case studies should offer strong direct quotes from the customer.

In-house or outsourced?

Large businesses that have sizable marketing departments can produce their own case studies — *but not without risk*. In-house efforts tend to employ company jargon and can lean toward the kind of PR hype that readers will instantly see through. Familiarity with clients/customers can backfire into oversimplification or missed story opportunities.

Outsourcing case studies affords an unbiased, thoroughly researched narrative. A professional writer has expertise in gaining a subject's trust, drawing out surprise nuggets, and balancing out the whole picture — while still producing the desired story-with-a-happy-ending. She will be focused exclusively on the project, while staff efforts are often diluted by other marketing/PR/advertising projects demanding attention.

What's your story? Susan McConnell can help you — and your customers — tell it like it is. Learn more at www.mcconnellcommunications.com.