

Solicit Testimonials to Build Buzz for Your Business

When I think about the businesses that I recommend, I think of those firms that offer outstanding service, consistent quality products, or a combination of the two. Whether I'm looking for a plumber or dry cleaner, a massage therapist or office supply store, my instinct is to check with my friends. That's why word-of-mouth marketing is the most effective form of marketing.

Brian Tracy, motivational speaker and author, claims that more than 84% of business in today's world is done on referral. So, how you conduct your business takes on even more importance after the sale.

Creating buzz demands you put the power of testimonial marketing to work for your firm, perhaps by asking satisfied customers for permission to use their comments about your product or service. Build a testimonial system with three easy steps.

Step one involves asking the customer what they think. People love to give their opinions. If you solicit with an open ended question, you'll get useful information as well as potential testimonials. Ask, "How did we do this evening?", "What do you think about the service you received?" or, "What did you like most about working together?" These prompts let your customer give a true opinion.

If you receive negative feedback, you have the opportunity to fix the issue then and there. If the feedback is positive, you can request permission to include it in your brag book or on a testimonial wall. One accountant that I know keeps a brag book

in his front office so that customers can leaf through it while they wait.

Step two in establishing a testimonial system involves requesting a testimonial letter from customers. Letters from customers can be posted on a wall so that they are visible for others. The best time to request a letter of testimonial is shortly after the sale when the customer is satisfied with their purchase.

In many service-oriented businesses the opportunity to request testimonials means that one must also offer to write the testimonials. Writing a testimonial for your customer is step three. A couple of options exist to make this easier.

You can use a standard letter that goes to all customers and requests their input. One consultant uses such a letter and suggests that you simply write your comments on the reverse and sent it back to him. At the bottom of his letter is a release that gives him permission to use the handwritten comments. I find that it's easy to take notes about a comment, write it up and request that the client drop the completed letter onto their stationery. I then include a standard release that gives me permission to use the quotation in my marketing materials.

Remember, if you state something about your business, it's a claim. If someone else makes the statement, it becomes fact.

That's the power of third party testimonials and that's the way they can help you build your business. © Mary Ellen Merrigan, 2007