

# A Recipe for Building Trust in Your Advertising



By: Doug Smith | SMS | February 2016

In our information-overloaded world, grabbing attention is often the sole goal of many advertising campaigns. But after an ad gets noticed, it must then overcome one of the biggest problems in advertising – believability.

A successful method for overcoming this lack of trust is to replace the advertiser’s carefully written copy with the voice of the customer. This is the testimonial ad. Consider these two testimonials for a lawn care service:

*“I think Glorious Green Grass is a wonderful product. My lawn looks great.”*

— and —

*“For six years I tried every weed control powder and spray at my local garden store, but nothing got rid of those darned dandelions. Then I saw your ad for Glorious Green Grass and decided to give it a try. I tried the Quick Cover method you suggested and WOW! Just a week later, there’s not a single speck of yellow anywhere, except in my neighbor’s yard.”*

The latter is clearly more compelling than the former for good reason: It follows these three rules of producing effective testimonial advertising:

1. **Focus on Emotion** — Nothing is more powerful in advertising than authentic emotion. A customer’s emotion (sincerity, happiness, pride) is a key ingredient in building trust and authenticity. Testimonial ads that focus on emotion, in turn, solicit authentic emotions in the audience. Here’s an example of a delighted mom having fun with her kids at the [Corning Museum of Glass](#).
2. **Keep Production Values Simple** — Too much polish can make a testimonial seem contrived. The goal is a simple, spontaneous, and genuine delivery that conveys a simple message and puts the audience at ease. As an example, listen to the dental patient testimonial we produced for [Dr. Ormsby, on our Healthcare page](#).



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3. **Allow Customers to Be Themselves** — Take time with the interview, giving the talent time to relax. Often, the most authentic and passionate testimonials come in the quiet moments between takes, or after the interview is over. Keep rolling and let them talk on their own terms. Dominos “our pizza stinks” campaign is a brilliant example of unscripted enthusiasm; their [social media campaign](#) plays into a negative customer belief and uses the credibility of a testimonial to reverse the perception.

In this author’s opinion, the two types of testimonials that work best in advertising are: “The Expert” that features an opinion leader who customers already trust — and “The Documentary” which captures an average customer or other influencer in the buying process, for example an employee or some other third party whose opinion can sway the outcome of the purchase. Because of their increased believability, a majority of the testimonial commercials or videos we do at Smith Marketing are documentary style.

Sold on the testimonial approach and ready to get started? Keep reading!

## **Eight Tips on How to Make a Powerful Testimonial Commercial**

1. Testimonials must feature a person who has experience consuming your product or service. Product knowledge is important, but experience and preference for the product is critical. Remember “documentary style” testimonials are about real people.
2. Be specific about the benefit. People want to know how and why the person speaking used the product and how it performed for them. The customer featured in the ad is a stand-in for the audience at large, so include details about your on-camera talent (e.g.: mother with two kids).
3. Honesty is disarming. Believability increases when there are glitches in performance. So, if the talent says something that is not grammatically correct, but you’re satisfied with the statement overall, include the information so viewers can make an informed decision.
4. If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all. Seek out customers that are passionate about your product or service. And, do not use a testimonial opportunity to lash out at a competitor; it will only make you and your speaker look bad.

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6. Just the facts, Ma'am! A great testimonial does not require two paragraphs of back story to set the stage. While the audience wants to know a little bit about the talent, the point of the commercial is to tell them about an excellent company, product or service.
7. Get permission in writing. And don't forget to have your testimonial participant complete a talent release clearly outlining how his/her testimonial will be used. This will help protect you if legal issues ever arise.
8. Last but not least, build the capture of future testimonials into your sales process — since the completion of a purchase, installation, or delivery of service is a great time to 'ask'... While your customer's positive experience is still fresh and top of mind!

Thanks for listening and good luck employing the words of others to build YOUR credibility!

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