

THE POWER OF PERSUASION

Maximizing Your Customer Testimonials And Reviews

By Kenny Pratt



Have you ever read an online review of a product you were considering for purchase? You are not alone. Forrester Research consultants found that 76 percent of consumers shopping online use reviews to help them make purchases.

Customer reviews are not only good for customers. Manufacturers and major e-commerce Web sites find that it makes good sense for them as well. Allowing their customers to have a voice, because that voice is more convincing, trustworthy, and persuasive, leads to more sales. According to Forrester Research, 96 percent of major e-commerce Web sites that feature user reviews rate them as an effective merchandising tactic.

For most people, this is intuitive. We all know shameless self-promotion rarely works. It's much better to have others vouching for us, promoting us, plugging us, and raising us up.

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As a self-storage operator, you have the opportunity to leverage the words and actions of customers that come in the form of reviews and testimonials to increase your stature and persuade shoppers to rent.

Why Reviews And Testimonials Work

What makes someone or something persuasive is well documented in the psychological

literature. Testimonials and reviews are persuasive primarily due to two phenomena: social proof and the fundamental attribution error.

Rather than dive into a lengthy explanation of these two basics of influence, let's look at some practical examples.

When we are uncertain, we look to the crowd for clues about what we should do. We look for social proof that we are doing the right thing. Have you ever been to a fancy dinner, unsure of which fork or knife to use and found yourself hesitating just a moment while you watched what the other guests did?

Marketers take advantage of our desire to quell uncertainty with social proof. You see this when marketers tell their audience that something is the "fastest selling" or "number one in its class." At the time of this writing in early 2010 (and since the 2009 holiday season), a visit to the Amazon.com homepage will greet you with

a giant picture of a Kindle e-book reader and the headline, "Kindle #1 Bestselling Product on Amazon." Amazon knows you'll believe the crowd.

As buyers, we also make a subconscious mistake that psychologists call, "the fundamental attribution error. The fundamental attribution error is when we believe a spokesperson's words and actions are attributed to how they must really feel without giving enough weight to the outside influences affecting what is said

Are you looking for a low-cost way to increase sales and rentals at your self-storage facility? Try utilizing customer testimonials to prove your products and services are a step above the rest.

and done. Celebrity endorsements are a simple example of this in action. Celebrity endorsements work, in part, because the target audience aspires to be like the celebrity. The other, more subtle reason, is that consumers subconsciously assume that the celebrity endorses the product because he or she likes it, without giving adequate weight to the fact that the celebrity is being paid for the promotion.

Research also shows that when agents (i.e., a lawyer, talent agent, or book agent, etc.) talk about the accomplishments of their clients, it is more convincing than if their clients spoke about themselves. This is true despite the fact that the agents clearly represent their clients and are compensated by them.

Testimonials Settle Uncertainties

You can begin to solve your marketing and sales problems when you start to solve your prospective customer's uncertainty problem. From your prospective customer's perspective, their challenge is to overcome the uncertainty surrounding a choice where the stakes seem high (because they are storing their personal property), in an area where they are inexperienced, among competitors who lack a strong or compelling brand, during a stressful time of their life.

Anything you can do to strongly signal to your prospective customers that you are an easy and obvious good choice will greatly enhance your ability to attract leads and close deals. One effective way to do that is to use reviews and testimonials to your advantage.

Testimonials Are Accessible

Coke® and many other familiar brands don't spend much time hitting you with testimonials because they have an established brand, which means their market finds them familiar. The bad news is, you are not a big brand, and you can't afford to become one.

The good news is, leveraging reviews and testimonials is much easier than brand building and is much less expensive.

Here are three suggestions for how to obtain positive reviews and testimonials:

1. Be worthy. Are you doing anything that would positively surprise your

customers, or are you merely meeting reasonable expectations?

2. Ask. It's amazing how simple this recommendation is and how few operators do it in a systematic way.
3. Make it easy. If you want someone to do something, make it easy. For example, don't just e-mail a request for your customer to leave a review for you on Yahoo®. Send them the exact URL of the page on Yahoo that reviews your facility. Include a few simple instructions that help walk them through the process of creating a Yahoo account and leaving the review.

Optimizing Your Reviews

One way to optimize your testimonials and reviews is to match your messenger to your market. Psychologists have proven that we are more likely to be influenced by people we perceive as similar to ourselves. What this means for you is that you want to identify your typical customer and then collect testimonials and encourage reviews from people like them. This is especially true if the message is accompanied by a photo or done in a video format.

Another way to optimize your persuasion is to pick a winning difference that you would like to be known for and encourage testimonials that reinforce that theme.

For example, if you want to be known as the most convenient place to store, you might have extended office hours, a kiosk open 24 hours a day, and 24-hour gate access. You can reinforce your positioning as the most convenient by collecting testimonials that mention convenience explicitly or that tell stories highlighting an easy and convenient experience.


Do you hear common objections or concerns from your prospective customers? You can use testimonials or point to reviews that address those concerns. Instead of relying on your reassurances, a prospective customer can be persuaded by the vicarious experience they have when reading or hearing the words of others like them.

Leveraging Your Testimonials

Reviews and testimonials are not hard to get, but are you using them to their full potential?

Here are a few places you might consider using reviews and testimonials.

- Quote on your Web site the reviews found on other sites. Link from your Web site to the online reviews hosted on Yelp.com, Insiderpages.com, Local.Yahoo.com, and other review hosting sites.
- Post testimonials on your Web site.
- Consider using testimonials in your other marketing collateral such as business cards, brochures, etc.
- Brag about new positive reviews on social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter. Rather than repeating your hours and specials, consider posting a testimonial from time to time.
- Post positive reviews and testimonials in your office.
- Post positive reviews and testimonials around your property with on-site signage to remind your current customers of the experience you are striving for and to subtly persuade people who are touring your property.
- Share them within your organization and celebrate the success and good service they represent.

People looking for storage are often facing a decision shrouded in uncertainty. Using the words of others is a scientifically sound and often repeated practice that helps your prospective customers feel comfortable choosing you. Begin where you are. If you are good at asking for reviews and testimonials, then start getting a little more strategic and optimizing them to reinforce a particular theme. If you already have a stockpile of testimonials and reviews, then now might be the time to get a little more creative in how you make your prospective customers aware of what others are saying about you. 

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