

How to Turn Customer Surveys into Testimonials

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There's more than one way to [ask for a testimonial from a customer](#). Searching online for customer reviews, scouring your email for client compliments, recording video or audio clips during in-person conversations, and initiating a testimonial swap are all great strategies for adding to your company's testimonial collection. But when it's time to ask customers for reviews and testimonials, many businesses forget to utilize a tool they *already* have in place: [the customer satisfaction survey](#). Your customers are offering you their opinions in their own words... Why wouldn't you turn customer surveys into testimonials?

A customer satisfaction survey helps you determine how happy your customers are. If you use one in your business, it's probably helped improve your product, enhanced your customers' overall experience, and boosted customer retention rates. So [many articles](#) list the benefits of customer surveys, but what many of them fail to mention is that the customer satisfaction survey is *also* an excellent opportunity to collect business reviews (and product reviews, and service reviews), and to turn these reviews into testimonials.

There are at least two reasons we can think of for why the customer satisfaction survey is one of the best places to get material for your testimonials.

The first is simply that *you're not asking your customers to write testimonials*. Your clients won't feel the same kind of anxiety filling out a customer survey (which only *you* will read) as they do writing a testimonial (which they'll think needs to be "formal" or "polished" because it's getting published). Once they dispense with that anxiety, they'll be more authentic—and more honest—in their answers.

And those are precisely the kinds of answers you want for your testimonials, because honesty and authenticity are what will convert your future prospects.

In the second place, most customers won't know [what a good testimonial looks like](#). And while positive online reviews and unsolicited testimonials undoubtedly give you good *feelings*, they're not always effective marketing tools.

So... how do you go about converting your customer satisfaction surveys into the best testimonial material possible? Here's our take on it:

1. Do great work

A testimonial is, by definition, "a written declaration certifying the value, excellence, etc., of a thing."

Which is to say: your clients aren't going to write you excellent testimonials (or excellent business reviews or excellent product reviews) unless you're doing excellent work.

So start there—and don't worry about the survey itself until step two.

2. Send your survey at the right time

"The right time," of course, will depend on the kind of business you do.

If you've sold a product or performed a service—such as a haircut or a plumbing job—send the survey out immediately after the work is performed: while the product is still new, their hair still looks great, and they haven't had time to get the next thing stuck in their bathroom sink.

If you've supplied a service that will take some time to fully evaluate (SEO optimization, for example), don't ask for feedback right away. You'll want some post-implementation data to have a sense of your impact (as we'll discuss below, actual numbers are essential).

3. Compose a friendly and personalized message

If you're a smaller business with the ability to send individual emails, do so! Your requests should do a few strategic things:

- Begin with something that warms them up—possibly in the way of compliments or a memory you still carry from the work you did for them
- Explain to them that their answers will benefit others who were once in their position, unsure of where to turn for solutions
- Promise them that answering the questions will be a quick process
- Give them an estimate of how long the survey will take (we are all comforted by numbers)

Businesses who deal with a larger volume of customers won't be able to individualize every interaction in this way; but they can still [customize and personalize the emails](#) that [link to their surveys](#). The copy for these emails should still try to incorporate the same four elements listed above.

4. Ask the right questions

Every great testimonial does four things: It offers specifics, quiets objections, tells a before-and-after story, and tells that story in an authentic voice. These are the kinds of testimonials you'll be prompting your clients to write as you construct your survey questions.

Elsewhere, we've compiled [a more comprehensive list of survey questions](#) you may find useful for this exercise. In short, your survey should ask about:

- Your client's biggest hesitations about buying your product or hiring your service
- What specific problems your client was hoping to solve when they bought your product or hired your service
- The features or benefits of your product or service that ultimately caused your client to buy
- How, *specifically*, your client has benefitted from your product or service (ask for numbers here if applicable)
- What specific feature about your product or service they most enjoy
- Who they would recommend your product or service to... *what*, exactly, would they say?

Posing these kinds of questions will ultimately get you a "testimonial template" that you can shape into a story.

5. Edit

Remember, you're looking to craft something like a miniature before-and-after story that offers specific client results. This means you'll be extracting the best parts of your customers' answers and combining them to get the biggest punch.

Don't "spin" your clients' responses. Sure, combine phrases, fix spelling and grammatical errors, add a linking word or two ("and" or "but") so that the testimonial reads like a cohesive statement from start to finish rather than a collection of answers to different questions. But *do not rephrase*. And *certainly* don't take words out of context to make your customers "say" something they never actually said.

Our recommendation? After you've crafted the testimonial from your customer survey material, send the testimonial on to your client and ask them to look at it. Tell them you want to make sure that you've represented their responses fairly and honestly. (They'll appreciate this; we promise).

6. Thank your customers

It should go without saying that if you get negative feedback on a customer satisfaction survey, you should contact that client to rectify their experience immediately.

For those clients who've supplied you with material for excellent testimonials? *Thank* them immediately. If you have a longstanding or valuable relationship with them, consider a handwritten note that thanks them for taking the time to respond and reminds them that they're the reason your business exists.

The point is to keep your business in your clients' minds so they continue to work with you and provide referrals in the future.

More referrals, after all, means more prospective testimonial writers.