

# Foundations—a Pedestal Group Publication

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FOUNDATIONS

## The Pedestal Group

### Testimonials—Let Your Customers Do the Talking

#### Special points of interest:

- *Branding*
- *Finding email addresses*
- *Email Marketing*
- *People Quitting*
- *Survey Results to Help Market*
- *AND MORE!*

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Testimonials can be one of the most compelling items in your marketing kit. Jeff Gitomer says if you tell prospects how wonderful are yourself, you are bragging. If you let your customers do it, it is truth. In a 2009 Nielsen Global Online Consumer Survey, peer recommendations were completely trusted or somewhat trusted by 90% of those participating in the survey.

With this in mind, it is time to get more testimonials! But, didn't you hear about the new Federal Trade Commission (FTC) guidelines on testimonials? They were issued in October to clarify how the FTC will view testimonials. Here, we wanted to address both the new guidelines AND how to effectively use testimonials.

The good news for us is, the rules to use testimonials are now more in line with honest business practice. The guidelines have two main parts: the first is to only use a testimonial if the results can be expected by the majority of your customers. Those weight loss ads where someone lost 60 lbs in 2 weeks? No longer al-

lowed with just a "results not typical" disclaimer. The second part is you can't say something in a testimonial that you couldn't say in your advertising. You cannot publish a testimonial claiming your product induced world peace because it isn't something you could say in your advertising.

One way to help you meet the guidelines is to follow the advice of Colleen Francis of Engage Selling Solutions. She recommends making testimonials CURRENT, COMPELLING and CREDIBLE.

Current is important because people change jobs, suppliers, and all the other variables involved in the testimonial. Having a testimonial posted from a company that has gone out of business could seriously damage your reputation.

Compelling goes without saying. A testimonial that says, "Jim is a great guy" or "Tina is easy to work with" doesn't provide much of a reason to call you. But something specific makes the testimonial compelling. Specific events, results or emotional benefits make people react to a testi-



#### Make testimonials current, compelling and credible

monial. Wouldn't you want to work with "Jim who made the entire process simple to understand and got us exactly what we needed—even though we didn't know what that was!"?

Finally, credibility is key. A very compelling testimonial from Darth Vadar would appeal to a very specific group of people and may not bring you the clientele you desire. In addition, the people you do want as customers may be turned off.

Some smart ways to use testimonials are to answer sales objections or to discuss the emotional benefits of using your product or service. This

## Testimonials (con't)

works for the guidelines because they are typical results that others can expect as well as being compelling subjects. If people are generally skeptical about needing your company, have a customer who started out as a skeptic write a testimonial about what hap-



Testimonials are very compelling—use them everywhere!

pened. Let them talk through how

they felt and then how you were able to turn that around. Giving a person an opportunity to read how someone else was in their shoes is very helpful when choosing a new supplier / vendor / provider.

Talking about the emotional benefits of a product or service is also very compelling. It helps the prospect say, “I want to feel like that too” and call you to discuss it.

The best way to get a testimonial is to offer to draft something for the client. This way you can give some control to the message and have an opportunity to get it done more quickly. If you

explain it is easier to edit than create so you could create it for them, when they edit it will take much less time. Often, the client will just sign off on what you wrote!

Finally, the last tip on testimonials is how to cite them. If you can use the person’s name, position and company, that is the best. If the person wants to remain anonymous, try hard to get permission to use the company name.

Testimonials are extremely important in your marketing kit and a powerful marketing tool. Be sure to get them as often as possible and use them everywhere!

## Branding You May Not Have Considered

### FROM, SUBJECTS AND SIGNATURES— ALL BRANDING OPPORTUNITIES

Branding is extremely important as it communicates your company information to prospects and customers. There are all the typical branding avenues like the way you answer the phone, your website and marketing materials, but there are many minor ways to brand that may have a bigger impact as they are seen more often.

First send yourself an email. What name shows up in the “From” area? This is a great place to make sure your brand is solid. A person’s name is the most compelling but it can also in-

clude your company name or tag line (if it is short). To change it in Outlook, go to Tools and Email Accounts (Outlook 2003) / Account Settings (Outlook 2007) and change your name.

Another opportunity is in the subject of marketing emails. If your email message is doing a good job of educating your prospects, you want the subject to support that effort. Design email subjects with the idea that the recipient will file the email and want to find it later. The subject has to be descriptive enough to be easily found.

The third area to look at is your signature on your email. Again, it is a good idea to look at the email you sent yourself. If one of your messages is

that you are an expert, list links in your signature to those relevant profiles, articles or websites that reinforce your expert status. If you promise customers you are connected, list links showing that. Typically, adding a link to a signature is easy. Just type the word you want to display, highlight it and right click on it. In the menu that appears, select Insert Hyperlink. Enter the address of the site you want to use and click OK.

Always check your branding by reviewing your messages in multiple programs, browsers, etc. There are many ways people can change how it looks so be sure you control the message and the appearance!

## Finding Email Addresses

There is nothing more frustrating than trying to contact someone and not knowing their email address. If you can find someone on line with their company you can sometimes guess at

their address, but that is tricky at best. Enter Google! Once again Google is trying to bring you one-stop shopping. The next time you need an address, check out

<http://sites.google.com/site/emails4corporations/>.

Google is adding new companies all the time so check back often!

## Email Marketing

Most of us use email marketing so knowing what has worked for others can be a big help. Recently, Pinpointe Email Marketing ([www.pinpointe.com](http://www.pinpointe.com)) and Prospect DB Inc. ([www.prospectdb.com](http://www.prospectdb.com)) released a study of variables affecting open rates of emails as well as conversions to business that are very interesting. They sent between 10k and 15k emails in each test to different people advertising a webinar series.

First, they tested the "From" name in a series of emails. If the "From" was a formal name, the open rate was 38% higher than if the email came from a business name (i.e. [info@](mailto:info@) or [service@](mailto:service@), etc.). In addition, if the name field was a common name (Kathy vs. Katherine), the email was another 14% more likely to be opened. That's a 52% difference between a company and a common name! **LESSON:** Always send email from an account tied to a person's name.

Next, they looked at various subject lines. Short subject lines (half as long as the longest tested) were twice as effective as long subject lines. Mark Twain and Blaise Pascal are both attributed to have said, "I apologize that this letter is so long -

I lacked the time to make it short" meaning, making things shorter takes more time. But invest the time! **LESSON:** Edit your subjects as carefully as you edit your email messages.

The third test was on adding a special offer. The test involved a standard email, one with a business-relevant offer (discount or extra service, etc.), and the third was a drawing for an iPod Nano. There was no difference in the number of people opening the email or the number of people clicking through to the website between the standard email and the iPod Nano drawing. However, a relevant business offering increased opens and click throughs by 46%! **LESSON:** Special offers must be related to the business.

The last test involved personalization. We have all heard that people like to hear and see their names, but this put that to the test. Variation one included no personalization of any kind, a generic subject line and sent from a company address. Variation two had the recipient's name in the subject, was sent from a specific person and had the recipient's name in the email (Dear NAME). Personalization resulted in 122% increase in the click through

rates of the email and a 93% increase in closed business!! **LESSON:** Personalization is key.



Finally, the group researched what they called, "Behavioral Targeting". If the recipient previously clicked on one or more links, or opened one or more previous campaigns, the email was resent. The example they used is if you sent a newsletter on Tuesday, you could resend it to the people who didn't open it at a later date.

The first group they varied the name of the person sending the information. In this case, both the formal and common name of the person resulted in an additional 35% of people opening the email. In the second group, they varied the format. Switching the second group to a no-graphic version resulted in 50% of those people opening the email. **LESSON:** Resend to those that don't open your email.

Overall the lessons here are pretty clear. Always send email from a person; Edit subjects thoughtfully to make them meaningful but short; Special offers are great when related to business; Personalization is key; and Resend to those that don't open it.

## People Comfortable Enough to Quit

Many people watching economic indicators look at the job numbers for validation of the recovery. But one number that should concern business owners is the number of people quitting jobs.

According to Steven Davis at the University of Chicago, "There is a century's worth of evidence that bears out this view that quits rise and layoffs fall as the job market improves."

Seems somewhat obvious, but in April the number of people who quit was nearly 2 million. And many of them don't have another job lined up.

Throughout the recession many companies cut back on workers, but not on the amount of work that needed to be done. People held on to jobs that became larger and larger, requiring more and more time away from home but without additional compensation.

Now, according to the Harvard Business Review's May survey, 25% of companies' top performers are planning to leave their current position. By contrast, in 2006, just 10 percent planned to leave their jobs within a year.

The message? If you have great employees, KEEP THEM. If you have openings, you may be able to grab the best and the brightest!

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Putting our clients where they belong.

The Pedestal Group was founded to answer a need we saw in small businesses to have a source for help. That could be how to find and integrate the right technology, how to better hire and manage people, how to set goals and create a strategic plan, or really attack and own your marketplace.

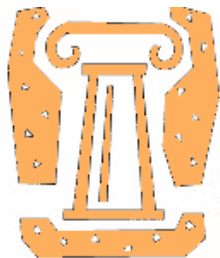
Our team has worked in a variety of industries including staffing, recruiting and executive search, retail, technology, healthcare software / IT, higher education and franchising and the consistent theme we have found it is very hard to see the forest for the trees. In small business, that is compounded by the number of resources available.

Our approach is unique in that we don't just say it is all about the customer, it really is. The Pedestal Group puts our customers on a pedestal – right where they belong. That isn't to say the customer is always right because that is an adversarial relationship – in our case, we always come to agreement. We are always in a partnership with our clients but also remember who's the most important – YOU.

The Pedestal Group - Putting our clients where they belong.

## Survey Results Help You Market

If you Google “lessons learned from the recession” you will be amazed at how many articles you will find! Everyone has a “top 10” or “top 12” lessons learned.



**Survey results can be a great marketing tool**

One survey we found useful for our clients was Robert Half Management Resources survey of over 1,400 Chief Financial Officers. In the survey, they asked, “Which one of the following is the

greatest lesson you have learned from the recession?” The top 5 results are interesting:

27% - Focus more on maintaining employee morale.

22% - Avoid multiple rounds of cost-cutting.

22% - Retain enough staff to maintain productivity

15% - Implement more detailed succession plans

11% - No lessons learned.

When talking with clients, look at ways to position your products or services with these results in mind.

How can you contribute to employee morale? What ways do you help avoid more cost-cutting? Is there a way your product or service will help them either keep or get back to needed staffing levels? How can you assist with succession planning?

Each one of these areas can be used in your marketing to help customers see the timely value of what you offer. Sharing these results with prospects can get them talking about their own lessons learned. While 11% said there were no lessons learned, we don't believe that to be the case. Everyone learned something over the last two years and now it is your job to capitalize on it!