

Newsletter # 16: You're the Best! Now Prove It! March 4, 2009

These days, most of us have to work harder than ever to gain new clients and sell more products or services. But how do we convince prospects to choose us? It's natural to start boasting, "Because we're the best!" Yeah, right -- says who?

Recently I heard Lisa Dennis, president of Boston-based *Knowledge Associates*, give a presentation to the Association for Accounting Marketing about crafting a compelling value proposition. One point that she made resonated with me: in their attempt to gain a competitive edge, many companies make either generic claims such as "we're one of the best in our field," or unsubstantiated hyperbole, "we're number one." As a researcher who frequently does competitive analysis, I can attest to how common this is, especially on company websites.

Claims such as "best" or "number one" are used so often – and by competitors in the same field – that they have lost meaning. Is it any wonder that prospective customers are unimpressed, or worse, turned off?

You can win back your credibility by substantiating your claims if you do it believably and honestly. How you set yourself apart from your competition must be, first, ***meaningful*** (i.e., an important criteria for prospects) and second, ***believable*** (you must have proof).

Here are 5 ways to prove your "we're the best!" claim:

1) Outside experts

Lucky you if there is an objective authority in your field which regularly ranks companies and you are ranked # 1 this year! The more widely-accepted this authority is – by both your peers and your customers – the better.

Tip: Even if your prospects have never heard of this ranking, if the rating criteria is important and relevant to them, play it up. If it's ***not*** important to them, by all means include it on your website and literature, but don't give it top billing.

2) Special credentials

If you or your company have a unique expertise or certification that sets you apart, this certainly can give credence to your claims, as long as prospects see it as relevant to their needs.

Lacking an industry-accepted authority, there is nothing wrong with doing your own survey. Whom to poll depends on the criteria you are looking at:

3) A random sample of target customers

This is most suitable for assessing company image or awareness versus your competitors. In most cases, you will want a fairly large sample to give weight to the results.

4) Your current customers

Surveying your customers is ideal for customer service, product or service quality assessments. You can also obtain valuable testimonials this way.

5) Your peers

Similar to outside expert opinion, your peers can judge you on special technical competencies or other criteria that valued within your industry.

Tips

- In most cases, having an objective third party conduct the research brings much more credibility to the results. Depending on the situation, you may or may not wish to have your company identified as the one sponsoring the research.
- Quantitative substantiation is almost always more impressive than qualitative (i.e., being ranked # 1 in customer service by a sample of 500 is more impressive than by a sample of 10).
- There are exceptions, however. Testimonials by a few very well-known customers can carry a lot of weight. So can endorsements by respected experts. Actual quotations, directly attributed to an individual (real name, not just a title), are essential in these cases.
- It goes without saying that all your communications should include information on how the documentation was obtained.

Just as you evaluate the credentials of vendors and suppliers before you buy, so do your prospective customers. **Do your claims stand up to scrutiny?**