

HOWTO...

use customer success stories

Objective

Success story, case study, customer testimonial – whatever you call them they are a valuable sales and marketing tool. This HOWTO... guide tells you how to create effective success stories: how to decide which success stories you need, how to gather the information, and how to structure the story. First of all, what are success stories for?

The function of a success story

A good success story can really work for you. It can persuade an unwilling prospect that you are worth an appointment, it can convince a buyer that they really do need to take action, it can generate the confidence needed to get you on the shortlist, it can even help your sponsor persuade key decision makers to put the order your way. So good success stories are sales tools, they must impact the buying decision. How will you decide which success stories you need?

The perfect set

There is no such thing as the perfect set of success stories – that's like the perfect golf swing, no sooner have you got it than you've lost it (unless you happen to be Tiger Woods, in which case what are you doing reading this?).

Each success story is a tool to do a particular job. Maybe you are well known as a great PC supplier, but customers do not realise you also sell fantastic servers? You need success stories about your server range. Perhaps there is a perception in the market that your products are high-priced? A success story with a customer saying "I thought they were way too pricey for us, but when I worked through the business case I could see that their lower operating costs made them more economical than the competition" will help combat sticker shock.

Success stories can be used to influence the buying process. Maybe you know that for your product to shine the customer must undertake a thorough evaluation, not just take a cursory look at the specification. A success story saying "we found it was essential to have a full scale trial, and xyz's product came out top" can be used to influence the customers' buying process. Do you have points of differentiation that are hard to get across? You need a success story quoting a customer who says something like: "we knew they offered great handsets,

but we had not realised how useful their radio knowledge would be in helping us get our network running properly, they showed us how we could reduce our network costs".

Create a list of the success stories you need. If you are not sure, ask your salespeople about the barriers they face when selling, what are the messages they find hard to get across to prospective customers? Those are the areas to target your success stories. Then, all you need are the right customer successes to write about – how will you find those?

Finding successful customers

A fundamental strength of the success story is that it is not about you, it is about one of your customers. So clearly, you should wait for the end of a project, contact the customer, ask them if they think it has been successful, and if they say "yes", ask them to provide a success story. Right? Wrong!

The time to ask for the success story is when the customer has just signed. This is a time of euphoria: the customer has made a big decision, they have chosen you, they expect you to be successful, they have a big stake in the success of this project. Consequently they will be pleased to hear that you are so confident of a successful outcome that you are seeking agreement to a success story now. In fact, thanks to the professionalism of your salespeople you probably already know the business benefits the customer expects to achieve. If it matches one of your target stories then write the first draft now, in readiness for the success. If you gain agreement to a success story at this stage it will be easy to go back at the end of the project and finalise the story.

What should you write? That deserves a **HOWTO...** guide all of its own, so see the companion guide: **HOWTO... write a success story.**

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What now?

Start by writing the list of success stories you need, then pick a likely customer and get started. Once you have your first success story it can start working for you straight away. Get it out to salespeople and tell them what it is designed to do. As

you assemble your full set earlier stories will go out of date, so keep a rolling programme of renewal. And don't forget the customers that have supported you with success stories. They are now part of an elite group, make sure they feel that way, and keep in touch because they will be the source of future sales and more success stories.

HOWTO... checklist

Each success story is a tool to do a particular job. Which stories do you need?

Name of product or service:

Success stories needed to:	Yes/No	Detail
Demonstrate the business value that you can bring		Value propositions: 1) 2) 3)
Explain the importance of your differentiators		Differentiator: 1) 2) 3)
Bring out features and benefits that are not readily apparent		Feature/benefit: 1) 2) 3)
Provide evidence of excellent customer service, e.g. fast delivery, in operation quickly, effective user training, good in-service support		Service feature: 1) 2) 3)
Illustrate new markets for your offering		New markets: 1) 2) 3)
Show that you offer a full range of services, e.g. design, configuration, project management, performance tuning		Services: 1) 2) 3)
Counter common objections such as price		Objections: 1) 2) 3)
Combat perceived weaknesses		Weakness: 1) 2) 3)
Provide reasons for customers to agree to that first meeting		Reasons: 1) 2) 3)
Influence the customer's buying process in a way that favours your offering		Buying process changes: 1) 2) 3)

What do you think? If you have comments on this **HOWTO... sales and marketing** guide, or new ideas, questions, or requests for new guides then email us on HOWTO@solutionsforsales.com, or go to www.solutionsforsales.com