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Health Copywriting Tactics

For A Tough Economy

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Intro

There are plenty of reports, articles and more, providing suggestions for how to run your business and market your products during a recession.

Now, more than ever, tactical marketing is critical for your company's health. As many veteran marketers have pointed out, many businesses survive and even thrive during recessions due to strategic and often aggressive marketing.

While this report does touch on marketing, it gets even more specific: It offers several ideas for how to tone your copywriting and where to use it to make the most of your marketing in the current economy.

On top of this, I offer a couple significant reasons to be optimistic as a company selling health products. And not only are these characteristics I note reasons for optimism, they are also great angles for positioning your products in this current climate.

Certainly times are tough right now and probably they're going to get tougher. People are losing their jobs, their homes, and the value of their stocks – everyone is watching their expenses like hawks. While the health market is not going to crash, it will soften in areas as it already is doing.

It's going to take strategic thinking to weather this storm.

As a health copywriter, I've given a lot of thought to how your customers are thinking as they weigh their purchases, track expenses and reconfigure their lives in such an uncertain climate. And I've also thought hard about what kinds of copy and what formats would be most effective in reaching them.

Some of the suggestions included here may be old hat, but it can't hurt to go over the basics in times like these.

In any case, I hope the following will help you keep your business going strong during these tough times . . . and maybe even flourishing.

I welcome any feedback you'd like to share with me on this report. Drop me an email at clac@metrocast.net with any questions or comments on this report. I'd also be happy to discuss any current projects you might need copywriting for.

And for more ideas on health copywriting, check out my website www.healthwriterclachar.com.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sarah Clachar

First, 2 Ways to Position Your Health Product In A Recession

As a company in the health industry, you've got a couple reasons to keep your fears in check for the upcoming months. Apply these angles to positioning your products and you might even start to feel optimistic.

Optimism-Inspiring Fact #1:

Consumers Do Not See Health Products As Luxury Items But As Necessities

You're in the health industry which, by all accounts, is not as sensitive to these economic downturns as other industries. Researchers from the Hartman Group, a Seattle-based market research group that focuses on LOHAS¹ consumers, were surprised with what they saw and heard during 2001's economic slump. Organic food purchase rates continued to grow at a steady pace. This was despite the fact that client after client predicted a sharp decline because "organics was a luxury item".

When Hartman Group researchers asked consumers why they continued to purchase these "luxury" items even though their wallets were shrinking, consumers explained that organics and other products associated with health were not considered luxury items at all. They were considered essential because they had to do with maintaining health.

Even more interesting, people explained their continued purchase of organic food as a way of *exercising a bit of control in their life when all else seemed chaotic and over their head.*²

As more people take the tenets of preventative medicine to heart – as more people lock on to its benefits – health products become essentials – not frills.

But even more to the heart of the matter, when the world seems to be spinning out of control, people look for areas in their life where they can anchor themselves. And what better place than inside a strong, healthy body with a sharp mind to boot?

Optimism-Inspiring Fact #2:

When Times Get Tough, People Tend to Focus On Homey Comforts

¹ LOHAS is an acronym that stands for Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability that is used to describe a growing market segment that uses health and sustainability as major criteria in their lifestyle – and purchasing – decisions. This market is estimated to be worth about \$209 billion in goods and services and is comprised of about 19% of the US adult population.

² Interview with Laurie Demeritt, Hartman Group 3/08

The other interesting behavior observed by marketing expert Darrin Duber-Smith, President of Green Marketing, Inc. in Colorado, is that people tend to nest more when times are tough economically.³ People tend to focus on fixing up their home, treating themselves to simple comforts like a good meal or a specially-scented bath. When people cannot go on those big vacations or spring for that new car, they find smaller, simpler ways to indulge themselves.

And health products – nutritious ingredients, special personal care products, a new cookbook on heart healthy meals – hit the spot with a double whammy. They provide this feeling of comfort while making you feel like you're making a smart move. No guilt in this indulgence – quite the opposite; you feel good in many dimensions.

Consider how your company provides guilt-free treats, balms for the current stress your prospects are feeling. Better yet, position your product as a smart treat – something that they will reap the benefits from in the future on top of the immediate pleasure it brings them.

Additionally, people look to strengthening their support network around them – friends and family. Health marketing already capitalizes on these themes, so it shouldn't be too hard to underscore them a bit as you position your products for prospects feeling anxious about what's to come.

Now let's get into the nitty gritty – ways to use copy to keep your customers close during these tough economic times . . .



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Tip #1

Emphasize And Explain Your Product's Value

There's a temptation to slash prices in order to corral in the growing number of bargain shoppers. However, this can be self-defeating – making you work harder to keep your revenue up.

And as a longtime frugal consumer, subscriber to many a frugal newsletters and surrounded by frugal friends, I know that most people seeking bargains balance out price with quality. Smart shoppers, who are growing in numbers, don't want the hassle of something that breaks, falls short, or simply doesn't work.

³ Interview Darrin Duber-Smith 1/08

For example, I recently purchased a remote-controlled helicopter and a digital video camera from a bargain-basement retailer. They both seemed like great deals. Yet each time I was disappointed – the price definitely reflected the quality. So I had to go through the hassle and expense of returning them.

And guess what - since this experience, the electronics purchases I've made were based more on an assurance of quality and service than simply the bottom line price. While I continue to bargain-hunt, this recent experience has inspired me to modify my criteria.

Many shoppers like me have learned the meaning of the old adage “pennywise and pound-foolish”.

Make your prospects feel like they won't experience these costs down the road, and you'll be making a sale.

So tangibly – how can you tap into the “pound-wise” radar shoppers are wearing?

If you are a supplement manufacturer, explain why your product is valuable by emphasizing the quality of ingredients, the care you use in manufacturing, etc. Use studies produced by Consumer Labs and testimonials from experts to underscore the difficulty in finding good solid products and distinguish your product from the examples that have fallen short.

For example, if you are selling a heart health supplement for \$39.99 - \$10.00 more than your competitors – don't automatically bring the price down. Instead discuss how you follow Good Manufacturing Protocols (GMPs), pre-testing all ingredients and more. How you visit your suppliers of organic materials to insure that the certification is not just paperwork, but based on real organic practices. Or even discuss how you don't skimp – you put a full 100 milligrams of a key ingredient when other products on the market squeak by with 70.

If it's an information product you're selling, discuss the level of research that went into it: How many researchers were working on this, what experts were involved, how long it took to put the book together, how you made sure you tapped into the latest findings – or dug down and uncovered long-forgotten gems of health information. Note how a team of experts vetted the book or newsletter, insuring that it is reliable information.

Emphasize how you've taken the time to add extra ways to access the information – menu plans, easy-to-use charts and guides that makes this book useable in multiple ways.

By providing *details* of the work, experience, quality materials, and finely-tuned techniques that went into creating your product, you explain its value and distinguish it.

And if you're an ingredient supplier, emphasize the technical support you offer. Do you help customers adjust their formulations for new ingredients? Do you offer excellent independent research that supports the effectiveness of your ingredients? What kind of oversight does your company employ to insure high quality and safe ingredients? Do you provide current news on new applications for old ingredients or new ingredients to boost old formulations?

And to tell you the truth, don't worry if what you highlight is common practice in the industry. *If no one else is discussing these specific qualities of the product, that's their loss.* If a competitor has decided to simply keep the price down to keep sales up rather than explaining the goods that you get for the price, that's their negligence.

All you are doing is making it clear to the consumer that their money is well spent. That what you are providing them for their ever-dearer money is worth what they are paying, if not more.

But watch out! Don't get lost in discussing the specific features listed above.

Keep your copy focused around the *invaluable benefits* of the product: A joint product that frees up your day from that nagging, low-grade pain that drains you of energy to get chores done, visit a friend, etc. Or that healthy'n'quick cookbook that saves money formerly spent on take-out while getting you to your goal of slimming down. Show them how your product will change their lives.

By sticking with these larger benefits in your copy, you make the product even more valuable. *The benefits – not the features - are the reasons why people buy things.* And when you tap into the emotions associated with this benefit – fear, frustration, excitement, hope – you are triggering the key element in making a sale.

Help your prospect out by letting them know that your product will move them closer to their goals or farther away from what they fear or hate.

Tip # 2 **Put The Cost In Context**

Another angle of increasing your product's value is by putting it's cost in the context of life. It's hard to assess the value of an orange sitting on your kitchen table. But when you start thinking of it in terms of how eating it might help keep

that cold at bay and allow you to get some extra work done this afternoon, or that that juiciness will give you that extra burst of energy, it starts to be more than an orange.

And jeez, if you put that orange with a price tag of 30 cents next to a Powerbar for \$1.40 or that magazine you picked up on the checkout line for \$3, it starts to look like really good value for your money.

Do this in your copy.

As you progress to the offer in your copy, compare your product's price to the costs it alleviates – doctor's bills avoided or less energy to compete in the workplace.

Make it as specific and vivid as possible. One sales letter promoting a book on alternative ways to treat cancer noted that many of the non-traditional therapies described in the book cost in the \$20,000 range while the average cost for conventional cancer treatments were \$500,000 and up. Now that potential savings of \$480,000 puts the \$19.99 price of the book in context – doesn't it?

After you've made this product valuable compared to alternative realities, break it down and hold it up against other mundane costs.

Diminish the price by noting that the \$1.10 you spend a day on this supplement is the same price as that candy bar you sneak in each afternoon or the cost of one takeout Chinese eggroll that does you no good. And even better, unlike these other expenses, this one is going to bring you valuable returns – not more problems.

Tip #3

Care For Your Long-term Customers Like They Are Solid Gold (Which They Are)

As any marketer knows, it costs more money to get new customers than to retain old ones. In fact, many marketers settle for losing money on new customer acquisition because they understand that the real profit is in keeping those customers over time. According to Ken Burke in his *Target Marketing* article, "Smoothing a Bumpy Ride; How to Build Loyalty In A Maturing Market," the average order size for loyal buyers is higher by 10% on average than that of a new customer. Not to mention that they place orders about 200% more often.

Inarguably, building loyal, long-term customers is invaluable.

And from the customer point of view, they don't want to try a new product or company right now! They're looking to stay with the tried and true, no-risk company – you. Give them every reason to continue to feel this way.

So what goes into customer retention?

First of all make sure your customers are satisfied with the product when they get it. In other words, do not sell them something with your copy that you cannot deliver on. Sure, you may get a higher number of initial sales, but consider the return rate when customers feel that they've been sold empty promises. And even worse, consider that now you've lost a potential lifetime customer – worth 100's or even 1000's of dollars more than that initial sale. (Not to mention the word-of-mouth advertising you've lost). So the first step to customer retention is delivering the goods you promised.

And from a copy perspective, that means making a persuasive argument for how valuable your product is without drifting into hype.

Secondly, do everything you can to make your customer service the best it can be. This is master copywriter and marketer, Bob Bly's top recommendation for a troubling economy: Find ways to accommodate your customers. Make the process of purchasing from you easy and pain-free. And providing follow-up service and support is also a big selling point (I go back to some of my electronics purchase problems).

While much of the work in this area resides outside of the copywriting sphere, there are some strategic ways you can use good copy to help on this front.

How much time and attention go into your auto-response messages after a purchase – or into the inserts you send in a new customer package? These two places are important, and often overlooked, opportunities for building customer loyalty and insuring that the whole purchasing experience ends in a SATISFIED CUSTOMER.

First off, express your gratitude for their patronage and *make it feel personal*. Clearly the customer felt good enough about your company and product to purchase from you. Keep the rapport going!

Then make them feel like they're not abandoned with their purchase. Give very clear directions for how to reach customer service should they need it.

But go further – include some tips on how to make the best use of the product. If it's a green drink mix, how about a smoothie recipe to go with it? If it's a book on organic gardening – how about a quick tip sheet on the easiest plants to start with or even a complementary seed pack.

If it's an e-commerce purchase, provide suggestions that bring them back to your site ASAP. Keep capitalizing on this good vibe. If they just purchased an exercise video, direct them to a forum of customers who are using this video and other products to lose weight and invite them to join as a way of finding support and motivation.

And don't neglect the backend potential. Include some recommendations of complementary products and offer a discount if they purchase within a certain time period.

Nick Usborne, master web copywriter and author of *Million Dollar Secrets to Online Copywriting*, points out that too often this prime opportunity for acquiring a long term customer is lost because the immediate follow-up is done in a perfunctory manner by someone in IT who suddenly realizes some text is needed for the autoresponder email.

Usborne suggests: *Use a copywriter and make the best of this new relationship!*

Tip #4

Provide Free And Useful Advice

Now, more than ever, people are looking for free tips on how to live better. It's the economy meets DIY. And if there's an area where people especially cherish accessing good advice, it's in the area of health. In fact when I worked with public librarians, I was surprised to find out that health was the number one topic for reference questions.

Today people realize how important it is to be active rather than passive health consumers. Doctors are more like consultants and preventative medicine is no longer a concept on the margins. Led by baby boomers, people have less faith in medicine to pull them out of bad health and instead are seeking ways to fix things themselves or prevent them from happening altogether.

When you provide good, credible advice that people can use, you're supporting them in this endeavor they care so much about. But you're doing more. You're communicating to people that you care about their well-being. I mentioned a couple ways to provide these information nuggets in immediate customer follow-up – package inserts and emails. Here are some other places:

Use this up front in your initial sales overture by offering good information in your copy. Bring in good research and add it to the sales package as a lift note or a sidebar.

In your next magalog advertising a book, make sure you include a few solid tips along with the tantalizing fascinations.

If you have a free email newsletter that goes out, make sure you're offering some good tips in there – home remedies, latest research on vision support, tasty recipes. Even include a recipe or a money-saving tip in your sales copy.

As I mentioned above, seize the opportunity of gaining a new customer to cement the relationship. Send a welcome kit with some free information products related to your product. Surprise your customers with your generous bonuses or promise them as premiums in your initial sales copy.

Whatever advice you provide, *make sure it's not fluff.*

Consumers are getting inundated by information as marketers apply the techniques I'm describing here. People still want it but they are getting more intolerant of time-wasters. Think hard about what is really useful to people, what people don't hear enough about, what is new and exciting – essentially what can really add value to their lives and make your company look valuable as well.

And please, make sure it's comprehensible to the average reader.

Not only are you building a sense of trust, a rapport with your customers, you're also sparking an instinct in people to reciprocate. Robert Cialdini, sociologist and author of marketing classic, *Influence*, spent much time documenting how people almost felt compelled to reciprocate if offered something gratis. That feeling of indebtedness can go a long way to making your company the first place people look when they next need to purchase something.

Tip #5 **Give Them A Great Guarantee**

Maureen O'Neill-Davis, Director of Marketing for Sportsnutrition.com told me how she was concerned about people getting more conservative in their buying habits with the economic downturn.

Now risk is inherent in any purchase. And it becomes even more pronounced to your prospect when the product isn't right there in their hand or on the store shelf as is the case with direct response advertising and e-commerce.

You can minimize the risk in two ways: by providing samples or by offering a generous guarantee.

Samples work extremely well for convincing consumers that a product does the job – but they are costly and they don't work for every product. A guarantee has costs as well, but many marketers have found that they are worth the cost since they increase sales so effectively.

Not only does a good guarantee reduce the feeling of risk that people feel in purchasing your product, but it also boosts your credibility. Prospects think, “Hmm, if she’s willing to offer that kind of a guarantee, she must really think it works.”

Test different guarantees to see which works best in the balance of increasing sales without losing too much on returns. But I *guarantee* that by providing a generous one, it will allow more of these increasingly risk-averse customers to decide to purchase.

Tip #6

Use Cyberspace

According to Internet Retailer’s 2007 report the *Top 500 Guide; Profiles and Statistics of America’s 500 Largest Retail Web Sites Ranked by Annual Sales*, the Internet has been the fastest growing retail sales channel for more than a decade, routinely generating annual growth of 25% while total retail sales have been growing 5-6% each year. For 2006, online sales reached \$136.2 billion.

More and more people are shopping online – it’s convenient, easy to compare prices, easy to research products and – drum roll – it even saves on gas.

And for those of you targeting older shoppers, don’t believe the stereotypes. Seniors over 65 are one of the largest growing sectors of online shoppers according to Jupiter Research. And get this, 82% of them go online to search for health and wellness information! (ThirdAge Inc.)

And as postal rates go up, the internet is increasingly an appealing place to market. In fact, many direct mailers test components of their direct mail packages – headlines, offers, price points - online where it’s cheaper, before they spend money on the more expensive print rollout.

However, online marketing is not a simple mirror of offline advertising. Nick Osborne, noted web copywriter, points out that most online shoppers are very task-oriented. They’ve googled a product they are looking for and are seeking to efficiently get the information they need on it and find a good place to purchase it. This is both good for marketers – you’re not knocking on their door as you do with mail packages, they’re knocking on your door – and a challenge.

You see, on the internet, the challenge is how to pinpoint target that prospect who wants your product – it means another level of fine-tuning your copy and refining the whole shopping process to go as smoothly as possible.

In fact, the *Internet Retailer* report also points out that the most successful online businesses are the ones that are niche-marketing, search-savvy and using analytics to really hone their retail sites into nimble shops that jump just the right way into your prospect's field of vision.

By working hard on your site's SEO, you can insure that you're planting yourself right in the center of the traffic you want.

And once they get to your site, keep working to keep them. Bryan Eisenberg, online conversion rate guru, advises in his article "3 Steps to Recession-Proof Your Online Marketing", that now, when it's economically-tough, is the time to really step up your website's optimization. Use your website analytics to pay keen attention to what shoppers are doing and adjust accordingly. Invest in good copy and good technology that makes shopping easy and satisfying for your customers.

Finally, take advantage of the other free advertising the web offers – articles marketing and social marketing. Find ways to make your website more interactive and content-rich. Locate places off your website for this content and forums to interact with your prospects outside of your home turf.

But as Scott Clark noted in his January blog post, "Marketing During a Recession? Get the Wind at Your Back", be careful with the tone of your copy. Keep your message authentic and give it a strong anchor – a compelling story or idea that it's centered around – that makes your message stick and makes it easier to re-tell to others.

Tip #7 **Keep it Relevant**

As postal rates rise, many marketers are reconsidering expensive mailers like magalogs and looking for lighter alternatives. Which brings up the age-old debate of is long copy or short copy better.

Test after test reveals that . . . it just depends. And to some extent you have to just test things yourself to see what is right for your product and market.

But one truth can be offered independent of any testing – keep it relevant. Long or short, the best copy is copy that keeps your prospect's attention. Give your prospects copy that speaks to their concerns, answers their questions, counters their objections and makes a clear offer with an unmistakable call to action.

This is where good listening and good editing comes in. Take time up front to get to know your market. Tap into customer service calls, do a few surveys, talk to

your neighbor. Go to online forums pertinent to your product and just see what people are talking about and how they are speaking.

Look at your competitors' advertising – what's working? What's tapped into that market consciousness – and what's missed the boat?

Do a good job painting a clear picture of who you're addressing with your copy and how best to connect with them.

Then later, bring that back to the editing process. Read your copy with a "Who cares?" question after each sentence. Make sure that everything you have in there is worth mentioning. Read it out loud to spot places where you're tripped up. Read it to your 8-year old and make sure that their attention doesn't stray because you've gotten dull.

Repetition can help copy but too much can kill it. Identify where it underscores your point and when it gets annoying.

And then use testing to continue to refine it and make sure that it *is* relevant.

Note: Also, as you work to economize on mailings, keep the copywriter engaged at the designing stage. Great copy can be smushed easily when poor design undermines it.

Tip #8 **Go Direct . . .**

Shift as much of your advertising to direct response advertising, where you can really measure the response and adjust accordingly.

Here's an example of what it can do for your business: Bob Myhal from Musclemaster.com, an online sports nutrition company, reports that by carefully monitoring their email response rates, they've figured out exactly how much a given customer brings in, specific to product category, and consequently how much they can afford to advertise for new customer acquisition.

Myhal also reports that he's been able to boost his website conversion rates to 3.5-6.5%, high for the sports nutrition business. By testing and adding or subtracting components, Myhal and his team have honed their websites down to *what works for customers*.⁴

Rather than guesswork, Myhal and other direct response marketers are actually seeing what consumers respond to and then applying that to their marketing.

⁴ Interview with Bob Myhal, 4/08

As a copywriter, I value direct response for the feedback it gives me on writing good copy. Remember, the best advertising is when you can really get into your prospect's head and speak to what they are interested in – no, passionate about. Direct response advertising allows you a peek into their head and get a sense of what moves them to purchase or, on the other hand, what moves them to toss your package in the recycling or to click away.

Tip #9 **Use Freelance Talent**

Finally, make use of outsourcing to keep your marketing leaner. I applaud companies that provide their employees with good benefits and security. Not only is it good for employees, it's good business. Some of the strongest companies are the ones that invest in their most valuable assets – the people who work there.

But many businesses cannot afford a fulltime copywriter or copywriting team. Or perhaps your copywriters already have full schedules and you have a few new promotions you want to add to your marketing agenda. (Like I mentioned before, now is a good time to really step up the marketing)

In this case freelance talent can be a boon. No overhead costs, no extra desk needed and only there for the specific project.

It's a great way to test new approaches and new voices as well – to gain another perspective in the room.



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Special Bonus: **Top 6 Credibility Boosters For Health Products**

Tough times makes for tough consumers: Skeptical, savvy, comparison-shoppers who are not going to open their wallets without some careful thought. To make sure your product is one of the few that make it in their shopping baskets, you need to give yourself credibility in all your communications.

Here's a few credibility boosting tips excerpted from my ebook [*Writing Irresistible Copy for Nutritional Supplements*](#), edited by Bob Bly. Incorporate them into your copy and strengthen your sales.

Credibility Booster #1 The science behind your product

The best thing is when you have run tests specifically on your product. Nothing can beat those product-specific clinical trials for really giving a clear picture on your product's effectiveness.

Anthony Almada, President and Chief Science Officer of sports nutrition think tank, Imaginutrition, contends that every sports nutrition company that has been around for about 5 years, should be able to fund good, third-party clinical testing on at least one of their products each year. Not only does it make sure that your product really works, but it provides inestimable credibility when you present your product to consumers.

But even if you haven't done testing, there are still reams of great research available on different ingredients. Al Powers, President of NOW Health Group pointed out in an interview posted at Nutraingredients.com, "There's a lot of good science out there that supports natural products. When you can support natural products with sound science, people are more willing to be patient to see results. When there's no science, you're right back to the old days of cause and effect."

He's right. There is a lot of good research on nutrition and botanicals. Take the time to really do some digging. And then make sure you cite your sources specifically. The public is well-beyond "Scientists say . . ." Tell them which scientists, where, when, published where. It makes your science more credible. And make sure the data refers to the specifics of your product: dosage, sub-species, form, etc.

Also, make good use of health claims approved by the FDA. Too few supplement manufacturers use of these claims which allow you to make a more direct connection between a supplement and a disease.

Credibility Booster #2 Who stands behind your product?

Do you have a doctor or chiropractor that has recommended your product for years to his patients? Is your book authored by a fitness guru? Highlight the experts who stand behind your product.

FRS Healthy Energy products put miles between themselves and their competitors because Lance Armstrong, 7-time Tour de France champion, advocates their product. I've read blog postings by cyclists who acknowledge that while they are a little skeptical about energy products, they're willing to try this one since "Lance uses it".

But it's not good enough to just attach a name to your product. Explain who the expert is. Find ways to highlight their credentials. If they had some initial skepticism about the product and then were pleasantly surprised, note it. If they

have a dramatic story of how their product helped change their own lives, note that as well.

And even if you don't have an expert on hand, if you use your product, let people know about it. One of my clients initially promoted his heart health product using stock photos of lab scientists. His company was small and he was struggling to create a picture of being a well-established, reliable company.

Concerned that savvy consumers would be able to see through the stock photos, I suggested instead that we confront the small company issue head-on.

So we shifted his emphasis to his own family history of heart disease and his personal journey to find some protection for himself from this unwanted heritage. This change added two layers of credibility: First, he didn't have to pretend to be something that he was not. And two, he communicated that he was right there in his prospects' shoes. What better expert than someone who knew intimately what's at stake and was willing to bank his own life on the product's success?

Credibility Booster #3 It's in the News

While we could spend weeks debating about whether the media is biased or not, instinctively, consumers trust what is splashed across headlines or discussed on the 6 o'clock news.

So if a key ingredient in your product or your product itself gets some coverage, run with it. Make clear references to the story in your copy with quotes, or even an excerpt used as a sidebar. And don't forget the visuals. If you can paste a copy of the cover of Time or even the stylized title of a well-known media source in your copy, it draws the eye and underscores the idea that this is a product with credentials.

Credibility Booster #4 Case Histories and Testimonials

The Hartman group found an interesting trend when surveying customers on how they chose natural health products. Forty-eight percent of respondents said that they use friends and relatives as an information source for finding health products. (This is just behind the 57% of respondents who refer to their doctor.)

"From qualitative research," reports the Hartman Group in the article, "The Role of Scientific Evidence and the Wellness Consumer", "We've learned that social networks truly influence how consumers look at being well and being ill. They cite a high level of influence from those they live with."

People like to know that someone like them has tried a product and liked it. Testimonials bring these experiences into your marketing.

But if you are going to include case studies or testimonials, there are a few things you can do to insure that they feel solid and real – almost as if they were your customer’s best friend sitting across from them:

1. Provide full names when appropriate and as specific a location as possible i.e. Mary Stains from Roseville, AK.
2. Do not edit to improve grammar or vocabulary. Few of us talk like a college professor, so don’t try to transform your supporter’s language either.
3. Keep in qualified testimonials. If someone writes in to say that it took a while for your supplement to work or that they were daunted by the idea of reading another weight-loss book, keep that in. If your prospects see that other people had doubts, maybe ones like their own, it helps to see that those reservations were overcome by the product.
4. Use testimonials that include details. What’s more convincing: “I used your recipes to cook dinner for my Aunt Stacy who has diabetes and she loved the food and wanted a copy of the book herself!” vs. “An excellent book for diabetics!”

Credibility Booster #5 Seeing Is Believing

Bob Bly worked on a package once for an eye health supplement. Included in the package was an eye-chart with the instructions to test your eyes upon right then and there and mark the lowest line you could get to. After using the supplements for two months, the customer was instructed, test yourself again and note the improvement.⁵

Samples are the best, but if you can’t provide samples, find other ways to encourage your prospects to measure and quantify the effects of the supplement. Nothing beats the before and after pictures of diet aids and that’s for the simple truth that people see the change with their own eyes.

If it’s an exercise book, provide a personal diary that the customer can use to note their progression and monitor results. Or how about photographs of the gross stuff that remains in a water distiller after the water is distilled.

Find ways to engage your prospects firsthand in assessing your product. Provide direction on where to look to measure the effectiveness of what you’re selling that will help them feel confidence in their purchase.

Credibility Booster #6 (Legendary Copywriter Joe Sugarman’s Favorite) Admit Your Shortcomings And Control Perception Of Them

⁵ Interview Bob Bly 7/07

Now this may be a little tough to swallow. The last thing you want to do is admit that your product has a problem. Or that it has something about it that your prospect may not like too much.

But remember what I said earlier, this is a skeptical and savvy audience. With the easy access to information, people can dig up a lot on your product.

Why not be the one to acknowledge a shortcoming and control the way your prospect perceives it?

For example, I recently wrote a promotion for an energy product that had a small amount of caffeine in it. Initially, the company made no mention of the caffeine in its product except in small print on the packaging. However, I could see from reading through online discussion boards, that most people looking for a healthy alternative to the over-caffeinated energy drinks that have flooded the market were wondering about the caffeine in this product.

It was important that the small amount of caffeine didn't become the deciding factor in whether someone bought the product or not, since there was so much good stuff in the product itself and the caffeine played a very small role in the energy boost.

So instead of ignoring it, I brought the caffeine content up in the copy, explained how minimal the amount was compared to a cup of coffee or any other energy product and then went on to explain how it worked in the overall formulation.

Certainly, there will be some prospects who decide not to use it anyways because they absolutely will not tolerate any caffeine in their diet. But the majority of prospects interested in this product were looking for something that could help them decrease their already high caffeine consumption.

Instead of letting them categorize it as just another caffeinated energy product trying to come across as healthy, we instead controlled the perception of the product and distinguished it from the other products with caffeine.

But even better, we also underscored this company's credibility. In some discussion boards it had come across as a company trying to hide its caffeine content. This bit of copy underscored that the company was transparent and trustworthy.

A Final Thought:

People are skeptical. They have questions. And when the money is tight, those questions become fiercer and the alarm bells ring louder.

Think through the objections, the questions, the doubts that your prospects are having and counter them, answer them and mollify them in your copy.

When you can answer their questions in your copy, you further their perception that you understand them and you instill confidence in them that they are making the right decision by spending their money with you.

When you can do this, you move your prospect ever more smoothly down the path to the final sale.



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If you have any comments or questions with regards to this report, please contact me. I'd like to hear from you.

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