

What Makes an Effective Testimonial?



Knowing how to leverage and utilize a great client or customer review is great, but to do so, you must be able to identify what makes a review effective and worthy of promotion. Read the following examples from a real assisted living community website (the name has been changed) and see which testimonial you find more compelling.

“Moving to a new home is scary but the staff at Shady Pines made me feel right at home. Everyone is so nice. It’s easy to fit right in.”

“Their training programs provided me with all the necessary tools to ensure the best care was given to the residents.”

One may argue that the second testimonial is more effective because it provides credibility to the assisted living community by referencing the training programs, thus providing confidence that you or your loved one will receive proper care at “Shady Pines”. Good point, though not necessarily the better testimonial. [Cognitive dissonance](#) is a theory that can be used to help identify an effective testimonial or review to determine whether it is worth promoting.

Simply explained, cognitive dissonance indicates that humans experience discomfort when a belief or attitude is inconsistent in any given situation, and that when this discomfort or dissonance occurs, people strive to make the conflicting situation consistent with their beliefs or attitude by reducing dissonance using the following methods; acquiring new information, lessening their belief or attitude to decrease the dissonance, or changing their belief or attitude all together. The latter is very difficult and seldom accomplished, as most attitudes and beliefs are deeply engrained.

In the case of the first testimonial, dissonance is created when the reviewer says that moving to a new home is “scary”. People believe that one’s home is supposed to be a happy safe haven, not a place to fear. The suggestion that a home is not a safe haven creates dissonance in the reader’s mind however, the reviewer further explains that the staff is friendly and the other residents are nice. This portion of the testimonial gives the reader new information and thus, lessens the dissonance that was created in the opening statement. To further simplify, take infomercials for example. Generally, there is a common theme; an actor states a problem or objection, then gives viewers new information about how a gadget, lotion, pill, etc. has resolved it—thus eliminating or lessening dissonance. Their expectation meets reality. While infomercials are not a great model for good testimonials, the pervasive use of this formula is suggestive of its effectiveness and manipulation of the cognitive dissonance theory.

Not all testimonials or referrals can feasibly utilize this formula explained by cognitive dissonance. For instance, restaurant reviews do not usually present a problem or create dissonance, but rather provide a detailed description of the food. Descriptive and effective testimonials include who, what, when (if relevant), and why. Hearing these details helps readers or viewers retain the association between the complimentary adjectives the viewer uses to describe their positive experience which they can later recall when making a purchasing decision.

Other effective types of testimonials [make elements of the reviewer’s story almost as important as the business they are giving a testimonial for](#). Humans are story-tellers by nature. We enjoy learning about other people. Keeping up with celebrity news and society’s enjoyment of reading peoples’ profiles on social media sites attest to this. Testimonials that paint a picture and tell the whole story of the experience described in a testimonial can be very persuasive. Added pieces of information in the testimonial or review that help you learn about who the speaker is as a person is not only more interesting, it can help viewers relate to the reviewer which provides credibility to the reviewer, making them seem more trustworthy because “they are like me”.

See the example below of a great review of the [Hall Street Grill](#) on Yelp that incorporates the reviewer’s story and engages the audience.

“Took my girlfriend here (Hall Street Grill) for a spur of the moment dinner, and couldn’t have been happier with the choice. To start, the drinks were amazing. I had an old fashioned, my usual drink, but the waiter suggested I try the Manhattan. It was memorable. The cherries they use are like no other I have had anywhere. The food was even better! The roasted chicken is a must have!”

Does this testimonial remind you of a time you were pleasantly surprised by a spontaneous dining experience? Now are you associating that fond memory with this person’s experience at Hall Street grill? Are you motivated to go try the roasted chicken? These are the types of testimonials businesses should leverage, but how? On what forums does your business receive reviews? Next week’s white paper will discuss the various ways small businesses can leverage testimonials through the Beaverton Area Chamber of Commerce and proactively, individually.

