Five Ways to Make the Most of Case Studies

People love case studies. Whether used to get the attention of prospects or to strengthen the credibility of your firm, case studies have proven many times over that they are effective. Casey Hibbard, author of *Stories That Sell*[1], even considers them your most powerful sales and marketing asset.

You can post them on your Web site, distribute them at events, or use them as a leave-behind after meeting with a prospect. Some large organizations even base their entire advertising campaign on them. But somehow people do not always think of using them to nurture leads. That is a terrible waste, especially when those success stories already exist, so it does not require any effort to create new content. Here are at five ways to leverage case studies for lead nurturing purposes. Discover the one that works best for you.

Keep top-of-mind

This is one of the key objectives of lead nurturing. Take a minute to think of all the people who have already expressed an interest in your products or services but are no longer on your radar, including information requests through your Web site, people who have registered for – and not necessarily attended – your webinars, etc. In a nutshell, this group represents all those who have been in contact with your organization one way or the other, but have not made a decision yet.

You can always send them your corporate brochure, but chances are your prospects would prefer to learn how your previous clients have successfully managed to overcome challenges that they also face. In addition, case studies allow you to create a repetition effect without being boring or annoying. For example, it is much easier and more effective to include a different case study in each issue of your eNewsletter than to send your brochure three times over.

Case studies can also be very helpful in growing your email list. For example, you can create a series of four or five postcards featuring a different client story each time. The cards will help keep you top-of-mind, but they can also help you obtain more email permissions. You can use the same strategy when you talk to prospects over the phone. Someone who would normally not grant you email permission may be happy to give it to you to receive success stories, simply because that is something he or she is genuinely interested in.

Strengthen your credibility

Sometimes the story is so good that it is worth applying for an award. This is generally the case when the results are outstanding or when you brought new and successful innovations to the market. Some industry awards, such as the OCTAS awards in Quebec, can generate quite a bit of visibility for your firm. As such, they represent a wonderful opportunity to strengthen your credibility, as well as the relationship with your client, who should be delighted to share the prestige of the award nomination.

It can also be effective to print and frame your success stories and hang them in the reception area or your main conference room. That way, each time one of your prospects, existing customers, or business partners comes to visit you, they will have a chance to learn more about your accomplishments.

Grouping several case studies by theme or industry in a booklet is another possibility. This approach is particularly effective if you are aiming to establish your credibility in a specific industry, but you can use it in many other ways as well: as a leave-behind at trade shows, a call to action for your lead nurturing email or direct mail campaign, etc.

Also, while you may already have a case study section on your Web site, it is perfectly acceptable to include excerpts or client quotes that link to the full story throughout the entire site. This approach makes it easier for your visitors to locate relevant success stories, and it confidently relays the message to prospects that they can expect similar results when they do business with your organization.

Likewise, social media represent a wonderful opportunity to re-use your case studies. Whether you insert relevant links in a blog post or comments about a similar situation you experienced with one of your clients, or you answer a question on LinkedIn, there are many opportunities to demonstrate your expertise. Sometimes, you just need to think about the avenues available to you.

Help prospects progress through their buying cycle

You probably wonder if it is better to use success stories at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the prospect's buying cycle. There is no one-size-fits-all rule, as it largely depends on the particular story you are telling.

In an optimal situation, each story should have a central theme. For example, some success stories will greatly stress the tangible benefits that resulted from the successful completion of the project. It is ideal to share this type of story at the end of the sales cycle, when you are trying to demonstrate the value of your solution but quantifiable benefits are sometimes hard to obtain. You can also use case studies to show that you have relevant experience in a specific industry or field. In that case, the story would be highly valuable during the initial exploratory stage, when you want to influence the prospect's vision of a new solution.

That said, if your prospect is already quite advanced in the sales cycle and is simply hesitating between two solutions, it would be more appropriate to send a case study that describes the frustrations faced by people using competing solutions. Organizing an event with a panel of experts could also be a good idea. It is always easier to convince your clients to participate if you have already completed the approval process for a case study.

Regardless of the approach you take, you will need to inventory your current case studies and group them by industry, theme, and relevancy in the sales cycle. This step helps your sales representatives find the case study they need when they need it, ensuring that the stories are used appropriately.

Increase the productivity of your sales professionals

When you think about it, the definition of your sales network can be quite broad. It includes your sales representatives, of course, but also the people who manage your existing customer relations, all your business partners and distributors, as well as your inside sales representatives, even if this is a function you prefer to outsource. Now, the question is: Do they all know where to find your case studies and how to use them?

For example, have your inside sales representatives ever considered mentioning your success stories when they leave voice mail? Jill Konrath, author of *Selling to Big Companies*[2], suggests integrating your unique value proposition into your message. Compare the two voice messages below.

> *"Hi, this is Geraldine Roy from ERPWorks. We offer business management software for companies just like yours. I would like to set up a time to discuss your needs and determine how we could help your organization achieve its objectives. I can be reached at 514-123-1111."*

> *"Hi, this is Geraldine Roy from ERPWorks. I was doing some research on your company, and I have some ideas on how we can help your business grow. Actually, we've just helped ABC Inc. save more than $80,000 in staff while they doubled their revenues. We should talk. Please call me at 514-123-1111."*

The more specific you are (tangible benefits, name of the client, etc.), the more effective the message will be.

Similarly, mentioning case studies can be very effective in discovering up-sell and cross-sell opportunities. This can be as simple as including some case studies in your monthly eNewsletter or as easy as creating a user group on a business portal. Happy clients usually love sharing their experience with their peers, and it often reassures them that they've made the right choice.

Close more business

Usually, at this stage, the potential client has already seen some of your success stories; however, that is not always the case, especially in a business to business environment, since there is often more than one person involved in the decision-making process. It is therefore more than appropriate to include case studies in the appendices of the proposal. After all, there is no better time to stress the results your customers typically experience than when you're about to close a deal!

To sum up, when you think of all the ways you can use case studies to nurture leads, you may realize that you will never have enough of them. That may be a fair assumption, but there are many organizations that poorly select the customers that should be featured in their success stories. By analyzing how you use your current ones, you are not only more likely to increase the return on the marketing dollars you have invested to produce them but also to identify gaps. In other words, this analysis may very well help you prioritize the success stories (industry, company size, location, theme, etc.) that will make a difference to your bottom line.

References:

1. Hibbard, Casey, 2009, *Stories That Sell: Turn Satisfied Customers into Your Most Powerful Sales & Marketing Asset*, AIM Publisher.

2. Konrath, Jill, 2006, *Selling to Big Companies*, Kaplan Publishing.

info@bnurture.com | www.bnurture.com | 514.739.9385