

Testimonials are an often overlooked asset.

By Esco Buff, PhD, CF

Testimonials are written, audio, or video reviews and comments from satisfied customers. They are unbiased recommendations of your service and products. Many farriers often overlook the power of testimonials because they are not aware of how to use them. Not only are testimonials a powerful marketing tool but they are cheap and easy to use. Testimonials can be used on your website, your social media sites (such as Facebook), in advertisements, your business cards, your telephone answering machine, and in testimonial booklets or packets to be handed out to prospective customers or left with veterinarians or equine related stores.

Testimonials let a potential customer know about your services that you provide and may convince a potential customer of your abilities. Testimonials are an endorsement by others that can give your products and service credibility. Testimonials are not about you "tooting your own horn." An effective testimonial can overcome skepticism by others of your products and service. Others will see that you made a difference and possibly could help them also. Testimonials can also build trust with potential customers as they will see others raving about your service or products. Using glowing testimonials will let potential customers know that you're worthy of their trust.

The first step in using testimonials is to obtain them. Never invent or make up a testimonial. Not only is this fraud, others will figure out that it is a lie and this could have serious negative impact on your farrier business. Always get permission to use a testimonial. Obtain testimonials from past and current customers as well as fellow colleagues who could attest to your knowledge or integrity.

One way to get a testimonial is simply just to ask if the person would like to write you a testimonial. Simply ask, "Would you write me a testimonial letter about how happy you are with my service or product?" Another method is to distribute a customer satisfaction or evaluation survey. In order to use the testimonial from a survey, you have to make sure there is a permission statement and signature line at the end of the survey. A good and simple permission statement could be "May we use your name and comments in our marketing materials?" "Yes" or "No?," then follow it with a signature line. Anytime you resolve a lameness issue, provide a service that goes above and beyond the norm, or provide a product that helped a horse; ask the customer if they wouldn't mind writing a testimonial. I have hundreds of testimonials from foundered horse owners. These powerful testimonials are used on my web site, my book, and in a personal handout packet. Many new foundered horse customers are obtained and comforted by reading the many different testimonials.

The second step is to inform the person writing the testimonial the type of testimonial you are looking for. Written, audio or video? About a product you provided or your service? We will focus on written testimonials since more farriers are likely to use this type of testimonial.

The third step is to inform the writer what you are looking to have written in the testimonial. You want to have people write testimonials that will appeal to your target audience that you're marketing too. You want potential customers to relate to the person who gave the testimonial because the more they relate the more likely they are to use your business. Some people may have problems actually writing the testimonial. One common practice, that I do not recommend, is to write it for them. I would recommend having them write the testimonial and offer to correct the testimonial, if needed, and have them re-write the testimonial. This way the meat of the testimonial is in their own words and substance.

When asking for a testimonial, hand out a short list of important points when writing a testimonial. For example:

- Please explain and describe why you like my product or service. (This allows the reader to get a clear explanation of why your service or product is better).
- Please explain and describe why my product or service is better than another product or service. (This allows the reader to see why your service or product is better than a competitor's).
- Please substantiate statements and claims, if possible. (This allows the reader to read concrete statements of not just that your product or service is better, but why).

The fourth step is to choose the right testimonial when putting together a promotional packet. You want the testimonial to be effective. The right testimonials are powerful promotional tools of your products and services.

The fifth and final step is to use the testimonials to promote yourself, your products, or your service. No matter if you use them on the web or in handout packets, using testimonials are free and powerful success stories. They tell the reader that there was a problem, you fixed it, and the customer is happy.

Testimonials will also provide you with many short remarks that can be used on your business cards, telephone answering machines, web pages, and mission statements. "Providing a service that is dependable, caring, ethical and professional" on a business card is one such example.

You may want to have several different testimonial packets. The cover should be a simple statement that will attract your target audience. For example, "John Doe provides a reliable, dependable, and professional farrier service," or "How farrier John Doe can help save your foundered horse." The second page of your packet should be a simple cover letter explaining to your target audience who you are and why they should use you or your product. Refer the reader to the enclosed testimonials. Make sure all the testimonials have the full name and contact phone number included so prospective customers can contact the testimonial writer.

Remember, don't overlook how powerful testimonials can be as a marketing tool. Start today by asking your satisfied customers for them.