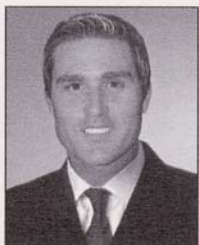


How to Get More Referrals Using the 'Hidden Asset' of Testimonials



by Adam D. Bishop, MBA

“The eyes believe themselves, the ears believe other people.” “Believability is the plus-factor in prospecting.” These

two quotes by Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Robert Trailus (*Dynamic Selling*) reinforce the power of including testimonials from satisfied patients and referral sources in our marketing and sales program. What others say about your agency is infinitely more believable than what you say about your agency. In order to persuade a new patient or referral source to use your agency's

services there must first be a level of trust established, especially for seniors. This is a must for them. Trust is extremely important to this market segment – their word is still their bond. It is not until

seniors feel they can trust you that they will buy from you. Believing that they can trust your agency is more important to seniors than any feature, benefit and/or outcome your agency may offer.

Clients, families and referral sources want to write and thank you for providing services and to compliment your staff when they have exceeded their expectations. As a matter of fact, if you want testimonials from your patients, seniors are the folks for you. Seniors will gladly write them. And they will write them with a feeling of honor and privilege. They will spend hours and hours writing a testimonial for you. Their testimonials will be sincere, honest and powerful enough to frame, or better yet, show to potential prospects and referral sources.

So if your sales team has not included testimonials in their sales presentations, then it's time to start! There is no tool more powerful. But unfortunately most agencies underestimate just how valuable they can be. Use testimonials in your ads, letters, brochures, admissions booklets, newsletters, website and your on-hold phone messages. I also recommend that each of your marketers put copies of the very best testimonials into a three-ring notebook that they can take with them to sales presentations, in-services and/or health fairs. Let prospects look through it. When a prospect sees how many clients are thrilled with your services, they will want to do business with your agency.

- Testimonials are one of the first things a prospect will read in an ad or brochure
- Testimonials enhance credibility and believability to your agency
- You can never have too many testimonials

By adding testimonials to your marketing you will reinforce the believability and credibility of your agency which are enormous factors for prospects and referral sources when choosing a home care agency. They must believe you can deliver the services and the results they want. It doesn't matter much to them whether your agency has been in business for a week or twenty years. So providing results becomes infinitely more important than providing anything else. Ten great testimonials will beat twenty years of history hands down.

Testimonials add a human factor to your advertising and marketing which increases the impact and strength of your message.

The single biggest reason why home care agencies don't use testimonials in their marketing programs is because they haven't asked their satisfied clients for them. They consider it an imposition or “non-professional”. Don't fall into this trap. If you truly believe in what you do and your agency truly helps people, then you are doing your prospective patients and referral sources a favor by sharing positive anecdotes about your agency with them.

When is the best time to ask for referrals? Obviously the best time to ask is after a positive outcome has been experienced by

the patient or referral source from your agency. This is an ideal time to ask for a testimonial. Remember, once they get away, they're gone forever. Don't miss the opportunity.

How do you collect testimonials? It's simple. Just Ask. Talk to your clients – those who you really know appreciate your services and staff, but most importantly are cheerleaders for your agency. Don't ask them to write a testimonial, per se. Keep in mind, however, that most people are not natural storytellers. You can help facilitate powerful testimonials by providing clients, families and referral sources with a simple questionnaire (see Exhibit A) to fill out. This questionnaire can be sent out before or shortly after discharge, on a monthly or quarterly basis. The more periodically you solicit testimonials the better, but I recommend that you establish a system that best works for your agency. This will make it much easier for your client to open up and give you the information you need to turn those answers into compelling testimonials. Also, you can save unsolicited patient or referral source letters. Instruct salespeople, care givers and telephone personnel to listen for and jot down comments that express satisfaction, exceptional health related outcomes, benefits or result.

There are two very different types of testimonials, which can be categorized as follows:

1. Superlative. These are the familiar effusive quotes: “Sensational service!” or “Wouldn't be without ABC Home Care Agency!”

2. Anecdotal. These describe an incident relating to the patient's and/or referral source's experiences using your agency's services. “Case histories” and “before-and-after” accounts fall into this category.

While “superlative-type” testimonials should not be dismissed, their only human interest element consists of the fact that a human being is quoted. Superlatives tend to lack credibility. Conversely, anecdotes are far more powerful than a bunch of adjectives. Such anecdotes are more believable because, in replace of empty praise, they cite a reason for the person's satisfaction. They provide color and convey a sense of authenticity and realism. It's easy for the prospect to doubt the sincerity of a superlative-type testimonial. It's much more difficult for her to be skeptical of a firsthand report of a specific event.

Ask for permission to use their testimonials in your advertisements and marketing materials. Unless confidentiality is a factor or permission is impossible to obtain, your testimonials will have the greatest impact and be more believable if they include the name, city and photo of the person providing the testimonials. Be sure to get permission, preferably a signed release when

Exhibit A

TESTIMONIAL FORM	
Name	_____
Address	_____
Occupation	_____
1. How many times have you used “Our Agency?”	
2. Describe in detail a specific experience with us that you were happy with:	
3. Describe 1 or 2 benefits you have received from us that you value the most. Explain specifically what you've attained from those benefits.	
Thank you very much.	
I do NOT mind if you use my name in any or all of your promotional material(s).	
Signature	Date

using testimonials in your printed materials. Be sure to save original letters in case you're asked for documentation.

I recommend that you have at least one testimonial for each benefit of your service. These benefits could be in the area of customer service, caring staff, specialty services, niche services, intake system and many more.

So start collecting these “hidden assets”. This strategy won't cost you anything, it's quick and easy to do and you'll get amazing results!