

## Let customers sell for you, in testimonials

In the immortal words of Copy Chasers, "they say" advertising is stronger than "we say" advertising. Companies with enthusiastic customers can get real mileage out of featuring them in testimonial ads or case history articles (or both). All it takes is a solid interview and some good, on-site photography... and there are ways to get those without leaving your desk.

### **There are four basic steps.**

**PREPARATION** – Get the details of a successful project, and a contact name, from someone in your company (e.g., the salesperson). If they'll call the customer and introduce you, so much the better. Prepare 10-15 questions in advance, focusing on quantifiable benefits (speed, uptime, operating cost) that highlight your company's strengths and/or competitors' weaknesses.

**INTERVIEW** – Call to schedule the interview at a time convenient for the

customer — but be prepared to conduct it on the spot. Explain your project and where it will appear, and promise an opportunity for review before publication. Then follow through.

**PHOTOGRAPHY** – Good photos of your product in action, and of the customer being quoted, are essential. (A case history requires more photos than an ad, and editors like to have a selection.) The customer may be able to suggest a local photographer; if not, try a bureau or a web search. Sample shots and clear direction will help the photographer quote the job and can often save you a trip to supervise. Note: If people are recognizable in the photos, they should sign model releases for your files.

**WRITE AND REVIEW** – Writing can begin as soon as the interview is over, and proceed simultaneously with the photography. When the ad or article is finished, have the customer review it for accuracy.

Approval may also be needed from upper management or corporate headquarters, so allow time for this. To play safe, let the customer see the photos, too.

A typical schedule for a testimonial is 4-8 weeks, depending on the customer's availability and the layers of approval required, but it can be done faster if everything goes right. Upon publication, why not send the customer a copy with a thank-you note? The courtesy will be appreciated, and it's the least you can do for the newest member of your sales team. (And speaking of the sales team, don't forget to order reprints for their sales calls.)

(The above first appeared in "Sudden Impact," a Design News e-newsletter, in October, 2005.)