



Healthcare Marketing

Case in point: Using case studies to promote your organization

Almost any healthcare organization today, whether it is a vendor, provider, payor or not-for-profit organization, will benefit from using a case study to convey the quality of its products or care delivery services. Case studies are a highly effective means to show what an organization has to offer because they tell the stories of satisfied end-users.

If you are a not-for profit organization, you can write a case study on a successful fundraiser. If you are a hospital, your case study could cover quality assurance programs. As a vendor, you can highlight product benefits through a customer story.

A case study is a narrative account of a real-life problem or conflict resolved through the use of your product or service. Typically, the outcome is a satisfied end-user who has a major need fulfilled by your organization.

The many benefits

Case studies are valuable for several reasons. By identifying your success stories and interviewing the people involved, your organization can get to know itself better:

- Why was the patient, customer or end-user initially interested in your product or service?
- What did they hope to gain?
- What were the challenges in using the product or service?
- What real-life problems did the product or service resolve? Did the product or service fulfill user expectations?

The questions involved in a case study help your organization identify strengths and weaknesses, and in the future, ultimately improve customer service.

A case study is a powerful testimonial of how your organization has helped people. Obviously, your target audience is prospective end-users and the goal is to attract them to your product or service. But a case study is also a way to pique the interests of reporters, analysts, investors and other industry experts. By getting your case study in print - whether it's on your organization's website, press kit, or as an article placement in a trade publication - you are building market and industry awareness of your organization's capabilities.

Appealing to users

Potential end-users appreciate the objective nature of a case study. It allows them to spend time with your product or service through the eyes of someone in a similar position. By relating to a colleague's problems and challenges, they see how your product or service helped that person, and they come to believe it could help them,

too.

Spin a tale

Audiences these days have one primary request - tell me a story. Entertain me. More people will be interested in your case studies if you provide a plot complete with conflict and resolution. To do this, construct your case study as a story, positioning your end-user as the main character with one desire - to solve a problem with the use of your product or service.

This allows you to portray the user's motivation. There are two main emotions behind making any change: frustration and desire. People shop for a new product because they're frustrated with how things currently operate. Patients sign up for a care delivery service because they are not happy with their health and want to improve.

A well-constructed case study will win over new users. They will relate to the emotions in the story and will want to give your product or service a try.

Build a strong selling message

With frustration and desire well established, you have the perfect stage to depict the resolution. Don't over-inflate or make it seem too-good-to-be-true. Readers will be skeptical of any one who promises the end-all solution. Use the facts. Perhaps a person doesn't use a particular feature of the product, or a patient was initially interested in your service for a trivial reason. You build a stronger selling message by using specifics. What was the specific problem the product resolved? You have outlined the user's frustration and desire. In the moment of satisfaction, be precise and base it on real-life situations, or it won't ring true.

If you are a vendor, a sure fire way to run through specific product benefits is to talk about the return on investment (ROI). This can be defined as the amount of money or time saved, or the number of potential full-time employees (FTEs) your customer avoided hiring because of the efficiency of your product. If you are a care delivery service, you can talk about patient satisfaction, cost-effectiveness, and quality outcomes.

Set your organization apart from competitors

The case study is an opportunity to establish a clear and appealing distinction between you and your competitors. Don't criticize the competition. Instead focus on the key features of your own product or service. By the end of the case study, establish the level of satisfaction your user has experienced. Stress how your organization may have handled any challenges or problems along the way. Today utilizing a new healthcare product or service can be a formidable task. Users know there may be initial obstacles; they just want to know you can handle them with service and a smile.

Create a simple, straightforward description of your product or service. Today it can be difficult to explain what a product or service does and how it works, especially if it operates behind the scenes. Assimilate the most appealing attributes. Don't try to cover every aspect. You'll lose the interest of the reader. Instead, focus on two or three significant elements that helped your end-user resolve problems and frustrations.

Relate the case study to a trend

Compliance, paperwork, electronic medical records (EMR), physician email - these are all current issues in healthcare. Relating your case study to a trend can be a powerful way for end-users to see that your product addresses today's market. It is not just a fad or whim of the moment, but a product that touches an industry need.

Approving and placing the study

An obstacle some organizations come across is identifying participants for their case study. To entice people to take part, tell them about the potential media coverage. Usually end-users will step forward to participate in a marketing and publicity campaign your organization is spearheading.

For liability issues, be sure to send participants the finished case study for their review and signed approval. Since they are providing you with a testimonial you can leverage for future opportunities, be open to their feedback and edits.

The first step to marketing the case study is to incorporate it into any organizational marketing and public relations material. This includes the organization's press kit and website. When crafting the case study, you should begin to identify publications and healthcare websites that may be interested in publishing it. If you have done your homework and strategically linked the case study to an industry trend and told an entertaining end-user success story, you will have media interested in interview and article opportunities.

Turning the tables

Many organizations worry about negative coverage. The media likes to present a balanced perspective - listing strengths AND weaknesses - or covering several competitors in a product line-up, but there is a natural tendency toward success stories - how people overcame their operational problems through a solution. Your only liability would then be if you are not included or even mentioned. For the prospective user, this means you are not a key player in that particular healthcare niche, and they may not consider using your product or service.

Just remember that no one expects a perfect scenario, and if you try to build one in a case study, it becomes suspect. Don't be afraid if your case study brings weaknesses to light.

The intrinsic call to action

Finding a publication or media venue for your case study adds tremendous value. The main goal is to reach your target audiences, namely prospective users, current users, potential partners, reporters and analysts. This exposure helps build the elusive "buzz" that so many organizations dream of achieving. In the end, you've helped to build your brand in the healthcare market and ultimately interested more people in your product or service. By reading your case study, many of your prospective users will be compelled to act - checking into and perhaps even signing up for your great new product or service.

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