



The case for case studies

Case studies don't tend to come top of anyone's marketing agenda. But perhaps they should. Written well, a case study is an unbiased account of how your company has achieved a client's aims. In a nutshell a case study is actually *evidence* of the benefits your products or services actually deliver – and it can be pretty powerful stuff.

So let's find out why case studies work and *how* they work. Let's examine the rules for writing a successful case study and set you on your way to making more use of your greatest resource: your own success.

Objectivity

We'll reiterate this point, because it's a big one: case studies stand apart from almost every other piece of marketing material you'll ever produce because they're written from a third party point of view. That gives case studies an immediate stamp of believability and authenticity. This isn't just you telling customers that you're good; it's an objective observer stating your case for you.

Insight

The best case studies incorporate comments from the people who made things happen on both sides of the client / customer contract. Their very personal take on things can enliven any story and give a real sense of partners working to a common end. The use of client quotes validates the message and makes the story even more compelling. Their insight is crucial in delivering a story that is, after all, about meeting *their* aims and expectations.

Structure

So, what are the rules of writing a successful case study? There are surprisingly few. A case study is a very flexible way of documenting your success story – it can take on a whole host of forms. Really the only thing that you have to ensure is that it gets right to the heart of the story and takes the reader on a clear journey from point a (problem) through point b (solution) to point c (the difference you made).

But apart from that, you can do it your way.



Case studies can be:

- **Long or short**
There's no optimum length – just take the time it takes to tell the story you want to tell. As with all marketing collateral your job is to keep the reader *interested* – so a very short and snappy case study can do that effectively. Equally a couple of pages of A4 that is carefully formatted and easy on the eye can be used to give a fuller account.
- **Single or multiple client**
Who said case studies had to focus on one client? The story's the thing and there are times when a compelling story cuts across individual client relationships. Case studies that focus on a particular industry issue (taking in elements from work with various clients) can be very persuasive. They break the trend and they show your effectiveness at working with a variety of different clients.
- **Ongoing or all over**
It doesn't even matter if your story is complete or still ongoing. It's good to be able to give a complete start to finish account of what you achieved for your client. It's also fascinating to have a peek into a story as it's developing – complete with how what you've achieve so far can help with the challenges that you're confronting right now.
- **General or sector specific**
As well as being a great way to highlight key strengths and showcase core capabilities, if you're looking to expand your reach into a particular sector, then a case study can show your pertinent experience within a vertical market. Back it up with evidence and client quotes from big names in the industry you've worked with and you'll benefit from the kudos of their brand too.

And there's still one more argument in favour of case studies. There is no better way to turn a negative into a positive. Let's face it, things don't always go according to plan; there are inevitable hiccups in any working relationship and things do go wrong from time to time. But a case study gives you an excellent opportunity to put all of those things into context. Yes, there was a problem, but you overcame it and reached a very satisfactory resolution.

As well as all the perfect success stories; nothing spells out your commitment and resourcefulness like a story of how you coped in challenging circumstances.