

Having Trouble Getting the Message Out?

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Are your written materials working as hard for you as they can?

Do they look and feel distinctive from similar materials your competitors use? Do they offer a clear value proposition? Do you know what you want to say to prospects but have trouble saying it in a way that turns them into paying customers? Is the information you're providing to current customers valuable enough to keep them coming back for more? Are you wasting valuable time—and money—explaining things that should have been laid out clearly in a policy document or user manual? Do you have ideas you've always wanted to write down but find that they get lost when you sit down at the keyboard?

Powerful written material can be key in establishing—and keeping—credibility with prospects, customers and even members of your own organization.

Your written materials represent you when you're not around. Marketing materials should clearly present the unique value you offer, so prospects are desperate to talk with you. Sales presentations should show that you understand the customer's problem—and that you are the best qualified to help them solve it. Touchpoint materials sent to current and past customers should offer timely and important information they can actually use, reminding them why they chose to work with you in the first place. And policy documents and user manuals should be written clearly and concisely so they can be resources for the people who need them. All of these things can—and should—demonstrate they you know what you're doing—and free you up to spend more time doing it.

Language is a critical sticking point for many professionals and their organizations.

Many professionals are concerned that they don't know how to write—or that they only know how to write specific things. They get so caught up in the mechanics of setting word to paper that they forget the unifying theme in what they're trying to say. Or the issues they're dealing with are so complex that they have trouble finding concise and straightforward ways to explain them. Buzzwords and jargon find their way into even the simplest communication, rendering them dull, trite and even completely meaningless. An exaggerated sense of “professionalism” prevents people from leveraging the opportunity to use written materials in relationship-building. It's really just a question of remembering what you need to say, and finding a simple, direct way of saying it—in writing.

Keep five simple things in mind to make all your written materials work harder for you.

If you keep these five points—I call them the “Five Vs”—in sight at all times, you'll get a much greater response from all of your written materials:

Vision: What you're trying to communicate at the most basic level.

- We understand your problem.
- Here's an idea.
- This is how this works/is supposed to work.

Viewer: Your audience:

- Prospective customers who don't know anything about you or your organization.
- Current and past customers who know and (presumably) like you.
- Employees or other internal audience.



Value: Why this is important to the viewer:

- You can help them solve their problem/meet their need.
- Your idea is really groundbreaking.
- You are offering a reward for buy-in or penalty for lack of buy-in.

Voice: Who's talking and the relationship they have (or desire) with the viewer.

- Intimate—1st person (singular or plural)—establishes a 1:1 relationship
- Detached—3rd person—establishes an organization to organization relationship
- Parental—3rd person—establishes an unequal—but not necessarily condescending relationship

Vehicle: What the document is will often determine the degree of formality you need to observe. In order from least to most formal:

- Web site and electronic marketing vehicles
- Printed marketing vehicles
- Presentations and pitches
- Proposals
- User manuals
- Policy documents

It's almost always hard to write your own material. In the process of writing, it's too easy to get lost in a sense of where you are and lose sight of where you want to go. Following these points will help you do that. Even if you hire someone to help you, you may want to sketch out the points ahead of time to ensure that they stay focused on your end goal. Either way, taking the time to acknowledge the full context within which you're trying to communicate will ensure that your message is clearer and more appealing—and ultimately gets the results you want.



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Evoke Strategies knows how to develop and deploy communications and marketing materials that get results.

Since 1988, Steven Skyles-Mulligan of Evoke Strategies has helped service professionals, educators and their organizations develop dynamic written materials. His work has resulted in more new business, increased return business and greater visibility. Working with Steven, clients have developed their unique voices, articulated their core messages, framed their value propositions and created strategies that work. Evoke works collaboratively—and quickly—to give you what you need. Steven would be glad to discuss your needs by phone at no charge. Call **212.967.7611** or visit www.evokestrategies.com.