



Developing Program Testimonials

Three Tools to Design Effective Website Testimonials
Great Plains IDEA

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▶ Start with best practices research

- > Research Forums for presidents, provosts, chief business officers, and key academic and administrative leaders
- > At the core of all we do
- > Peer-tested best practices research
- > Answers to the most pressing issues

▶ Then hardwire those insights into your organization using our technology & services

Enrollment Management

Our **Royall & Company** division provides data-driven undergraduate and graduate solutions that target qualified prospective students; build relationships throughout the search, application, and yield process; and optimize financial aid resources.

Student Success

Members, including four- and two-year institutions, use the **Student Success Collaborative**TM combination of analytics, interaction and workflow technology, and consulting to support, retain, and graduate more students.

Growth and Academic Operations

Our **Academic Performance Solutions** group partners with university academic and business leaders to help make smart resource trade-offs, improve academic efficiency, and grow academic program revenues.

1,100⁺

College and university members

10,000⁺

Research interviews per year

250M⁺

Course records in our student success analytic models

1.2B⁺

Student interactions



A Diversified Portfolio

Serving Leaders Across Professional, Adult, and Online Education



Membership at a Glance

350+

COE Forum
Member
Institutions

94%

Percentage of
Members who
Renew

300+

Practices, Case
Studies, and
Implementation Tools

3000+

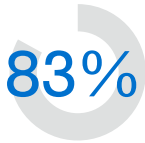
Market Demand
Briefs Completed
to Date



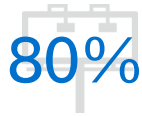
“Prove it” Says the American Consumer

Disconnect Between Marketing and Consumers

What Marketers Believe is Effective...



Percentage of marketers who believe traditional advertising is most influential to customer decision making



Average proportion of marketing budget allocated to advertising

...Out of Sync with Ideal COE Target Audience

Distrust in Advertising by Education Level



Post-Graduates



High School Grads

Highest Quality Leads Most Skeptical

“Your **most desirable customers don’t trust shallow branded messages**, but are exposed to more of them than other customers because of their perpetual connection. This gives marketers more opportunities than ever before to engage their customers in meaningful ways – or to screw it up.”

*Melissa Parish,
Forrester Research*

Consumers Increasingly Seek External Validation

Consumers Most Trusted Sources

- 1 Friends and Family
- 2 Online Reviews
- 3 Third Party Experts

Source: “New Study: Traditional Marketing Fails to Gain Consumer Trust,” Experticity, December 2015, <https://www.experticity.com/blog/2015/09/29/new-study-traditional-marketing-fails-to-gain-consumer-trust/>; Edelman D, “Branding in the Digital Age: You’re Spending Your Money in All the Wrong Places,” Harvard Business Review, 2010, <https://hbr.org/2010/12/branding-in-the-digital-age-youre-spending-your-money-in-all-the-wrong-places>; Parrish, M. et al, “Create Marketing your Customers can Use,” Forrester, <https://www.forrester.com/report/Create+Marketing+Your+Customers+Can+Use/-/E-RES113043>; EAB interviews and analysis

- 1 Tool 11: Content Solicitation Templates and Nomination Criteria
 - 2 Activity: Identify Testimonial Candidates
 - 3 Tool 13: Testimonial Builder
 - 4 Activity: Write a 5-Point Guide for Contributor
 - 5 Tool 14: Video Testimonial Prep Guide
 - 6 Activity: Sketch Your Video
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Seek Strong Testimonial Candidates



Student Criteria

- Doing well in the course
- Moderately to highly engaged (e.g., participates in discussions, inquisitive)
- Volunteers for responsibility (e.g., to be team leader, to mentor other students)
- Recognizes connection between classwork and professional life
- Developing relationships with instructors through office hours, etc.



Alumnus/ae Criteria

- Did well in the course
- Was highly engaged (e.g., completed all/most assignments, attended all/most classes)
- Articulated connection between class and job
- Maintains professional relationship with instructors (e.g., sends periodical emails)
- Employed or seeking employment in relevant field or by an employer of interest



Faculty Criteria

- Accessible and responsive to students
- Assumes additional responsibility (e.g., lead task force, joined committee, mentoring colleagues) voluntarily
- Gets largely positive feedback from students and colleagues



Ask for Testimonial Nominees via Email

Instructors, Program Leads, and Coordinators Recommend Participants

Anatomy of Nomination Email

Email Body

Statement of Goal

During the coming semester, we aim to recruit # future students into the __ program offered through Great Plains IDEA. **To meet that goal, we ask for your help suggesting colleagues and students who you think would be well suited and willing to contribute to developing testimonials.**

Description of the Ask

Attached is a Testimonial Candidate Nomination Form. We hope that you will take **two or three minutes** to fill it out. We will follow up with nominated individuals to further explore their possible participation. (Of course, you should feel free to volunteer yourself!)

Statement of Impact

Thank you for your help. We've heard time and again that prospects value insight and advice from subject matter experts and current and past students. Your voices are remarkably powerful, trustworthy, and helpful in their decision-making process. By contributing you will help countless prospective students make more informed decision.

Activity: Identify Testimonial Candidates



Nominees

Write down three people you think could serve as testimonials for your program. Consider students, alumni, instructors, and employer partners.



Recommenders

Write down three people you think could recommend candidates for testimonials.

Craft Testimonials to Attract Prospective Students

Basic Guidelines for Crafting Testimonials

- Don't Break the Bank
- Include Must-Have Content
- Avoid the Generic
- Use Both Video and Text
- Make Testimonials Easy to Find

- Career development
- Personal pathways back to education
- Brand name recognition
- Quality of instruction and academics
- Quality of technology and instructional design
- Flexibility of degree format



The Excelsior Effect

Adrienne Mason
Bachelor of Science in Business

- 105:** Community college transfer credits accepted by Excelsior
- 2011:** Received her Excelsior degree
- 2012:** Earned her first post-graduate promotion
- 2:** More promotions since then



Provide Guidance on Testimonial Content

Selected Contributor Talking Points

Student

- Describe your history before pursuing continuing education
- Explain what program attributes (e.g., online delivery) enable you to accommodate education among other responsibilities
- Discuss how courses have complemented your work responsibilities

Alumnus/ae

- Describe your path to higher education
- Offer how you feel about your successful completion of the program
- Explain specific skills or mindsets that continuing education afforded you
- Give a brief overview of your current job duties and employer

Instructor

- Identify curricular components that align with industry needs, preparing graduates to enter the workforce
- Discuss what's going on in the discipline and why it's an exciting time to pursue a degree or certificate in the subject
- Explain what makes the program academically rigorous and technologies that facilitate optimal learning in a distance environment

Employer

- Describe a graduate's job responsibilities, focusing on the skills necessary for job (e.g., oral communication skills, proficiency in ArcGIS)
- Answer how graduates demonstrated they possessed skills for the job and illustrated their preparation
- Describe graduates of the university as a whole— what have your impressions been?

Sample Testimonial

From the Great Plains IDEA Community Development page

▼ How will I engage with faculty and students when we only attend classes online?

Being part of a virtual community provides opportunities an on-campus program never could. Interaction with learners and faculty from across the country allows you to learn from diverse perspectives.

In this video, listen as a graduate of the community development program shares how surprised she was at the connections she made with fellow students from across the country.



“In addition to the **flexible learning environment** and **knowledgeable faculty**, a very unexpected and pleasant surprise has been the **connections I’ve made with my fellow classmates**...there are students I consider to be friends and have even had the privilege of meeting in-person. I’ve had the pleasure of learning from them and their distinct experiences.”

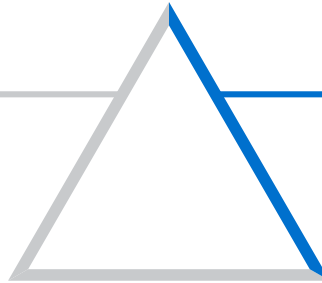
- Janice Edwards, Community Development student

Activity: Write a 5-Point Guide for Contributor



Activity

- Write out five talking points for one of the testimonial nominees from the previous activity



Share Out



- Who is your nominee?
- What would you ask your nominee to include in her/his testimonial?

Optimize Attention-Grabbing Video Testimonials

Production Advice

Make it Short

- <3 minutes
- Takeaway point every 30 seconds

Think about Dialog Ahead of Time

- Script questions for interview-style videos
- Ask subject to develop bullet points to guide a narration-style video

Engage Through Subtitles and Dialog

- Subtitles assist students with disabilities, and allow for video engagement in a quiet place (e.g., on a commuter train, at the office)
- Consider asking two subjects to discuss in the video to create anticipation for responses

Vary Footage

- Incorporate extra footage of subject teaching a course, working in the field, etc.
- Splice interview audio over active footage
- Embed text into footage to highlight takeaway points



GP IDEA Support

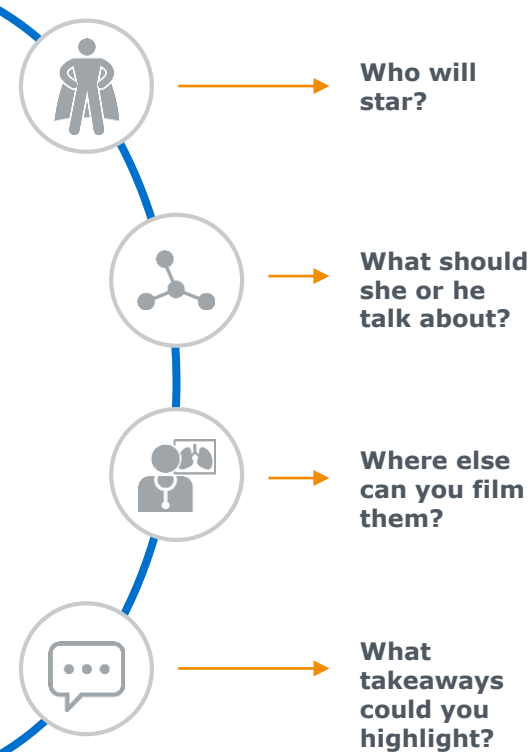
The GP IDEA team at the lead institution can offer expert guidance and technical support for video testimonials.

Contact **Kathryn Harth** for more information.

Activity: Sketch Your Video Testimonial



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Takeaways and Next Steps



- What seems most do-able vs. least do-able across these testimonial tactics?
- What are some anticipated roadblocks to implementing testimonials?
- What are ways you plan to overcome these roadblocks?



For more web optimization strategies and implementation ideas, see the COE Forum's [Web Optimization Toolkit](#)



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