



BLASTmedia

BUILDING **CUSTOMER** REFERENCES

How to Build Customer References to Complement Your PR Program

Much like their impact on prospect conversations, referenceable customers greatly increase the efficacy of B2B SaaS PR programs. With 75% of B2B buyers [spending more time researching purchases](#) each year and 73% relying on more sources to do so, leveraging a customer story can help move prospects down the funnel.

Customer stories are essential in communicating success and helping to establish a brand in the marketplace. Translated in various ways from written case studies to verbal interviews, these stories help illustrate to prospective customers the varied ways a company's products and services can add value. Used in sales, client success and marketing efforts, customer stories are one of the most impactful and diverse assets to leverage across the business.

When it comes to press, customer stories and use cases are well-received, as an editor uses them to demonstrate everyday applications and real-life examples to readers. Different than a news announcement, a use case allows your customers to be the star, with your brand as the supporting actor.

Why is this type of media coverage valuable to you?

Customer coverage can help you champion the successes your users have seen with your product, which can, in turn, act as sales enablement content for your business to target similar customers with parallel problems. With this championing, you can directly impact customer satisfaction, retention and future sales. Additionally, customer coverage gives you an opportunity to highlight your most noteworthy customers, associating your company with established, household names.

Why is this type of media coverage valuable to your customers?

As a SaaS business, media coverage focused on your customers' use of your product not only highlights their spokespeople but also promotes the company as a leader in tech innovation. For example, if The Wall Street Journal features your customer's CIO sharing the operational efficiencies gleaned from the adoption of a new AI operations platform, this showcases the CIO's ability to innovate and, ultimately, save his organization time and money.

The value a customer receives from participating in a media opportunity is multi-tiered. The customer will:

- Receive free PR as a result of media coverage
- Appear as a proactive problem-solver due to their ability to recognize a bottleneck and implement a solution
- Act as a resource to media, building relationships for the spokesperson down the road

Building a Customer Reference Program from Scratch

Let's face it: it can be tough to get customers to publicly vouch for you. After all, every time they do, they're putting their brand on the line; plus, many customers work within highly-regulated industries — making it difficult to get executive buy-in.

Because of this, it's important to ease customers into becoming public references through a well-planned process to help build your credibility and create a level of comfort for your customer spokesperson. Here are five steps to build a successful customer reference program:

1

Build low-commitment and/or medium-commitment activities into the contract during the new customer onboarding process. Customers may negotiate them out, but some may not.

For companies who are new to customer reference programs, we recommend starting customers with low-commitment activities (such as a sales reference call) and building to higher-commitment activities (such as a media interview).

Low-commitment activities:

- Sales reference calls
- Analyst reference calls
- Customer logo on website

Medium-commitment activities:

- Press release announcing customer
- Written customer case study
- Customer blog post
- Contributed content for media
- Customer video

High-commitment activities:

- Customer presentation at events
- Media interview

2

Identify impactful customer use cases and ask the customer success manager responsible for the accounts to make first contact with the customer, asking for a call to discuss outcomes from using the platform.

If you don't know where to start to extract a strong story from your customer, we recommend honing in on specifics around the problem they were looking to solve before your platform and the solution your business presented. Here are a few questions to get the conversation flowing.

Questions to define a customer success story:

- What is the focus of your company's business?
- How does your company use [vendor]?
- How long have you been using [vendor]?
- What problem were you trying to address by purchasing [vendor]?
 - How was this problem affecting your team?
- How did you manage [vendor focus area] before [vendor]?
- Did you evaluate other solutions before choosing [vendor]?
 - If so, what were the criteria you used to evaluate the solutions?
 - What were the deciding factors that led you to choose [vendor]?
- What was the implementation process like?
- What are some of the most useful features of [vendor]?
- How does [vendor] help your team or company achieve its objectives?
- Is there any data you can share to show an increase in retention or decrease in time to resolution?
 - Are there any additional measurable benefits you have seen with [vendor]?
- Did your team track any metrics or KPIs before using [vendor]?
 - What metrics do you track with [vendor]?
- What is your overall impression of [vendor] as a partner in your success?

**3**

Loop in the company's marketing and/or PR team to present the opportunity to publicly share the previously defined successes with prospects and media.

4

Conduct a call to prep the customer spokesperson on the outreach plan and define a talk track for media conversations.

5

Work with your PR team to secure opportunities with fitting media, prepping the customer spokesperson before each opportunity as necessary.

Possible Outcomes of Customer Participation in Media Opportunities

A customer's participation in media opportunities can have several outcomes depending on the outlet and media contact's area of coverage. These can range from thought leadership content authored by the customer to a feature article developed from a phone interview.

Thought Leadership Content

This is a vendor-neutral, written article authored by a spokesperson at the customer's company or a spokesperson at the vendor company about the customer. Generally, this type of coverage revolves around actionable, tips-based topics on the area in which the spokesperson is an expert.

EXAMPLES



Evan Luxon, Co-Founder & CEO of Centese, a Greenlight Guru customer, contributes an article on Medical Product Outsourcing explaining how to choose a medical device quality management system, referencing Centese's experience with Greenlight Guru as a talk-track:

[Not All Medical Device QMS Solutions Are Created Equal](#)

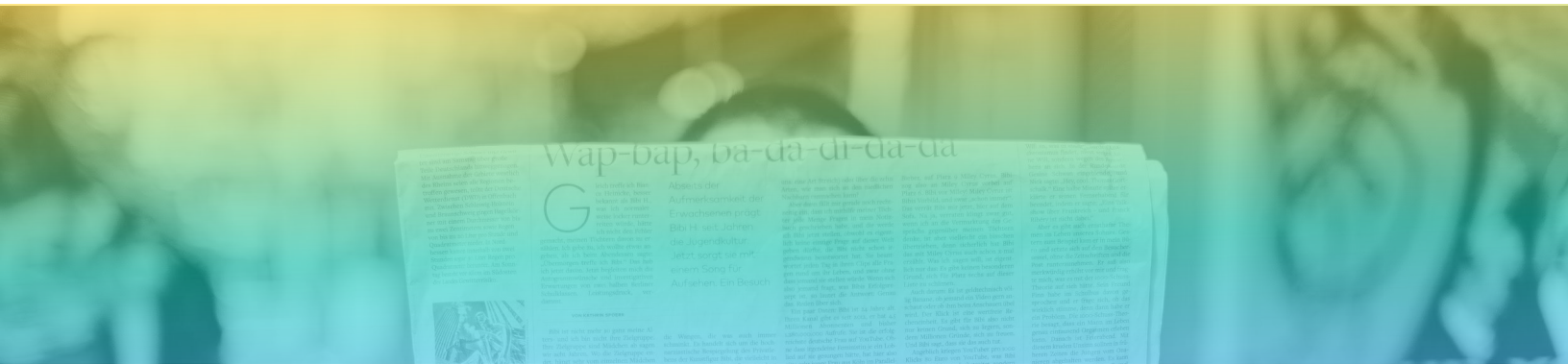
"So, how do you choose a QMS that can set your emerging company up for future success? As co-founder and CEO of my own startup medical device company and partner at a medical device incubator, I've been through the transition from a paper-based QMS to a quality management software platform, and there are a few tips I picked up along the way."



Dan Hanrahan of Sigstr contributes an article to 60SecondMarketer about the company's work with customer, the Indiana Pacers:

[How to use Email Signature Marketing like the NBA](#)

"[Michael Lake who heads up corporate partnership sales for the Indiana Pacers] worked with designers at Sigstr, an email signature marketing application, to put his Opening Night game sponsor, Kroger, into their clickable call-to-action banner for the October tip-off. In six days, the Pacers + Kroger campaign was seen on every 1:1 human email sent from the 175 implemented employees from the sports property."



Quote Inclusion

Quote inclusion coverage often stems from a written interview — where the publication provides a list of questions to which the spokesperson should deliver written responses — or verbal interview — where the publication schedules a time to ask the spokesperson questions verbally via phone or video call — and include insights from the spokesperson in quotable form within a larger article. These types of articles often include multiple sources and are authored by a reporter/editor at the publication.

EXAMPLES

WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Wall Street Journal reporter John Murawski quotes Moogsoft customer American Airlines and Moogsoft President & COO:

[AI Watches Over Complex Corporate IT Networks](#)

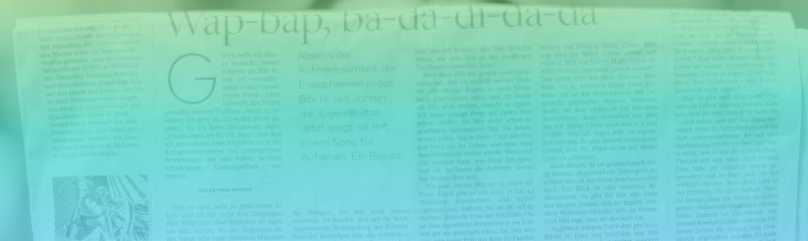
“American Airlines Inc., one of the world’s largest airlines, was an early adopter, bringing in Moogsoft in 2017. With the AIOps system, American Airlines has cut the average time it takes to resolve technical snafus by 50%, said David Bell, the airline’s managing director of cybersecurity and technology risk management.”

CIO

CIO contributing writer Maria Korolov quotes Functionize customer TOTVS:

[AI is poised to radically transform software development](#)

“Keeping up is a significant challenge, says Vicente Goetten, executive director at TOTVS Labs. Each test case must be customized to fit the user interface. With applications constantly being redesigned, interfaces are always changing. And if the platform itself changes, such as when updating to a newer version of JavaScript, all design elements change at once. ‘Imagine rewriting thousands and thousands of use cases,’ Goetten says.”



Feature Article

Feature articles often result from a written or verbal interview. These articles revolve completely around a specific company or person and are authored by a reporter/editor at the publication.

EXAMPLES

WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Wall Street Journal reporter Jared Council features Moogsoft and customer Fannie Mae:

[AI Cuts IT Problems at Fannie Mae by a Third](#)

"The teams using the AIOps tool have cut the time needed to resolve problems by between 25% and 75%, depending on the issue, Mr. Rudrachar said. Some problems that used to take several hours to fix are now handled in a matter of minutes, he added."

CMO

FROM IDG

IDG's CMO editor Nadia Cameron features 6sense customer Aprimo:

[How Aprimo is building a better target customer strike-rate through ABM](#)

"It took 3-4 months to set-up the account-based marketing program. While Aprimo achieved success in the first year, it was clear more data insight into prospective customers was needed to improve strike rates. It was at this point the team adopted 6Sense's ABM technology offering."

Referenceable customers for the media can be the cherry on top of an already successful PR program, with benefits for both you and your customers. Not only can customer participation in media opportunities help move prospects along the buying journey, but can improve retention and relationships with those who participate. So, why wait to build your reserve of customer references?

