



HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR WRITING CONSULTANTS

A hallmark of successful clients is an insistence on getting candid advice from consultants who speak “straight talk”. Telling a client what they need to know rather than what they want to hear is simply smart business.

At first blush, this may seem like a given. After all, clients hire a **writing service** for domain expertise, proven methodologies and a track record, right? In theory, perhaps, but in practical reality it’s always more complicated.

Constructive criticism isn’t for the thin-skinned on either side of the table. Especially when you think you’re dead right about what the words should say. But time and again, the clients who encourage writers to candidly engage in the work are more likely to benefit. This is especially true at key junctures in a project when course corrections can determine success or failure.

A writer’s willingness to play a vigorous devil’s advocate is indispensable. And even more so if a company finds itself mired in a stale or failing campaign, losing market share or suffering from being elbowed out of leadership. Not all companies possess the DNA for thick skin. Here are the warning signs and the antidotes:

1. *“We’ve re-invented our segment and don’t have any direct competitors.”* Really? If so, chances are you don’t have much of a market, either. Better revisit the business plan. Or do some market research right way.
Rx: Make your content reflect a rigorous understanding of your prospects and users. Choose writers who know the territory and express your competitive differentiation in the language users actually use.

2. *“Our value proposition is time-tested and we haven’t had to update our web site in more than a year.”* Ouch. Keeping content fresh, provocative and current is a given in the Web 2.0 world of social marketing. Not to mention that competitive environments in this mercurial world have a way of changing suddenly, regularly and disruptively. Overnight.
Rx: Do regular site checkups. Get customers to give you feedback on your content and compare you to your competitors. Engage your writing service to do a content audit and make recommendations.

3. *“We have more customers than we can service.”* You might think of this as the lulled-into-complacency syndrome. Getting comfortable is an open invitation to competitors looking to feast on your early gains. Never forget the sage words of Intel’s Andy Grove: only the paranoid survive.

Rx: Lively, engaging content that spotlights the way users apply your technology can form the basis of much more than garden-variety application stories. Dive deeply into unconventional applications as a way to showcase more features and benefits.

4. *“We’ve got a three year technology lead on our closest competitor.”* No you don’t. Cling to this misguided notion and you’ll spend more time playing defense than you will on offense successfully marketing your differentiation and advantages that address your customers’ needs.

Rx: Concentrate on practical market education tools that explain your distinction in the market from a rational, pragmatic and credible point-of view. No reader wants to be told how great your technology is. They want to know how your technology is best suited to *their* requirements to determine if you’re worthy of making the short list.

5. *“Our carbon sequestering technology advances make us a lock for a feature article in The New Yorker.”* Right. The editors there are aching for a tutorial on multi-pollutant removal strategies because the readership is chock full of energy czars, sustainability directors and energy policy wonks. Not.

Rx: Ask your writers to weigh-in on if and how your written pieces can be best placed or re-purposed. Don’t ‘spray and pray’ your content.

Bringing new ideas to the table is the engine room of business. But before adopting those great ideas as gospel, put them through a messaging stress test. Unless, of course, you subscribe to the irony of David Brinkley’s collection of closing commentaries entitled, “Everyone is Entitled to My Opinion.”

What other signs of “thin skin” can you think of? What does your team do to encourage outsourced content creators to “push back” on directives they believe are misguided?