

The Damaging Admission--a Persuasive Technique

By Matthew Cobb

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We would all like to think that our product or service is flawless. More importantly, we would like for others to believe that as well. But no matter what you sell, a drawback (sometimes several) will always exist, even if only in the mind of your reader-prospects. Either way, you MUST address the issue up front. In fact, if written properly, "the damaging admission" can actually be used to your advantage.

Too many times, sales letters attempt to convince reader-prospects that there's nothing wrong with the product or service...that it is absolutely perfect. This kind of hyperbole will actually persuade some people, but your credibility will suffer with more others. There's nothing wrong with positioning your product or service to sound better than the competition, but to position it as perfect is a huge mistake. Admit your fault(s). Just be sure to show their real significance (or lack of) in proportion to the overall purchase.

A damaging admission must be 1) credible and 2) useful.

A damaging admission is only credible if it's real--no product is perfect, so you shouldn't have to make up a damaging admission. Work-at-home opportunities are notorious for poor persuasive techniques, many to this effect: "Hey, we understand that some people don't want to make more money. That's okay--this new program isn't for everyone. It's only for those who want a steady stream of residual income." That's a ridiculous statement and it isn't even a real argument. I don't know anyone who wouldn't like to make more money. Making up a false negative only hurts your image.

A damaging admission is often used to exclude (or appear to exclude) potential customers who might be

turned off by the facts related to the admission. This can be useful for eliminating time-wasting "tire kickers."

For example, if your product is expensive (but not prohibitively so for your target audience) then say so up front. Explain that the price is high, but that quality, customer service, etc., makes up for the price and even saves money over the life of the product. This will exclude many people who have no real intention of buying but still want more information. Plus, a higher price often creates the perception of increased value.

(If you decide to use price as a damaging admission, make sure your product will stand up to the test after the purchase, or be prepared to see sales drop off quickly.)

A damaging admission can be used to demonstrate a reason for a discount. Consider a recent example in the Dallas/Fort Worth area: a few days after a hailstorm, a local car dealership advertised lowered prices as part of a "hail sale." Their "damaging admission" was that many of the cars had been marked by the hail, so the dealership was forced to offer the cars at discount prices.

Were these cars really damaged? Perhaps, perhaps not. Either way, the dealership seized the opportunity to use a "damaging admission" to their advantage and have a special sale. The success of the campaign would depend on whether the damaging admission was credible. Were the discounts proportional to the supposed hail damage? If not, customers might think they'd been fooled. Because there was an actual hailstorm, however, the admission was probably accepted as credible.

When you write a sales letter, you're engaging in a one-sided conversation. You can't be present to answer any objections the reader might have and you can't be there to respond to concerns about your credibility. Make sure your sales letter does this for you.

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