

Session Objectives:

- The basis of persuasive sales messages – Identifying objectives
- The basis of persuasive sales messages – Organizing the message
- Claim letters and requests for favors
- The Collection series
- Strong appeal or urgency
- Ultimatum

writing persuasive messages:

- Identifying the objective
- Organizing the message

The basis of persuasive sales messages – Identifying objectives

Three questions that need to be answered while identifying the objectives of persuasive sales messages are:

- What is the product/service that is being promoted?
- Who is the target audience?
- What is the desired result?

These questions can be answered only by knowing the product or service, knowing the customer, and by knowing the desired action that the reader must take.

Know the Product or Service

To write persuasive sales messages, it is important to have a thorough knowledge of your product or service. In order to persuade others to buy the product or service, the person writing the persuasive sales message must know all the details pertaining to the product or service. This would include answers to questions such as:

- How will it benefit the customers?
- What is the material used to manufacture the product?
- What is the process involved in manufacturing the product?
- In what way are the product's design features superior to that of other products?
- What is the price of the product and what kind of servicing is it likely to require?

A persuasive sales message must also differentiate the company's product or service from that of competitors and mention the advantages to the customer of choosing the product or service among all other competing products or services.

Example: In a sales message written to persuade prospective customers to purchase a refrigerator of Alpha Company, the message includes details about the product, differentiates it from products of other companies and the advantages to the customer of

choosing Alpha's product in relation to the products of other companies.

Know the Customer

It is essential to know about the target audience while writing a persuasive message. The person writing the persuasive message should know about the people for whom the message is intended, their age, occupation and other demographic details.

Information on these details requires answering the following questions:

- Who would purchase the product and why?
- How frequently would it be purchased?
- How will the product be used? Will it be a necessity or a luxury?
- What do people like and dislike about the product?

Answering these questions will help the writer pen down effective and convincing persuasive messages.

Example: In a persuasive sales message to promote cellular phones, the message must be written keeping in mind the target audience, frequency of purchase of the product, its usage as a necessity or as a luxury, and its most liked and disliked features.

Know the Desired Action

Before writing a persuasive message, the writer must have a clear definition of the action that is desired from the reader. Depending upon whether the desired action is to make a sale, or to invite further communication from the target audience, the message should be accordingly drafted.

The basis of persuasive sales messages – Organizing the message

An indirect approach is adopted to write a persuasive sales letter. Just as a selling procedure includes the following four steps –*attention, interest, desire* and *action*, likewise, a persuasive sales letter too must be written following the same outline. The opening part of the sales letter must attract the reader's attention. This is followed by sentences that introduce the product and are intended to arouse the curiosity of the reader. The sentences that follow this part of the letter produce convincing evidence regarding the product and are intended to generate desire for the product among the target audience. The letter must end with sentences that would encourage action on the part of the reader.

This type of outline is suited for unsolicited sales letters. Solicited sales letters do not require to have the opening attention seeking sentences since it is obvious that the writer by seeking information about the product has already given some attention to the product.

First paragraph: An attention-getter

There are various attention-getting techniques that can be adopted by writers of unsolicited sales letters in order to attract the attention of the recipients. These include offering solution to a problem, making a startling announcement, beginning the letter with a what-if statement, highlighting an outstanding feature of the product, or by enclosing a free gift along with the letter.

However, in order to avoid losing the reader's interest, the writer must follow certain guidelines such as avoiding the usage of clichés or oft-repeated sentences, and avoiding asking the reader foolish and senseless questions.

Introducing the product

Having succeeded in obtaining the attention of the recipients and arousing their interest, the sales letter must go on to introduce the product. For the introduction to the product to be effective, it has to be

natural and cohesive. In other words, the attention-seeking sentence of the letter must naturally lead to the introduction to the product rather than switching to it abruptly.

Also, the introduction to the product must be worded in an action-oriented manner. Rather than describing the product, the introduction to the product must write more about the use of the product.

Further, the introduction to the product must highlight or emphasize the central selling point or most distinctive feature of the product.

Convince the readers with evidence

Having introduced the product, the writer must now try to convince the reader by substantiating claims about the product with adequate evidence. The evidence may be in the form of facts and figures. There is no need to use flowery statements, exaggerations and unsupported claims just for the sake of providing the reader with evidence. The evidence provided should be authentic. The idea is not just to be impressive but to increase reader confidence about the product.

In addition to providing supporting evidence, it may also be required to interpret the evidence for readers who are not much familiar with the product. Interpretation of the evidence makes the sales letter more convincing. Further, the issue of the price of the product must be carefully handled and must not be instrumental in losing the sales opportunity.

Last paragraph: Motivating the reader to action

There are greater chances of obtaining the desired response from the readers if the sales letter specifically states the action desired from the reader, refers to the benefit or reward that the reader can avail by taking the desired action, presents the action as easy to take, provides a stimulus for quick action, and confidently asks the reader to take the desired action.

Claim letters and requests for favors

These are persuasive letters that aim to obtain a favorable action from the reader. However, these letters elicit a favorable action from the reader only after attempting to arouse the reader's interest.

Making a Claim

The basis for a claim letter is the assurance or guarantee of an adjustment without the need for persuasion on the part of the customer. However, businesses are often unwilling to initiate necessary action. At such times, claim letters need to use a persuasive approach. They should be written in an inductive style. Moreover, there should be an emphasis on appeal throughout the letter.

Asking a Favor

A favor is an action for which people usually do not seem to have the time nor the inclination since there is no reward attached to it. The willingness of people to respond to a letter asking for a favor is hence low. Therefore, a letter asking for a favor should follow an inductive outline, make use of attention-getting techniques and should allude or refer to the incentive that would follow upon the reader taking the desired action.

The Collection Series

The aim of writing a collection letter is to obtain the desired action from the reader, that is, payment. Since slow-to-pay customers usually do not respond at the first instance, businesses have to resort to sending such customers a series of collection letters which comprise the collection series. Collection letters should follow an inductive outline and since these are written to those who are aware of their payment obligations, they need to be short in length thereby increasing the chances of the entire letter being read by the reader.

The following characteristics are essential to develop an effective collection series.

Characteristics for an effective collection series:

- **Timeliness:** Collection letters should be promptly sent in order to encourage timely payments. If sending of the letters itself is delayed, debtors will take even longer time to repay the dues.
- **Regularity:** Regular letters should be dispatched to debtors reminding them about their obligation to pay. This will reflect the seriousness of the creditors about recovery of their dues.

Understanding:

- The collection series must reflect an understanding of the nature of the debtor. A company's understanding of human relations determines the adaptability as well as the regularity of its collection series. Occasionally, some persons may default in making payments due to genuine reasons. Debtors who have a good-pay reputation should be given more time to make the payment as compared to those having a poor-pay reputation.

Letters in a collection series should not be sent at too close an interval. Not only does this make it impossible for the debtor to make the payment before receiving the next letter, it is also annoying to receive a collection letter even after the payment has been made.

- **Increase Stringency:** The seriousness in the tone of the letter must increase with increasing delay in making the payment. Depending upon the seriousness of the problem, the letters in the collection series are accordingly classified into various types. These also reflect the steps in the collection process.

Understanding

Depending upon the collection philosophy of the company and the nature of the debtor, the number of letters in the collection series varies. Many times, companies have to resort to legal action to obtain their dues.

A typical collection series consists of the following steps:

- **Reminder:** Even though most people pay their bills as soon as they are received, companies often have to send a reminder in order to obtain payment from the remaining accounts. A reminder is usually a duplicate of the original bill. Companies usually send two to three reminders before moving on to the letter-writing stage.
- **Inquiry:** In spite of sending a number of reminders, if a company fails to elicit the desired response (payment) from the debtor, it has to resort to writing a letter to the debtor. The underlying assumption of the writer while writing the letter is that something has prevented the debtor from making the payment. The letter must aim at obtaining some action from the customer, in the form of payment or in the form of an explanation.

Further, the company must not send more than one letter of inquiry to the customer since this will convey the message that the company is willing to wait for the customer to make the payment.

Appeal: A letter of appeal must be short in length so that it encourages the reader to read it entirely. Also, it must refer to only one kind of appeal so that if an additional letter is needed, it can be written using a different type of appeal.

There are four types of appeal that are commonly used in letters comprising a collection series.

- **Fair play:** This is essentially an appeal to the debtors' cooperation, loyalty and

honesty.

- **Closure:** This appeals to the sense of satisfaction that people derive by completing a transaction.
- **Pride:** People take pride in their reputation. Letters of this category appeal to the pride of people and encourage them to preserve their reputation by paying their dues.
- **Fear:** Letters making use of this appeal depend on people's fear of losing their credit privileges or their possessions and their fear of getting involved in possible litigation.
- **Strong appeal or urgency:** This type of letter emphasizes urgency and insists on payment for the debtor's own good. In order to make the debtor pay up, the letter hints at stringent measures such as the possibility of a lawsuit, loss of credit privileges and loss of possessions. This type of letter tries to build up pressure on the debtor by suggesting that a distasteful situation may arise if the payment is not made. The tone of the letter must be less persuasive and more demanding. A deductive approach may also be adopted to have a forceful impact on the debtor and make him pay up.
- **Ultimatum:** The tone of the letter must change from 'must pay' to 'pay now or else'. The letter must convey the seriousness of the matter by reviewing the sequence of events and communication that has taken place between the company and the debtor from the past to the present date. The letter must also clearly indicate the course of action the company intends to take in order to obtain the final collection. While writing the letter of ultimatum, the writer should avoid name-calling and preaching to the debtors on how they should have acted. If the letter of ultimatum too fails to result in collection, the company must communicate to the debtors about the course of action that the company has taken.

Summary

Persuasive messages are written to attract the reader's attention, arouse his interest, generate desire and encourage action. They revolve around a central selling point and try to motivate the reader to get the desired action.

Collection letters are a form of persuasive messages and are written with increasing stringency to elicit the desired response from the reader in the form of payment of dues.