

Clearing up the Big Muddy

4 Steps to Better Consumer Communication

Helping your customers to make better decisions about the products and services they purchase is not easy. But it's worth the effort!



1. Understand your consumer's hierarchy of decision-making.

People choose a car differently than they choose a brand of toilet paper. A company needs to understand the thought processes consumers go through as they make purchase decisions. Do they choose first by brand name or price? Style or color? Feature or availability? The same holds true of health care products. Listen to 20 of your consumers describe what they think about before a purchase, and map their **decision-making journeys**. You'll learn things you would have never guessed. Understanding your consumers will help you design packaging and websites that guide people more easily through their decision-making process.

2. Write plainly.

Complex information is often filled with jargon. Instructions in industries like healthcare and finance are routinely write copy that is above the heads of their consumers. Regulation controlling what can be said on a package, on a website, or in an ad are rigid, but it is still possible to satisfy regulations and communicate clearly to a consumer. **Define your terms and provide examples.** Avoid acronyms. Break the writing into short sections with clear headings. Lead each section with the most important information. And write as if you're explaining the issue to a twelve-year-old, using **simple words and straightforward sentences.**

3. Use visual explanations whenever possible.

The most effective rule of writing is not to write at all when you can avoid it. Visual explanations are easier to understand. Even better, **people pay attention to visuals** in ways they don't with writing. Imagine the impact a simple drawing that shows the effect taking the wrong pain reliever would have on people with peptic ulcers. Finally, visuals are approachable and friendly, which complex information usually isn't. Do an inventory of your company's content. Where can visual explanations replace copy?

4. Test your communication with your consumers.

Once your communication is drafted, it's time to take it back to your consumers. Make sure you **test it with the same people you're trying to reach**—the right ages, the right socio-economic levels, the right education. If your communication is a website, let them take it for a spin. If it's a package, let them see it on a shelf alongside all of the other products. Watch how they consumer the information. Ask pointed follow-up questions to see if they've understood the most important parts of the communication. Then rewrite and repeat. Make sure you build in time in your timeline for several rounds of feedback. You'll be glad you did.

To learn more about clearly communication to consumers, get in touch at 412.488.8600 or www.thoughtform.com

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