Parmenion

Keeping your communications sludge-free

Sarah Lyons shares her top tips

We all give our customers a lot of information. Arguably too much. Our sector can be guilty of giving a (often virtual these days) forest of pages of information that they have no hope of reading, let alone understanding which can hinder them from confidently making decisions.

At Parmenion, we spend a lot of time trying to make our communications accessible and easy to understand so customers can confidently make informed decisions to achieve the outcomes they want.

So how do you avoid sludge practices?

Keep information concise

Transparent reporting makes customers feel confident in the decisions they take and understand the advice they're being given. When they understand, they can make decisions in their best interest and align with their expectations, and this'll be reflected in the customer service reviews.

Always use plain English

There's a real skill to taking complicated content and making it simple. Many people want to sound 'clever' when they write but consumers want their reports to be accessible and understandable, so try to use plain English. The Flesch reading ease score is a good indicator of the readability of text.

And another thing to avoid – TLAs. Our industry has a real fondness for using acronyms, often Three Letter Acronyms to shorten words. But remember, even if you know what it means, someone else might not – which in the long run could actually take more time.

How do you share your sludge free reports with customers?

Use writing principles to help readers

Brevity is key. Attention spans are getting shorter so start your article with a summary of the article, let your reader know what you're going to talk about. Write in short sentences and paragraphs, and use headers and call outs to emphasise your point you're making to keep your reader's attention. Your goal is to get your customer to read your report, not just scan it and close it.

Use design principles to present your reports at their best

Consistency is key so use consistent imagery, fonts and colours in your reports and communications. Creating familiarity with your branding is reassuring for a customer and makes your content legible.

Don't be scared of white space either, big blocks of text can be off putting so make sure your pages are balanced and have strong point of alignment so the consumer's eyes can move seamlessly across the page.

Always proofread your work

And having someone else proofread and edit work is even better. They'll find your typos, your grammatical errors and poor phrasing so your work can be read. Remember, the point is to help your customer to understand what you're telling them.

A picture paints a thousand words

Images are always received well. They can convey sometimes complex ideas or points in a more digestible or understandable way. So if you can show something as an image rather than words, do.

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