1.0 USING THE THREE-STEP WRITING PROCESS FOR PERSUASIVE MESSAGES

Successful businesses rely on persuasive messages in both internal and external communication. Whether you're convincing your boss to open a new office in Europe or encouraging potential customers to try your products, you'll use many of the same techniques of persuasion—the attempt to change an audience's attitudes, beliefs, or actions. Persuasive techniques are a cornerstone of marketing and selling, but even if you never work in those fields, you'll still need good persuasion skills to advance in your career. Successful professionals understand that persuasion is not about trickery or getting people to make choices that aren't in their best interest; rather, it lets your audience know they have a choice and helps them choose to agree with you.

As with every type of business message, the three-step writing process improves persuasive messages. In addition, these messages require some specific techniques which you have the opportunity to explore in this chapter.

1.1 Step 1: Plan Your Message

Unlike the routine positive messages we covered in an previous module, persuasive message aim to influence audiences who may be inclined to resist at first. Even if they agree that your idea or product is attractive, they face so many options in today's crowded markets that you'll often need to use persuasive techniques to convince them the your choice is the best of all the attractive alternatives.

In today's information-saturated business environment, having a great idea or great product is no longer enough. Every day, untold numbers of good ideas go unnoticed and good products go unsold simply because the messages meant to promote them aren't compelling enough to rise above the competitive noise. Creating successful persuasive messages in these challenging situations demands careful attention to all four tasks in the planning step, starting with an insightful analysis of you purpose and your audience.

1.1.1 Analyzing Your Situation  Your purpose might seem obvious—to persuade people to visit your website or buy your surfboards—but persuasive messages can suffer from three common mistakes related to purpose. The first mistake is failing to clarify your purpose before you continue with planning. Let's say you want to persuade top management to support a particular research project. But what does "support" mean? Do you want them to pat you on the back and wish you well? Or do you want them to pull five researchers off another project and assign them to your project? Having a specific goal is crucial to effective persuasion.
The second mistake is failing to clearly express your purpose to your audience. You may feel uncomfortable with the idea of asking others to give you time, money, promotions, or other considerations. However, if you don't ask, or if you are vague about what you want, you're never going to get a positive response.

The third mistake is failing to realize that the decision you want someone to make is too complicated or risky to make all in one leap. You can't sell a $10 million office building by writing someone a letter and asking her to buy it. You need to persuade in stages with a message adapted to each stage. Your purpose in the first message might be to spark interest with a brief analysis of potential lease income. If that message is successful, you might then offer a tour of the site, and so on until you finally ask for a decision. If you try to accomplish too much with any single message, you risk confusing you audience or prompting them to say "no" before you've had a chance to build your case.

You can identify the right number of messages and the nature of each one by analyzing your audience. Consider both the positives and the negatives—the wants, needs, and motivations of your audience (the reasons they might respond favorably to your message) as well as their concerns and objections (the reasons they might not respond favorably). With these two insights as guides, you can then work to find common ground with your audience, while emphasizing positive points and minimizing negative ones.

The best persuasive messages are closely connected to your audience's desires and interests. Consider these important questions: Who is my audience? What are their needs? What do I want them to do? How might they resist? Are there alternative positions I need to examine? What does the decision maker consider the most important issue? How might the organization's culture influence my strategy?

Some theorists believe that certain needs have priority. Psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that only after lower-level needs have been met will a person seek to fulfill needs on higher levels. Other theories of motivation exist as well, but the point here is that people have a variety of needs and that the most effective persuasive messages are aligned with the most important needs of every audience member.

**Fig. 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SELF-ACTUALIZATION</th>
<th>Creativity – Self-realization – Wisdom – Vocation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESTEEM AND STATUS</td>
<td>Self-worth – Uniqueness – Respect – Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL</td>
<td>Affection – Friendship – Group ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAFETY AND SECURITY</td>
<td>Personal confidence – Stability – Protection from enemies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SURVIVAL (PSYCHOLOGICAL)</td>
<td>Air- Food – Water – Sleep – Shelter</td>
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To understand and categorize audience needs, you can refer to specific information such as **demographics** (the age, gender, occupation, income, education, and other quantifiable characteristics of the people you're trying to persuade) and **psychographics** (personality, attitudes, lifestyle, and other psychological characteristics). Both types of information are strongly influenced by culture. When analyzing your audience, take into account their cultural expectations and practices so that you don't undermine your persuasive message by using an inappropriate appeal or by organizing your message in a way that seems unfamiliar or uncomfortable to your audience.

**1.1.2 Gathering Information** Once your situation analysis is complete, you need to gather the information necessary to close the gap between what your audience knows, believes, or feels right now and what you want them to know, believe, or feel as a result of receiving your message. Most persuasive messages are a combination of logical and emotional factors, but the ratio varies dramatically from message to message. You can get a sense of this variation by comparing the websites of American Fastener Technology (industrial goods, [www.americanfastener.com](http://www.americanfastener.com)), Chrysler (automobiles, [www.chrysler.com](http://www.chrysler.com)), and Lancome (beauty products, [www.lancome.com](http://www.lancome.com)).

American Fasteners relies primarily on straightforward product information to convince buyers, whereas Lancome tries to evoke a more emotional response through it visual and verbal imagery. Chrysler is somewhere in the middle, providing plenty of fact and figures about its cars but also including strong emotional messages about the joy of driving. By identifying the mix of factors that will most likely persuade your audience you'll know what sort of information you need to gather. You'll learn more about the types of information to offer when you read "Developing Persuasive Business Messages" later in this reading.

**1.1.3 Selecting the Right Medium** Persuasive messages can be found in virtually ever communication medium ever devised, from instant messages and computer animation to radio ads and skywriting. For marketing and sales messages, your options are numerous. In fact, advertising agencies employ media specialists whose only job is to analyze the media options available and select the most cost-effective combination for each client and each ad campaign.

To further complicate matters, various members of your audience might prefer different media for the same message. Some consumers like to do all their car shopping in person, whereas others do most of their research online. Some people don't mind promotional e-mails for products they're interested in; others resent every piece of commercial e-mail – spam – they receive. If you can't be sure you can reach most or all of your audience with a single medium, you'll need to use two or more, such as following up an e-mail campaign with printed letters.

**1.1.4 Organizing Your Information** Be sure to give attention to all four aspects of organizing your information—defining your main idea, limiting your scope, choosing direct or indirect approach, and grouping your points—in a meaningful way. The most effective main ideas for persuasive messages have one thing in common: they are about the receiver, not the sender. Take a cue from a successful advertiser such as Nike. The company's ads are never about the company and often aren't even about the product. They're about the customers experience when using Nike products. You can benefit from this same approach for all persuasive messages. If you're trying to convince others to join you in a business venture, explain how it will help
them, not how it will help you.

To limit the scope of each message effectively, include only the information needed to help your audience take the next step toward making the ultimate decision or taking the ultimate action you want. In simple scenarios such as persuading teammates to attend a special meeting, you might put everything you have to say into single, short message. But if you want your company to invest several million dollars in your latest product idea, the scope of your first message might be limited to securing 10 minutes at the next executive committee meeting so that you can introduce your idea and get permission to explore it. You might not be in a position to actually ask for the money for weeks or months, after you've gathered support for the idea and collected enough information to make a compelling business case for it.

As with routine and negative messages, the best organizational approach is based on your audience's likely reaction to your message. However, because the nature of persuasion is to convince your audience to change their attitudes, beliefs, or action, most persuasive messages use an indirect approach. That means you'll want to explain your reasons and build interest before asking for a decision or for action—or perhaps even before revealing your purpose.

Consider the direct approach whenever you know your audience is ready to hear your proposal. If your boss wants to change shipping companies and asks for you recommendation, you'll probably want to open with your choice, then provide your reasons as backup. Similarly, if there's a good chance your audience will agree with your message, don't force them to wade through pages of reasoning before seeing your main idea. If they happen not to agree with your pitch, they can move into your reasoning to see why you're promoting that particular idea. The direct approach is also called for if you've been building your case through several indirect messages and it's now time to make your request.

### 1.2 Step 2: Write Your Message

The generally uninvited and occasionally even unwelcome nature of persuasive messages means the "you" attitude is more critical than ever when it comes to writing them. Most people won't even pay attention to your message, much less respond to it, if it isn't about them. You can encourage a more welcome reception by (1) using positive and polite language, (2) understanding and respecting cultural differences, (3) being sensitive to organizational cultures, and (4) taking steps to establish your credibility.

Positive language usually happens naturally with persuasive messages, since you're promoting an idea or product you believe in. However, polite language isn't as automatic, surprisingly enough. Some writers inadvertently insult their readers by implying that they've been making poor choices in the past or need the writer's keen insights to make a good choice in the current situation.

Your understanding and respect for cultural differences will help you satisfy the needs of your audience and will help your audience respect you. That's because persuasion is different in different cultures. In France, an aggressive, hard-sell technique is likely to antagonize your audience. In Germany, where people tend to focus on technical matters, plan on verifying any figures you use for support, and make sure they are exact. In Sweden, audiences tend to focus on theoretical questions and strategic implications, whereas U.S. audiences are usually concerned with more practical matters such as info on precisely how the product will benefit them.
Just as culture within various social groups affects the success of persuasive message, so too does the culture within various organizations. Over time, every company develops a particular internal culture that establishes numerous expectations regarding communication. For instance, some organizations handle disagreement and conflict in an indirect, behind-the-scene way, whereas others accept and even encourage open discussion and sharing of differing viewpoints. Similarly, the degree of formality varies widely. When you accept and follow these traditions, even if they don't reflect your personal preferences, you show the audience that you understand them and respect their values.

Finally, when trying to persuade a skeptical or hostile audience, you must convince people that you know what you're talking about and that you're not trying to mislead them. Your credibility is even more important in persuasive messages than is in other business messages. Without it, your efforts to persuade will seem ineffective at best and manipulative at worst. Research strongly suggests that most managers overestimate their own credibility—considerably. Establishing your credibility in persuasive messages takes time. Characteristic essential to building and maintaining your credibility include honesty, objectivity, awareness of audience needs, knowledge and expertise, endorsements, performance, and communication style. To establish credibility in persuasive messages, try to go beyond these characteristics by

- **Using simple language.** In most persuasive situations, your audience will be cautious, watching for confusing words, fantastic claims, insupportable descriptions, and emotional manipulation. Speak plainly and simply.

- **Supporting your message with facts.** Documents, statistics, research results, and testimonials (from people who've made the choice you're advocating)—all provide objective evidence for what you have to say, which adds to your credibility. The more specific and relevant your proof, the better.

- **Naming your sources.** Telling your audience where your information comes from and who agrees with you improves your credibility, especially if your sources are already respected by your audience.

- **Being an expert (or finding one to support your message).** Your knowledge of your message's subject area (or even of some other area) helps you give your audience the quality information necessary to make a decision. If you aren't an expert in the subject, try to get the support of someone who is.

- **Establishing common ground.** Those beliefs, attitudes, and background experiences that you have in common with members of your audience will help them identify with you.

- **Being objective.** Your ability to understand and acknowledge all sides of an issue helps you present fair and logical arguments in your persuasive message. Top executives often ask if their employees have considered all the possibilities before committing to a single choice.

- **Displaying your good intentions.** Show your audience your genuine concern, good faith, and truthfulness. Let them see how you are focusing on their needs. Your willingness to keep your audience's best interests at heart helps you create persuasive messages that are not only more effective but also more ethical.
1.3 Step 3: Complete Your Message

The pros know from experience that the details can make or break a persuasive message, so they’re careful not to shortchange this part of the writing process. Advertisers may have a dozen or more people review a message before it's released to the public. Ads and commercial websites are often tested extensively with representative recipients to make sure the intended audience gets the information the sender intends.

When you evaluate your content, try to judge your argument objectively and try not to overestimate your credibility. When revising for clarity and conciseness, carefully match the purpose and organization to audience needs. If possible, ask an experienced colleague who knows your audience well to review your draft. Your design elements must complement, not detract from, your argument. In addition, meticulous proofreading will identify any mechanical or spelling errors that would weaken your persuasive potential. Finally, make sure your distribution methods fit your audience's expectations as well as your purpose. Don't start your persuasive efforts on the wrong foot by annoying your audience with an unwelcome delivery method.

With the three steps in mind, you're ready to begin composing persuasive messages, starting with persuasive business messages (those that try to convince readers to approve new projects, enter into business partnerships, and so on), followed by marketing and sales messages (those that try to convince readers to consider and then purchase products and services).

2.0 DEVELOPING PERSUASIVE BUSINESS MESSAGES

Your success as a businessperson is closely tied to your ability to convince others to accept new ideas, change old habits, or act on your recommendations. Even early in your career, might have the opportunity to convince your manager to let you join an exciting project or to improve an important process. As you move into positions of greater responsibility, your persuasive messages could start to influence multimillion dollar investments and the careers of hundreds or thousands of employees. Obviously, the increase in your persuasive skills needs to be matched by the care and thoroughness of your analysis and planning, so that the ideas you convince others to adopt are sound.

Persuasive messages constitute a broad and diverse category, with audiences that range from a single person in your own department to government agencies, investors, clients, community leaders, and other external groups. Most of your messages will consist of persuasive business messages, which are any persuasive message designed to elicit a preferred response in a non-sales situation.

The goal of your persuasive business message is to convince your reader that you request or idea is reasonable and that it will benefit your reader in some way. Effective persuasion involves four essential strategies: framing your arguments, balancing emotional and logical appeals, reinforcing your position, and anticipating objections.

2.1 Framing Your Arguments

Many persuasive messages follow some variation of the indirect approach. However, unlike the buffer in an indirect negative message, the opening in a persuasive message is designed to get
your audience's attention. Similarly, the explanation section does more than present reasons, and it is expanded to two sections. The first raises your audience's interest, and the second attempts to change your audience's attitude. Finally, your close does more than end on a positive note; it emphasizes reader benefits and motivates readers to take specific action. This persuasive approach, called the AIDA model, organizes your presentation into those four phases: (1) attention, (2) interest, (3) desire, and (4) action

1. **Attention.** Your first objective is to encourage your audience to want to hear about your problem, idea, new product—whatever your main idea is. Write a brief engaging opening sentence, with no extravagant claims or irrelevant points. And be sure to find some common ground on which to build your case.

2. **Interest.** Explain the relevance of your message to your audience. Continuing the theme you started with, paint a more detailed picture with words. Get your audience thinking.

3. **Desire.** Help audience members embrace your idea by explaining how the change will benefit them. Reduce resistance by identifying and answering in advance any questions the audience might have. If your idea is complex, you may need to explain how you would implement it. Back up your claims in order to increase audience willingness to take the action that you suggest in the next section. Just remember to make sure that all evidence is directly relevant to your point.

4. **Action.** Suggest the action you want readers to take. Make it more than a statement such as "Please institute this program soon" or "Send me a refund." This is the opportunity to remind readers of the benefits of taking action. The secret of successful action phase is making the action easy, so if possible, give your readers a couple of options for responding, such as a toll-free number to call and a website to visit. Include a deadline when applicable.

The AIDA plan is tailor-made for using the indirect approach, allowing you to save your main idea for the action phase.

### 2.2 Balancing Emotional and Logical Appeals

Few persuasive appeals are purely logical or purely emotional. Imagine you're sitting at a control panel, with one knob labeled "logic" and another labeled "emotion." As you prepare your persuasive message, you carefully adjust each knob, tuning the message for maximum impact. Too little emotion, and your audience might not care enough to respond. Too much emotion, and your audience might think you haven't thought through the tough business questions.

To find the optimum balance, consider four factors: (1) the actions you hope to motivate, (2) your reader's expectations, (3) the degree of resistance you need to overcome, and (4) how far you feel empowered to go to sell your point of view. When you're persuading someone to accept a complex idea, take a serious step, or make a large and important decision, lean toward logic and make your emotional appeal subtle. However, when you're persuading someone to purchase a product, join a cause, or change an attitude, you might rely a bit more heavily on emotion.

**a. Emotional appeals** call on feelings, basing the argument on audience needs or sympathies; however, such an appeal must be subtle. For instance, you can make use of the emotion surrounding certain words. The word *freedom* evokes strong feelings, as do words such as
success, *prestige, compassion, free, value,* and *comfort.* Such words put your audience in a certain frame of mind and help them accept your message. However, emotional appeals aren't necessarily effective by themselves. For most business situations, the best use of emotion is working in tandem with logic. Even if your audience reaches a conclusion based on emotions, they'll look to you to provide logical support as well.

**b. Logical appeals** call on reason. In any argument you might use to persuade an audience, you make a claim and then support your claim with reasons or evidence. When appealing to your audience's logic, you might use three types of reasoning:

- **Analogy.** With analogy, you reason from specific evidence to specific evidence. For instance, to persuade reluctant employees to attend a planning session, you might use a town meeting analogy, comparing your company to a small community and your employees to valued members of that community.

- **Induction.** With inductive reasoning, you work from specific evidence to a general conclusion. To convince your team to change a certain production process, you could point out that every company who has adopted it has increased profits, so it must be a smart idea.

- **Deduction.** With deductive reasoning, you work from a generalization to a specific conclusion. To persuade your boss to hire additional customer support staff, you might point to industry surveys that show how crucial customer satisfaction is to corporate profits.

Every method of reasoning is vulnerable to misuse, both intentional and unintentional, so verify each of your rational arguments before you distribute your message. For example, in the case of the production process, are there any other factors that affect the integrity of your reasoning? What if that process works well only for small companies with few products, and your firm is a multinational behemoth with 10,000 products? To avoid faulty logic, practice the following guidelines:

- **Avoid hasty generalizations.** Make sure you have plenty of evidence before drawing conclusions.

- **Avoid circular reasoning.** *Circular reasoning* is a logical fallacy in which you try to support your claim by restating it in different words. The statement "We know temporary workers cannot handle this task because temps are unqualified for it" doesn't prove anything because the claim and the supporting evidence are essentially identical. It doesn't prove why the temps are unqualified.

- **Avoid attacking an opponent.** Focus on the real question. Attack the argument your opponent is making, not your opponent's character.

- **Avoid oversimplifying a complex issue.** Make sure you present all the factors rather than relying on an "either/or" statement that makes it look as if only two choices are possible.

- **Avoid mistaken assumptions of cause and effect.** If you can't isolate the impact of a specific factor, you can't assume it's the cause of whatever effect you're discussing. The weather improves in spring, and people start playing baseball in spring. Does good weather cause baseball? No. There is a *correlation* between the two—meaning the data
associated with them tend to rise and fall at the same time but there is no causation—no proof that one causes the other. The complexity of many business situations makes cause and effect a particular challenge. You lowered prices and sales went up. Were lower prices the cause? Maybe, but it might've been caused by a competitor with delivery problems, a better advertising campaign, or any of a host of other factors.

- **Avoid faulty analogies.** Be sure that the two objects or situations being compared are similar enough for the analogy to hold. Even if A resembles B in one respect, it may not hold true in other important respects.

- **Avoid illogical support.** Make sure the connection between your claim and your support is truly logical and not based on a leap of faith, a missing premise, or irrelevant evidence.

### 2.3 Anticipating Objections

Even the most powerful persuasive messages can expect to encounter some initial resistance. The best way to deal with audience resistance is to anticipate as many objections as you can and address them in your initial message before your audience can even bring them up. By doing so you not only address such issues right away, but you demonstrate a broad appreciation of the issue and imply confidence in your message. This anticipation is particularly important in written messages, when you don't have the opportunity to detect and respond to objections on the spot.

For instance, if you know that your proposal to switch to lower-cost materials will raise concerns about product quality and customer satisfaction, address these issues head-on in your message. If you wait until people raise the concern after reading your message, chances are they will already have gravitated toward a firm "no" before you have a chance to address their concerns. At the very least, waiting until people object will introduce additional rounds of communication that will delay the response you want to receive.

If you expect a hostile audience, one biased against your plan from the beginning, present all sides. As you cover each option, explain the pros and cons. You'll gain additional credibility if you present these options before presenting your recommendation or decision. To uncover audience objections, try some "What if?" scenarios. Poke holes in your own theories and ideas before your audience does. Then find solutions to the problems you've uncovered.

People are more likely to support what they help create, so ask your audience for their thoughts on the subject before you put your argument together. Let your audience recommend some solutions. With enough thought and effort, you may even be able to turn problems into opportunities; for example, you may show how your proposal will be more economical in the long run, even though it may cost more now. Just be sure to be thorough, open, and objective about all the facts and alternatives.

When putting together persuasive arguments, avoid common mistakes such as these:

- **Using an up-front hard sell.** Don't push. Setting out a strong position at the start of a persuasive message puts potential opponents on guard, giving them something to grab onto—and fight against.

- **Resisting compromise.** Don't dig your heels in. Persuasion is a process of give and take. As one expert points out, a persuader rarely changes another person's behavior or
viewpoint without altering his or her own in the process.

- **Relying solely on great arguments.** Don't limit your tactics. In persuading people to change their minds, great arguments matter, but they are only one part of the equation. Your ability to create a mutually beneficial framework for your position, to connect with your audience on the right emotional level, and to communicate through vivid language are all just as important; they bring your argument to life.

- **Assuming persuasion is a one-shot effort.** Don't expect too much at once. Persuasion is a process, not a one time event. More often than not persuasion involves listening to people, testing a position, developing a new position that reflects new input, more testing, more compromise, and so on.

Your success with persuasive messages depends on your ability to frame your argument, balance emotional and logical appeals, reinforce your position, and overcome resistance. These strategies will help you craft strong persuasive messages, no matter what the situation.

### 3.0 COMMON EXAMPLES OF PERSUASIVE MESSAGES

Throughout your career, you'll have numerous opportunities to write persuasive messages within your organization: selling a supervisor on an idea for cutting costs suggesting more efficient operating procedures, eliciting cooperation from competing departments, winning employee support for a new benefits package, requesting money for new equipment or funding for a special project. Similarly, you may send of variety of persuasive messages to people outside the organization: promoting products, soliciting investment funds, shaping public opinions, or requesting adjustments that go beyond a supplier's contractual obligations.

### 3.1 Persuasive Requests for Action

The bulk of your persuasive business message will involve requests for action. In some cases, your request will be anticipated, so the direct approach is fine. In others, you'll need to introduce your intention indirectly and the AIDA model is ideal for this purpose. Open with an attention-getting device and show readers that you know something about their concerns.

Use the interest and desire sections of your message to demonstrate that you have good reason for making such a request and to cover what you know about the situation: the facts and figures, the benefits of helping, and any history or experience that will enhance your appeal. Your goals are (1) to gain credibility (for yourself and your request) and (2) to make your readers believe that helping you will indeed help solve a significant problem.

Once you've demonstrated that your message is relevant to your reader, you can close with a request for some specific action. When asking for a special favor (such as asking someone to chair an event or to serve as the team leader because you can no longer fill that role), use persuasive techniques to convince your reader of the value of the project. Include all necessary information about the project and any facts and figures that will convince your reader that his or her contribution will be enjoyable, easy, important, and of personal benefit.
3.2 Persuasive Presentation of Ideas

Most internal persuasive messages focus on getting the audience to make a specific decision or take some specific action. However, you will encounter situations in which you simply want to change attitudes or beliefs about a particular topic, without asking the audience to decide or do anything—at least not yet. In complicated, multistep persuasive efforts, the goal of your first message might be nothing more than convincing your audience to re-examine long-held opinions to admit the possibility of new ways of thinking. For instance, you think your company is spending too much time processing payroll, and you've found an outside firm that can do it for less money than you now spend on internal staff and systems (a practice known as outsourcing). However, your company president is philosophically opposed to outsourcing a critical business function, saying that something as important a payroll should never be entrusted to outsiders. Until and unless you can bring about a change in the president's way of thinking there is no point in pushing for a decision about outsourcing.

Another example is the effort to improve Internet access for people with visual and other disabilities. A campaign called the Web Accessibility Initiative has been launched by the World Wide Web Consortium (a global association that defines many of the guidelines and technologies behind the World Wide Web.) Although the Consortium's ultimate goal is making website more accessible, a key interim goal is simply making website developers more aware of the need. As part of this effort, the Consortium has developed a presentation that highlights issue such as the following:

- The web's growing importance as a source of everything including news and entertainment, workplace interaction and government services
- The web's gradual displacement of traditional sources of these services
- The presence of barriers on the web for many types of disabilities
- The number of people whose disabilities affect their access to the web (the number is in the millions)
- The fact that accessible web designs can also help other users

Information on these specific issues can help open the eyes of website operators which may assume that standard web practices are sufficient for their audiences.

3.3 Non-routine Requests and Persuasive Claims

Although persuasive claims requests are sometimes referred to as complaint letters, you don't write them merely to get a complaint off your chest. Your goal is to persuade someone to make an adjustment in your favor. You work toward this goal by demonstrating the difference between what you expected and what you actually got. Most claim letters are routine messages and use the direct approach discussed in our previous module. However, suppose you purchase something and, after the warranty expires, discover that the item was defective. You write the company a routine request asking for a replacement, but your request is denied. You're not satisfied, and you still believe you have a strong case. Perhaps you just didn't communicate it well enough the first time. Persuasion is necessary in such cases.
You can't threaten to withhold payment, so try to convey the essentially negative information in a way that will get positive results. Fortunately, most people in business are open to settling your claim fairly. It's to their advantage to maintain your goodwill and to resolve your problem quickly.

The key ingredients of a good persuasive claim are a complete and specific review of the facts and a confident and positive tone. Assume that the other person is not trying to cheat you but that you also have the right to be satisfied with the transaction. Talk only about the complaint at hand, not about other issues involving similar products or other complaints about the company. People generally respond more favorably to requests that are both calm and reasonable. Your goal is to solve a particular problem, and your audience is most likely to help if you focus on the audience benefits of doing so (rather than focusing on the disadvantages of neglecting your complaint.)

4.0 DEVELOPING MARKETING AND SALES MESSAGES

Marketing and sales messages use the same basic techniques as other persuasive messages, with the added emphasis of encouraging someone to participate in a commercial transaction. Although the terms marketing message and sales message are often used interchangeably, they do represent separate but related efforts. Marketing messages usher potential buyers through the purchasing process without asking them to make an immediate decision; that's when sales messages take over. Marketing messages focus on such tasks as introducing new brands to the public, providing competitive comparison information, encouraging customers to visit websites for more information, and reminding buyers that a particular product or service is available. In contrast, a sales message makes a specific request for people to place an order for a particular product or service.

Most marketing and sales messages, particularly in larger companies, are created and delivered by professionals with specific training in marketing, advertising, sales, or public relations. However, you may be called on to review the work of these specialists or even to write such messages in smaller companies, so a good understanding of how these messages work will help you be a more effective manager. The basic strategies to consider include assessing customer needs, analyzing your competition, determining key selling points and benefits, anticipating purchase objections, applying the AIDA model, and maintaining high standards of ethics, legal compliance, and etiquette. Also, keep in mind that marketing and sales campaigns often include the series of messages in a coordinated effort that can last for weeks or months. In these campaigns, your message planning might encompass a website, e-mails, letters, brochures, personal sales presentations, as well as a mix of print, online, and broadcast media.

4.1 Assessing Audience Needs

As with every other business message, successful marketing and sales messages start with an understanding of audience needs. For some products and services, this assessment is a simple matter. For instance, customers compare only a few basic attributes when purchasing copy or printer paper, including weight, brightness, color, and finish. In contrast, they might consider dozens of features when shopping for real estate, cars, professional services, and other complex purchases.

In addition, customer needs often extend beyond the basic product or service. Clothes do far more
than simply keep you warm. What you wear makes a statement about who you are, which social groups you want to be associated with (or not), and how you view your relationship with the people around you. In fact, a simple pair of shoes can meet at least four levels in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Begin by assessing audience needs, interests, and emotional concerns—just as you would for any business message. Try to form a mental image of the typical buyer for the product you wish to sell. Ask yourself what audience members might want to know about this product. How can your product help them? Are they driven by bottom-line pricing, or is quality more important to them?

Note the ads you're exposed to every day. They often focus on just one or two attributes or issues, even if the product or service has many different facets to consider. The purpose of these narrow marketing messages is to grab your attention and then raise your interest level enough to encourage you to conduct further research.

4.2 Analyzing Your Competition

Marketing and sales messages nearly always compete with messages from other companies trying to reach the same audience. When Chrysler plans a sales letter to introduce a new model to current customers, the company knows that its audience has also been exposed to messages from Ford, Honda, Volkswagon, and numerous other car companies. In crowded markets, writers sometimes have to search for words and phrases that other companies aren't already using. They might also want to avoid themes, writing styles, or creative approaches that are too similar to those of competitive messages.

4.3 Determining Key Features and Benefits

With some insight into audience needs and existing messages from the competition, you're ready to decide which benefits and features of your product or service to highlight. For all but the simplest products, you'll want to prioritize the items you plan to discuss. You'll also want to distinguish between the features of the product and the benefits that those features offer the customers.

As you learned in our previous module, features, also called selling points, are the most attractive features of an idea or product, whereas benefits are the particular advantages that readers will realize from those features. Selling points focus on the product. Benefits focus on the user. For example, if you say that your snow shovel has "an ergonomically designed handle," you've described a good feature. But to persuade someone to buy that shovel, say "the ergonomically designed handle will reduce your risk of back injury." That's a benefit. For your message to be successful, your product's distinguishing benefit must correspond to your readers' primary needs or emotional concerns.

4.4 Anticipating Purchase Objections

As with persuasive business messages, marketing and sales messages often encounter objections, and once again, the best way to handle them is to identify them up front and try to address as
many as you can in the original message (or messages, as the case may be). However, with marketing and sales messages, you often don't get a second chance to explain yourself or to present your case. Your boss might feel an obligation to let you explain what you meant in the third paragraph of your persuasive proposal, but potential customers feel no such responsibility. If your website for fashion jewelry aimed at college-age consumers strikes visitors as too juvenile, for instance, they'll click to another site within seconds and probably never come back to yours.

Objections can range from high price to low quality to a lack of compatibility with existing products. Perceived risk is another common objection. Consumers might worry that a car won't be safe enough for a family, that a jacket will make them look unattractive, or that a hair salon will botch a haircut. Business buyers might worry about disrupting operations or failing to realize the financial returns on a purchase.

Price can be a particularly tricky issue in any message, whether audience members are consumers or business customers. Whether you highlight or downplay the price of your product, prepare your readers for it. Words such as luxurious and economical provide unmistakable clues about how your price compares with that of competitors. Such words help your readers accept your price when you finally state it.

If price is a major selling point, give it a position of prominence, such as in the headline or as the last item in a paragraph. If price is not a major selling point, you can handle it in several ways. You could leave the price out altogether or de-emphasize it by putting the figure in the middle of a paragraph that comes well after you've presented the benefits and selling points.

Emphasizes the rarity of the edition to signal value and to prepare the reader for the big ticket price that follows

Only 100 prints of this exclusive, limited-edition lithograph will be created. On June 15, they will be made available to the general public, but you can reserve one now for only $350, the special advance reservation price. Simply rush the enclosed reservation card back today so that your order is in before the June 15 publication date.

The pros also use two other techniques for minimizing price. One is to break a quantity price into units. Instead of saying that a case of motor oil costs $24, you might say that each bottle costs $2. The other technique is to compare your product's price with the cost of some other product or activity: "The cost of owning your own exercise equipment is less than you'd pay for a health-club membership." Your aim is to make the cost seem as small and affordable as possible, thereby minimizing price as a possible objection.

If you've done your homework up front and assessed your audience thoroughly, you should be aware of most of these concerns. You might not be able to address every one of them in your message—if the product or service isn't ideal for the customer, you're message can't fix that—but you will be prepared to do the best you can with the product or service you have to promote.

4.5 Applying the AIDA model

Most marketing and sales messages are prepared according to the AIDA plan or some variation of it. You begin with an attention-getting device, generate interest by describing some of the product or service's unique features, increase desire by highlighting the benefits that are most appealing to your audience, and close by suggesting the action you want the audience to take.
4.5.1 Getting Attention  Not only do marketing and sales messages open with an attention-getting device, but professionals use a wide range of techniques to attract their audience's attention

- **Your product's strongest benefit.** "1,000 Songs. Impossibly small. iPod nano."

- **A piece of genuine news.** "Take entertainment to a whole new place." (Promoting Verizon's V Cast service, which lets people download a variety of entertainment services to their mobile phones)

- **A point of common ground with the audience.** "An SUV adventurous enough to accommodate your spontaneity and the gear that comes with it."

- **A personal appeal to the reader's emotions and values.** "The only thing worse than paying taxes is paying taxes when you don't have to."

- **The promise of insider information.** "You may be one of those people who dream of working and living in France and don't know how to go about simply doing it. This guide tells how—from the inside out—how others like yourself have managed to work within the French system."

- **The promise of savings.** "Right now, you can get huge savings on a new camera phone."

- **A sample or demonstration of the product.** "Here's your free sample of the new Romalite packing sheet."

- **A solution to a problem.** "This backpack's designed to endure all a kid's dropping and dragging."

Of course, words aren't the only attention-getting device at your disposal. Strong, evocative images are a common attention getter. With online messages, you have even more options, including audio, animation, and video.

4.5.2 Building Interest  Use the interest section of your message to build on the intrigue to build interest, expand on the intrigue you created with your opening. This section should also offer support for whatever support the promises in your claims or promises you might've made in the opening. For instance, after opening attention-getting opening, with the headline that claims "1,000 Songs. Impossibly small. iPod nano," the Apple iPod webpage continues with

Explain the concept of the iPod Nano by relating it to what millions of consumers already know about the original iPod

Take everything you love about iPod and shrink it. Now shrink it again. With 2GB (500 songs) and 4GB (1,000 songs) models starting at $199, the pencil thin iPod Nano packs the entire iPod experience into an impossibly small design. So small, it will take your music places you never dreamed of.

At this point in the message, Apple has offered enough information to help people understand how they might use the product, and it has answered a couple of potential objections as well.
(compatibility with Windows and the price). Anyone interested in a digital music player is probably intrigued enough to keep reading.

4.5.3 Increasing Desire To build desire for the product, continue to expand and explain what it offers, how it works, how customers can use it, and so on. Think carefully about the sequence of support points, and use plenty of subheadings and other devices to help people find the information they need quickly. For example, after reading the much about the iPod, some users might want to know more about the iTunes Music Store, whereas others will want technical specifications. You will want to make it easy to find the information each individual wants.

Of course, with websites, e-mail, CC ROMs, and other electronic formats, you can offer navigational links to let people access specific information almost instantly. The iPod product page continues with detailed discussions of various product features and benefit, but it also offers numerous links to pages with other kinds of support information. The ability to provide flexible access to information is just one of the reasons the web is such a powerful medium for marketing and sales.

Throughout the body of your message remember to keep the focus on the audience, not on your company or your product. When you talk about product features, remember to stress the benefits and talk in terms that make sense to users. Listing the capacity of the iPod as 10,00 songs is a lot more meaningful for most readers than saying it has 40 gigabytes of memory. Action words give strength to any business message, but they are especially important in sale letters. Compare the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of This</th>
<th>Write This</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Nuform desk chair is designed to support your lower back and relieve pressure on your legs.</td>
<td>The Nuform desk chair supports lower back and relieves pressure on your legs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second version says the same thing in fewer words and emphasizes what the chair does for the user ("supports") rather than the intentions of the design team ("is designed to support")

To keep readers interested, use colorful verbs and adjectives that convey dynamic image. Be careful, however, not to overdo it: If you say "Your factory floor will sparkle like diamonds," your audience will find it hard to believe, which may prevent them from believing the rest of your message.

To increase desire, as well as boost your credibility, provide support for your claims. You can't assume your audience will believe what you say just because you've said it in writing. You'll have to give them proof. Support is especially important if your product is complicated, costs a lot, or represents some unusual approach.

Creative marketers find many ways to provide support: testimonials from satisfied users, articles written by industry experts, competitive comparisons, product samples and free demonstrations, independent test results, even movies or computer animations that show a product in action. You can also highlight guarantees that demonstrate your faith in your product and your willingness to back it up.

4.5.4 Motivating Action After you have raised enough interest and built up the reader's desire
for your offering, you're ready to ask your audience to take action. Whether you want people to pick up the phone to place an order or visit your website to download a free demo version of your software, try to persuade them to do it right away. You might offer a discount for the first 1,000 people to order, put a deadline on the offer, or simply remind them that the sooner they order, the sooner they'll be able to enjoy the product's benefits. Even potential buyers who want the product can get distracted or forget to respond, so the sooner you can encourage action, the better. Make the response action as simple and as risk-free as possible.

Take care to maintain the respectful, professional tone you've been using up to this point. Don't resort to gimmicks and desperate-sounding pleas for the customer's business. Make sure your final impression is compelling and positive. For instance, in a sales letter, the postscript (P.S.) below your signature is often one of the first and last parts people read. Use this valuable space to emphasize the key benefit you have to offer and to emphasize the advantages of ordering soon.

### 4.6 Maintaining High Standards of Ethics, Legal Compliance, and Etiquette

The word persuasion has negative connotations for some people, especially in a marketing or sales context. They associate persuasion with dishonest and unethical practices that lead unsuspecting audiences into accepting unworthy ideas or buying unneeded products. However, effective business people view persuasion as a positive force, aligning their own interests with what is best for their audiences. They influence audience members by providing information and aiding understanding, which allows audiences the freedom to choose. Ethical businesspeople inform audience of the benefits of an idea, an organization, a product, a donation, or an action so that these audiences can recognize just how well the idea, organization, product, donation, or action will satisfy a need they truly have. To maintain the highest standards of business ethics, make every attempt to persuade without manipulating. Choose words that won't be misinterpreted, and be sure you don't distort the truth. Adopt the you-attitude by showing honest concern for your audience's needs and interests. Your consideration of audience needs is more than ethical; it's the proper use of persuasion. That consideration is likely to achieve the response you intend and to satisfy your audience's needs.

As marketing and selling grow increasingly complex, so do the legal ramifications of marketing and sales messages. In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has the authority to impose penalties (ranging from cease-and-desist orders to multimillion-dollar fines) against advertisers who violate federal standards for truthful advertising. Other federal agencies have authority over advertising in specific industries, such as transportation and financial services. Individual states have additional laws that apply. The legal aspects of promotional communication can be quite complex, from state to state and from country to country, and most companies require marketing and sales people to get clearance from company lawyers before sending messages. In any event, pay close attention to the following legal aspects of marketing and sales communication.

- **Marketing and sales messages must be truthful and nondeceptive.** The FTC considers messages to be deceptive if they include statements that are likely to mislead reasonable customers, and the statement is an important part of the purchasing decision. Failing to include important information is also considered deceptive. The FTC also looks at implied claims, those you don't explicitly make but that can be inferred from what you do or don't say.
• **You must back up your claims with evidence.** According to the FTC, offering money-back guarantee or providing letters from satisfied customers is not enough; you must still be able to support your claims with objective evidence such as a survey or scientific study. If you claim that your food product lowers cholesterol, you must have scientific evidence to support that claim.

• **Marketing and sales messages are considered binding contracts in many states.** If you imply or make an offer and then can't fulfill your end of the bargain, you can be sued for breach of contract.

• **In most cases, you can't use a person's name, photograph, or other identity without permission.** Doing so is considered an invasion of privacy. You can use images of people considered to be public figures, as long as you don't unfairly imply that they endorse your message.

In both the United States and other countries, lawmakers are considering new legislation covering several other major aspects of advertising and related efforts. Before you launch a marketing or sales campaign, make sure you're up to date on the latest regulation affecting spam (or *unsolicited bulk e-mail*, as it's officially known), customer privacy, and data security. New laws are likely to appear in all three areas in the next few years.

Meeting your ethical and legal obligations will go a long way toward maintaining good communication etiquette as well. However, you may still face etiquette decisions within ethical and legal boundaries. For instance, you can produce a marketing campaign that complies with all applicable laws and yet is still offensive and insulting to your audience. An audience-centered approach, involving respect for your readers and their values, should help you avoid any such etiquette missteps.