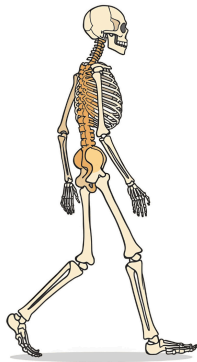


Your Case Study Needs A Backbone



Even the strongest case studies need structure, no matter what format they come in. Without it, they're just a pile of parts. Pull those parts together, and your stories will stand up on their own, giving readers something to follow.

Hi ,

Ever come across a case study that had all the right elements of a good story — a happy customer, a decent result — but somehow still felt flat?

It may not be the writing. But it could well be the structure.

The Insight: Stories That Walk Tall Have A Strong Structure

Case studies come in all shapes and sizes, from 500-word data-driven analyses to full-length customer stories. But the most effective ones include the same core elements:

Customer → Challenge → Solution → Results

Unfortunately, this structure often gets blurred in the writing process. I see case studies that:

- Skip or minimize the challenge (to avoid dwelling on the negative)
- Lead with the solution before explaining what was wrong in the first place
- Wrap up or even lead with vague outcomes like “boosted efficiency” or “improved collaboration” without offering any real proof

Let me show you what I mean.

A while ago, I reviewed a case study from a manufacturer of sensors and machine vision systems. They had **soft-pedalled the challenge** to the point it was almost obscured:

“The previous XXX microscope served the company well for around 15 years, but it was upgraded to keep pace with the latest innovations and improvements.”

True, they stated the customer’s microscope was old and outdated. But as a reader, I still had questions. Why wasn’t it enough anymore? I wanted to know the real pain this company was experiencing.

A stronger version might have started like this:

“For years, [company] relied on a microscope that had seen better days. But as inspection demands grew tougher—slowing analysis, risking missed flaws and straining compliance—the team knew it needed a sharper, faster way forward. Enter the XXX microscope.”

Now that spells out the pain and gives a reason to keep reading. It also gives an ideal segue to the solution.

Try This When Reviewing Your Next Draft

Open your latest case study and ask:

- Where does the real problem first appear?
- Do the customer's pain points tie in with the solution?
- Do the results include specifics?

If any section feels thin or disconnected, that's where your structure needs reinforcing.

Pro-tip: Don't Be Afraid To Name The Challenge

Marketers often tell me that their biggest roadblock is that customers don't want to highlight a problem, even if they're thrilled with the outcome. They're worried it will make them look bad.

Here's what I suggest: Reassure them by reframing the challenge as a common industry pressure or a turning point.

Instead of: "They were doing it all wrong,"

Try: "Like many teams in their position, they'd outgrown their legacy system."

This allows the customer to be seen as smart and proactive, not flawed. And it turns your product or service into an industry-wide solution.

Bonus Tip: Use AI To Stress-Test Your Structure

Run every case study through The Quick Backbone Test:

"Identify the Challenge, Solution and Results in this case study, then check:

- **Is the Challenge clearly stated, or does it skip straight to the Solution?**
- **Are the Results specific and credible, or vague?**

Then suggest how to rewrite weak sections so the backbone of the story is clear and persuasive."

Over to You

Pick one of your case studies today and give it a quick backbone test, manually or using your favorite LLM. Then let me know the results!

Until next time (when we'll talk about how to make your customer the star of the story).



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