Case
Study
Buddy

The State of SaaS Customer Success Stories in 2023

Findings and recommendations based on a study of the top 50 SaaS companies

Introduction

When you've had a massively successful engagement with a client, you want to shout it from the rooftops.

But how, exactly, do you do that?

How can you leverage that success story to the max and provide evidence of your company's capabilities to prospective clients across your sales and marketing funnel?

One way to get insights into this topic is to look at what the largest enterprise companies are doing with THEIR customer success stories—and then learn from what you find.

That's why we decided to study the customer success pages of the 50 biggest SaaS companies—such as Adobe, Salesforce, Zoom, and HubSpot—to see what they're doing with their success stories.

We asked the following questions:

- What medium do top-performing SaaS companies use to tell customer success stories?

- How do they integrate video testimonials and written customer success stories on their websites?

- Do they leverage long-form or short-form content and which performs better?

- How do they make their video testimonials engaging?

- How do they make it easy for prospects to find relevant success stories?

- How do they identify and create success stories at scale?

Read on to see what these companies are doing well and what they're not—and learn from their experience to guide your own customer success programs, whether your business is big or small.

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An important caveat

This research project focuses on customer success stories as found on the websites of large SaaS companies. This should NOT imply that your website is the only place you can use your case studies and video testimonials.

Case studies and video testimonials are wildly versatile marketing assets that you can use at every stage of the sales and marketing funnel, from raising brand awareness on social channels to reducing buyer's remorse on sales confirmation pages.

In short, your website shouldn't be the ONLY place you put your customer success stories.

Methodology

We chose our sample of SaaS companies by selecting the top 50 SaaS companies listed on U.S. stock exchanges as compiled by Mike Sonders (as of October 5, 2022) and analyzing them to project what we will see in 2023.

We analyzed readily available customer success stories, including:

- Customer success story overview pages (which list all of the public-facing case studies for that company)

- Individual customer success story pages

- Written and video testimonials embedded in and/or linked to from individual and overview pages

- Company YouTube channels and playlists that included customer video testimonials

When these didn't yield immediate results, we searched for "[company name] + case studies" or "[company name] + "customer success stories" to identify other sources of case studies and testimonials that interested prospects would likely encounter during the buyer's journey.

Specific analytics for individual customer success stories (e.g., word count, type of content, etc.) are based on an average calculated across 2–4 success stories from each company.

Research findings and recommendations

Let's walk through each of our research findings… and draw some recommendations.
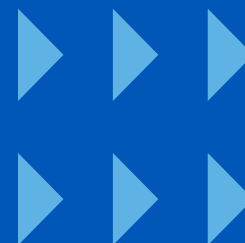
01

Written customer success stories

Let's start with the basics. Our research confirmed that written case studies are a hugely popular marketing asset among the largest SaaS companies.

100% of the top 50 SaaS companies we studied have a page (or multiple pages) on their website devoted to customer success stories.

We've captured the results in our cheeky pie chart, to the right.

100%

SaaS Companies with written case studies

100% of the top 50 SaaS companies have a page on their website devoted to customer success stories.

This is no surprise. Among our own SaaS clients, we've seen the important role customer success stories can play across sales and marketing funnels. So it's no wonder that the largest SaaS companies invest in their customer success stories, big time.

Number of Written Customer Success Stories

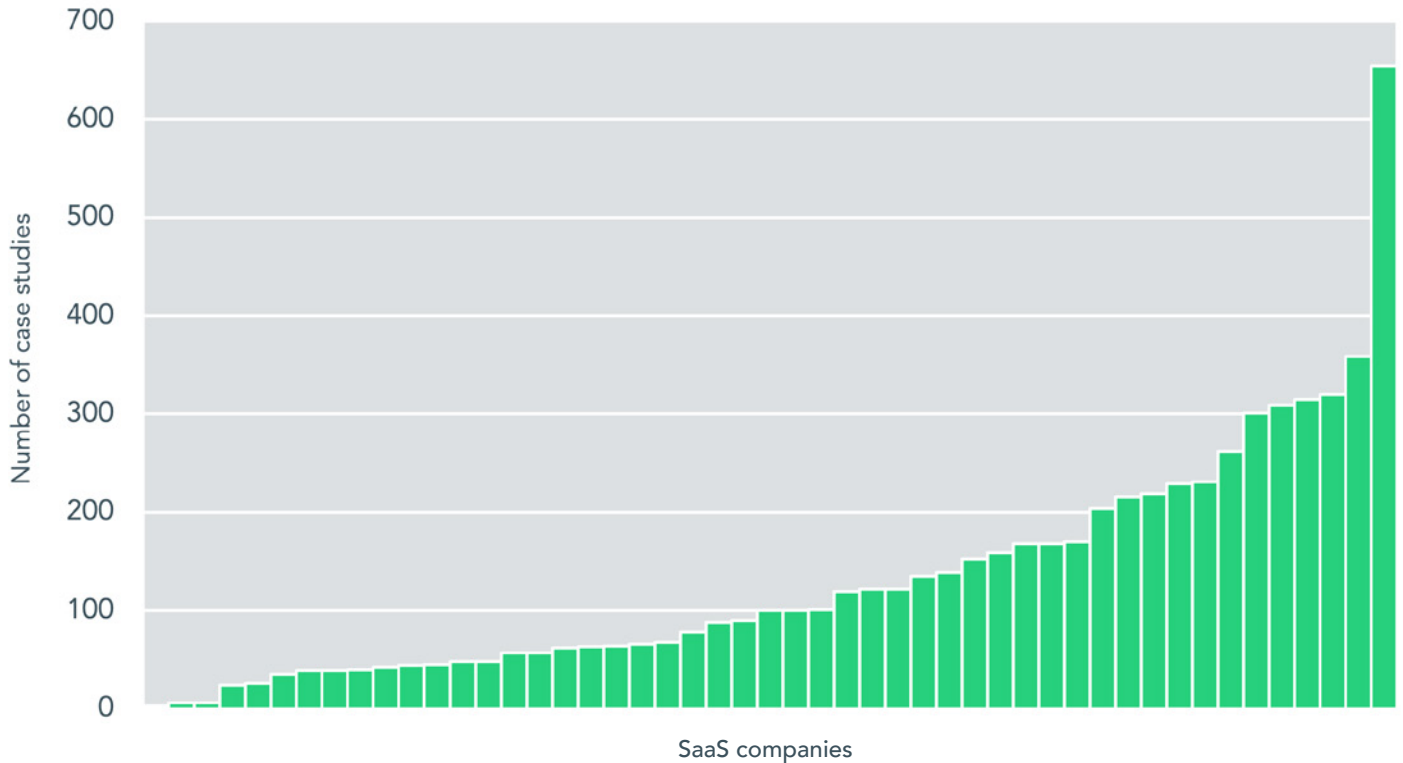How many case studies did each SaaS company have? Lots.

On average, the SaaS companies we analyzed had **132 written case studies**. The median was 100.

On average, the top 50 SaaS companies have 132 written case studies each.

Here's how those numbers broke out:

Number of written customer success stories

At the top of the heap was <u>Okta, which clocked in at 654 case studies</u> at the time of writing.

It's an impressive amount.

Clearly, these large SaaS companies have learned that one (or even a dozen) case studies aren't sufficient. They have a <u>library of customer success stories they can draw from</u> to address the myriad situations their sales and marketing teams can face. For every use case, pain point, service offering, feature, industry, niche, customer role, and objection—they have a case study (or several case studies) they can deploy.

How are these SaaS companies able to generate so many customer success stories, so consistently?

We know from experience with our own clients that the key to producing customer success stories at scale is **to have a strategy and process to identify and create them.**

In other words, you need to treat customer success stories like a PROGRAM, not an ASSET.

Your ability to predictably capture and share customer success stories depends heavily on how well you systematize things like...

1. How user journeys are documented and shared internally

2. How well you set up a cadence of conversation with your customer around KPIs

3. How intentionally you meet and collaborate across departments to get customer wins and context out of silos and into the hands that need it.

4. How well you've codified these processes into standard operating procedures—and how closely they're followed.

Recommendation: Create a program to identify and capture customer success stories and codify those processes into SOPs.

Length of Written Customer Success Stories

With so much emphasis on social media and email as marketing channels, is there still a place for long-form written customer success stories?

Judging by what these companies are doing, we can conclude yes. Most definitely.
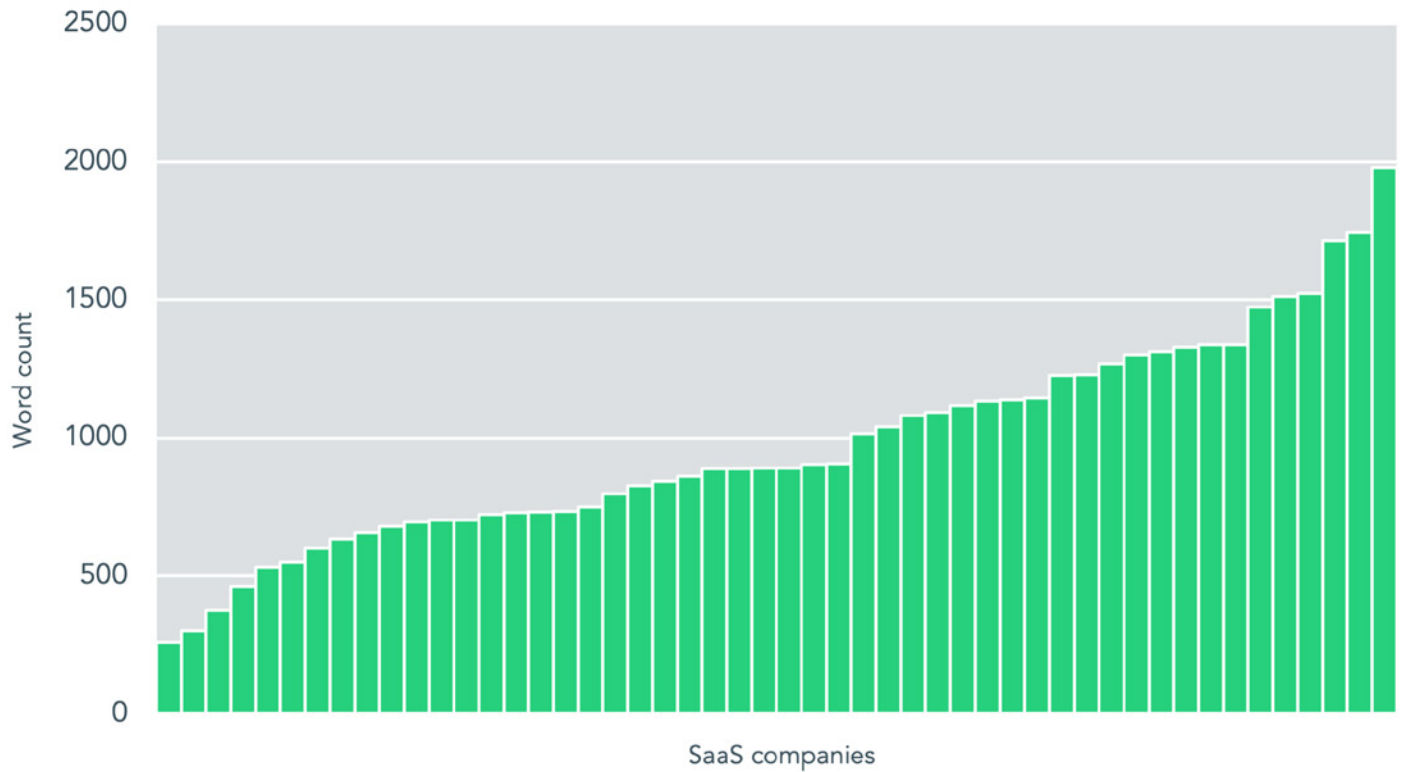
We found the average length of SaaS case studies is **970 words** (for on-page, HTML format case studies). The median is **890 words.**

The average length of on-page case studies for the top 50 SaaS companies is 970 words.

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Here's how those numbers broke out:

Case study word count

As you can see, long-form case studies remain very popular.

At the same time, short-form case studies were also common. Most often, they were accompanied by other assets that told the same story, such as a testimonial video or long-form downloadable PDF.

Here's an example from Paycom, which comes in at about 179 words:

Paycom provides a short synopsis with the option to download a longer PDF version of this customer success story.

So is it better to have a long or short story on the individual case study page?

Generally, we prefer a long-form story, even if a PDF download is available. Why force readers to download the PDF to get the full story?

Besides, you can use elements, such as short synopses, layout, and design, to help long-form assets cater to both time-starved and detail-craving readers—which we talk about next.

Recommendation: Put long-form case studies on individual case study pages.

Making Long-form Customer Success Stories Scannable

Why do some SaaS companies hesitate to put a long-form version of their success story on their website? Probably because they worry about readability.

They're right to be concerned. Trying to absorb 890 words while reading online is no joke. That's why most of these companies use layouts and design elements to make their customer success stories more scannable and digestible, such as pull quotes, sidebars, and images.

Here's how those elements broke out:

Making case studies scannable online
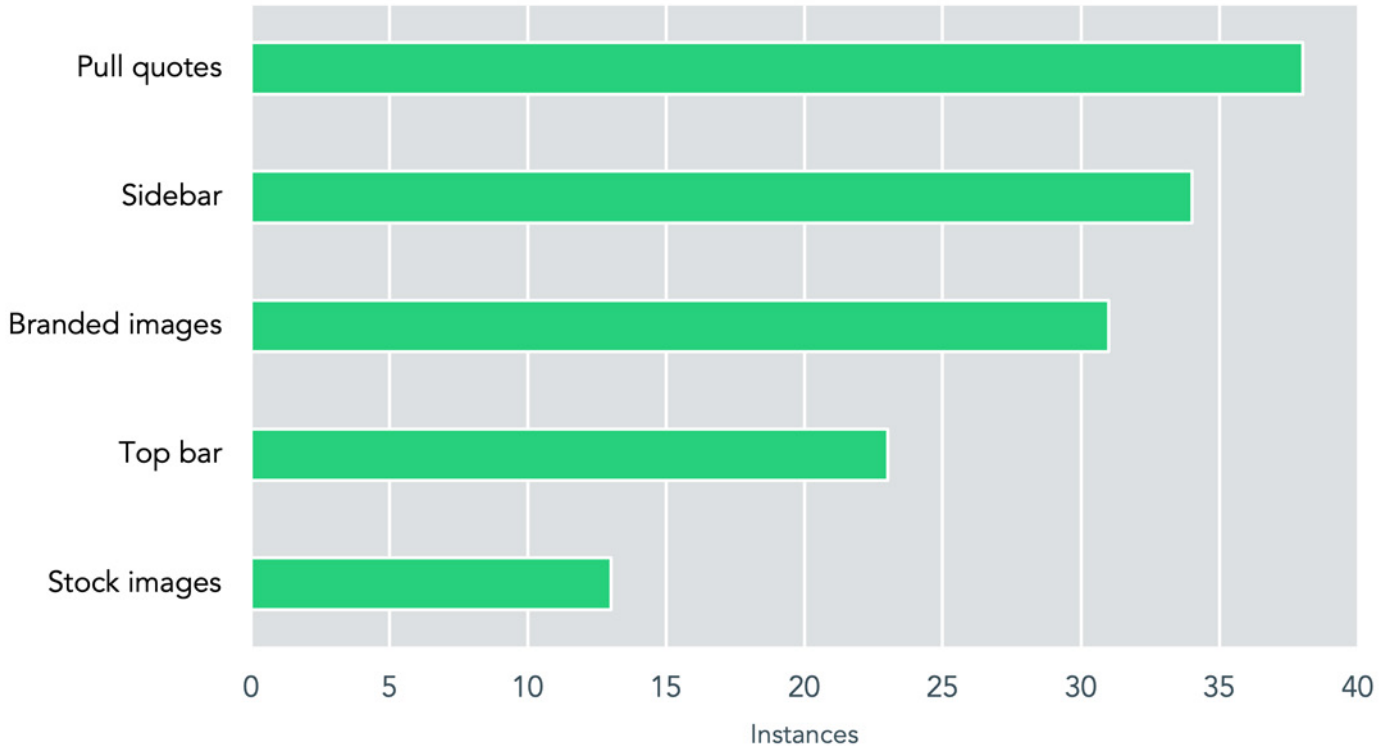
Pull quotes

Pull quotes—a highlighted customer quote pulled directly from the text and then blown up for added emphasis—were the most popular way to break up text on the page. **76%** of the SaaS companies analyzed use pull quotes.

76% of the top 50 SaaS companies use pull quotes in their case studies.
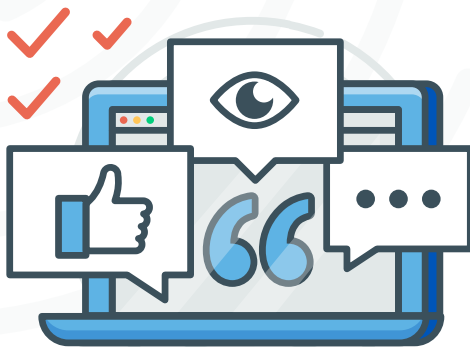
Top bars and sidebars

All but five SaaS companies studied used a scannable top bar, sidebar, or both.

Here, Elastic uses a top bar to bullet-point to highlight key wins:

The sidebar method was slightly more popular than the top bar method—possibly because it helps narrow column width for improved readability. Sixty-eight percent of SaaS companies had sidebars, 46% had top bars, and 24% had both.

Here, Dynatrace uses a sidebar to briefly describe the customer and describe the main results:

The content of these bars varied. Sometimes it was a company description, products used, call to action, and key metrics. Sometimes it was a short summary of challenges, solutions, and results. There was no discernable trend.

Images

Images were another popular way to break up text. These included stock images, custom images, and screenshots of tools.

We were surprised to find that few of these SaaS companies used obvious stock images. Most made the effort to use ACTUAL images of customers, products, or employees—or at least choose really good stock images that had us fooled.

Let's look at two good examples of these design elements in practice.

Example one: Zendesk's customer success story for the John Lewis Partnership (excerpt):

Zendesk does a great job of using pull quotes, a stat-filled top bar, bolding, and customer images to make this story more approachable.

The narrow, single column also makes it more readable online.

Example two: UiPath's Carglass success story (excerpt):

UiPath uses a bold headline, images (including tool screenshots), pull quotes, and bolding to break up the text.

The sidebar also narrows the central column, further enhancing readability.

The takeaway here? Long-form, narrative case studies on case study website pages are best practice— as long as they are designed and laid out in a way that enhances readability.

> **Recommendation:** Use layout and design to make your long-form case studies scannable online.

Written Case Studies: HTML Versus PDF

Once upon a time, downloading PDF case studies was the norm. But these days, the biggest SaaS companies are moving to give their readers more options on how they want to digest content.

We can see this movement in the growing number of SaaS companies that give readers the choice of downloading a PDF AND reading the story on-page in HTML. **38%** of the SaaS companies analyzed included both options.

38% of the top SaaS companies present their case studies both in HTML and as a downloadable PDF on their websites.

This is exactly what <u>Splunk</u> has done here (option to download PDF circled in red):
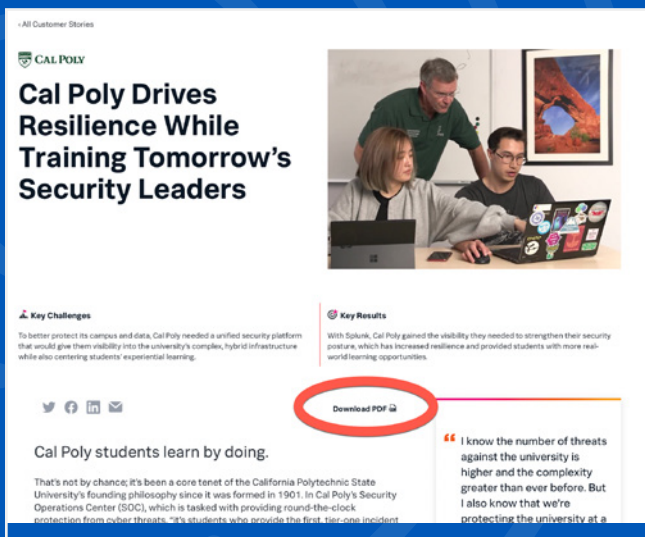
By contrast, **18% of the SaaS companies studied had ONLY a PDF on their website** (or a PDF with a short synopsis).

Here's an anonymized screenshot of a customer success story presented as a PDF:

Yes, you can zoom in and out with these PDF readers and expand to full screen. But even so, does anyone really like reading this type of PDF online? And the experience is even worse on mobile devices.

The danger with simply uploading a PDF, even without one of those gawd-awful readers, is that you can easily end up with blocks of text that *might* be readable in hardcopy, but become indecipherable online.

Another (anonymized) example:

Recommendation:
Put your case studies in HTML and give users the option of downloading a PDF.

To Gate or Not to Gate?

Once upon a time, gating case studies was common practice.

Fortunately, this practice is almost extinct. We found **only three of the top 50 SaaS companies** where some (or all) of their customer success stories were gated.

Before they allow you to view, they want information from you:

Granted, some of these companies operate in sensitive industries (e.g. healthcare) or highly competitive environments. But still, requiring a potential lead to enter their email address to view your customer success stories could cost you the opportunity to demonstrate your value to that customer altogether.

It's like charging a prospective customer a fee for the privilege of having you sell to them.

After all, if your competitive advantage is so flimsy that your competitors could replicate and overtake you by viewing one success story, you've got bigger problems.

Plus, you always have control over how granular and specific you get when telling the story. You never need to give away the most sensitive details.

Recommendation: Make your case studies freely available. Do not gate them.

Using Trust Indicators

The SaaS companies we studied also used different elements in their written case studies to foster trust and add authenticity, such as customer quotes, logos, and headshots.

Here's the prevalence of those trust indicators:

Trust indicators
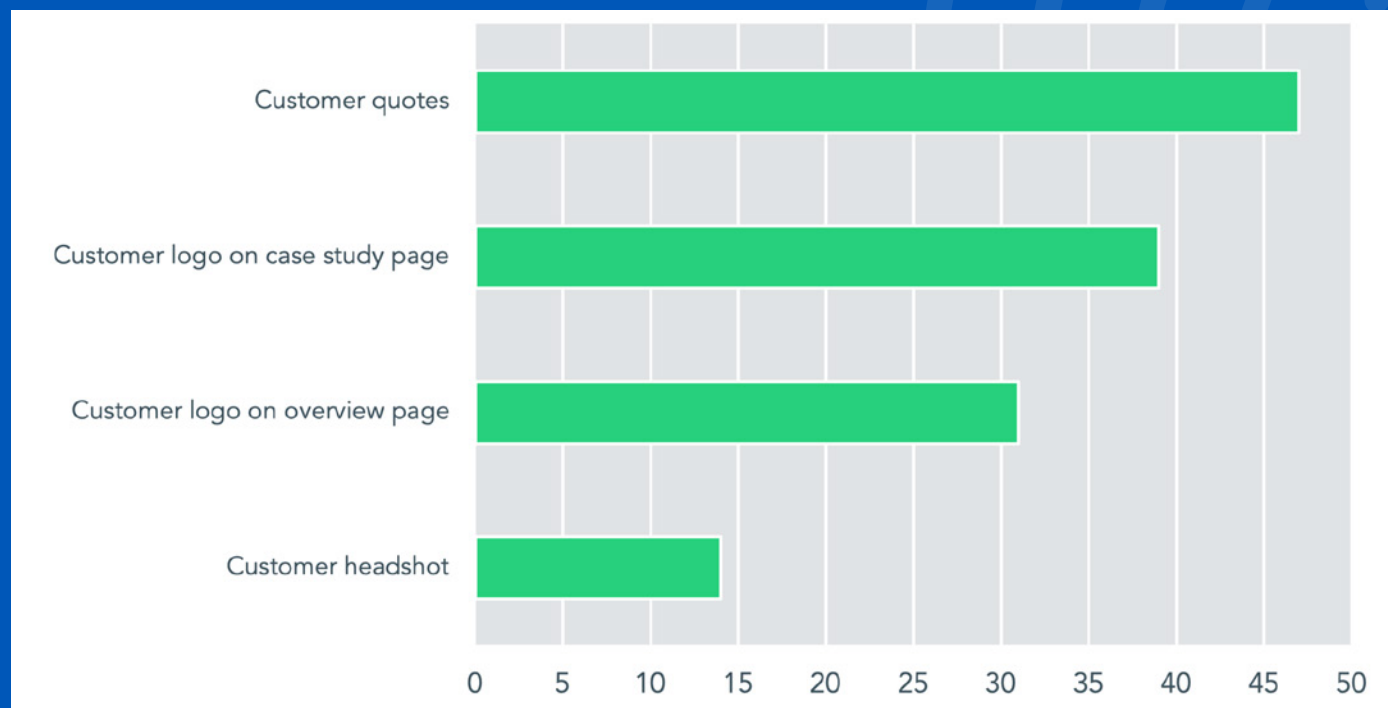
Customer quotes

94% of the SaaS companies analyzed included direct customer quotes in their customer success stories. This is an encouraging finding considering that much of the power of the written success stories comes from having the customer tell it, in their own words.

> **94% of the top SaaS companies include direct customer quotes in their customer success stories.**

Recommendation: Always include direct customer quotes in your case study.

Customer logo

Including the customer logo was another popular way to communicate trust and authority.

78% of SaaS companies included the customer logo on individual case study pages, such as Atlassian did here (Bitly logo circled in red).

About 62% of SaaS companies put customer logos on the success story overview page.

BITLY + ATLASSIAN

Bitly Chooses Opsgenie to Scale Business Operations

If you've ever relied on just SNS notifications to manage an infrastructure without a middleman in between, you know the horror of an alert flood. Kyle Moschetto, Director of DevOps & Security at Bitly knew this pain too well. Bitly, established in 2008, is a link management platform. Known for shortening and tracking links, Bitly empowers their customers in the age of digital marketing. In 2016, Kyle joined Bitly to modernize their infrastructure and improve operations. Maintaining 150+ microservices across 3 different cloud providers 24/7 operations using just SNS notifications via mobile was confusing, clunky, and complicated.

INDUSTRY
Technology

LOCATIONS
New York, NY

NUMBER OF USERS
10

PRODUCTS
Opsgenie
Jira Software

SHARE PAGE

As a new director joining Bitly, Kyle needed to find the best solution, fast and present the business case to the CTO. With a lengthy background in ITOps, DevOps, Networking and Security he had the chance to try various solutions in previous jobs. "I had familiarity with PagerDuty, I knew the pain of that really. Opsgenie stood out right away. It was modern, the mobile app seemed easy to use, the API calls were good, and the Slack integration was built in." During the Proof of Concept, Kyle and his team quickly determined that Opsgenie was the way to go, he even put a Junior Engineer who had only been working for 6 months in charge of rolling over to Opsgenie because he felt it would be that easy.

"When you wanted to take on-call, you had to take your laptop to make an API call to AWS

"In DevOps you exist in a world of plumbing, when the plumbing is working no one cares. But when it's not working and

Here's an example from Adobe Experience Cloud (logo circled in red):

Retail

Albertsons onboards 170 marketplace sellers

Read the story

Many SaaS companies put the customer logo on both the overview and individual case study pages.

By our assessment, putting the logo on both pages is the best practice. It's not something you can overdo.

Recommendation:
Recommendation: Put customer logos on case study overview pages AND individual case study pages to foster trust.

Customer headshot

We were surprised to find that only **28% of the SaaS companies analyzed** included an image of the customer interviewed, such as a headshot.

And even when we did find customer headshots, they weren't used consistently.

Here's a nice example of a customer headshot included with a pull quote (from Qualys):

"As soon as we introduced Qualys' APIs into the environment, we cut the time to less than 24 hours."

Emmanuel Enaohwo
Senior Manager for Vulnerability / Configuration Management, Capital One

The lack of customer headshots is troubling. Headshots are an important trust indicator that lends authenticity to your customer success story. When you include a headshot, it makes the words of your customer more real and proves that you're not just making them up.

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If we hypothesize WHY headshots were lacking, we can come up with a few reasons:

Headshots can be difficult to get

Quite simply, it can be difficult to source headshots and secure permission to use them. They require consistent, persistent follow-up.

However, getting headshots is a lot easier if you set expectations at the outset. Well before the interview, make clear that you'll need a headshot to accompany the piece and explain why.

When all else fails, get creative. If a customer drags their feet on getting a headshot to you, you can ask permission to use a screenshot of their LinkedIn profile photo, for example.

The customer feels self-conscious

Occasionally, customers will hesitate to supply a headshot because they feel shy about putting their image out into the world.

You can assuage this fear by showing them examples and giving them the opportunity to review the finished deliverable so they can see that it's just a small image (that they've chosen!). It's not like it's going to fill the cover page or be put on a bus stop.

The customer doesn't want to take credit

No one wants to be "that guy" taking personal credit for a team effort. You can overcome this objection by making sure that the efforts of the entire team are recognized within the case study story. Offer to attribute any accomplishments to the team or company instead, and suggest that they amend their quotes from "I" statements to "we" statements.

When you do that, the interviewee isn't claiming all the credit. They're just narrating the story.

Concerns about diluting the customer brand

Some companies hesitate to include customer headshots in their case studies because they worry that by telling the story from the individual's perspective, they're somehow diluting the power of the customer's brand.

To put it harshly: they may not care so much that Jane Smith thought the project was great. (After all, Jane Smith could quit her job tomorrow.) They might care much more that Jane's employer thought their project was great, especially if it's a big brand with a familiar logo they can splash all over the front page.

We also propose that many SaaS companies may fail to include customer headshots because they underestimate the power of the individual storyteller in these stories. They'll fight tooth and nail to get a customer logo on their case study page, but wiff when it comes to getting the customer headshot.

But this points to a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of case studies and what makes them so powerful: case studies are ultimately people stories, not company stories, whether they're for a solo business or enterprise company.

The old adage still holds true: people buy from people, not companies.

When prospective customers look at your case studies, they don't just want to see a company that's just like their company. **They want to see THEMSELVES.**

And when you put a headshot in those case studies, you make that person more relatable. They're no longer just a faceless voice. They're a real person that experienced the same challenges that your prospective customer is facing.

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Someone who triumphed over challenges that your prospective customer shares—with your help.

Which means giving the hero of your story a name—and a face.

The problem with thumbnail headshots on overview pages

While we're on the topic of headshots, let's talk briefly about another common practice we found.

Frequently, the companies studied used a video thumbnail as a headshot on their case study overview page. Here's a typical example:

The problem with this practice is twofold.

First, presented with zero content like this, these headshots don't communicate much. They really belong on the individual case study page.

Second, it's hard to get an attractive thumbnail headshot! Even supermodels (we would guess) have crappy thumbnails: awkward positions or faces, etc.

It's much better to make your customer look their best by using a professional headshot or being very intentional about the thumbnail.

Or, you can choose to go with an image that communicates something about the customer, such as [Qualtrics](#) does here:
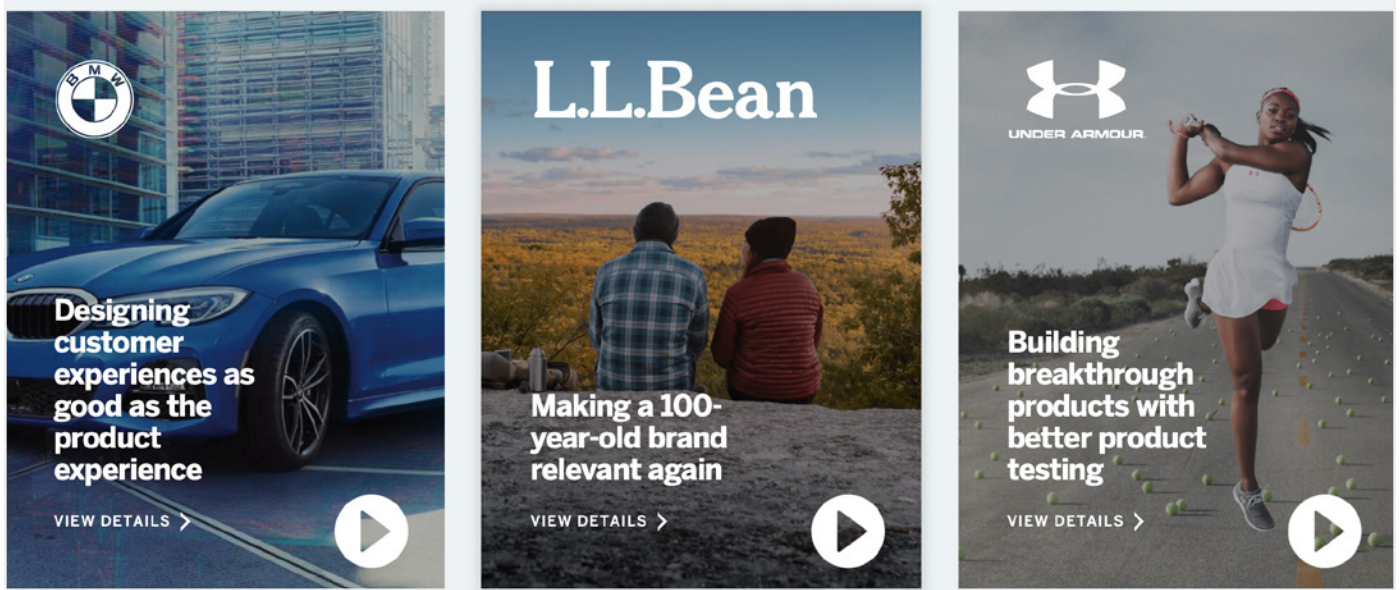
Recommendation: Include a headshot of the person interviewed to add power and authenticity to your case study.

Anonymized Stories: Worth It or Not?

Anonymous customer success stories sometimes get an undeserved bad rap.

When you don't have a customer name or logo to put on your customer story, doesn't that diminish the value?

Not necessarily. In fact, there are some things you can do to [make your anonymous case study just as powerful](#)—if not more—than one where the customer is named.

This is something that many SaaS companies have learned; particularly those in sensitive industries where this type of anonymity would be the expectation and the norm.

We found that 14% of SaaS companies examined had at least a few anonymous case studies. It's *very* likely that the actual number is higher. Anonymous case studies aren't always easy to spot at a glance, so we may have missed a few while churning through thousands of them! It's also very possible that some of these SaaS companies have anonymous case studies but chose to not put them on their websites.

14% of the top SaaS companies have at least a few anonymized case studies.

It's too bad this number isn't higher. It seems the majority of these top SaaS companies are missing out on the opportunities inherent in anonymous studies.

What does it look like when you include anonymous case studies on your customer success pages? In this example, Elastic anonymized the customer, identifying them only as a "European police force."

SECURITY | GOVERNMENT

Harnessing Elastic to hunt digital threats

How a European police force hunts for digital threats with Elastic

Several years ago, this European national police agency of 22,000 officers and 1,000 IT personnel began a transformation journey, one that included consolidating the bureaucracy, modernizing its policing equipment, and digitally transforming its IT infrastructure.

A key element to that digital transformation project was securing the new, modernized enterprise which entails about 35,000 connected computers and 250 IT systems. Other elements to the modernization project included a new app store for police officers' smartphones, new drones with cameras, an upgraded command center, and specialized telecommunications to connect with embassies.

"All of these things need to be secure and they need to work every day, every night, all of the year," says the agency's security operations center manager.

The internal, external threat landscape

The threat landscape for a police department is similar to those confronted by most businesses. This European police agency says it's harnessing Elastic to defend against:

- Targeted cyber attacks from external actors who want to steal data
- External actors who want to destroy data and prevent police infrastructure from functioning
- Malicious insiders who want to steal information, sabotage data or prevent police infrastructure from operating

In response, the agency has adopted a security strategy that relies on Elastic Security, to **prevent, detect, and respond** to these threats.

Recommendation:
Create anonymized case studies when the customer prefers to not be named.

Meanwhile, on the case study overview page, Elastic uses a "stand in" generic logo for its anonymous case studies. A very neat idea:

Harnessing Elastic to hunt digital threats

Learn more →

Embracing Elastic to process COVID-19 stimulus checks

Learn more →

Uniting data to better serve the public with Elastic

Learn more →

02

Customer video testimonials

While we found some inconsistencies and less-than-ideal practices in our review of written case studies among these top SaaS companies, things really started to diverge when we looked at video customer testimonials.

Again, let's start with some basic findings.

We found that customer video testimonials are very popular among these companies. 84% of the SaaS companies we studied have customer video testimonials on their case study pages, their YouTube channel, or both.

84% of the top 50 SaaS companies have customer video testimonials on their case study pages, their YouTube channel, or both.

Customer success stories—video

SaaS with NO video
16%
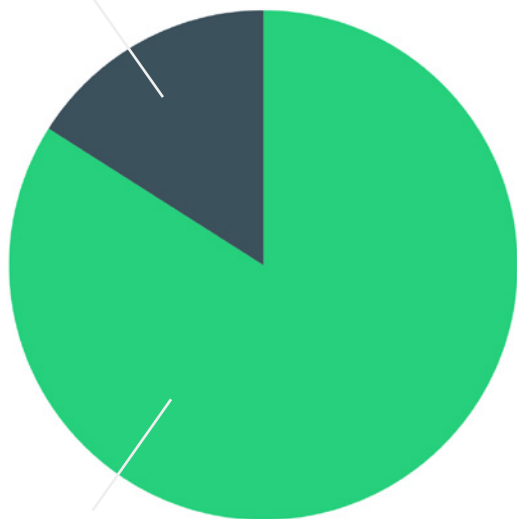
SaaS with video
84%

In truth, this percentage may be even higher. Just because we couldn't always find video testimonials on the websites or YouTube channels of these companies doesn't mean these videos don't exist.

They may be present on private Vimeo channels, used heavily within internal campaigns, etc.

We also found many inconsistencies. Some video testimonials were posted to YouTube channels but didn't live on customer success pages. Some videos lived on customer success pages but weren't posted to the company's YouTube channel.

Recommendation: Create both written and video versions of your customer success stories to maximize impact and versatility.

Challenges for Sensitive Industries

Given the growing role of video assets in sales and marketing, we might have expected 100% of these SaaS companies to have video success stories freely available on their websites. But if we look at those companies that did NOT have video customer success stories front and center, we can infer why.

Many of the SaaS companies that did NOT have video customer success stories operate in high-tech, high-security industries. In fact, many of them had anonymized some or all of their written customer success stories for reasons of privacy and security.

This creates a challenge when it comes to creating video customer success stories. How do you create a "talking head" video testimonial when the customer must remain anonymous?

Fortunately, there are ways around this particular challenge, such as voiceovers coupled with animation.

For example, Google for Startups uses animation in the video testimonial below. Even though the customer is named and voices the narration, you could easily take the same approach with an anonymized success story.

Another successful approach we're seeing in sensitive spaces: rather than jumping right to the "would you like to participate in a video testimonial?" ask, companies are inviting customers to participate in other ways, such as webinars or joint pieces of content. This builds trust in the relationship and lays the groundwork so that the customer may eventually agree to provide a video testimonial.

Recommendation: Don't let the need to anonymize your customer prevent you from creating video testimonials.

The Problem With Repurposing Video Content Into Testimonials

In the rush to get customer video testimonials, we found that some SaaS companies took shortcuts.

Many defined "customer success stories" very loosely when it came to video. Some took video footage from webinars and conference presentations, called it a "video testimonial," and threw it up on their customer success story page.

While this type of content can be valuable, mixing a 30-minute presentation in with two-minute testimonials only makes it harder for prospective customers to find what they need. If you're going to repurpose other assets, go the distance and make sure they meet the expectations inherent in the video testimonial format.

At a minimum, different types of content should be filterable by type.

We found this practice a lot on "customer success story" YouTube playlists. It wasn't uncommon for these playlists to contain a wide assortment of content, from customer testimonials to presentations to how-to videos.

Recommendation: When repurposing content into video testimonials, ensure the end product meets expectations for the video testimonial format.

Branding, B-roll, and Graphics

We also found many examples where video testimonials were less than great. Many lacked critical elements to improve watchability, storytelling, and engagement, such as branding, b-roll, and graphics.

In one example, all the video testimonials were six-minute talking-head testimonials, with zero branding, b-roll, or graphics. They were lightly edited to remove the questions posed, but that was about it.

That makes for long—and very boring—videos.

It's true that in some cases a raw aesthetic makes sense—and there's a growing acceptability of this aesthetic thanks to platforms such as TikTok. However, there's no denying that intentional curation and editing make videos easier to consume, more focused, and more effective.
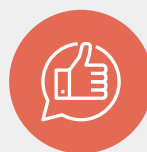
Recommendation: Improve the watchability of video testimonials with branding, b-roll, and graphics.
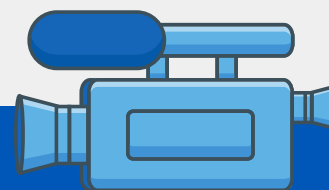
Length of Customer Testimonials

Because video testimonials are still the Wild West stage for many SaaS companies, we found a lot of variance in video length.

When we eliminated videos that were actually full-length webinars or customer presentations, we found the average length of a SaaS customer success story video is roughly 2–3 minutes—though some are much longer, and some much shorter.

The average length of success story videos is 2-3 minutes for the top 50 SaaS companies.

It's hard to specify exactly how long a video testimonial should be. It will vary depending on your target audience, channel (and the expectations of your audience when viewing that channel), and goal.

Very short videos can be very powerful for ads, for example, and can still tell a powerful story.

This brisk 55-second video from Salesforce works just fine, for example.

But for a case study page or YouTube playlist, the two to three-minute range sounds about right—as long as the content remains focused and compelling for the duration. You can help with this by adding chapter markers and labeling segments of your video to make them scannable.

Recommendation: Keep videos on your customer success pages around two to three minutes in length and include chapter markers.

Number of Video Testimonials

We attempted to estimate the number of video success stories created by each SaaS company. To arrive at this number, we searched the case studies pages on their websites and checked their YouTube channels.

Some of our searches returned videos that didn't live in either place—so it's entirely possible that these estimates are understated.

Based on the videos we could quantify, the number of success story videos ranged from 0 to 201. The median number of videos per company was **31** and the average was **41** (if we exclude SaaS companies with no video testimonials).

> **The median number of video testimonials is 31 for the top 50 SaaS companies. The average is 41.**

Number of video testimonials
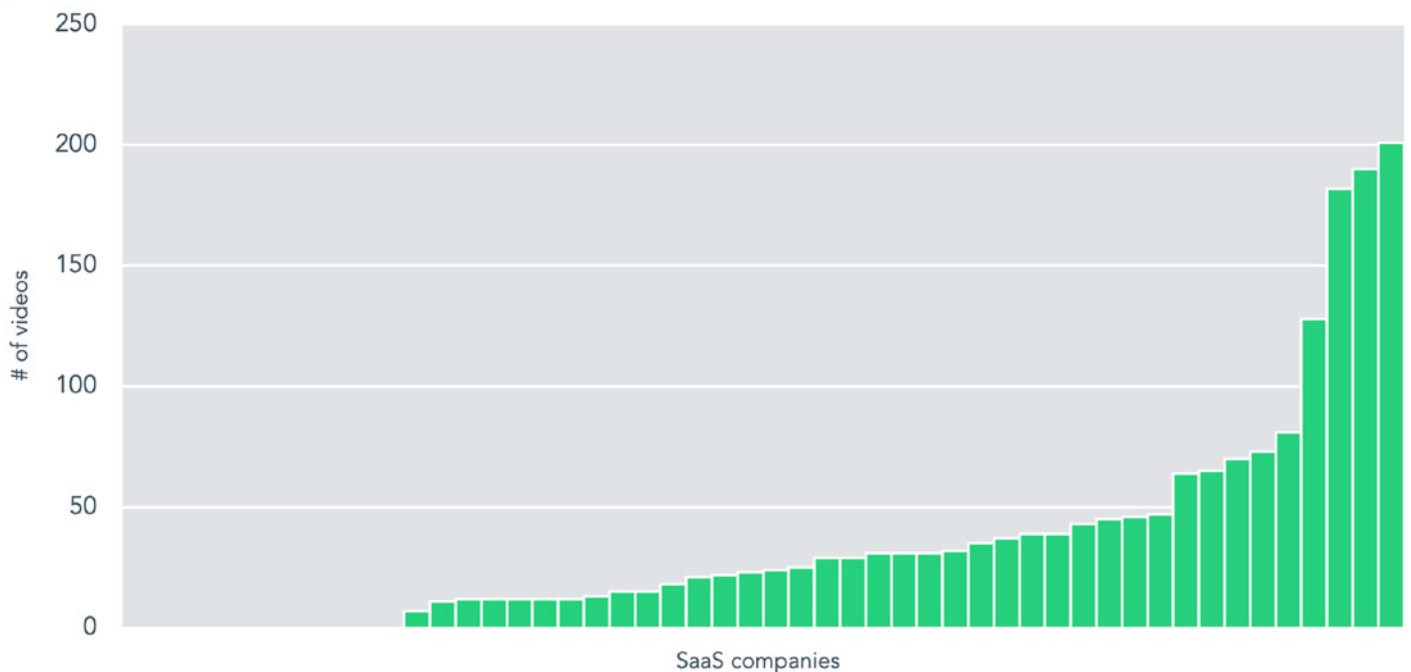
Anecdotally, most of these videos were created in the last few years, reflecting the massive growth in interest in video generally and video testimonials in particular.

Some SaaS companies have really amped up the production of video testimonials. Workday had 190 at last count, Adobe 182, and Okta 128. We can infer that these companies have found a way to create videos at scale, undoubtedly by implementing clear processes and procedures to identify good candidates, get internal and external buy-in, and produce the videos.

Recommendation: Make video testimonials an integral part of your customer success story production process.

The Disconnect Between Video Testimonials and Written Case Studies

What's striking in our findings is the low number of video testimonials relative to written customer success stories.

We can surmise that's because video testimonials are still new-ish when compared to written case studies, which have been around forever. Videos have also been far more expensive to produce in the past and require a higher level of buy-in from the customer. So some discrepancy is expected.

What's harder to explain, however, is the disconnect between video testimonials and written customer success stories—where written case studies exist with no accompanying video testimonials and where video testimonials exist with no written case study.

This is too bad because written and video formats complement each other and often work in tandem. For example, it's easy to imagine the following scenario:

- Prospective client quickly scans the written customer success story, particularly the headline and key metrics
- If the story is relevant, the prospect watches the video
- If the prospect wants more details, they return to the written story and consume it in more detail.

So why wouldn't you present visitors with both options—a video for those who want it and written for those that would rather scan or read (and then perhaps go on to watch the video or vice versa)?

The problem of written assets with no video testimonial

As mentioned above, we found many instances where recent written case studies had no video equivalent.

It seems that these SaaS companies were "saving" video production for only their very best customer success stories.

Why would this be? It's possible that they saved video production for a select few candidates because it added another big, additional step to their production process, particularly if their writing and video teams weren't coordinated from the very start of the project.

So it may be a situation where:

- The writing team interviews the customer and writes a great case study
- The story is so compelling, the writing team recommends it for a video testimonial
- The video team has to GO BACK to the customer and ask for a SECOND interview they can capture on camera.

That's a big ask of any customer.

In contrast, if the writing and video teams had coordinated at the outset and had a process in place to identify good candidates early on, they could create both written and video assets from a SINGLE interview, which significantly lightens the ask of customers and brings new efficiencies to the entire process.

This, incidentally, is exactly the process we follow at Case Study Buddy.

The problem of video testimonials with no written assets

We can hypothesize that a similar scenario played out whenever we found video testimonials with no complementary written assets.

20% of the SaaS companies analyzed had instances of ONLY a video customer testimonial on their customer success overview page, with no accompanying written study.

The case study overview page contained a link that took viewers straight to the video. They provided little written context beyond maybe a headline or short synopsis. In some cases, nothing was provided beyond a thumbnail headshot.

Thus, prospective customers couldn't tell whether a video was relevant to them and their needs until they clicked through and watched it. Not ideal.

Not having accompanying written assets is also a huge missed opportunity for SEO and deeper storytelling.

Here's an example:

Watch the video — CTA links directly to video on YouTube
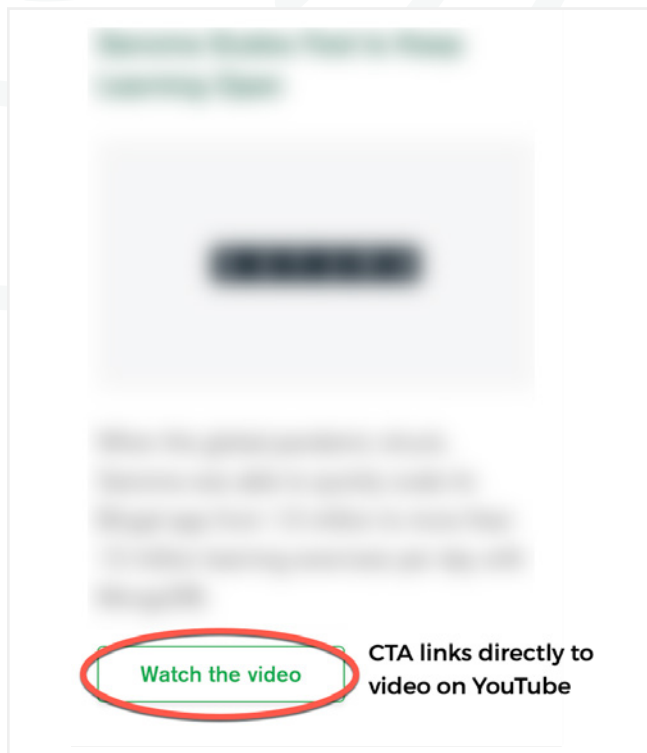
In contrast, if you put the video link on the individual case study page with a nice, scannable, long-form case study, prospective customers would have the information they needed to decide whether it was worth their while to watch the video or not.

The written context would also provide valuable fodder for SEO to help similar prospects find you through Google search.

Recommendation: Present customer testimonial videos in context with written, scannable text.

Coordination between video production and writing teams

Both of these issues (video with no written and written with no video) indicate a larger problem: lack of coordination between video production and writing teams.

It's not unusual for these functions to live in two different places, whether internally or with external agencies, which makes coordination difficult.

Which is too bad. Because when these two groups are disconnected, you introduce process inefficiencies—and lose out on the opportunity to tell great customer success stories in multiple ways for greater deployment versatility and ROI.

Recommendation: Coordinate video and writing teams BEFORE you make the ask of your customers.

Integrating Video Testimonials and Written Case Studies

Fortunately, we also found lots of examples where SaaS companies did an excellent job of integrating video with written studies to make it easier for prospective customers to pick and choose how they wanted to engage with their content.

In fact, half of the SaaS companies we studied embedded the video into individual case study pages.

Half of the top 50 SaaS companies embed video testimonials into their written case study pages.

Here's an example of a customer success story page from Zoom. You can see that the video is embedded at the top of the page (embedded video circled in red):
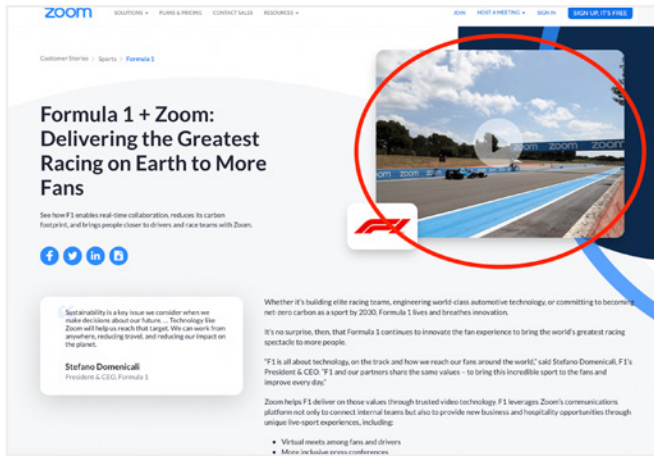
Other companies **provided a link to the video testimonial from the case study page**, which is another good option. This is what ServiceNow did with its case study page for the NBA and WNBA (link to video circled in red):
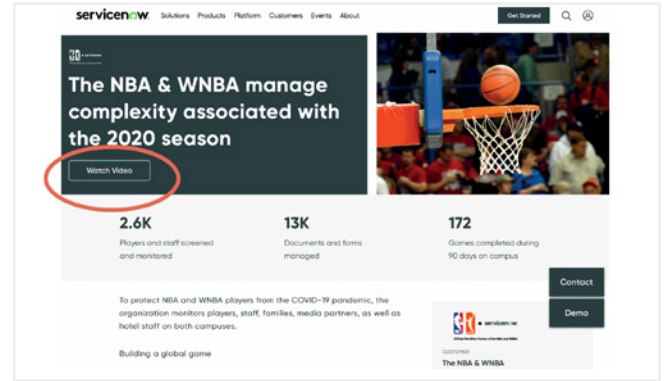
We love these two examples because they give prospective customers the best of both worlds. They can quickly scan the written study, watch the video, then return to read the study in more detail.

And when you only have a few seconds to grab a prospect's attention, making your customer success stories easy to absorb and digest is critical.

A few other SaaS companies we studied chose to provide a link to the video directly from the success story overview page, as Adobe has done in the screenshot below:
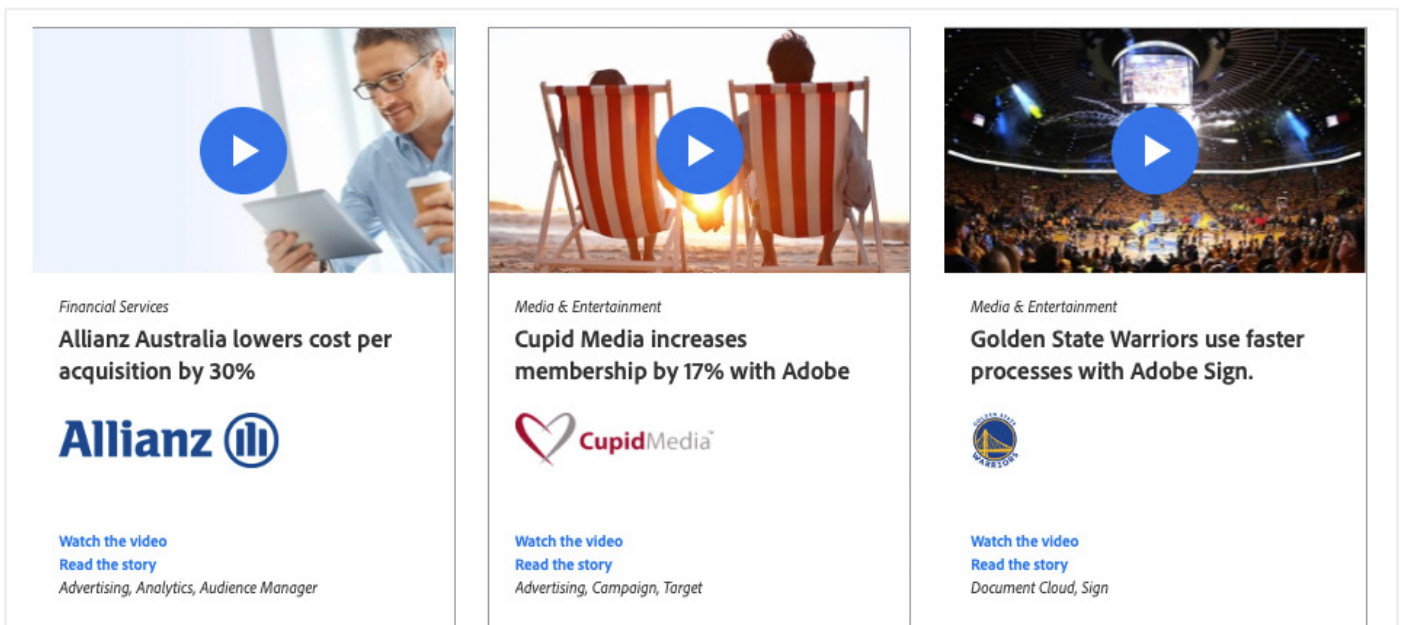
However, Adobe also puts a link to the video on the individual case study page, giving it important context (see red arrow):
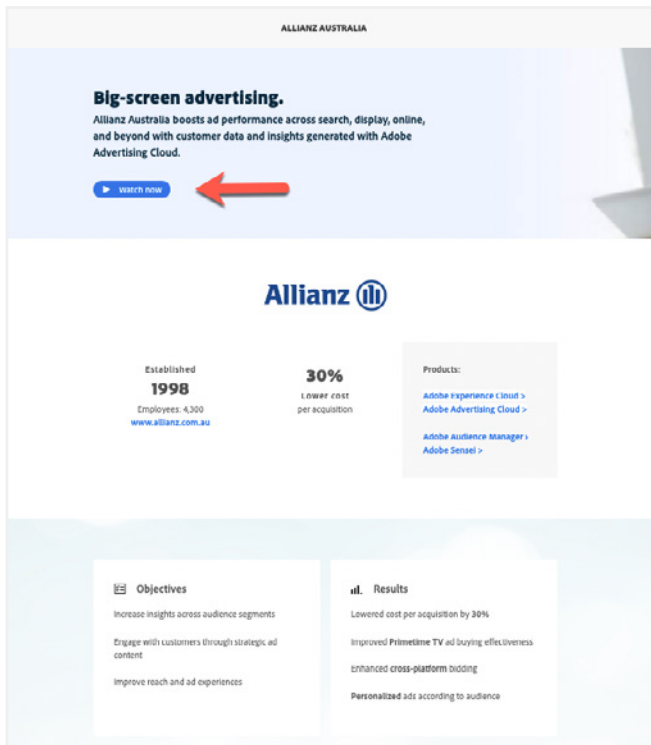
Recommendation: Integrate video testimonials with written case studies on your overview pages.
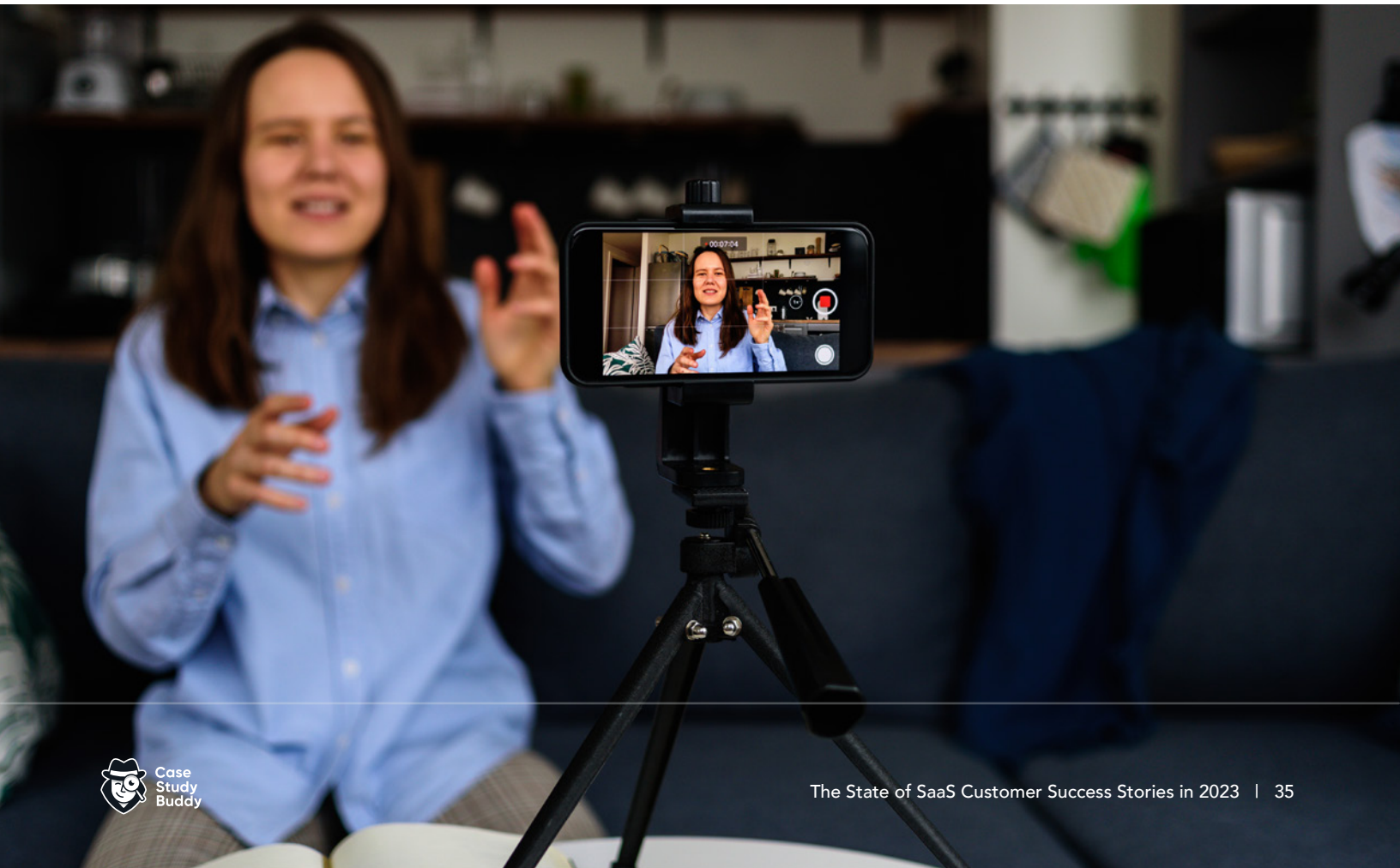
03

Customer success story overview pages

As we've shown, many of these SaaS companies do an outstanding job of creating customer success stories and video testimonials at scale.

They have so many at their fingertips, they arm their sales and marketing teams with valuable evidence of their ability to solve different pain points in different industries for different types of customers.

But with so many customer success stories, another problem emerges: how do they help prospective customers find the case studies and video testimonials most relevant to them?

It all comes down to how these SaaS companies present their case studies and video testimonials on their customer success overview page—the page that lists all customer success stories with links.

Here's the customer success story overview page from Zscaler, for example:
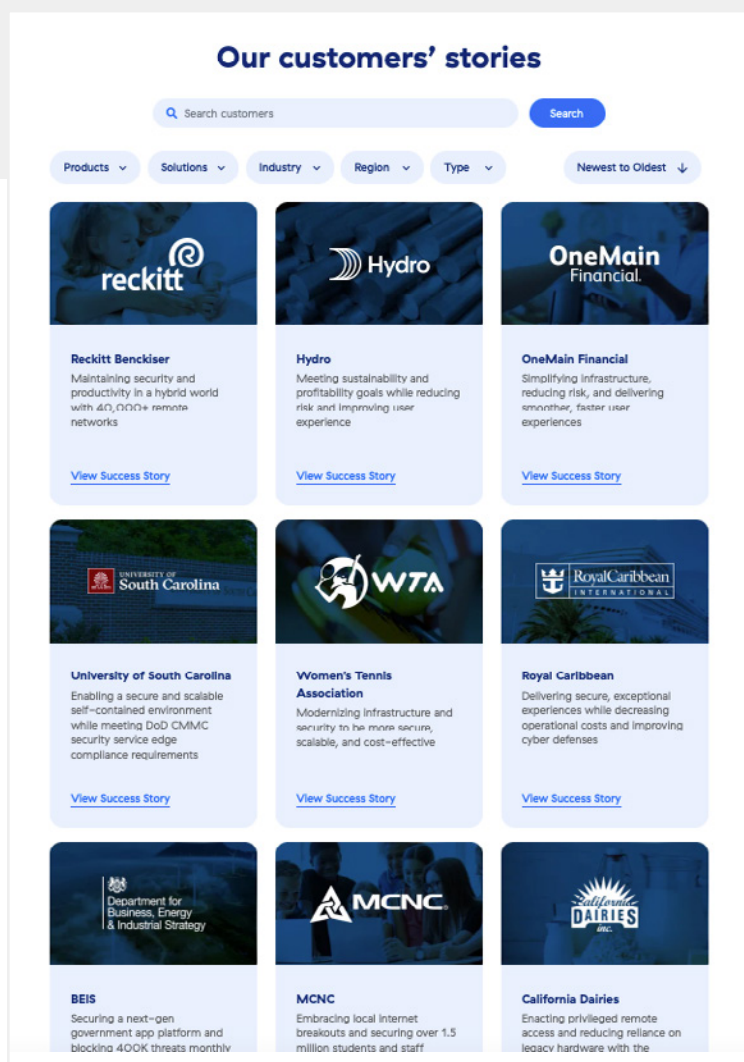
Generally, these companies used three methods to help their prospective customers find relevant success stories:

- Built-in filters
- Search functionality
- Visual and descriptive cues

Let's look at each of these in more detail.

Built-in Filters

Almost all of the SaaS companies analyzed provided at least a few filtering options to help prospective clients find customer success stories relevant to their industry and use case.

Of the top 50 SaaS companies, almost all of them provide filtering options to make customer success stories more findable.

Here are the filtering options we found, sorted by prevalence:
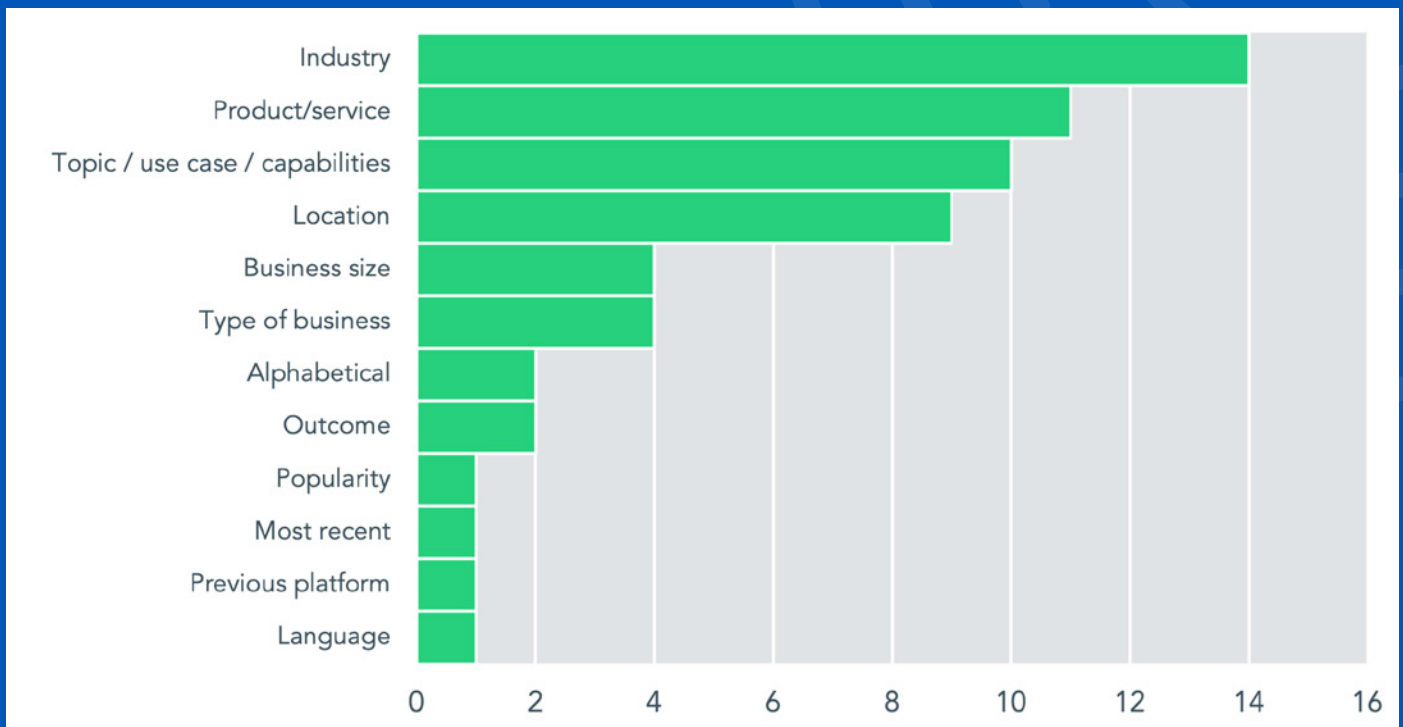
It's no surprise that "industry" and "product/service" top the list. Those have long been popular filtering options and for good reason.

Overlapping categories, such as topic, use case, and capabilities, were also popular.

The usefulness of some options, such as location and language, will vary depending on the global reach of the SaaS company.

We also found some innovative filters. Shopify's use of "previous platform" as a filter is a cool idea, as is AutoDesk Construction Cloud's "outcome" filter that gives the options of "cost, quality, schedule, safety, and winning business":
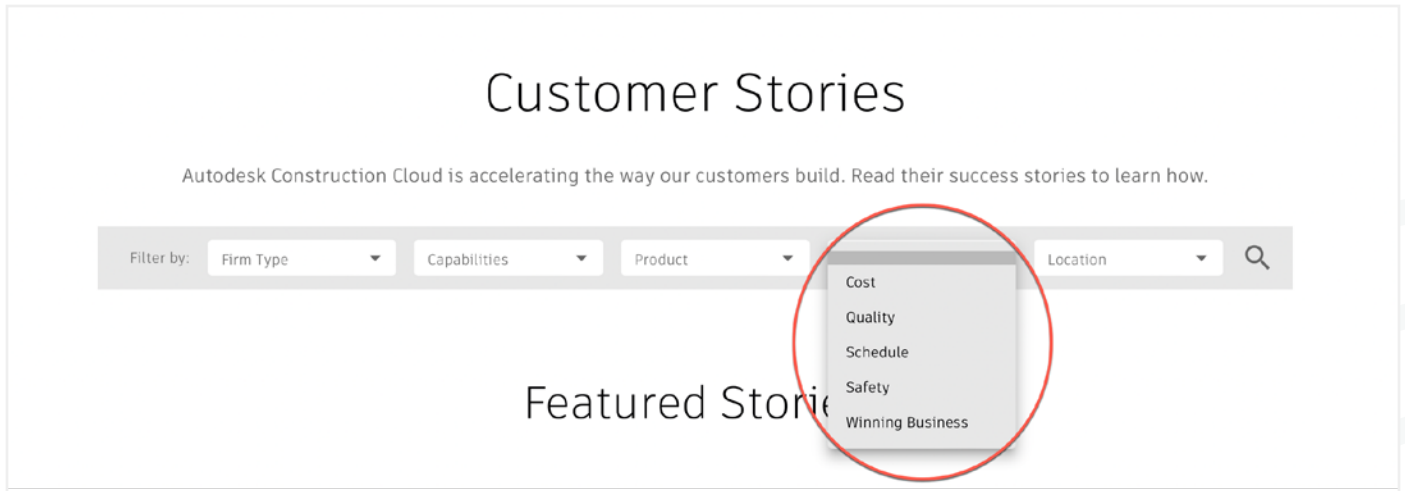
"Most recent" is an interesting outlier because we feel more companies should use this filter. Prospects don't care about how great your company was 50 years ago, back in its glory days when mullets were in style and gas was 36¢ per gallon. They want to see proof of the good work you're doing right now.

Having up-to-date (and evergreen) case studies is a must, so giving people the option to filter by "most recent" just makes sense!

Recommendation: Provide filters to help prospects find success stories most relevant to them.

Search Function

Only 8 out of 50 SaaS companies studied included a search function on their customer success story overview page.

In a few cases, the number of customer success stories was small enough that a search tool really wasn't warranted. However, once you have enough customer success stories that people have to scroll down or click to a second page to see them all, a search tool is needed.

Including a search tool is also a band-aid way to overcome a lack of on-page integration between different video and written formats. We often used the on-page search tool to find written equivalents of video testimonials we found on the company's YouTube channels. It's by no means an ideal solution, but it is a useful short-term workaround.

Recommendation: Put a search tool on your success story overview page once you have to scroll or click to a second page to see them all.

Visual and Descriptive Cues

Most SaaS companies also provided visual and descriptive cues about individual customer success stories on their overview page to help prospective customers find relevant ones.

Here are the most common cues we found, ranked by prevalence:

Visual and descriptive cues
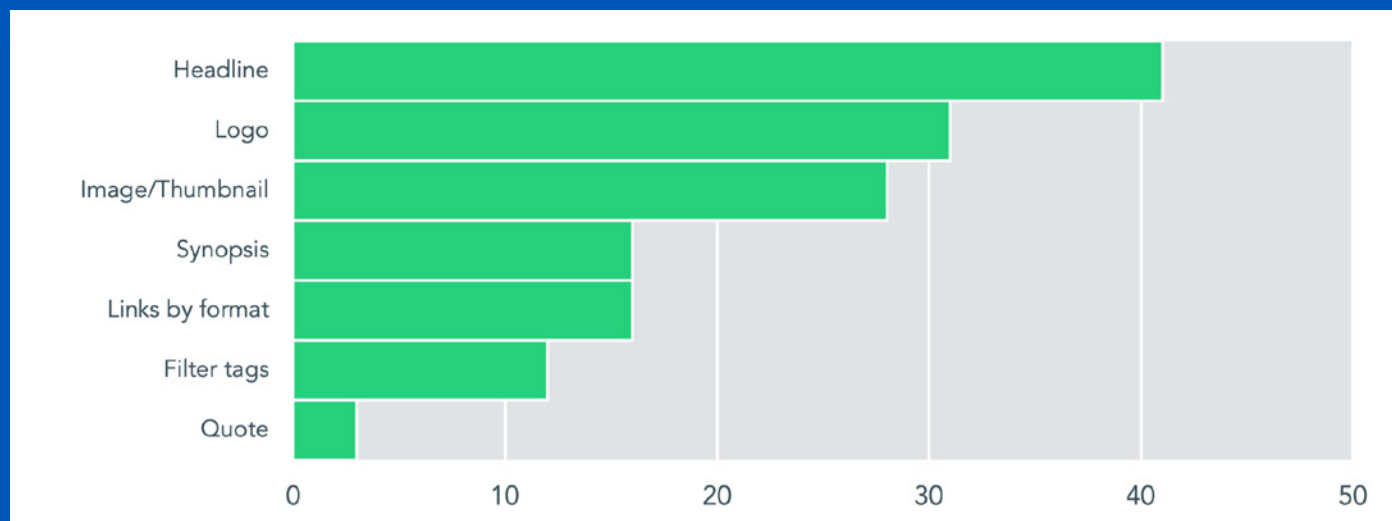
Headline

Almost every customer success story listing included a story headline—but not all. A few had only the customer's name.

The danger of this is that your leads may gravitate solely to the earliest studies listed or those with the largest logos—stories that may or may not actually resonate with the pains they're feeling or outcomes they desire.

Customer logo

Displaying the customer logo was another popular way to communicate relevancy and build authority. Naturally, this works best when the customer name is well-known within its industry.

When this is not the case, a synopsis, quote, or detailed headline helps establish who the story might be most relevant to and why.

Image or thumbnail

Many companies used video thumbnails or stock photos to communicate "the essence" of each customer featured. This is easier to do for some industries than others (e.g. a manufacturer versus a software provider).

Snowflake does this well on its overview page:
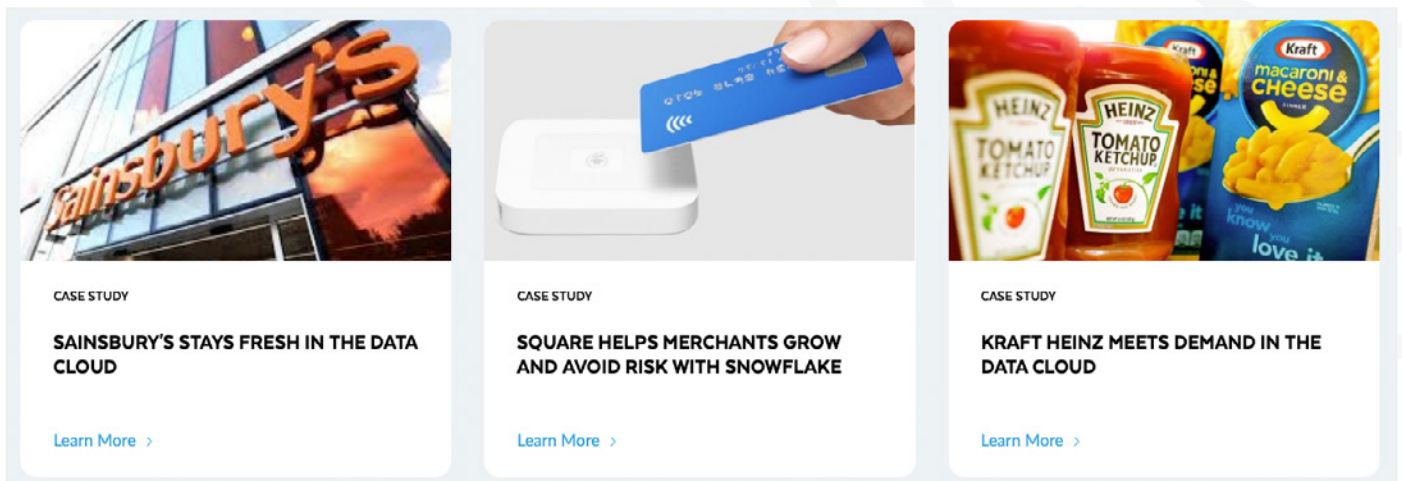
Each of these images communicate something about the customer. And some even contain logos, which is an added bonus.

Meanwhile, a few SaaS companies used images of unbranded customer buildings, which wasn't very helpful (though better than no image at all). Some had images with dark overlays, which made it challenging to discern what the image actually was.

The most common shortcoming we encountered was using a "talking head" thumbnail from a video as the image. Unfortunately, an unidentified talking head doesn't communicate much about the customer or industry.

Synopsis

32% of the top 50 SaaS companies we looked at included short one- or two-sentence descriptions on their customer success overview pages to help prospective customers assess relevance to their own situations.

Here's a nice example from Cloudfare:

Cross-border payment gateway service provider AsiaBill uses Cloudflare to fix slow-loading payment pages, speed up the payment experience, and reduce cart abandonment.

Learn More >

Megalayer defends itself against prolonged, large-scale attacks with Cloudflare Magic Transit. Cloudflare has also helped Megalayer improve network quality, reduce customer churn, and lower O&M costs.

Learn More >

Nuvolo, the modern solutions provider company, deploys Cloudflare Area 1 for comprehensive cloud-native email security for their Microsoft Office 365 inboxes.

Learn More >

Links by format

Often, SaaS companies used descriptive links to indicate whether the linked asset was in written or video format (e.g. "Read their story" or "Watch video").

Providing these kinds of links by format is fine— but we also recommend embedding or including a link to the video from the individual case study page to reduce the amount of back-and-forth clicking needed.

As mentioned previously, what you don't want is a video link on your overview page with no written context to help your audience understand what it is they're going to get out of watching it (or why that story is valuable to view in the first place.)

Filter tags

Including filter-based tags on the success story overview page was also a common practice.

[HubSpot](#) does this to great effect by including industry and use case filter tags on its overview page:
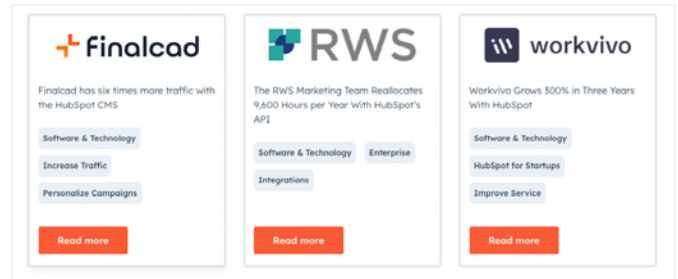
Quotes

Only a few SaaS companies chose to include a quote for each success story on their overview page. Providing a quote isn't a bad option if it doesn't take up a huge amount of space. Done well, it can help establish credibility and help prospects who are scanning for studies relevant to their situation.

Most landing pages included several of these elements on the overview pages, such as [this page from Coupa](#) (not on our top 50 SaaS list, but still a great example). They've done a great job of combining image, logo, headline, industry, and summary in one tight package.
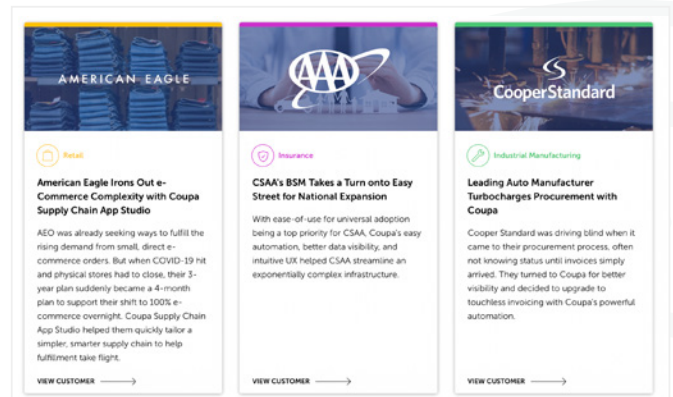
Recommendation: Use visual and descriptive cues on your success story overview page to help prospective customers find relevant stories.

Conclusion

What can we conclude about the state of SaaS customer success stories in 2022—and what 2023 might bring—after completing all this research?

Some SaaS companies are crushing it. They're doing an impressive job of creating video testimonials and written case studies at scale and are integrating them beautifully on their websites.

Others are doing a great job with their written case studies but treat video testimonials as something separate. In some cases, we can deduce that these two formats are led by two different teams with little coordination between them.

If you're going to create video testimonials and written case studies at scale efficiently, as our best examples have done, you need to get both teams on the same page at the outset.

A few SaaS companies seem to have jumped onto the video testimonials bandwagon to the detriment of their written studies—which also isn't a great result. Both formats have an important role to play in sales and marketing. Video testimonials can't replace written case studies and vice versa; they serve different informational needs and may outperform each other at different stages of the buyer's journey.

Your sales and marketing teams need both.

And a select few of the SaaS companies analyzed haven't prioritized customer success stories in *any* format. Or if they have, they treat them like precious jewels that must be kept under wraps.

This variance among the top 50 provides an opportunity for every SaaS company—and really, any company— to learn what, and what not, to do with their own customer success story program.

Start by creating a process to capture these stories at scale in multiple formats. Put them on the customer success pages of your website. Make them open and findable.

But don't stop there. Put them in the hands of sales, marketing, HR, training, and every other team so they can put these high-octane assets to work.

Case Study Buddy

Need help with your SaaS customer success stories?

At Case Study Buddy, we take the complex task of creating customer success stories in video, written, and audio formats off your plate, from strategy, to buy-in, to production, to approvals.

Contact us to learn more about how we can help you get more customer success stories and video testimonials more efficiently.

Contact Us

Appendix 1:
List of recommendations

Written Customer Success Stories

- Create a program to identify and capture customer success stories and codify those processes into SOPs.

- Put long-form case studies on individual case study pages.

- Use layout and design to make your long-form case studies scannable online.

- Put your case studies in HTML and give users the option of downloading a PDF.

- Make your case studies freely available. Do not gate them.

- Always include direct customer quotes in your case study.

- Put customer logos on case study overview pages AND individual case study pages to foster trust.

- Include a headshot of the person interviewed to add power and authenticity to your case study.

- Create anonymized case studies when the customer prefers to not be named.

Customer Video Testimonials

- Create both written and video versions of your customer success stories to maximize impact and versatility.

- Don't let the need to anonymize your customer prevent you from creating video testimonials.

- When repurposing content into video testimonials, ensure the end product meets expectations for the video testimonial format.

- Improve the watchability of video testimonials with branding, b-roll, and graphics.

- Keep videos on your customer success pages around two to three minutes in length and include chapter markers.

- Make video testimonials an integral part of your customer success story production process.

- Tell the same customer success story in video and written formats.

- Present customer testimonial videos in context with written, scannable text.

- Coordinate video and writing teams BEFORE you make the ask of your customers.

- Integrate video testimonials with written case studies on your overview pages.

Customer Success Story Overview Pages

- Provide filters to help prospects find success stories most relevant to them.

- Put a search tool on your success story overview page once you have to scroll or click to a second page to see them all.

- Use visual and descriptive cues on your success story overview page to help prospective customers find relevant stories.

Appendix 2:
List of SaaS companies analyzed

1	Salesforce		26	Twilio
2	Adobe		27	Samsara
3	Intuit (QuickBooks Enterprise)		28	Splunk
4	ServiceNow		29	DocuSign
5	Snowflake		30	Dynatrace
6	Atlassian		31	Unity Software
7	Autodesk - Construction Cloud		32	Zendesk
8	Workday		33	Okta
9	CloudStrike Holdings		34	Change Healthcare
10	Shopify - Shopify Plus		35	Bentley Systems
11	Block (formerly Square)		36	F5
12	Datadog		37	Ceridian HCM Holding
13	Veeva Systems		38	Avalara
14	Zscaler		39	Dropbox
15	Zoom Video Communications		40	GitLab
16	Paycom Software		41	SentinelOne
17	Cloudfare		42	UiPath
18	ZoomInfo Technologies		43	Elastic
19	Palantier Technologies		44	Procore Technologies
20	Bill.com Holdings		45	Confluent
21	MongoDB		46	HashiCorp
22	Palocity Holding Corporation		47	Qualtrics International
23	Citrix Systems		48	The Descartes Systems Group
24	HubSpot		49	Qualys
25	Akamai Technologies		50	Five9