Persuasive Messages

© Maridav/Shutterstock.com

OBJECTIVES
After studying this chapter, you should be able to

8-1
Explain digital-age persuasion and identify time-proven persuasive techniques.

8-2
Craft persuasive messages that request actions.

8-3
Write compelling claims and deliver successful complaints.

8-4
Understand interpersonal persuasion at work, and compose persuasive messages within organizations.

8-5
Create effective and ethical direct-mail and e-mail sales messages employing the AIDA strategy: gaining attention, building interest, developing desire, and motivating action.

8-1 Understanding Persuasion in the Digital Age

In the digital age, businesses have moved toward leaner corporate hierarchies, simultaneously relying on teams, dismantling division walls, and blurring the lines of authority. Persuasive skills are becoming ever more important at work as teams and managers abandon the traditional command structure and focus instead on *influencing* others.[1] However, getting others to do what we want isn't easy. Persuasion is needed when we are making more than routine demands and facing skeptical audiences.

Experts say that the average American adult endures between 300 and 1,500 ads and other persuasive appeals a day.[2] As citizens and consumers, we need to be alert to persuasive practices and how they influence behavior. Being informed is our best defense. On the other hand, social media networks have put power into the hands of many. Persuasion guru B. J. Fogg points out that social media enable individuals or groups to reach virtually limitless audiences and practice "mass interpersonal persuasion."[3]

You have already studied techniques for writing routine request messages that require minimal persuasion. This chapter focuses on messages that require deliberate and skilled persuasion in the workplace. It also addresses selling, both offline and online.

8-1a How Has Persuasion Changed in the Digital Age?

The preoccupation with persuasion is not new. From the days of Aristotle in ancient Greece and Niccolò Machiavelli in Renaissance Italy, philosophers, politicians, and

businesspeople have longed to understand the art of influencing others. However, persuasion in the twenty-first century is different from persuasion in previous historic periods in distinct ways.[4] The most striking developments, summarized in this section, are less than three decades old.

The Volume and Reach of Persuasive Messages Have Exploded.

TV, radio, the Internet, and mobile phones blast myriad messages to the far corners of the earth. A Pew Research study shows that American popular culture continues to soar abroad. Two thirds of people surveyed in 16 countries said they liked American music, films, and television—up 6 percent from five years earlier.[5]

Persuasive Messages Spread at Warp Speed.

Popular TV shows such as *The X Factor* and their corporate sponsors use social media to engage the fans whose more than half a million social media comments instantly influence the contestants' dance routines, songs, and wardrobes. *American Idol* now clocks one million posts during a single show,[6] and citizen reporters deliver instant updates from disaster areas on Twitter and other social media networks.

Organizations of All Stripes Are in the Persuasion Business.

Companies, ad agencies, PR firms, social activists, lobbyists, marketers, and more, spew persuasive messages. Although outspent by corporations that can sink millions into image campaigns, activists use social networks to rally their followers.

Persuasive Techniques Are Subtler and More Misleading.

Instead of a blunt, pushy hard-sell approach, persuaders play on emotions by using flattery, empathy, nonverbal cues, and likability appeals. They are selling images and lifestyles, not products.[7] In this age of spin, the news media are increasingly infiltrated by partisan interests and spread messages masquerading as news.

Persuasion Is More Complex and Impersonal.

American consumers are more diverse and don't necessarily think alike. To reach them, marketers carefully study various target groups and customize their appeals. Technology has increased the potential for distortion. People can "mash up" content, give it meanings the original source never intended, and blast it into the world in seconds.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1

Explain digital-age persuasion and identify time-proven persuasive techniques.

Workplace in Focus

Evan Agostini/Liaison Agency/Getty Images

At Our World Neighborhood Charter School in Queens, a third-grader who learned to write a persuasive letter in class decided to try his new skill to change the school's no-Pokémon policy. In a handwritten message to his teacher, the boy opened, "A lot of people in our class like Pokémon . . . I think we can use it educationally." Next, after explaining that the fantasy-card trading game teaches subtraction, addition, and multiplication, he made a request: "I was thinking we could have some friendly and educational competition as a center for math." The boy's letter closed, "If you can't, you are still a great teacher." The school lifted the ban and approved the game for math and recess. What made the student's message so persuasive?[8]

Figure 8.1 Effective Persuasion Techniques

Establish credibility

- Show that you are truthful, experienced, and knowledgeable.
- Use others' expert opinions and research to support your position.

Make a reasonable, specific request

- Make your request realistic, doable, and attainable.
- Be clear about your objective. Vague requests are less effective.

Tie facts to benefits

- Line up plausible support such as statistics, reasons, and analogies.
- Convert the supporting facts into specific audience benefits.

Recognize the power of loss

- Show what others stand to lose if they don't agree.
- Know that people dread losing something they already possess.

Expect and overcome resistance

- Anticipate opposition from conflicting beliefs, values, and attitudes.
- Be prepared to counter with well-reasoned arguments and facts.

Share solutions and compromise

- Be flexible and aim for a solution that is acceptable to all parties.
- Listen to people and incorporate their input to create buy-in.

You probably recognize how important it is not only to become a skilled persuader, but also to identify devious messages and manipulation attempts directed at you. The delivery channels may have changed, but the principles of effective, time-tried persuasion outlined in Figure 8.1 still apply today.

When you want your ideas to prevail, start thinking about how to present them. Listeners and readers will be more inclined to accept what you are offering if you focus on important strategies, outlined in Figure 8.1 and further discussed throughout this chapter.

8-2 Planning and Writing Persuasive Requests

Direct claim messages, such as those you wrote in Chapter 6, are straightforward and direct. Persuasive requests, on the other hand, are generally more effective when they are indirect. Reasons and explanations should precede the main idea. To overcome possible resistance, the writer lays a logical foundation before delivering the request. A writing plan for persuasive requests requires deliberate development.

WRITING PLAN FOR PERSUASIVE REQUESTS

- **Opening:** Capture the reader's attention and interest. Describe a problem, make an unexpected statement, suggest reader benefits, offer praise or compliments, or ask a stimulating question.

- **Body:** Build interest. Explain logically and concisely the purpose of the request. Prove its merit. Use facts, statistics, expert opinion, examples, and specific details. Focus on the reader's direct and indirect benefits. Reduce resistance. Elicit a desire to comply. Anticipate objections, offer counterarguments, establish credibility, demonstrate competence, and show the value of your proposal.

- **Closing:** Motivate action. Ask for a particular action. Make the action easy to take. Show courtesy, respect, and gratitude.

In this chapter you will learn to apply the preceding writing plan to messages that (a) request actions, (b) make claims and request adjustments that may meet with opposition, (c) persuade subordinates and supervisors, and (d) create effective direct-mail and e-mail sales messages.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 2

Craft persuasive messages that request actions.

8-2a Crafting an Effective Persuasive Message

Convincing someone to change a belief or to perform an action when that person is reluctant requires planning and skill—and sometimes a little luck. A written request

may require more preparation than a face-to-face request, but it can be more effective. For example, you may need to ask a businessperson to make a presentation to your club, or a company to encourage its employees to participate in a charity drive. Such messages require skill in persuasion.

Figure 8.2 shows a persuasive request from Sophia Tellez. Her research firm seeks to persuade other companies to complete a questionnaire revealing salary data. In most organizations, salary information is strictly confidential. What can Sophia do to convince strangers to part with such private information?

Analyzing the First Draft. The hurriedly written first version of the request in Figure 8.2 suffers from many faults. It fails to pique the interest of the reader in the opening. It also provides an easy excuse for Mr. Mosher to refuse (*filling out surveys can be tedious*). In the body, Mr. Mosher doesn't receive any incentive to accept the request. The writing is self-serving and offers few specifics. In addition, the draft does not anticipate objections and fails to suggest counterarguments. Last, the closing does not motivate action by providing a deadline or a final benefit.

Revising the First Draft. In the revised version shown in Figure 8.2, to gain attention, Sophia poses two short questions that spotlight the need for salary information. To build interest and establish trust, she states that Hunter Research has been collecting business data for a quarter century and has received awards. She ties her reasonable request to audience benefits.

8-3 Writing Effective Persuasive Claims and Complaints

As their name suggests, complaints deliver bad news. Some complaint messages just vent anger. However, if the goal is to change something (and why bother to write except to motivate change?), then persuasion is necessary. Persuasive claim and complaint messages may involve damaged products, mistaken billing, inaccurate shipments, warranty problems, limited return policies, insurance snafus, faulty merchandise, and so on.

An effective claim message makes a reasonable and valid request, presents a logical case with clear facts, and has a moderate tone. Anger and emotion are not effective persuaders.

8-3a Developing a Claim Message Logically

Strive for logical development in a claim message. You might open with sincere praise, an objective statement of the problem, a point of agreement, or a quick review of what you have done to resolve the problem. Then you can explain precisely what happened or why your claim is legitimate. Don't provide a blow-by-blow chronology of details; just hit the highlights. Be sure to enclose copies of relevant invoices, shipping orders, warranties, and payments. Close with a clear statement of what you want done: a refund, replacement, credit to your account, or other action. Be sure to think through the possibilities and make your request reasonable.

8-3b Adopting a Moderate Tone

The tone of your message is important. Don't suggest that the receiver intentionally deceived you or intentionally created the problem. Rather, appeal to the receiver's sense of responsibility and pride in the company's good name. Calmly express your disappointment in view of your high expectations of the product and of the company. Communicating your feelings without rancor is often the strongest appeal.

Charlotte Piroska's e-mail, shown in Figure 8.3, follows the persuasive strategy as she seeks credit for two VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) systems. Actually, she

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 3
Write compelling claims and deliver successful complaints.

Figure 8.2 Persuasive Request

DRAFT

Dear Mr. Mosher:

We need your help in collecting salary data for today's workers. Hunter Research has been collecting business data for 25 years, and we have received awards for accuracy. We know that filling out surveys can be tedious, but the results are very useful. — *Fails to pique interest; provides easy excuse*

Companies trust the survey data we compile. We have been in this business long enough to know how important comparative salary data are to most organizations. Filling out our questionnaire will not take very long. If you wish, we could send you some of the results showing not only salaries, but also perks and other benefits. — *Does not promote direct and indirect benefits*

Please fill out the enclosed questionnaire and call us if you have any questions. Thank you for your cooperation. — *Does not anticipate objections; fails to motivate action*

REVISION

HUNTER RESEARCH

599 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14850   www.hunterresearch.com
PH 716.878.2300

FAX 716.878.4359

May 18, 2016

Mr. Brian H. Mosher
Walker Wealth Management
420 South Cayuga Street, Suite 250
Ithaca, NY 14850

Dear Mr. Mosher:

Poses two short questions related to the reader — Have you ever added a unique job title but had no idea what compensation the position demanded? Has your company ever lost a valued employee to another organization that offered 20 percent more in salary for the same position? — *Gains attention*

Presents reader benefit tied to request explanation; establishes credibility — To remain competitive in hiring and to retain qualified workers, companies rely on survey data showing current salaries. Hunter Research has been collecting business data for a quarter century and has been honored by the American Management Association for its accurate data. We need your help in collecting salary data for today's workers. Information from the enclosed questionnaire will supply companies like yours with such data. — *Builds interest*

Anticipates and counters resistance to confidentiality and time/effort objections — Your information, of course, will be treated confidentially. The questionnaire takes but a few moments to complete, and it can provide substantial dividends for professional organizations just like yours that need comparative salary data. — *Elicits desire and reduces resistance*

Offers free salary data as a direct benefit — To show our gratitude for your participation, we will send you free comprehensive salary surveys for your industry and your metropolitan area. Not only will you find basic salaries, but you will also learn about bonus and incentive plans, special pay differentials, expense reimbursements, and perquisites such as a company car and credit card.

Appeals to professionalism, an indirect benefit — Comparative salary data are impossible to provide without the support of professionals like you. Please complete the questionnaire and return it in the prepaid envelope before June 1, our spring deadline. Participating in this survey means that you will no longer be in the dark about how much your employees earn compared with others in your industry. — *Motivates action*

Provides deadline and a final benefit to prompt action

Sincerely yours,

HUNTER RESEARCH

Sophia Tellez
Sophia Tellez
Director, Survey Research

Enclosures

Figure **8.3** Persuasive Claim (Complaint) E-Mail

```
File   Edit   Mailbox   Message   Transfer   Special   Tools   Window   Help

B  I  U        [icons]         Send
```

To: customer.service@versafon.com
From: charlotte.piroska <cpiroska@artdeco-style.com>
Subject: Requesting Merchandise Return—VersaTel 5.8 VoIP System
Cc:
Bcc:

Dear VersaFon Customer Service:

Your VersaTel 5.8 VoIP Expandable Telephone System came highly recommended and seemed to be the answer to increasingly expensive telephone service. Here at Art Deco Style we were looking for a way to reduce our local and long-distance telephone charges. The VoIP system was particularly attractive to us because it offered Internet phone service with unlimited calling to the United States, Europe, and Asia. Our business in fine furnishings and unique objets d'art requires us to make and receive national and international calls.

Begins with compliment and keeps tone objective, rational, and unemotional

On January 8 we purchased two VoIP systems (SGU #IP7402-2) for our main office here in White Sulphur Springs and for our Lewisburg showroom. Each system came with two cordless handsets and charging docks. Although we followed all the installation instructions, we discovered that an irritating static sound interfered with every incoming and outgoing telephone call.

Provides identifying data and justifies claim

Explains why claim is valid and suggests responsibility of receiver

This static is surprising and disappointing because the product description promised the following: "You will experience excellent signal clarity with Frequency Hopping Digital Spread Spectrum (FHDSS) transmission and a frequency of 5.8 GHz. A ninety-five-channel auto search ensures a clear signal."

On January 10 we filled out a Return Merchandise Authorization form on your website. However, we are frustrated that we have had no response. We are confident that a manufacturer with your reputation for reliable products and superior customer service will want to resolve this matter quickly.

Expresses disappointment and appeals to receiver's reputation and customer service

Please authorize return of these two systems and credit our account for $377.24, which represents the original cost plus taxes and shipping. Attached is an electronic copy of the invoice with our credit card number.

Tells what action to take

Sincerely,

Charlotte Piroska
President
cpiroska@artdeco-style.com

Art Deco Style
370 W. Main Street, White Sulphur Springs, WV 24986
(855) 864-4858 | www.artdeco-style.com

Tips for Persuasive Claims and Complaints
- Begin with a compliment, point of agreement, statement of the problem, or brief review of the action you have taken to resolve the problem.
- Provide identifying data.
- Prove that your claim is valid; explain why the receiver is responsible.
- Attach document copies supporting your claim.
- Appeal to the receiver's fairness, ethical and legal responsibilities, and desire for customer satisfaction.
- Describe your feelings and your disappointment.
- Avoid sounding angry, emotional, or irrational.
- Close by telling exactly what you want done.

was quite upset because her company was counting on these new Internet systems to reduce its phone bills. Instead, the handsets produced so much static that incoming and outgoing calls were all but impossible to hear.

However, Charlotte resolved to use a moderate tone in writing her claim/complaint e-mail because she knew that a calm, unemotional tone would be more effective than an angry one. She opted for a positive opening, a well-documented message, and a request for specific action in the closing.

sjenner13/iStock/Thinkstock

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 4

Understand interpersonal persuasion at work, and compose persuasive messages within organizations.

8-4 Crafting Persuasive Messages in Digital-Age Organizations

The lines of authority are blurry in today's information-age workplaces, and the roles of executives are changing. Technology has empowered rank-and-file employees who can turn to their companies' intranets and don't need their managers to be information providers—formerly a crucial managerial role.

This huge shift in authority is affecting both the strategies for creating and the tone of workplace persuasive messages. You may still want to be indirect if you hope to persuade your boss to do something he or she will be reluctant to do; however, your boss, in turn, will be less likely to rely on the power of position and just issue commands. Rather, today's executives increasingly bank on persuasion to achieve buy-in from subordinates.[9]

This section focuses on messages flowing downward and upward within organizations. Horizontal messages exchanged among coworkers resemble the persuasive requests discussed earlier.

8-4a Persuading Employees: Messages Flowing Downward

Employees have traditionally expected to be directed in how to perform their jobs; therefore, instructions or directives moving downward from superiors to subordinates usually required little persuasion. Messages such as information about procedures, equipment, or customer service still use the direct strategy, with the purpose immediately stated.

However, employees are sometimes asked to volunteer for projects. For example, some organizations encourage employees to join programs to stop smoking, lose weight, or start exercising. Organizations may ask employees to participate in capacities outside their work roles—such as spending their free time volunteering for charity projects. In such cases, the writing plan for persuasive requests introduced earlier provides a helpful structure.

Paying Attention to Tone. Because many executives today rely on buy-in instead of exercising raw power,[10] messages flowing downward require attention to tone. Warm words and a conversational tone convey a caring attitude. Persuasive requests coming from a trusted superior are more likely to be accepted than requests from a dictatorial executive who relies on threats and punishments to secure compliance.

Presenting Honest, Accurate Evidence. The goal is not to manipulate employees or to seduce them with trickery. Rather, the goal is to present a strong but honest argument, emphasizing points that are important to the receiver or the organization. In business, honesty is not just the best policy—it's the only policy. People see right through puffery and misrepresentation. For this reason, the indirect strategy is effective only when supported by accurate, honest evidence.

8-4b Persuading the Boss: Messages Flowing Upward

Convincing management to adopt a procedure or invest in a product or new equipment requires skillful communication. Managers are just as resistant to change as others are. Providing facts, figures, and evidence is critical when submitting a recommendation to your boss. When selling an idea to management, strive to make a strong dollars-and-cents case.[11] A request that emphasizes how the proposal saves money or benefits the business is more persuasive than one that simply announces a good deal or tells how a plan works.

Persuasive messages traveling upward require a special sensitivity to tone. When asking supervisors to change views or take action, use words such as *suggest* and

recommend rather than *you must* or *we should*. Avoid sounding pushy or argumentative. Strive for a conversational, yet professional, tone that conveys warmth, competence, and confidence.

When Marketing Manager Michael Cooper wanted his boss to authorize the purchase of a multifunction color laser copier, he knew he had to be persuasive. His memo, shown in Figure 8.4, illustrates an effective approach.

Notice that Michael's memo isn't short. A successful persuasive message typically takes more space than a direct message because proving a case requires evidence. In the end, Michael chose to send his memo as an e-mail attachment accompanied by a polite, short e-mail message because he wanted to keep the document format in Microsoft Word intact. He also felt that the message was too long to paste into his e-mail program. The subject line announces the purpose of the message without disclosing the actual request.

The strength of the persuasive document in Figure 8.4 is in the clear presentation of comparison figures showing how much money the company can save by purchasing a remanufactured copier.

8-5 Creating Effective Sales Messages in Print and Online

The best sales messages, whether delivered by postal mail or by e-mail, have much in common. Marketing professionals analyze and perfect every aspect of a sales message to encourage consumers to read and act on the message. This section presents techniques developed by experts for drafting effective sales messages, in print and online.

Sales letters are usually part of multichannel marketing campaigns. These letters are a powerful means to make sales, generate leads, boost retail traffic, solicit donations, and direct consumers to websites. Direct mail is a great channel for personalized, tangible, three-dimensional messages that are less invasive than telephone solicitations

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 5

Create effective and ethical direct-mail and e-mail sales messages employing the AIDA strategy: gaining attention, building interest, developing desire, and motivating action.

Workplace in Focus

© iStockphoto.com/lawcain

As part of a recent marketing campaign, Taco Bell sent handwritten fan notes and jewelry to popular models in hopes of generating buzz. The highly personal letters, which marketers sent to Miss California Leah Cecil and swimsuit model Chrissy Teigen, among others, gushed statements like "You're cool, a great friend, and you like Taco Bell" and "Following you on Twitter was the best decision we ever made." To prove their affection, the marketers enclosed two rings that, worn together on the hand, spell Taco Bell. "We like you, so we wanted to give you this custom Taco Bell ring," explained one of the notes. The models were seen flashing their new friendship rings on Instagram and Twitter. How can communicators develop marketing messages that get attention?[12]

Figure 8.4 Persuasive Message Flowing Upward

To: Gary Greer <gary.greer@smartmachinetools.com>
From: Michael Cooper <michael.cooper@smartmachinetools.com>
Subject: Saving Time and Money on Copying and Printing
Cc:
Attached: refurbished color copiers.docx (10 KB)

Serves as cover e-mail to introduce attached memo in MS Word

Opens with catchy subject line

Gary,

Attached is a brief document that details our potential savings from purchasing a refurbished color laser copier. After doing some research, I discovered that these sophisticated machines aren't as expensive as one might think.

Please look at my calculations and let me know what you suggest that we to do improve our in-house production of print matter and reduce both time and cost for external copying.

Does not reveal recommendation but leaves request for action to the attached memo

Mike

Michael Cooper
Marketing Assistant * Smart Machine Tools, Inc.
800 S. Santa Fe Blvd. * City of Industry, CA 91715
213.680.3000 office / 213.680.3229 fax
michael.cooper@smartmachinetools.com

Provides an electronic signature with contact information

↓ 1 inch

MEMORANDUM

↓ 2 blank lines

Date: April 8, 2016

↓ 1 blank line

To: Gary Greer, Vice President

↓ 1 blank line

From: Michael Cooper, Marketing

↓ 1 blank line

Subject: Saving Time and Money on Copying

↓ 1 or 2 blank lines

Describes topic without revealing request

Summarizes problem

We are losing money on our current copy services and wasting the time of employees as well. Because our aging Canon copier is in use constantly and can't handle our growing printing volume, we find it increasingly necessary to send major jobs out to Copy Quick. Moreover, whenever we need color copies, we can't handle the work ourselves. Just take a look at how much we spend each month for outside copy service:

Copy Costs: Outside Service

10,000 B&W copies/month made at Copy Quick	$ 700.00
1,000 color copies/month, $0.25 per copy (avg.)	250.00
Salary costs for assistants to make 32 trips	480.00
Total	$1,430.00

Uses headings and columns for easy comprehension

To save time and money, I have been considering alternatives. Large-capacity color laser copiers with multiple features (copy, e-mail, fax, LAN fax, print, scan) are expensive. However, reconditioned copiers with all the features we need are available at attractive prices. From Copy City we can get a fully remanufactured Xerox copier that is guaranteed and provides further savings because solid-color ink sticks cost a fraction of laser toner cartridges. We could copy and print in color for roughly the same as black and white. After we make an initial payment of $300, our monthly costs would look like this:

Proves credibility of request with facts and figures

Copy Costs: Remanufactured Copier:

Paper supplies for 11,000 copies	$160.00
Ink sticks and copy supplies	100.00
Labor of assistants to make copies	150.00
Monthly financing charge for copier (purchase price of $3,105 – $300 amortized at 10% with 36 payments)	93.74
Total	$503.74

Highlights most important benefit

As you can see, a remanufactured Xerox 8860MFP copier saves us more than $900 per month. For a limited time Copy City is offering a free 15-day trial offer, a free copier stand (a $250 value), free starter supplies, and free delivery and installation. We have office space available, and my staff is eager to add a second machine.

Provides more benefits

Counters possible resistance

Please call me at Ext. 630 if you have questions. This copier is such a good opportunity that I have prepared a purchase requisition authorizing the agreement with Copy City. With your approval before May 1, we could have our machine by May 10 and start saving time and more than $900 every month. Fast action will also help us take advantage of Copy City's free start-up incentives.

Makes it easy to grant approval

Repeats main benefit with motivation to act quickly

and less reviled than unsolicited e-mail. A recent study shows that tangible mail appears to have a greater emotional impact than virtual mail. MRI scans suggest that physical materials "leave a deeper footprint in the brain."[13] Figure 8.5 juxtaposes the most relevant features of traditional direct-mail and online sales messages.

8-5a Betting on Highly Targeted, Relevant Direct Mail

Although not as flashy as social media campaigns, direct mail still works as long as it is personalized and relevant.[14] Experts know that most recipients do look at their direct mail and respond to it; in fact, 79 percent of consumers act on direct mail immediately, whereas only 45 percent deal with e-mail right away.[15] Despite ever-increasing spending on digital and mobile advertising, more money still goes to traditional direct-mail marketing ($93.6 billion) than to online marketing ($62 billion).[16] The infographic in Figure 8.6 displays information about channel choice and consumer perceptions of the most common marketing media.

Professionals who specialize in traditional direct-mail services have made it a science. They analyze a market, develop an effective mailing list, study the product, prepare a sophisticated campaign aimed at a target audience, and motivate the reader to act. You have probably received many direct-mail packages, often called junk mail. Chances are they will keep coming, but they will be a lot more relevant to you and your spending habits.

8-5b Considering the Value of Sales Letters

We are most concerned here with the sales letter: its strategy, organization, and evidence. Because sales letters are usually written by specialists, you may never write one on the job. Why learn how to write a sales letter? Learning the techniques of sales writing will help you be more successful in any communication that requires persuasion and promotion. What's more, you will recognize sales strategies directed at you, which will make you a more perceptive consumer of ideas, products, and services.

OFFICE INSIDER

"Direct mail is perhaps one of the most powerful marketing media in use today. Few other marketing tools can deliver your message with exact precision at such a low cost. The amount of mail in your mailbox every day attests to the effectiveness of this medium (If it didn't work, your mailbox would be empty!)."
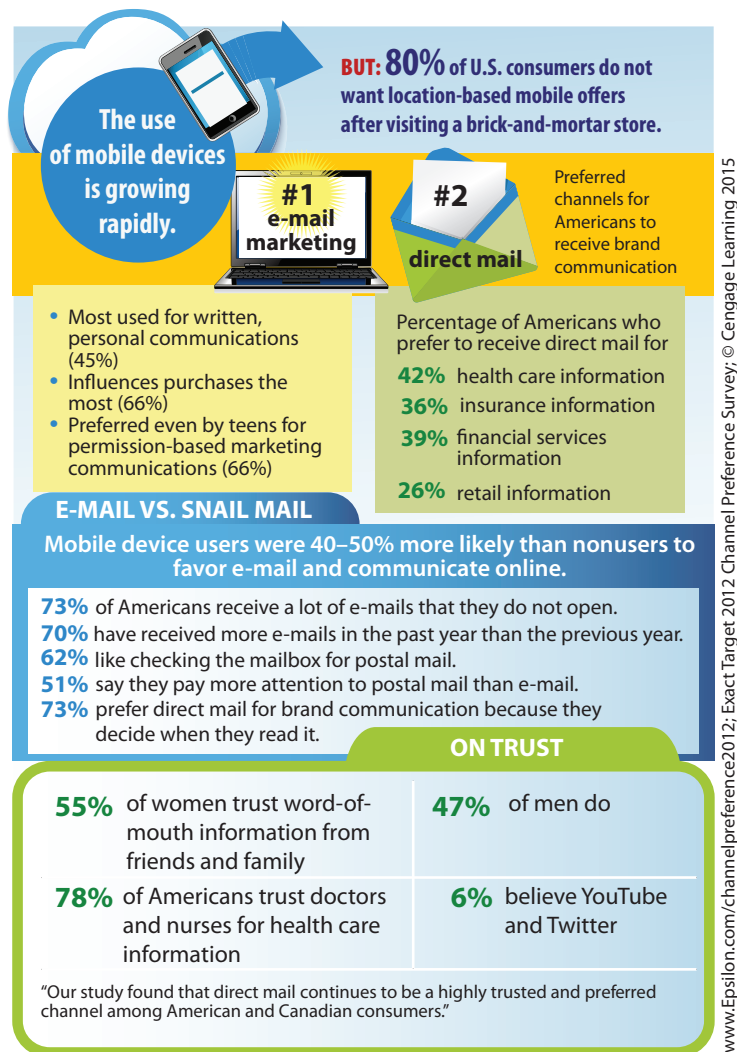
—David Frey, president of Marketing Best Practices, Inc., Houston, Texas

sjenner13/iStock/Thinkstock

Figure **8.5** Persuasive Sales Techniques in the Digital Age

Characteristics of Traditional Versus Online Sales Messages

Traditional Direct Mail (Sales Letter)	E-Commerce (E-Mail, Social Media Messages)
Creating static content (hard copy)	Creating dynamic digital content
Anticipating a single response (inquiry, sale)	Creating engagement instead of selling overtly
Resorting to "spray-and-pray" approach	Building one-to-one relationships and communities around brands
Single communication channel	Multiple communication channels
Limited response	Potentially unlimited responses
Monologue	Dialogue, potential for mass diffusion
Private response	Public, shared response
Asynchronous (delayed) response	Instant, real-time response possible
Passive	Interactive, participatory
Promoter-generated content	User-generated content
The needs of target groups must be anticipated and met in advance.	Consumers expect that brands understand their unique needs and deliver.
Direct mail is preferred for information about insurance, financial services, and health care; excellent channel for offline customers.	**Savvy brands respond nimbly to customer participation; today's sophisticated consumers dislike "hard sell."**

Chapter 8: Persuasive Messages

235

Copyright 2016 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

Figure **8.6** Channel Choice: Direct Mail and Social Media

BUT: 80% of U.S. consumers do not want location-based mobile offers after visiting a brick-and-mortar store.

The use of mobile devices is growing rapidly.

#1 e-mail marketing

#2 direct mail

Preferred channels for Americans to receive brand communication

- Most used for written, personal communications (45%)
- Influences purchases the most (66%)
- Preferred even by teens for permission-based marketing communications (66%)

Percentage of Americans who prefer to receive direct mail for

42% health care information

36% insurance information

39% financial services information

26% retail information

E-MAIL VS. SNAIL MAIL

Mobile device users were 40–50% more likely than nonusers to favor e-mail and communicate online.

73% of Americans receive a lot of e-mails that they do not open.
70% have received more e-mails in the past year than the previous year.
62% like checking the mailbox for postal mail.
51% say they pay more attention to postal mail than e-mail.
73% prefer direct mail for brand communication because they decide when they read it.

ON TRUST

55% of women trust word-of-mouth information from friends and family

47% of men do

78% of Americans trust doctors and nurses for health care information

6% believe YouTube and Twitter

"Our study found that direct mail continues to be a highly trusted and preferred channel among American and Canadian consumers."

www.Epsilon.com/channelpreference2012; Exact Target 2012 Channel Preference Survey; © Cengage Learning 2015

Your primary goal in writing a sales message is to get someone to devote a few moments of attention to it. You may be promoting a product, a service, an idea, or yourself. In each case the most effective messages follow the AIDA strategy, illustrated in Figure 8.7: (a) gain attention, (b) build interest, (c) elicit desire and reduce resistance, and (d) motivate action. This is the same recipe we studied earlier in the writing plan for persuasive requests, but the ingredients are slightly different.

WRITING PLAN FOR SALES MESSAGES: AIDA.

■ **Opening:** Gain *attention*. Offer something valuable; promise a benefit to the reader; ask a question; or provide a quotation, fact, product feature, testimonial, startling statement, or personalized action setting.

■ **Body:** Build *interest*. Describe central selling points and make rational and emotional appeals. Elicit *desire* in the reader and reduce resistance. Use testimonials, money-back guarantees, free samples, or performance tests.

■ **Closing:** Motivate *action*. Offer a gift, promise an incentive, limit the offer, set a deadline, or guarantee satisfaction.

Figure 8.7 The AIDA Strategy for Sales Messages

	STRATEGY	CONTENT	SECTION
A	**Attention**	Captures attention, creates awareness, makes a sales proposition, prompts audience to read on	Opening
I	**Interest**	Describes central selling points, focuses not on features of product/service but on benefits relevant to the reader's needs	Body
D	**Desire**	Reduces resistance, reassures the reader, elicits the desire for ownership, motivates action	Body
A	**Action**	Offers an incentive or gift, limits the offer, sets a deadline, makes it easy for the reader to respond, closes the sale	Closing

Gaining Attention in Sales Messages. One of the most critical elements of a sales message is its opening paragraph. This opener should be short (one to five lines), honest, relevant, and stimulating. Marketing pros have found that eye-catching typographical arrangements or provocative messages, such as the following, can hook a reader's attention:

- **Offer:** *Subscribe now and get a free iPad to enjoy your programming on the go!*
- **Promise:** *Now you can raise your sales income by 50 percent or even more with the proven techniques found in. . . .*
- **Question:** *Why wait in the Starbucks line for a pitiful paper cup when for $20 you can have the Chiseled Chrome Coffee Cup, a handsome stylish tumbler of your own to refill every morning?*
- **Quotation or proverb:** *Necessity is the mother of invention.*
- **Fact:** *The Greenland Eskimos ate more fat than anyone in the world. And yet . . . they had virtually no heart disease.*
- **Product feature and its benefit:** *The Atlas sock is made from cotton, polyester, and carbonized coffee. Yup! Coffee helps filter odor, but equally important, the sock uses pressure mapping and thermal imaging to create a ridiculously comfortable sock!*
- **Startling statement:** *Bigger houses cost less.*
- **Personalized action setting:** *It's 4:30 p.m. and you have to make a decision. You need everybody's opinion, no matter where they are. Before you pick up your phone and call them one at a time, pick up this card: WebEx Teleconference Services.*

Other openings calculated to capture attention include a solution to a problem, an anecdote, a personalized statement using the receiver's name, or a relevant current event.

Building Interest With Rational and Emotional Appeals. In this phase of your sales message, you should describe clearly the product or service. In simple language emphasize the central selling points that you identified during your prewriting analysis. Those selling points can be developed using rational or emotional appeals.

Rational appeals are associated with reason and intellect. They translate selling points into references to making or saving money, increasing efficiency, or making the best use of resources. In general, rational appeals are appropriate when a product is expensive, long-lasting, or important to health, security, or financial success.

Emotional appeals relate to status, ego, and sensual feelings. Appealing to the emotions is sometimes effective when a product is inexpensive, short-lived, or nonessential. Many clever sales messages, however, combine emotional and rational strategies for a dual appeal. Consider these examples:

Rational Appeal
You can buy the things you need and want, pay household bills, pay off higher-cost loans and credit cards—as soon as you are approved and your ChoiceCredit card account is opened.

Emotional Appeal
Leave the urban bustle behind and escape to sun-soaked Tahiti! To recharge your batteries with an injection of sun and surf, all you need is your bathing suit, a little suntan lotion, and your ChoiceCredit card.

Dual Appeal
New ChoiceCredit cardholders are immediately eligible for a $200 travel certificate and additional discounts at fun-filled resorts. Save up to 40 percent while lying on a beach in picturesque, sun-soaked Bora-Bora, the year-round luxury resort.

A physical description of your product is not enough, however. Zig Ziglar, thought by some to be America's greatest salesperson, pointed out that no matter how well you know your product, no one is persuaded by cold, hard facts alone. In the end, people buy because of product benefits.[17] Your job is to translate those cold facts into warm feelings and reader benefits. Let's say a sales message promotes a hand cream made with aloe and cocoa butter extracts, along with vitamin A. Those facts become *Nature's hand helpers—including soothing aloe and cocoa extracts, along with firming vitamin A—form invisible gloves that protect your sensitive skin against the hardships of work, harsh detergents, and constant environmental assaults.*

Reducing Resistance and Building Desire. Marketing specialists use a number of techniques to overcome resistance and build desire. When price is an obstacle, consider these suggestions:

- Delay mentioning price until after you have created a desire for the product.
- Show the price in small units, such as the price per issue of a magazine.
- Demonstrate how the reader saves money—for instance, by subscribing for two or three years.
- Compare your prices with those of a competitor.

In addition, you need to anticipate objections and questions the receiver may have. When possible, translate these objections into selling points (*If you are worried about training your staff members on the new software, remember that our offer includes $1,000 worth of on-site one-on-one instruction*). Be sure, of course, that your claims are accurate and do not stretch the truth. Other techniques to overcome resistance and prove the credibility of the product include the following:

- **Testimonials:** *"I never stopped eating, yet I lost 107 pounds."* —Tina Rivers, Greenwood, South Carolina

- **Names of satisfied users** (with permission, of course): *Enclosed is a partial list of private pilots who enthusiastically subscribe to our service.*
- **Money-back guarantee or warranty:** *We offer the longest warranties in the business—all parts and service on-site for five years!*
- **Free trial or sample:** *We are so confident that you will like our new accounting program that we want you to try it absolutely free.*
- **Performance tests, polls, or awards:** *Our TP-3000 was named Best Internet Phone, and Etown.com voted it Smartphone of the Year.*

Motivating Action at the Conclusion of a Sales Message. All the effort put into a sales message goes to waste if the reader fails to act. To make it easy for readers to act, you can provide a reply card, a stamped and preaddressed envelope, a toll-free telephone number, a smartphone-readable matrix barcode, a simple Web address, or a promise of a follow-up call. Because readers often need an extra push, consider including additional motivators, such as the following:

- **Offer a gift:** *You will receive a free iPad mini with the purchase of any new car.*
- **Promise an incentive:** *With every new, paid subscription, we will plant a tree in one of America's Heritage Forests.*
- **Limit the offer:** *Only the first 100 customers receive free travel mugs.*
- **Set a deadline:** *You must act before June 1 to take advantage of these low prices.*
- **Guarantee satisfaction:** *We will return your full payment if you are not entirely satisfied—no questions asked.*

The final paragraph of the sales message carries the punch line. This is where you tell readers what you want done and give them reasons for doing it. Most sales messages also include postscripts because they make irresistible reading. Even readers who might skim over or bypass paragraphs are drawn to a P.S. Therefore, use a postscript to reveal your strongest motivator, to add a special inducement for a quick response, or to reemphasize a central selling point.

8-5c   Putting Together All the Parts of a Sales Message

A direct-mail sales letter is the number two preferred marketing medium right behind e-mail[18] because it can be personalized, directed to target audiences, and filled with a more complete message than other advertising media can. However, direct mail is expensive. That's why crafting and assembling all the parts of a sales message are so critical.

Figure 8.8 shows a sales letter addressed to individuals and families who may need health insurance. To prompt the reader to respond to the mailing, the letter incorporates the effective four-part AIDA strategy. The writer first establishes the need for health coverage. Then she develops a rational central selling point (a variety of affordable health plans for every budget offered without sales pressure and medical jargon) and repeats this selling point in all the components of the letter. This sales letter saves its strongest motivator—a free heart-rate monitor for the first 30 callers—for the high-impact P.S. line.

Although you want to be persuasive in sales letters, you must guard against overstepping legal and ethical boundaries. Be sure to check out the Communication Workshop at the end of this chapter to see specific examples of what is legal and what is not.

8-5d   Writing Successful E-Mail Sales Messages

E-mail is the primary channel that consumers use to interact with brands today. It is the most used channel for written, personal communication (45 percent), and

Figure **8.8** HealthSelect Sales Letter

HealthSelect
Insurance you can count on

Choose our health plans if you want
VALUE!

Confused about health insurance?
You're not alone.

June 17, 2016

Call a licensed expert at **(877) 522-0417.**

Visit us online at **choosehealth.com.**

Mr. Jared Klugman
350 South 2nd Street, Apt. B
Ashland, OR 97520

Return the completed reply card to us by mail.

Dear Mr. Klugman:

Addresses common fear → Do you think you can't afford quality health insurance? Let us try to change your mind. HealthSelect offers attractive health plans that fit a range of budgets, needs, and lifestyles. Whether you're a recent graduate, self-employed, retiring early, or working without health insurance, one of our plans could be right for you. ← *Gains attention*

Establishes need for health insurance → Health care needs can rise at any time in life, even in healthy and fit individuals. Anyone can succumb to an infectious disease or become sidelined by an accident. Wouldn't you want to have peace of mind? Knowing that such an unfortunate event won't break the bank will give you peace of mind. ← *Builds interest*

Emphasizes central selling point and reader benefits → **Choose from a variety of plans and benefits at affordable rates, starting at $110.***
Our individual and family plans feature important benefits to keep you healthy:
- Preventive care comes at no additional cost, so that you don't put off your annual exam!
- Generic and brand-name prescription drug coverage will save you money every time.
- Chiropractic care, acupuncture, and rehabilitation coverage will help keep you in shape.
- A range of deductible options that work for your budget will put coverage within reach.
- Optional dental, vision, and life insurance coverage will protect you from unexpected expense.

Elicits desire and reduces resistance

Visit our website **choosehealth.com** for lots of ideas on how you can achieve your wellness goals. Learn about discount programs that help you save money and achieve a healthier lifestyle—at no additional charge.

Repeats central sales pitch → **Compare HealthSelect plans when you're ready. No obligation. No pressure. Simple!** ← *Motivates action*
Call us at **(877) 522-0417**, and we will answer your questions in clear, easy-to-understand language, no medical or bureaucratic jargon. We promise. No sales types will hound you, either. That's a promise too.

Stay well,

Danielle McCoy
Danielle McCoy
Director of Individual and Family Care

Spotlights free offer in P.S. to prompt immediate reply → P.S. Call **(877) 522-0417** today for your free quote or to apply for coverage. The first 30 callers will receive a free heart-rate monitor. We're here to help improve the health of the people we serve.

* This rate may not apply to you. Rates vary based on age, location, and health history.

---

77 percent of consumers prefer permission-based marketing through e-mail.[19] E-mails cost about $7 per consumer response versus about $48 per response for traditional direct mail.[20]

Much like traditional direct mail, e-mail marketing can attract new customers, keep existing ones, encourage future sales, cross-sell, and cut costs. However, e-marketers can create and send a promotion in half the time it takes to print and distribute a traditional message. To reach today's consumer, marketers must target their e-mails well if they wish to even get their messages opened.

Meet Chef James Barry. The owner of Wholesome2Go, an organic food home-delivery service, knows that to achieve success today, he must cultivate relationships, not just push products.[21] A former personal chef for celebrities, James engages his clients by maintaining a website, tweeting updates, and posting on his Facebook

and Pinterest pages. Wholesome2Go also has a YouTube channel. Frequently, Chef James sends persuasive e-mails in HTML format such as the one shown in Figure 8.9 that follows the four-part AIDA strategy.

On a practical level, you want to show how your persuasive message solves a problem, achieves a personal or work objective, or just makes life easier for your

Figure 8.9 Wholesome2Go Engages the Audience With Social Media

Personalizes the letter to connect with customers

Captures attention with holiday greetings and teaser announcement

Makes it easy to order the meals and share the information on social media

Announces benefit of savings and uses graphic highlighting for emphasis

Builds excitement by not revealing the full news

Invites action to sign up for special offer and view holiday video

Employs *you* view throughout

Provides opt-out statement

facebook

Wholesome2Go
584 likes • 46 talking about this

Chef James   The Books

Order Meals
Fill in the intake form to start receiving our delicious, healthy meals.

Questions? Simply reply to this email.

Hi, Irene!

Happy Holidays from all of us at Wholesome2Go! We've got exciting news to share with you for the New Year.

As you know, we are the premier food company providing the most healthy, effective, and sustainable detox in Los Angeles: The 14-day Sugar Control Detox

Normally this detox costs $71 a day for food and nutritional support.

Get ready for **a very special three-day sale of the 14-Day Sugar Control Detox** from our nutritional partner, Eat Naked, happening on January 7th, 8th, and 9th.

You will have the opportunity to have Wholesome2Go provide you with sugar control meals for only $50 a day! **That's over $200 in savings from our normal program.**

Eat Naked hasn't revealed all the details for this super sale yet, so consider this a little taste of what's to come. Learn more here and make sure to sign up to receive this special offer.

This week, enjoy our thank you holiday video from the Wholesome2Go team. We are grateful for all your support.

Much health and happiness this holiday season. Wishing you the best New Year's ever!

Cheers,

Chef James and Team W2G
Wholesome2Go

If you wish to stop receiving our e-mails or to change your options, please go to Manage Your Subscription.
Wholesome2Go, PO Box 801, Culver City, CA 90232

audience. Chef James understands that New Year's resolutions to eat healthy food and lose weight might reduce resistance to his offer.

When adapting persuasive requests to your audience, consider these questions that receivers will very likely be asking themselves: *Why should I? What's in it for me? What's in it for you? Who cares?*

8-5e   Best Practices for Online Sales Messages

The goal of a persuasive message is to convert the receiver to your ideas and motivate action. To accomplish this feat in the age of social media, persuaders seek to build relationships with their audiences. Even so, a message without a clear purpose is doomed. Too often, inexperienced writers reach the end of the first draft of a message before discovering exactly what they want the receiver to think or do.

The first rule of e-marketing is to communicate only with those who have given permission. By sending messages only to "opt-in" folks, you greatly increase your open rate (i.e., the percentage of people who actually open the e-mail). E-mail users detest spam. However, receivers are surprisingly receptive to offers tailored specifically for them. Remember that today's customer is somebody—not anybody. Marketers must make it easy for the recipient to unsubscribe.

Some differences between traditional sales messages and e-marketing are obvious when you study Figure 8.9. Online sales messages are shorter than direct-mail messages, feature colorful graphics, and occasionally even come with sound or video clips. They offer a richer experience to readers who can click hyperlinks at will to access content that interests them. When such messages are sent out as ads or periodic e-newsletters coded in HTML, they may not have salutations or closings. Rather, they may resemble Web pages.

Here are a few guidelines that will help you create effective e-mail sales messages:

- **Craft a catchy subject line**. Include an audience-specific location (*Emporium in Vegas Opens Soon!*); ask a meaningful question (*What's Your Dream Vacation?*); and use no more than 50 characters. Promise realistic solutions. Offer discounts or premiums.
- **Keep the main information "above the fold."** E-mails should be top heavy. Primary points should appear early in the message to capture the reader's attention.
- **Make the message short, conversational, and focused**. Because on-screen text is taxing to read, be brief. Focus on one or two central selling points only.
- **Sprinkle testimonials throughout the copy**. Consumers' own words are the best sales copy. These comments can serve as callouts or be integrated into the text.
- **Provide a means for opting out**. It's polite and a good business tactic to include a statement that tells receivers how to be removed from the sender's mailing database.

8-5f   Writing Short Persuasive Messages Online

Increasingly, writers are turning to social network posts to promote their businesses, further their causes, and build their online personas. As we have seen, social media are not primarily suited for overt selling; however, tweets and other online posts can be used to influence others and to project a professional, positive online presence.

Typically, organizations and individuals with followers post updates of their events, exploits, thoughts, and experiences. In persuasive tweets and posts, writers try to pitch offers, prompt specific responses, or draw the attention of their audiences to interesting events and media links. Figure 8.10 displays a sampling of persuasive tweets.

Figure **8.10** Analyzing Persuasive Tweets

Tweet promoting professional services by offering the reader a general benefit.

Sandra Zimmer @sandrazimmer
Coaching for authentic presentations, public speaking & **persuasive messages** to help you shine. tinyurl.com/m5hrrx
Expand ← Reply ↑↓ Retweet ★ Favorite

Tweet offering a freebie and testimonials to promote a book and urging action by restricting the availability of the freebie

Jessica Brody @JessicaBrody
5 autographed copies of UNREMEMBERED (UK edition) are up for grabs on Free Book Friday teens this week! Check it out! ow.ly/k5k6M

Delta @Delta
Be sure to enter our Kick It in NYC contest before the curtain closes. Enter now! oak.ctx.ly/r/1nwv pic.twitter.com/CRHxOwKe
📷 View photo ← Reply ↑↓ Retweet ★ Favorite

An airline creating urgency by suggesting that time to enter a contest is running out

James Barry @ChefJamesBarry
The Sugar Control Detox is coming and at an insanely low price! This opportunity is available to everyone, no... fb.me/S2XDfTXB
▶ View media ← Reply ↑↓ Retweet ★ Favorite

Teaser tweet by a small business owner announcing an upcoming promotion

A notable public figure advocating action for a cause, to sign a petition

richardbranson @richardbranson
Make this holiday story have a happy ending – sign the petition to put #educationfirst for children around the world virg.in/hap
Expand

A nonprofit organization requesting political action of advocacy for a popular cause

Army of Women @ArmyofWomen
Think #breastcancer should be a Nat. priority? Tell the president HERE:ow.ly/dnMd3
Expand ← Reply ↑↓ Retweet ★ Favorite

Notable philanthropist tweeting to motivate giving by reassuring followers of charities' merit

Bill Gates @BillGates
Make your donations count. @CharityNav provides great information on the impact non-profits are actually having. b-gat.es /ThLBLJ
Expand

Mike Bloomberg @MikeBloomberg
I've joined @Instagram. Follow me here: instagram.com /mikebloomberg
Expand

Tweet by a notable public figure announcing his new social network account and inviting followers along

Guy Kawasaki @GuyKawasaki
Are you a writer? Here are some fantastic resources available free today as a download on the APE website.... fb.me/10bBh8apK
Expand ← Reply ↑↓ Retweet ★ Favorite

Tweet by notable businessperson offering a free resource using an attention-getter

Note that the compact format of a tweet requires extreme conciseness and efficiency. Don't expect the full four-part AIDA strategy to be represented in a 140-character Twitter message. Instead, you may see attention getters and calls for action, both of which must be catchy and intriguing. Regardless, many of the principles of persuasion discussed in this chapter apply even to micromessages.

SUMMARY OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES

8-1 Explain digital-age persuasion and identify time-proven persuasive techniques.

- Business communicators need to use persuasion when making more than routine demands and facing a skeptical audience.
- Digital-age persuasion techniques are different from those used in earlier periods because the volume and reach of persuasive messages have exploded; messages now travel at warp speed; all kinds of organizations are persuaders; and persuasion is subtler and more misleading and has become more complex and impersonal.
- Effective persuasion involves establishing credibility; making specific, reasonable requests; linking facts to benefits; recognizing the power of loss; overcoming resistance; and sharing solutions and compromising.