

How credible are your communications? The Thinkshift® Credibility Quotient™ gives you the score.

Don't just *think* your stakeholder communications are credible—*know* they are.

Evaluating your communications' credibility based on insider impressions is like evaluating children's talents based on their parents' observations—the conclusion is bound to reflect a partisan bias. The Thinkshift Credibility Quotient gives you a more objective way to assess credibility. Using this standards-based system, we score your website, reports, fundraising materials, e-mail messages, Facebook content, or other communications on 10 factors integral to credibility. We weight these scores according to the importance of each factor, then add them up to produce an overall Credibility Quotient.

Each Credibility Quotient report details strengths and weaknesses related to each factor, revealing missed opportunities and providing a road map for boosting credibility and effectiveness. We always consider context issues, such as public concerns and your fundraising environment, and can even rate similar organizations' communications to show you how you stack up.

The credibility payoff

Credibility is key not only to communications success, but also to fundraising success. The bar is particularly high today because donors increasingly seek transparency and accountability from nonprofits they support, and grantmakers often are analytically minded professionals who make decisions based on data.

Highly credible communications help you stand out from the crowd and stand up to third-party scrutiny; support fundraising efforts by answering donor questions up front; and provide a basis for accurate, positive media coverage.

Communications that lack credibility fail to motivate because they're not persuasive. They slow the relationship-building process because potential supporters have a lower level of comfort and understanding. And they expose you to skeptical examination that can harm your reputation when reality doesn't match up to your claims.

A system based on expertise and research

To develop the Credibility Quotient, Thinkshift drew on the principals' decades of combined experience in journalism and as communications consultants for publications, nonprofits, businesses, and institutions. We also considered research on ethical persuasion techniques, online communications, and marketing communications.*

For example, social psychology research has found that people are motivated to follow others' behavior. That makes testimonials, particularly from people much like the target audience, powerfully persuasive, so Credibility Quotient ratings take that into account in the Support for Claims factor. Ample research shows that people perceive organizations that are frank about challenges they face as more trustworthy. That finding is reflected in the Attention to Challenges factor. Research on website credibility in particular has found that unprofessional design and poor usability reduce perceived credibility; the Credibility Quotient accounts for that in the Presentation factor.

OK, so how do I get a rating?

Thinkshift provides Credibility Quotient ratings as part of all relevant client engagements. Ratings are also available as a stand-alone service. To learn more, call 415.848.9181 or e-mail start@thinkshiftcom.com.

*You can find overviews of some of this research in *Yes! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to be Persuasive*, by Noah J. Goldstein, Steve J. Martin, and Robert B. Cialdini, Free Press 2008; "Understanding Web Credibility: A Synthesis of the Research Literature," by Jonathan Lazar, Gabriele Meiselwitz, and Jinjuan Feng, *Foundations and Trends in Human Computer Interaction*, April 2007 v1 i2 p152(26); and "Crafting Key Messages and Talking Points—Or Grounding Them in What Research Tells Us," by Cornelius B. Pratt, *Public Relations Quarterly*, Fall 2004.

Thinkshift® Credibility Quotient™ rating criteria

The Thinkshift Credibility Quotient rates communications on 10 factors integral to credibility. For nine factors, we assign up to 100 points each based on how well the communication achieves standards for that factor. These scores are then converted to weighted scores based on the factor's

relative importance. (Think back to school—a final exam counts more than a midterm.) For the tenth factor, Consistency with Actions, we assess a penalty if the standard isn't met. The Credibility Quotient is the sum of the weighted scores, minus any penalty. The rating is roughly equivalent to an academic grade scale.

Factor	How does this affect credibility? What do we look for?	Weight
Provable claims	Credible claims are specific and verifiable. Grandiose claims (“most successful,” etc.) and vague statements are not credible because they can't be proved. What we look for: Are claims made and are they provable?	Highest
Support for claims	Providing support for claims is the most important single contributor to credibility. Evidence from trustworthy sources—particularly verification by respected third parties—is the strongest support. What we look for: Are claims supported? Are data sources and testimony trustworthy? Are claims specific and detailed enough to be understandable?	Highest
Accuracy	Accuracy is fundamental to credibility. Even one or two innocuous slip-ups can cast doubt on everything you say. What we look for: Are factual statements correct? Is data presented with needed context?	Highest
Sufficient information	Communications that answer obvious questions and provide relevant information inspire confidence. What we look for: Are the questions that come to mind answered? Are relevant details provided? Is information consistent?	High
Attention to challenges	Acknowledging challenges (major programmatic, financial, or operational concerns) and describing how you address them enhances credibility—telling the truth makes you trustworthy. And it's essential if you're trying to increase transparency. What we look for: Are challenges acknowledged, and is an approach to addressing them described?	High
Issue knowledge	Communications that demonstrate that you know your supporters' needs and concerns enhance confidence among potential donors and others. What we look for: Is demand or need demonstrated? Is the program or campaign clearly explained?	Moderate
Relevance to audience	Any communication is more credible if you speak the target audience's language and address their concerns. Failure to do this can lead people to tune you out or even assume that you don't really understand the issue. What we look for: Does the communication address audience concerns? Does it speak the target audience's language? Does it sound authentic?	Moderate
Currency	Communications that are out-of-date can make you seem overwhelmed or stalled, or deliver inaccurate information. What we look for: Is the information current?	Moderate
Presentation	Well-organized communications that have a design appropriate to your audience and are in tune with your message support credibility because they make information easy to find and keep impressions consistent with facts. What we look for: Are design and content professional? Is information accessible?	Moderate
Consistency with actions	Saying one thing and doing another is a sure credibility killer. The Thinkshift Credibility Quotient subtracts points when claims don't match actions. What we look for: Does the organization do what it says it does? Are claims contested by a credible source?	NA