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Credibility Killers—

And How to Avoid Them

A communications guide for the solar industry

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COMMUNICATIONS

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Why 7 Credibility Killers?

Credibility is key not only to communications success, but also to business success. And in the solar industry—where new players are proliferating, doubters are loud and legion, and many customers feel like they're taking an expensive risk—the bar for achieving it is particularly high.

Credibility requires clarity, completeness, and well-supported arguments. Communications that have it can make potential customers and others more open to technology that challenges the status quo, assuage fears that your company or technology won't last, and help people sort out conflicting claims or distinguish facts from hearsay. Communications that don't have credibility are worse than nothing—if people don't believe your claims, your company comes off as overly optimistic at best, intentionally misleading at worst. Either way, you're untrustworthy.

That makes credibility assurance an essential part of any solar enterprise's communications effort. The following credibility killers are common. Hunt them down, and people will feel more comfortable investing in you, buying from you, and writing about you.

The Thinkshift team

1. Exaggeration

Symptoms Presenting goals as fact, stating best-case scenarios without qualification, hyperbole (“best,” “cleanest,” “most reliable”), saying you’re going to “revolutionize” the industry (it’s already revolutionary).

Example Your website says you “offer the most efficient thin-film solar technology available today,” which is hard to prove, especially since you don’t have product on the market yet.

Why it kills

- It triggers BS detectors, subjecting you to extra scrutiny.
- When people realize the statement is not quite true, they doubt everything else you say.
- It sets you up for failure if you can’t deliver the best case.

Credibility cure Make the strongest claim *that you can support*. Don’t say you’re generating zero-carbon electricity at current market prices if you don’t have a plant up and running yet—say that’s what you plan to do. And don’t say you have the “world’s most efficient” solar solution unless you’re prepared to back it up with an honest comparison of your performance with everyone else’s.

2. Unsupported or vague claims

Symptoms Unprovable statements, absence of detail and backup data, meaningless comparisons.

Example “Our installers, technicians, and designers are trained to the highest standards” (without describing the standards or explaining what the training involves).

Why they kill

- Just because you say it doesn’t mean people will believe it.
- Lack of data raises suspicions of empty boasting.
- Lack of detail makes claims and descriptions feel insubstantial.

Credibility cure Saying you’re 99 percent reliable? Prove it with third-party verification, monitoring data, or customer testimony. Boasting about your high standards for technician training? Tell us what they are. Saying you’re better, smarter, or more advanced? Make sure you answer the question, “Than what?”

3. Silence on challenges

Symptoms Your communications never mention major barriers for your technology or service, site types you can't serve, or environmental impacts (and what you're doing to mitigate them).

Example Environmentalists are protesting your solar farm on the grounds that it will threaten essential wildlife habitat, but you never mention land-use issues.

Why it kills

- Your silence lets people assume the problem affects you more than it does.
- Silence on the problem means silence on the solution.
- You may engage people outside your target audience, which heightens their disappointment when they learn you can't help them.

Credibility cure Follow the debating rule: raise known negatives yourself, so you can talk about why they don't apply, describe your plan for overcoming them, or show how the positives outweigh the negatives. This honesty engenders confidence in you, or lets people move on without wasting their time (or yours).

4. Failure to speak to the audience

Symptoms Talking deep tech to average homeowners, providing inadequate technical detail for those who need it (such as builders and utilities), lack of data in media kits and press releases, content that's irrelevant to target audiences.

Example You're selling utility-scale solar systems, but your website says nothing about your technology's advantages for utilities or how you work with them.

Why it kills

- When you don't sound like you know your audience, you make people uneasy about working with you.
- It makes it hard for people to understand your value.
- People in your target market may wonder if you're for them.

Credibility cure Maintain a rigorous focus on your audiences' core concerns and run the language by a few trusted testers before going public. Provide case studies if you can—they help potential customers see how you work and how they can benefit. And don't try to speak to everyone—you'll wind up reaching no one.

5. Lack of information

Symptoms You get lots of questions about basic information that could be answered by your marketing materials and website; people often have misperceptions about your service or product; you intentionally left information gaps to get potential buyers to call you.

Example You currently sell only commercial systems to businesses, but you get frequent calls from homeowners seeking service.

Why it kills

- It invites skepticism—people may think you're hiding something.
- It creates confusion by inviting people to fill in the gaps.
- Potential buyers or investors may conclude you're not ready for prime time.

Credibility cure Answer all the basic questions—the ones customers always ask and the ones they should be asking—on your website and in other marketing materials. Be on the lookout for new questions that come up. And avoid jargon—it impedes understanding.

6. Chaotic presentation

Symptoms Your website requires potential customers to click through many pages to get essential information; your communications contain conflicting information; you don't provide a clear path to specific information or make it easy to engage with you.

Example Your website says you develop 250–500 MW plants, while your sales collateral says you develop 150–400 MW plants. Descriptions of how your technology works differ as well.

Why it kills

- It raises the question, “Are your business operations and customer service also unfocused and inconsistent?”
- It can make you seem like you're not quite sure who you are.
- You frustrate people you want to engage.

Credibility cure Avoid thinking of your website as a filing cabinet or a static brochure—create clear paths for different audiences. Be rigorous about applying your brand identity and key messages to all communications.

7. Inappropriate attire

Symptoms Your communications look crunchy-granola, old-fashioned, low-budget, or unappealing to your target audiences.

Example You're targeting skeptical, knowledge-seeking consumers with a cluttered website that uses an '80s color palette and generic photos.

Why it kills

- Looks matter—poor design can undermine a great business case and make it hard for users to find information.
- People think of solar as advanced technology—if your look is too homey, it may communicate that you're behind the curve.
- People are hesitant about making high-ticket purchases from companies that look unsophisticated (or cheap).

Credibility cure The look of your communications should match the sophistication of your product. You don't have to break the bank, but professional, contemporary design is essential. And it should be based on communicating your brand and delivering information to your target audience, amplifying your content rather than overpowering it.