

Short reports

Short reports are used to summarise information that has to be communicated to people inside or outside an organisation. They are designed to provide an overview which can be read and assimilated quickly. Many different subjects can be presented in a short report and some of the most common types of short reports are project / progress reports, business proposals and summaries of research or results. Although the length of a short report will vary depending on the amount of information and commentary that it contains, most short reports will be between one and six pages long. They should be clearly structured so that the reader can find the relevant information quickly. Short reports may also include graphic material and are often used as the basis for an oral presentation.

Layout

Title page – indicates the subject that is being dealt with, in large font, with the name and position of the author of the report clearly indicated at the bottom of the page, together with the date of its publication.

Summary – gives a concise presentation of the report, the reasons for writing it, the most important information it contains and a general idea of its main findings. For a short report this can be simply one or two sentences.

Introduction – presents the overview, showing why the report was written and how it has been constructed.

Development section – includes the main body of information which may be divided into several subsections.

Conclusion – presents the results of the report. This might take the form of a recommendation for future action or draw the reader's attention to problems that need to be addressed.

Language styles

Short reports are documents that use a formal writing style. They should not contain contracted verb forms like *it'll* or *don't* but use the full forms of verbs.

The language of the report should be as clear as possible. It is not necessary to use long and complicated sentences or obscure vocabulary. Using simple language in short sentences will make it easier for the reader to assimilate your message.

Try to avoid using the personal pronoun *I* too much. Although it is true that 'you' wrote the report, it will only put your readers off if you refer too often to your own role. Use neutral phrasing instead.

Useful phrases

Connect sentences by

- showing contrast:

However, this does not necessarily mean that ...

On the other hand, it is true that ...

While these results may appear to ...

- showing cause and effect:

This has been mainly due to ...

Consequently, additional data was obtained which showed that ...

As a result of this, it has not been possible to ...

- following on to the next point that you wish to make:

Moreover, in this particular case ...

In addition to this, the survey included ...

Sample report

Preliminary report on cost cutting at MultiBrands

Summary

The Strategic Cost Steering Group was asked to conduct a review of the company's current operating costs and to outline suggestions following the Management Advisory Board's decision to examine the feasibility of obtaining a 15% reduction in total spending in the coming fiscal year. The following short report presents our findings and outlines several policy recommendations.

Introduction

The four areas that the group was asked to examine were the following:

- Product development
- Brand consolidation
- Quality control and pricing
- Personnel retention and hiring

Product development

After consultation with managers from the Marketing, Sales and R&D departments, it became clear that freezing product development is not a viable option ...

The only changes that we propose to make in this area would be a reduction in the lead time through the introduction of a new software system and the merging of the two design centres into one operational unit.

Brand consolidation

A detailed audit of the company's brand portfolio was carried out ...

We propose to eliminate both of these brands, now in the declining phase of their product life cycles, and to reorientate the marketing resources that were devoted to them.

Quality control and pricing

The information from production units and the after-sales services shows that there was a slight deterioration in overall quality standards during the previous year. Since much of our production ...

The senior managers who provided input for our study all agreed that greater emphasis should be placed instead on adding value to our products and on differentiating them from their cheaper, lower-quality rivals. There are therefore no significant savings to be made in this area.

Personnel retention and hiring

The Human Resources Department provided a detailed breakdown of all our personnel costs and supplied projections to show the effects of ...

Further savings from the adoption of a more equitable performance-related compensation scheme would provide an additional £4.8m.

Conclusion

It seems clear that the most significant savings that can be made are in the areas of HR, product development and brand consolidation. These savings alone would amount ... We would therefore suggest that an additional report be prepared to cover savings in these two areas.

Benoit Nguyen
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21 April 200_