

The Art of Storytelling

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Renowned writer, Robert McKee, once said that stories are the currency of human contact. They are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. Everyone loves a good story and a story well-told has the power to inspire, to motivate and to involve its reader. Stories also help a person to relate and retain information in a way that straight facts and data can't always achieve on their own.

While McKee was likely talking specifically about his work as an author and role as mentor to numerous award-winning Hollywood screenwriters, his simile applies beyond books and movies. Whether we realize it or not, stories and how we tell them are an integral part of business, public relations and marketing. Corporate culture is based upon the story of your company. Mission and vision statements are stories meant to portray your promise to stakeholders. Each piece of direct mail, the pictures in an advertisement, the quotes in a press release, the content of a website, the messages in emails, status updates and tweets—these are all stories used to communicate a purpose, a call to action. These are the stories that grow business and build relationships.

With that said, being an effective storyteller—one who can identify which stories to tell, when to tell them and how to tell them well—is an art form that's not inherent to everyone. Luckily for those of us who aren't born storytellers there is a plethora of experts willing to share their insight. In this Blue Paper®, we bring the best of it to you: Why stories matter, what makes them great, an overview of the different kinds of stories, how to use them in your business and marketing efforts and much more. Keep reading to find your fairytale.

Importance of storytelling in marketing

Storytelling has been used since the dawn of human existence to convey events in words, gestures, images and sounds. Stories express thoughts, explain the unknown, detail history, imagine the future, bring context to situations and caution of consequences.

Storytelling in its most basic definition is a form of communication. It's how we make sense of the world around us and our place and relationship to others. Stories provide stimulation—the knowledge to act—and inspiration—the motivation to act. Sometimes our stories are fictional, while other times they're not ... but regardless, they all have value.



Ronald Reagan, the late actor-turned-president who was known by Republicans and Democrats alike as “The Great Communicator,” didn’t start speeches on “the multi-lateral imperative of deficit reduction” with facts and figures. Instead, he’d tell you a story about a little girl in a yellow dress. Within a minute or two, when even the most cynical listeners were unconsciously disarmed and pulled in by the parable, Reagan would move over to the hard business of the day’s talk.

Why? Because it’s true that storytelling is virtually the most effective way to not only capture human attention, but to get people to remember. Something in our hardwiring actually hypnotizes us when we hear the words: “Let me tell you a story ...”

Our unconscious can’t resist letting stories in, and their stamp on human nature is everywhere. We’re born to tell stories—whenever something great or horrible happens to us, when we have a new restaurant to recommend, an excuse to offer ... we often develop stories to deliver the news.

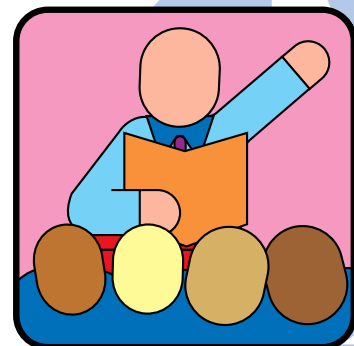
In a business context, storytelling has many uses and a multitude of benefits:

- Stories—about products, customers, employees—make brands relatable to stakeholders. “That girl in the commercial is frustrated with her car insurance, just like me!”
- Stories—about business approaches, attitudes and promises—build brand loyalty. “That guy in the testimonial was so happy about his purchase; I’ve got to check that company out.”
- Stories—about recent events and announcements—create awareness. “I just read on their blog that they have a new program and it sounds like it could be fun. We should try it out!”

Storytelling can also be used to pitch new ideas, to demonstrate expertise, to explain complex issues and problems, to change behaviors and to create brand champions, especially when your brand leverages the stories about you that others are creating and sharing. Storytelling is a powerful tool that business and marketers everywhere need to know how to harness and once they do, the benefits will become apparent.

Elements and varieties of stories

So what makes a story a story and not just a flat message? A careful recipe of very specific elements.



In literature, these elements are:

- **Theme** - The idea or point of a story formulated as a generalization. Dominant themes are often those pertaining to innocence/experience, life/death, appearance/reality, free will/fate, madness/sanity, love/hate, society/individual, known/unknown. Themes may have a single, instead of a dual nature as well.
- **Character** - People imagined by the storyteller and perhaps the most important element of literature.
 - **Protagonist** - Major character at the center of the story, often the hero.
 - **Antagonist** - A character or force that opposes the protagonist, often the villain.
- **Plot** - The arrangement of ideas and/or incidents that make up a story.
- **Causality** - One event occurs because of another event.
- **Foreshadowing** - A suggestion of what is going to happen.
- **Suspense** - A sense of worry established by the author.
- **Conflict** - Struggle between opposing forces.
- **Exposition** - Background information regarding the setting, characters and plot.
- **Complication or Rising Action** - Intensification of conflict.
- **Crisis** - Turning point; a moment of great tension that fixes the action.
- **Resolution/Denouement** - The way the story turns out.
- **Setting** - The place or location of the action; the setting provides the historical and cultural context for characters. It often can symbolize the emotional state of characters.
- **Point of View** – The perspective from which the story is being told, and who is telling it.



- **Language and Style** - Style is the verbal identity of a writer, oftentimes based on the author's use of diction (word choice) and syntax (the order of words in a sentence). A writer's use of language reveals his or her tone, or the attitude toward the subject matter.

In business and marketing, much of these elements are the same—they should be considered when using stories to communicate with stakeholders—and knowing these elements will help identify the stories worth telling.

Marketing expert Duke Greenhill offers further insight to the elements of storytelling by referencing famous philosopher, Joseph Campbell, and arguing that while active storytelling from the business perspective isn't new, it's often misused.¹

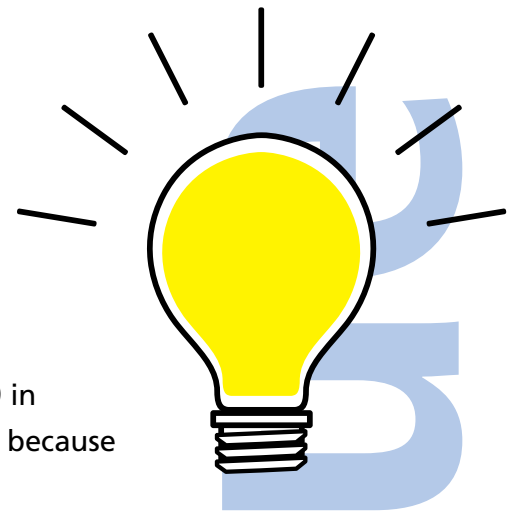
"The idea that brands are stories is not novel," shares Greenhill. "But as a filmmaker-turned-marketer, I'm sensitive to how often brands focus on tactics, or, dare I say it, politics and compromise. They therefore lose sight of their monomyth—that narrative that identifies with consumers' values and transcends mere sales propositions in favor of an eternal, universal truth."²

The concept of the monomyth is Campbell's and he's best known perhaps for his ideas that created the basis for what is often referred to as transcendent storytelling. His thoughts on transcendent storytelling were arrived at through the understanding of the power of mythology and the notion that every narrative has a basic pattern—one that he identifies as the known, the unknown and the unity. Greenhill demonstrates with the brand analogy of Apple®.

The known³

For Campbell, this is where a transcendent story begins. It is the moment the reader finds the hero in a world he understands but one that is somehow dissatisfying. It's Beowulf, a kingdom away, before he hears of the vicious Grendel. For a brand, it's the moment when it launches and either breaks through or fizzles.

For Apple, the moment was 1984. Apple bought every available page (39 in total) of Newsweek's popular post-election edition, but the launch failed because



¹ Greenhill, Duke. "Need a Brilliant Brand Strategy? Go See a Movie : MarketingProfs Article." MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals. 18 Mar. 2011. Web. 20 Apr. 2011.

<<http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2011/4650/need-a-brilliant-brand-strategy-go-see-a-movie>>.

² Greenhill, Duke. "Need a Brilliant Brand Strategy? Go See a Movie : MarketingProfs Article." MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals. 18 Mar. 2011. Web. 20 Apr. 2011.

<<http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2011/4650/need-a-brilliant-brand-strategy-go-see-a-movie>>.

³ Greenhill, Duke. "Need a Brilliant Brand Strategy? Go See a Movie : MarketingProfs Article." MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals. 18 Mar. 2011. Web. 20 Apr. 2011.

<<http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2011/4650/need-a-brilliant-brand-strategy-go-see-a-movie>>.

Apple was already lost in the tactics. The Newsweek ads strove to differentiate Apple from IBM™ in technological terms, when they should have differentiated in terms of *values*.

Apple corrected its mistake with a seminal Super Bowl spot in which a leggy supermodel, wearing a Mac tank top, ostensibly saves a mass of oppressed people by hurling a sledgehammer into the image of their Orwellian captor, IBM.

The ad was simple, mythic and clear: IBM is the machine of the boring status quo, and Apple is the machine of an imaginative, beautiful future.

The unknown⁴

In the unknown phase, according to Campbell, a monumental event thrusts the hero into the unknown: a life-or-death journey.

Beowulf runs to assist the village and gets caught in a battle between mother, father and illegitimate son. A brand enters the marketplace and must achieve market share or die.

After the success of the Super Bowl launch, Apple did not repeat its mistake. Apple realized that attacking IBM as a technology company was a losing battle and contrary to Apple's monomyth.

Instead, Apple re-emphasized its values with the "Crazy Ones" campaign, which featured significant historical figures like Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Albert Einstein, and John Lennon—and a new slogan: "Think Different."

Apple stayed on its authentic, narrative track and secured an alliance with values like art, innovation and freedom. It's no wonder that, to this day, if you're a banker you likely use a PC, and if you're an artist you likely have a Mac on your desk.

The unity⁵

At the unity stage, the hero has survived the life-or-death ordeal and lives in a new world with a deeper, unified understanding.

Beowulf slays the monsters, the villagers are safe, but all of them understand that secrets and infidelity bring down wrath.



⁴ Greenhill, Duke. "Need a Brilliant Brand Strategy? Go See a Movie : MarketingProfs Article." MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals. 18 Mar. 2011. Web. 20 Apr. 2011.
<<http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2011/4650/need-a-brilliant-brand-strategy-go-see-a-movie>>.

⁵ Greenhill, Duke. "Need a Brilliant Brand Strategy? Go See a Movie : MarketingProfs Article." MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals. 18 Mar. 2011. Web. 20 Apr. 2011.
<<http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2011/4650/need-a-brilliant-brand-strategy-go-see-a-movie>>.

A brand achieves market share, it enjoys consumer loyalty, but it also understands that it is obliged to stay true to the values that got it there.

Apple's unified understanding is simple: It is not a technology brand but an aesthetic one, and its monomyth is built on values like design, freedom and imagination ("coolness"). Today, Apple's brand strategy remains true to those values: What would make a computer company think it could enter the portable music market? Music is cool. Music is art. Music is imaginative.

"Apple, like Target™, The North Face™, Coca-Cola™ and LexusSM, is one of an elite group of brands that created an emotional bond with its customers—a bond that transcends commerce," says Greenhill. "Apple customers don't simply like Macs. They love them. And the thought of returning to a PC is anathema."

Greenhill also points out that Apple's customers are deeply, emotionally involved, just as the viewers of a great film or the readers of a great novel.

"Settle on a brand's authentic truth and core values, and use Campbell's monomyth to construct a story around them to achieve transcendent brand equity," advises Greenhill.

In a more specific sense, companies and organizations use all of these elements to tell different kinds of stories of their own. In her book "The Story Factor" author Annette Simmons suggests that there are six kinds of stories that all business leaders and communicators should be able to tell well⁶:

- **Who I Am** – Stories of self revelation, like how a business came to be
- **Why I am Here** – Stories of motivation, like why a customer decided to buy
- **The Vision** – Tales of where we are going, like the announcement of a new product
- **Teaching Stories** – Tales of why and how, like tutorials on how best to use a brand's service
- **Values in Action** – Stories of how values intersect the real world, like how a nonprofit helps its community through its programs
- **I Know What You are Thinking** – Tales to overcome objections, like a political ad addressing an opponent

Lois Kelly, author of "Beyond Buzz: The Next Generation of Word-of-Mouth Marketing," drills in on these ideas and takes them one further to explain specific

⁶ Simmons, Annette. *The Story Factor: Secrets of Influence from the Art of Storytelling*. New York: Basic, 2006. Print.



kinds of stories that business professionals and marketers need to know—stories that involve brands that people like to talk about.

She maintains that if you're pitching your company to investors, customers, partners, journalists, vendors or employees and you don't use at least one of these story lines, you probably have a problem. Marketing expert, blogger and founder of AllTop.com, Guy Kawasaki sums up her "Nine Best Storylines for Marketing"⁷ :

1. **Aspirations and beliefs.** More than any other topic, people like to hear about aspirations and beliefs. Sun Microsystems'SM Scott McNealy's point of view about ending the digital divide is aspirational, as is Patagonia® founder Yvon Chouinard's views about how companies can grow by reducing pollution and creating more sustainable business strategies. Aspirations are helpful because they help us connect emotionally to the speaker, the company and the issues. They help us see into a person or company's soul.
2. **David vs. Goliath.** In the story of David and Goliath, the young Hebrew David took on the Philistine giant Goliath and beat him. It is the way Southwest AirlinesSM conquered the big carriers, the way the once unknown Japanese car manufacturers took on Detroit, and the way social media is taking on the media giants. Sharing stories about how a small organization is taking on a big company is great business sport. Rooting for the underdog grabs our emotions, creates meaning and invokes passion. We like to listen to the little guy talk about how he's going to win and why the world—or the industry—will be a better place for it.
3. **Avalanche about to roll.** The mountain is rumbling, the sun is getting stronger, but the rocks and snow have yet to fall. You want to tune in and listen to the "avalanche about to roll" topic because you know that there's a chance that you will be killed if caught unaware. This theme taps into our desire to get the inside story before it's widely known. It's not only interesting to hear someone speak about these ideas, they have the ingredients for optimal viral and pass-along effect.
4. **Contrarian/counterintuitive/challenging assumptions.** These three themes are like first cousins, similar in many ways but slightly different.



⁷ Kawasaki, Guy. "The Nine Best Story Lines for Marketing." *How to Change the World: Guy Kawasaki's Blog*. 5 July 2007. Web. 11 Apr. 2011. <<http://blog.guykawasaki.com/2007/07/what-people-tal.html>>.

- **Contrarian** perspectives defy conventional wisdom; they are positions that often are not in line with—or may even be directly opposite to—the wisdom of the crowd. The boldness of contrarian views grabs attention; the more original and less arrogant they are, the more useful they will be in provoking meaningful conversations.
- **Counterintuitive** ideas fight with what our intuition (as opposed to a majority of the public) says is true. When you introduce counterintuitive ideas, it takes people a minute to reconcile the objective truth with their gut assumption about the topic. Framing views counter to how we intuitively think about topics—going against natural “gut instincts”—pauses and then resets how we think and talk about concepts.
- **Challenging widely-held assumptions** means that when everyone else says the reason for an event is X, you show that it’s actually Y. Challenging assumptions is good for debate and discussion, and especially important in protecting corporate reputation.



5. **Anxieties.** Anxiety is a cousin of the “avalanche about to roll,” but it is more about uncertainty than an emerging, disruptive trend. Examples of anxiety themes abound: (1) Financial services companies urging baby boomers to hurry up and invest more for retirement: “You’re 55. Will you have your needed \$3.2 million to retire comfortably?” (2) Tutoring companies planting seeds of doubt about whether our kids will score well enough on the SATs to get into a good college. Although anxiety themes grab attention, go easy. People are becoming skeptical, and rightly so. Too many politicians and companies have bombarded us with FUD (fear, uncertainty and doubt) with no facts to back up their points.
6. **Personalities and personal stories.** There’s nothing more interesting than a personal story with some life lessons to help us understand what makes executives tick and what they value the most. The points of these personal stories are remembered, retold and instilled into organizational culture. Roberto Goizueta, the respected CEO of Coca-Cola, said he hated giving speeches but he was always telling stories—often personal ones about how he and his family had to flee Cuba when Castro took control and had nothing more than his education.

7. **How-to stories and advice.** Theoretical and thought-provoking ideas are nice, but people love pragmatic how-to advice: how to solve problems, find next practices and overcome common obstacles. To be interesting, how-to themes need to be fresh and original, providing a new twist to what people already know or tackle thorny issues like how to get IT and marketing organizations to work together despite deep culture clashes between the two.
8. **Glitz and glam.** Robert Palmer sang about being addicted to love. Our society is more addicted to glamour and celebrity. Finding a way to logically link to something glitzy and glamorous is a surefire conversation starter. For example, tagging on to the widespread interest in the Academy Awards, Randall Rothenberg, former director of intellectual property at consultancy Booz Allen-Hamilton, last year talked about the similarity and challenges between creating new “star” product brands and movie stars.
9. **Seasonal/event-related.** Last, is tying your topic into seasonal or major events. Talking about industry predictions around the New Year or advertising during SuperBowl season are examples of this type of story.

It's these elements and varieties of stories that can help make or break a business or organization's approach to storytelling—familiarize yourself with them today.

Characteristics of a great story

A story worth telling is worth telling well. But what exactly separates a story from a great story? Author and entrepreneur, Seth Godin offered some insight in an article he wrote for Ode magazine. Here are a few key points⁸:

- A great story is true. Not necessarily because it's factual, but because it's consistent and authentic. Consumers are too good at sniffing out inconsistencies for a marketer to get away with a story that's just slapped on.
- Great stories are trusted. Trust is the scarcest resource we've got left. No one trusts anyone. As a result, no marketer succeeds in telling a story unless he has earned the credibility to tell that story.

⁸ Godin, Seth. "How to Tell a Great Story." Ode Magazine | The Online Community for Intelligent Optimists. Apr. 2006. Web. 19 Apr. 2011. <http://www.odemagazine.com/doc/32/how_to_tell_a_great_story/>.

- Great stories happen fast. First impressions are far more powerful than we give them credit for.
- Great stories don't appeal to logic, but they often appeal to our senses
- Great stories are rarely aimed at everyone. Average people are good at ignoring you. Average people have too many different points of view about life and average people are by and large satisfied. If you need to water down your story to appeal to everyone, it will appeal to no one. The most effective stories match the world view of a tiny audience—and then that tiny audience spreads the story.
- Great stories agree with our world view. The best stories don't teach people anything new. Instead, the best stories agree with what the audience already believes and they make the members of the audience feel smart and secure when reminded how right they were in the first place.



Just as knowing what elements comprise a story will help you recognize and create great stories, so will recognizing the things that make a great story truly great.

Developing a strategy and cultivating stories

Storytelling for a brand or a business or organization is like any marketing effort in that it starts with research and strategy. Start the process by identifying goals, pinpointing target audiences and developing a basic message from which stories can be weaved.

Telling a story often involves breaking that story into parts/chapters/acts and developing the plot to lead prospects along. When the storytelling timeframe has been stretched, it can offer the opportunity to add ongoing news elements and updates to your story to make it more seasonable. In many companies, this turns into lead nurturing and drip marketing campaigns—both ways to weave a story around content and slowly build interest.

Telling a story also requires that you involve your listener by building the story around them, talking of a situation they are most likely to be in. Depending on the medium, you can even get them to participate in the storytelling process—social media platforms, comment enabling on product sites and blogs, customer satisfaction surveys ... these are all means of asking consumer's questions to let their answers move the story forward, all the while engaging them and building a relationship.

It's helpful to look at the kinds of stories mentioned above as individual strategies for storytelling in the marketplace. For example, consider these topics that double as storytelling strategies:

- Breaking News
- Educational
- Thought Leadership
- Product Launch
- Brand Awareness
- Crisis Management
- Persistent Presence
- Community Relations
- Corporate Social Responsibility

Combine these with the knowledge of what makes a good story and you're well on your way to winning.

The following are taglines, bumper stickers, names for legislation, or simply conventional wisdom—but they are all micro-scripts that people love to pass along to others:

- What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.®
- What would Jesus do?
- Pork. The Other White Meat®
- Location, Location, Location.
- No Child Left Behind
- He's a flip flopper.
- The domino theory
- Guns don't kill people, people do.
- Made from sugar, so it tastes like sugar.
- Where there's smoke, there's fire.

Many marketing professionals agree that micro-scripts are a big piece of how businesses need to tell stories today. In the new digital landscape, the volume of messages and information has grown and the rate at which we hear stories

is fast—through social media channels alone, more than 500 billion distinct messages are generated per second, shrinking the average attention span 29 seconds to a whopping nine seconds per person, per message. Micro-scripts help lead into the larger stories that brands tell to capture more of that attention span and appeal to stakeholders.

Choosing a medium and a channel

Just as important as the story itself, the way in which you communicate the story to your intended audience matters, too. First, take into account the target audience that you've identified previously as the primary recipients of your message. Then, consider communicating your story to them through channels that make the most sense.

Generally speaking, all marketing and public relations channels are fair game—press releases, pitches, collateral materials, video, social media, email, direct mail, face-to-face interaction and so on and so forth.

To make it really interesting for your listeners use different marketing mediums to tell the story, narrate some part of it as a videos, photographs, an online game, a podcast, a questionnaire or an email. Every time you send out a message to your prospects, use a different medium for storytelling, this breaks monotony and makes the communication more interesting. Ensure the story is fully available on all these formats, but when sending it out, send it out in bits and pieces. If your concept is interesting, you will have them hooked and they will wait for your next update.

Marketers can use the technique of storytelling while writing case studies and whitepapers as well. Talking of real life scenarios and how the events panned out can be interesting and inspirational reads. Also, when the narration is easy and free flowing it is easier to absorb and understand. Think of [TED videos](#) : The way the TED speakers turn the most complex of scientific ideas into content consumable by masses by weaving a story around their technology in a way that is highly shareable through social media and email is enough to amaze anyone.

Measuring the impact of your stories

Measuring the effectiveness of your stories is simple—benchmark them with goals and consider the stories your brand has created in comparison to those who have elected to tell your stories for you. In essence, measure storytelling efforts as you would any marketing efforts but with special attention to the effectiveness of subject matter and relevance of the channel used.



Website traffic, social media conversations, email conversions, sales figures—these are all great indicators for doing so.

How the von Trapp family found success in storytelling and social media

Richard Nadworny, marketing expert and owner of Digalicious, recently shared an interesting case study in effective storytelling on MarketingProfs.com. His post posed the question, “When you have a well-known and fabled story attached to your business, it should be easy to go out and succeed in social media, right?”

“For the Trapp Family Lodge resort in Stowe, Vermont, the challenge wasn’t telling the old story; it was finding a way to connect the past with the present. Ultimately, the von Trapps turned to social media to tell stories of the next generation of family members, and found they could use their stories to help grow their business,” wrote Nadworny.

As he tells it, when Johannes von Trapp, the youngest son of Maria in the “Sound of Music,” started the transition to hand the business over to his son Sam, they turned to Nadworny’s firm to see how they could use online marketing.

“We noticed two things right away: Sam was starting to implement a lot of changes, and he was telling us stories about these changes every time we saw him,” shares Nadworny. “We realized we had an opportunity but needed to put some structure around the idea of using those stories.”

So Nadworny’s team asked themselves a few key questions:

- How could they develop a structure and format for capturing the stories from Sam and his sister Kristina (and others), and then write them in a very personalized way?
- Once they had the stories, what channels should be used to disseminate them?
- How would they monitor the responses the stories elicited?

Based on the answers they found through conversations with Trapp, they moved forward by:

Conducting weekly interviews. One phone call (30 minutes to an hour long) and email follow-ups with various people—resort staff and siblings Sam and Kristina von Trapp.

⁹ Nadworny, Rich. “How Storytelling Can Spur Business Growth : MarketingProfs Article.” MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals. 24 Mar. 2011. Web. 10 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2011/4667/how-storytelling-can-spur-business-growth>>.



Writing test stories with style and tone variations. “That led us to a writing style that was personal, direct and easy to replicate. It “sounded” like what we heard,” said Nadworny.

Setting up social channels, including a blog on the site, a Trapp TwitterSM account and FacebookSM fan page.

Using monitoring services. The team utilized tools like Social Oomph, BackType, Topify and Google Alerts to monitor what people said about the Trapp Family Lodge resort.

Focusing on the e-newsletter as the main storytelling vehicle. With it, the stories became easier to write, shares Nadworny. His team could then repurpose these articles to the blog and promote them on Twitter and Facebook.

Monitoring email responses, Tweet stream (using CoTweet so that multiple people could tweet under the same account) and Facebook insights.

“Monitoring is only as good as the people listening. We weren’t interested in volume as much as real sentiment,” Nadworny said. “And the best way of measuring sentiment isn’t through automation; it’s through personal attention.”

What Nadworny discovered through this monitoring was quite positive: He found that half of the responses were from current resort guests expressing their desire to return and the other half had never visited the resort. They were just big fans of the von Trapp story and the “The Sound of Music.”

Other discoveries made through seeking stories to tell, sharing them with stakeholders and monitoring the feedback ultimately led to new ideas for marketing and promotions that helped boost the Trapp’s bottom line.

“It all started with the stories and listening, which helped us figure out what people really wanted and needed, and how we could deliver it,” said Nadworny. “After all, people don’t want relationships with brands, they want relationships with people—like Sam, Kristina and Johannes von Trapp.”

Effective storytelling helped them do that.



Ten truths of branded storytelling

Hopefully, all this insight has prepared you to take your business's storytelling to the next level. But before you begin we want to leave you with a few final tips, tips that we've found incredibly useful. Alain Thys of FutureLab calls these "The Ten Truths" of storytelling:

Truth # 1: Seek the story to rule them all

Great brand stories stem from the reason a brand exists. Apple wanted to free creative spirits while slaying the Microsoft® dragon. Coco Chanel set out to reinvent fashion and liberate women from tradition. Pepsi® wants to be a catalyst for change for every generation. Dig into the history, people and promises of your brand to uncover its Unique Story Proposition (USP). Make this the anchor for everything other story you tell.

Truth # 2: Great stories come to you, if you listen

Once you have defined your USP, use every opportunity to listen for supporting stories from your staff, clients and customers. Encourage people to bring these stories through competitions, blogging and, perhaps most importantly, through actually listening to them.

Truth # 3: Amplify those stories that others can tell

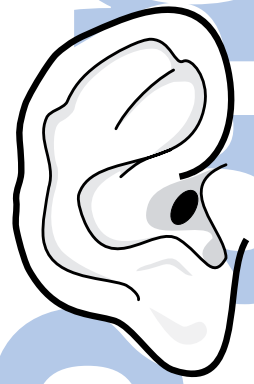
The brands that win tomorrow are those whose customers tell the best stories. As you discover stories that match your USP, select those that are simple enough to remember and fun to recite. Minimize plot-twists and complex layers and highlight those aspects that reinforce your overall brand message. Test what sticks best, and when you've got it, put the weight of your media behind them so they can start living a life of their own.

Truth #4: Connect your branding efforts to your USP

Each commercial, branded entertainment program or promo is a "mini-story" within the overall framework of your brand. It should always connect to your USP. Work with your creative team to establish parameters and rigorously apply them to each idea.

Truth #5: Connect your story efforts to your bottom line

A great story is nice, yet to make money it has to press the "buy" button in the customer's brain. For this you need to ensure that your story "trips" the age-old behavioral triggers like emotion, contrast, egocentricity, the power of beginnings and others. Use them, and people will respond.



10 Thys, Alain. "The Ten Truths of Branded Storytelling." Futurelab | We Are Marketing and Customer Strategy Consultants with a Passion for Profit and Innovation. 6 July 2006. Web. 10 Apr. 2011.
<<http://www.futurelab.net/blogs/marketing-strategy-innovation/2006/07/the-ten-truths-of-branded-storytelling/>>.

Truth #6: Know your classics (but don't get hung up on them)

Writers from Aristotle to Vogler have successfully captured the essence of storytelling into rules and recipes. However, when taking their guidance, it's easy to get intimidated by the need for story arches, archetypes, enemies, heroes, challenges. Study and apply their teachings, yet don't let them get in the way of actually telling the story (even if it's not perfect). It's not just what you say; it's how you say it.

Truth #7: Storytelling is not just about words

Reflect your USP in everything you do: The way you design your product, the way you build your stores, the way your staff dresses and behaves, the way you deal with your customers. Your brand's actual behavior and culture is the loudest storyteller of them all and any dissonance will be noticed. Look at every touchpoint and benchmark it against the story you aim to tell. If there is a disconnect, fix it.

Truth #8: You don't need to tell it all

If you want to promote word-of-mouth, leave a little mystery. People love to guess the end of the novel. Use your story as a prelude or epilogue to the actual experience of using your product or service. If you truly live your USP, people can fill in the blanks themselves.

Truth #9: Let go of the illusion of control

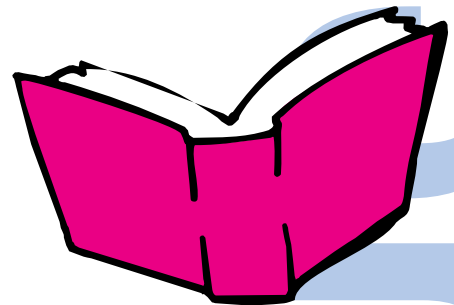
It used to be that there was the comforting illusion that if you shot enough advertising at consumers, all would be well. In story-world, this illusion is gone. Good stories amplify themselves. But stories also evolve as they travel from ear to mouth.

Truth #10: You cannot fake authenticity

Last, but definitely not least, ensure your stories reflect the real behavior of your brand. In the age of consumer-generated media any sign of insincerity will backfire. Every claim you make will be investigated by someone, somewhere. The footsteps you leave in search engines and social media cannot be completely erased.

Epilogue

Storytelling has been a means of communication since the dawn of human existence. In marketing, it can help relate brands to the people it deems most important and it can create champions of brands in these customers by inspiring them to tell their own stories or share the stories of others on the brands behalf.

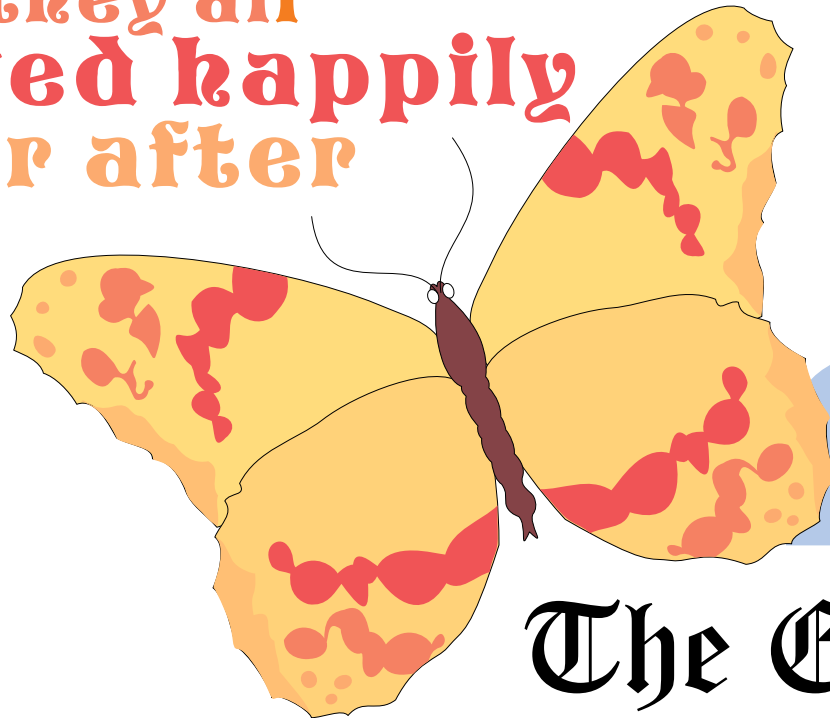


Simply telling people what to think about us is no longer enough in marketing, public relations and advertising—we have to show them.

So get going. Tell your story. Live happily ever after.

The end.

...and they all
lived happily
ever after



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