

Course 2, Module 4 Transcript

Host: Doris Montanera

Guest: Lisa D’Innocenzo

Doris Montanera

Hi, we're here today with Lisa D’Innocenzo. Lisa has worked as a journalist, as the editor of strategy magazine and marketing magazine as a creative at an advertising agency, and for at least a decade as a content strategist at BMO bank and TV bank, as well as at the Ontario teachers’ pension plan. She's going to talk to us today about storytelling for brands, why do it, how to do it well, and where brands go wrong. Welcome, Lisa.

Lisa D’Innocenzo

Thank you, thank you for having me.

Doris Montanera

Thanks for coming and sharing your experiences, you have a ton of experience. So which I got storytelling, there's all this talk about the importance of storytelling. So what does storytelling mean for a brand?

Lisa D’Innocenzo

I think story telling it enables a brand to connect in the really authentic and relevant way. It allows you to tell stories that are compelling, and is less about the brand itself and more about the person consuming the brand, or the target audience of the brands. And I think that's really important. Because we don't want to just be talking to people about ourselves. Some bad thing to do at a party. It's bad to do it as a brand as well.

Doris Montanera

But yet we do it all the time. So yeah, we do. Yeah, yeah, we

Lisa D’Innocenzo

get stuck in the habit of saying we are a certain way, a good way. Instead of saying, what, what do you need? And and how can we add value to your life based on that need?

Doris Montanera

Okay, so here's the thing, stories. We're not doing fiction. So in terms of when it comes to content marketing, must the stories be true?

Lisa D’Innocenzo

I think they need to be true, or they don't ring true. I think the whole point of storytelling in this sense is to really have authenticity, and be real. And I think, you know, unlike the a commercial or an ad, where it's creative, and fictional, those are always fun and entertaining. But if we really want to resonate in a powerful way, that can also be entertaining, but it's really like a motive for connecting with someone resonating with them at their core. And in a sense that it's getting at whatever their need is that kind of connection. I think it needs to be true, if that makes sense.

Doris Montanera

Yeah. So we have an element of storytelling is that it needs to be true art and it needs to add value, is there anything else that would be an element of storytelling, for brands?

Lisa D’Innocenzo

Well, it needs to be a good story needs to be put together in a nice, you know, a nice package. It needs to be truthful to the brand as well, like it can't be too outlandish. Again, it needs to be a true story. And I also think, I think it's just about really knowing your target audience. And really going deep on that and saying something fresh and interesting about how the brands can provide solutions.

Doris Montanera

And you said it needs to be put together in a nice package. Can you expand on that?

Lisa D’Innocenzo

I don't mean it needs to be super polished. But it needs to make sense, right? It needs to be it needs to have a good story flow. It shouldn't be erratic and jump all over. It needs to have the right message at the right time, if that makes sense. And it needs to be articulated in the right way as well. And that can be tough to do. Right? Because sometimes, you know, when we're doing we've done at Ontario teachers, we've done a lot of storytelling with employees where we asked them, Why did you choose teachers, and there is a little bit of like, coaching in that as well, right? Because you want to get them comfortable. You don't want people to be too stiff, you want to have them feel relaxed. And then you know, you want to ask the right questions as we do to get them to share some of that personal deep connective content that that's really going to resonate with.

Doris Montanera

You know what I've heard from what I've heard from people I've heard from students, I've heard them say that that's so boring. So how do we counteract that because because we have to tell we have to fill in the details. Um, what do you think about that particular comment?

Lisa D’Innocenzo

Well, I don't I don't think it has to be boring at all. Like, I think if you send your students to wealthsimple.com, they will see that the stories there are really interesting that they're written by exceptional talents, of course, right? But they are super. Not only do you learn something, but you want to read it, you want to read about these people who have had experiences financially and come out of it on the other side, like their money diaries, for instance, I was looking at it earlier today to get and lobbies on they're talking about growing up in Canada, and what he learned from his mom about finances, but they also have this really hurt. You know, breaking in a way story about Angelica Ross, who's a trans actor who was kicked out of the Navy and fired from Applebee's, because she was trans, she was discriminated against in her her journey to becoming an actor in what she learned from her experiences in terms of how she saves money and how she manages her finances. super interesting. And then there's a former prisoner who learned about money in prison, like really interesting stories like that not only can you take away insights from but you want to read, because there they're really, you know, compelling.

Doris Montanera

So, yeah, yeah,

Lisa D'Innocenzo

that's a great example, right? Because you look at an investment, personal investment firm, don't, they're not usually what you would think of as exciting stories to tell, especially if you're young. And you're just starting out, but actually, they've done a really good job of telling those stories in an interesting way. And even even some of their other how tos are interesting enough that you'd want to consume them.

Doris Montanera

And do they include stories and their how tos? Yeah, they do. Like they'll use specific examples.

Lisa D'Innocenzo

They definitely do that. And I think that helps again, right? When you use those specific examples, people can relate to them, but they can also wrap their heads around. What's been set. So when you, you know, it's like, when you give advice, and you provide an analogy, or you give an example that relates to your, if you're talking to a friend, and you're giving advice as a, I don't know, I'm just gonna say, Mom, because I am a mom. And I know that scoring, but you know, I was 16 year old and, you know, if you're talking to friends, you might say, Well, what did you do? What were was your experience? They might share that and you learn from that?

Doris Montanera

Okay, so, you know, what I'm hearing is that there's a lot of journalism involved in creating good content. Yeah, yeah. So

Lisa D’Innocenzo

frequently, because you're, you're really focused on the end user, I always say this, I work at Ontario teachers, I always say, what we to my team, what we need to remember is we're focused on the end user, we're focused on the person who's looking for a deal for a company like looking for an investment partner, what are their needs? And what do they need to know? And how can we show them that we're working to have value as a partner, as opposed to saying, we're an investment firm that focuses on long term, you know, investing, like going at it from that angle, it's more as we like to say going at it from the outside in versus the inside out, really making sure we're starting with that target audience, understanding their needs and who they are and how they operate even and, and the best way to talk to them. Speak to them so that we can, we can get through we can get our messages through

Doris Montanera

better that way. So show not tell.

Lisa D’Innocenzo

show not tell. That's right. Yeah.

Doris Montanera

I love the whole analogy of the outside in not the Inside Out lens. I mean, you worked in you worked in advertising Do I think that there's a lot we when we come from that we tend to think Inside Out versus outside in?

Lisa D’Innocenzo

Well, it's interesting. Most creatives, in my experience, think about the target audience. The problem is the you know, the struggle is with a lot of product owners at the companies who they are so focused on their product, that it's easy, right? It's easy to lose sight of the consumer at the end of it. That's not to say like it's totally off, off, but there they're so focused on delivering certain messages about the product that it could be easy to forget to spin it to make sure that you're thinking about the consumer at the end of the journey.

Doris Montanera

Okay, so I think I think there are a lot of brands who think they're doing storytelling. Yeah, tried to do storytelling, but it, they don't do it well, what what in your experience is going wrong?

Lisa D’Innocenzo

I think sometimes again, they get too stuck on what they want to say, and making sure they're getting all their messages in to the storytelling. And really, for it to be authentic and come off as real, they need to take a step back and think about how these voices they're putting forward are contributing to the overall message in a different way. But, but still a relevant way that that gets across what they want to get across, that they're valuable to whoever their audience is. You know, I think sometimes it's the that corporate hat that says, we need to say X, Y and Zed

and forgets about like, what's the value to the end user? What are they going to take from it? Because in my experience, like every storytelling piece, someone needs to walk away with something new, or something fresh, or something they didn't know before. And something that really, they can understand that their core as opposed to, you know, jargon, or words that are strung together, but are direct enough. Does that make sense? I'm all about direct.

Doris Montanera

Yeah, for sure. Because

Lisa D'Innocenzo

communicators are right. Yeah. Most communicators are.

Doris Montanera

Direct, Clear.

Lisa D'Innocenzo

Clear. Yeah. Are we talking words that we don't?

Doris Montanera

I think we're talking now we're talking about our pet peeves, which is a favourite subject. What other pet peeves since we're on that?

Lisa D'Innocenzo

I think just like, again, yeah, the the words, too many words. Drip it down, every word should have value, whether it's video, whether it's written content, whether it's a podcast, you know, and story flow is really important, in my opinion, as well. Because if you you want to keep it tight that way to engage people. You don't want to jump around too much, right? We want to talk about one thing. And then

Doris Montanera

do you use sort of, do you use journalism? Like we have structures with journalism, we have feature structures and newspapers. And so you

Lisa D'Innocenzo

use, you use journalism, crap that's coming in even a lot away. Because you have the research component, you have to know your audience. And the way you put a story together is really important as well. Journalists think about the end user creatives do too. They're just not often always allowed to do

Doris Montanera

well. That's a huge part, right? And sometimes

Lisa D’Innocenzo

they get stuck in the creative for creative sake. And you know, like, sometimes some creative ideas can be so out there because they, they want to do this big thing. But some not everything needs that approach. So that has to factor in as well.

Doris Montanera

Although a lot of people, I mean, we want to do that. But a lot of people don't have the budget for that anyway.

Lisa D’Innocenzo

No, no. And I think you can really differentiate your brands, by telling good stories without spending a lot of money, especially now, right? Because of social media. And the way that has evolved, how we tell stories and telling snippets of stories or smaller, shorter stories is okay, as well. It doesn't have to be a big production

Doris Montanera

doesn't have to be epic, like a no, no. Okay. How do you tell a story on social media?

Lisa D’Innocenzo

Well, I think it's, it's the same as on a website, you know, you have to saw on social media, the one thing I've learned is people want to consume content in platform. So if you're, we use LinkedIn a lot, obviously. But no matter what it is, you don't want to send them off platform to a website, they're probably not going to do it like those clicks are going to be really low. You need to engage them there. So you need to use video or even a long post or you know, you mentioned I think we've talked in the past about Humans of New York. They do a great job on social, right? They tell the story right there in the platform. And they do it in a series, which is even better, because then it makes you look forward to the next piece. All of that is, is smarter. Have you wanting more?

Doris Montanera

Yeah. Yeah. Humans of New York is great. Great example. I think they did a stellar job at storytelling. And yeah, like you said, people waiting and wanting to come back for more. You had mentioned. Also, you worked at TD and you had mentioned earlier, we were talking that they won the marketing award for their stories. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

Lisa D’Innocenzo

Yeah, so they have a website called TD stories, and it's a blend of stories from their employees. So those are really strong stories. You know, when I was reading, it was a person with a disability who works in TD, and who works on making products more accessible. So I found that so, such a great way to tell consumers and customers that they they work hard to make, make their products more accessible by actually highlighting one of their employees who faces the same challenges as persons with disability and is is doing that exact job like it was just

such a nice way to bring it together. But they also do community stories so any sponsor you know, any sponsorship they're they're big in the arts. So they'll talk about you know, how their sponsorships helped an artist but they'll really get to the the emotions or the lick the heartstrings right with their storytelling. And yeah, I think that's, that's pretty good Burbank.

Doris Montanera

For sure. They do also a lot of Yeah, they do a lot of that. Not just employee stories. They do. Yeah, they do customer stories, as well, right? They go out and they ask customers, can we interview you? Is that how it works?

Yeah, I think a lot of cases like I know, when we worked at BMO, we did, we did some of that with small businesses. So sometimes it would be, you know, asking the branches, even Do you know a customer that you tell? Like it goes even to that level to find people, right? Like you, you go to your customer facing staff, to ask them who's grown as a company because of our help, you know, they're the ones with the relationships. And then often those pieces will feature the employee and the customer, and show how that relationship came together and was strong and, and the helpfulness of that as well.

Doris Montanera

He had a brilliant idea. I thought it was brilliant. At the time, it does get more about The Big Short idea.

Lisa D'Innocenzo

Yeah, that wasn't being mobile. And we were working on a small business content strategy. And we were going to replicate the Big Short where we had these small businesses that were be more customers in their work environments, explaining what it takes to run a successful small business by leveraging that same approach with The Big Short, you know, where you'd have a chef, like cutting fish or whatever the case might be, while they're explaining what it takes or what it's about the how to piece. It's just nice way to, to frame the story and make it interesting, and people would want to watch it. But

Doris Montanera

because money what was it that?

Lisa D'Innocenzo

No, I actually laughed? We weren't. We had it brief. But then I wound up leaving the company. And often when that happens, people don't pick it up. It was a good

Doris Montanera

idea. Yeah. But the amount of work to go and find people who could represent, you know, that's half that's probably three quarters of the work.

Lisa D’Innocenzo

Yeah. But if you're, you know, some people, like former journalists find that fun.

Doris Montanera

Yes, no, True. True, just like saying, yeah,

Lisa D’Innocenzo

that is that is a lot. But it is like when we did our leaders, we have a leadership series we call it which is like a series of interviews with portfolio companies that Ontario teachers invested in. So that came from our investment teams, talking to our investment teams and saying who would be a good candidate for this who have we helped as a company grow and you know, our partnership was very valuable to them. So you just you just focus on you know, you ask the people who are closer And then you wind up, Kevin there that way.

Doris Montanera

Now I know the Leadership Series is something that you're particularly proud of, is there anything else in terms of that you're working on that you're particularly proud of? In terms of storytelling?

Lisa D’Innocenzo

Um, well, you know, we've, again, I mentioned the employee videos. So we did a series, we're working on our last one, which is on diversity, equity and inclusion, but we did a series of six, and they were all around the employee experience. And that was a lot of fun. You know, we even shot in London and Hong Kong, not, we didn't fly there, we hire people to do it in those offices and be my one of my team members, when this woman on my team, she watched it happen live and was able to give directions, which was awesome. So that was, that was a lot of fun, because they're, they're fairly easy to put together in a way, and they're, they just, they make an impact on social, they make such an impact. Like it's our highest watched videos in terms of people spending time and watching it on social that really works by the way, the like sound bites. You know, the quick sound bites that from a series of people, that's a storytelling technique that I'm finding is really, people gravitate to on social media,

Doris Montanera

a little bit like a pull quote, in a magazine article where we Yeah, they weren't

Lisa D’Innocenzo

back quick hit right. And, and, you know, the, let's face it, the attention to social media is not long. So if you can string together a bunch of interesting, conversational sound bites, I think that's helpful, always with, you know, your captions or accompanying text, because people tend to listen with their sound off as well.

Doris Montanera

Yeah. And I know, I'm like that. So what about on websites? On your website? Do you find how to storytelling help you help your website metrics? Oh, it's

Lisa D'Innocenzo

huge. Because if you don't engage people who come to the website, they're never going to stay, they're going to bounce. And this is why like, the value of the story is so important, important as well. And they'll, they'll leave and that will, that'll reduce the time spent on page or on your site, and then the Google algorithm doesn't like that. So you start getting penalized for an SEO perspective as well.

Doris Montanera

So really helps with your SEO, you don't have to. Yeah, so

Lisa D'Innocenzo

what we, it's interesting, because, like, in my limited experience with video length, I don't think like if you're gonna do a 10 minute video or something like that, that's very long, right? So that would mean to be a TED talk or something like that might be YouTube, that would be better for that. But on your site, I find if you have video and text with a lot of like, you know, what we would call snackable pieces. That's, that's helpful. So to your point, like the poll quotes, still are strong. And the

Doris Montanera

What do you mean by snackable? Do you mean like, make them into sub heads chunk the information?

Lisa D'Innocenzo

Exactly. We find that and this is no surprise to many of us, but to have the data to back that up as

Doris Montanera

well. Also, it helps in order to get the budget to do a story which takes a little bit, right, because you can't get charged up to write the story, your do it yourself. out fires, research and originality fresh. Okay? I always say this, you always need to try and get a human element into your into all your pieces, whether it's a how do I mean, storytelling is obvious, but just anywhere? To get that in there?

Yeah, I think it helps even if it's, you know, we're, we have a piece coming out on career advice from a couple of our leaders, and even them sharing their early career advice that they received, or their early career experience that maybe set them on a different path or, or how

they navigated that is, is a great way to resonate with people who are early on in their career here. Right.

Doris Montanera

Right.

Lisa D’Innocenzo

It's relevant because it's like they're super successful. So how the asking them what did you learn in those first few years? Like that's valuable information for someone starting out in this in a similar field?

Doris Montanera

Okay. Okay, yeah. Okay, I think we're running out of time here. Is there anything that I've missed that you'd like to add?

Lisa D’Innocenzo

I think, you know, it's storytelling. The beauty of it is you can hit on so many things, the authenticity piece is key. But there's also the opportunity to be really powerful with your storytelling. The Wealthsimple is a good example, I was looking at Burt's Bees as well, because they do this whole mini documentary style with their founder, and he's so entertaining and interesting. I really thought that was great, too. So, you know, you can hit so many different emotions or characteristics that I think are so valuable to the brand in making that connection with the target, right, without actually fooled out, just telling people. So instead of telling them how to feel, right, you're actually making them feel instead of telling them what they didn't feel so much more powerful, right? Psychologically?

Doris Montanera

We do remember that more? Yes, absolutely. Okay. Okay. That was so amazing. Thank you so much. It was fun. Thank you for sharing your stories. Everyone. For more about storytelling, please check the module on Moodle. And thanks for listening. Bye