

The Storytelling Thesis

Brett Bivens

2-3 minutes

For companies — large and small — each day is spent telling your story over and over again to all of your key stakeholders. Hiring, selling, raising capital...the storytelling doesn't stop, it simply changes contexts.

Where collections of people have existed, so too have stories.

A company is a collection of people. A startup company, to use [one definition](#), is the largest collection of people you can convince of a plan to build a different future.

The way that this collection of people — employees, investors, even customers — becomes convinced of that future is through storytelling.

Yuval Noah Harari has famously [pointed out that](#) “humans control the world because we are the only animal that can cooperate flexibly in large numbers.” Storytelling is the skill enables this large-scale cooperation.

In the same way, effective storytelling enables companies to separate themselves from competitors and gain control in the marketplace.

Good storytelling...

...bridges gaps by building context and conveying empathy which reinforces commonalities, minimizes cosmetic differences, and helps both sides find common ground. We see ourselves and project our own experiences onto the narratives others build.

...makes it possible for large collectives to share systems of beliefs and visions of the future. This applies to companies like it does to religions and political or social movements.

...connects the dots. It shifts the view from “what happened” to “why it happened”, “what will happen” to “why will it happen”.

Progress depends on storytelling **and on the evolution of who is empowered to be a storyteller**. When an overmatched collection of individuals come together to build compelling stories, they not only make their internal bonds stronger, they also create advocates on the outside. From there, the cycle repeats itself. Social movements start small. Religions start small. Businesses start small.

Stories are both the oxygen and the sustenance of these nascent groups. Stories keep these groups alive. Stories help these groups grow. So long as the right story exists, so too does the movement.