

HOW TO SELL YOUR BRAND THROUGH STORY

The Human to Human Connection



A WHITE PAPER

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How to Sell Your Brand Through Story: The Human to Human Connection

Executive Summary

Would you like to set potential buyers at ease, creating the best possible experience, so people are ready to purchase? Today's consumers prefer an increasingly personalized experience, and sharing your brand through story is one of the best ways to start a relationship. Brand stories offer a friendly introduction to your company, building trust with a generation that craves distinct, authentic connections.

Many companies don't think of themselves as a brand or believe they have a story to tell. And that's just not the case! A brand story isn't merely a chronological account of your history; it's a portrait of who you are and the essence of why you exist. In this white paper, you'll gain keys for:



1. Finding Connection

On a neural level, the brain actually "feels" a story. Story-based communication brings greater comprehension and allows your listeners to grow in confidence and receptivity because people buy in to what they trust! To create meaningful customer connections, begin by intentionally discovering who you are talking to. Carefully crafted customer personas can provide a catalyst for asking prospects the right questions while empowering your customers to choose for themselves.



2. Telling Your Story

After shaping a customer persona, you're ready to dig into your message. This story includes what your brand says about itself, what your brand does in the world, what others believe and say about your brand, and how people interact with your brand. In this section, you'll find a template for building your narrative and tools for sharpening your story so it is captivating, concise, concrete, consistent, and conversational.



3. Taking it to the Masses

Wondering how (and where) to share? The opportunities are limitless! A brand story is actually a collection of many stories delivered to multiple audiences, over several years, in a variety of formats. Along with inspiring brand story examples, this white paper offers practical tools (like style guides and compelling visuals) to keep you on track for a consistent, cohesive message.

Stories aren't just entertaining; they are mission critical in overcoming the noise of this information age. This white paper will help you to find your voice and craft an extraordinary story that resonates with your customers for years to come.

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The Human to Human Connection

An Appropriate Introduction

Have you ever been introduced to an overly chatty person? They pause briefly to learn your name, then launch into an extended monologue about their life and interests. After finally “escaping” the interlude, you realize they never asked you a single question. When you meet someone like this, does it raise a red flag? This pushy demeanor causes you to lose trust in their entire character.

The same can be true in marketing, when companies spend too much time talking about themselves instead of authentically connecting with consumers. Often businesses start making a case for their company before ever really being “introduced.” Without building adequate rapport, marketers prematurely oversell and repel prospects for good. How can you avoid this mistake? By building connections through story. Stories make life interesting because they fulfill a curiosity and craving in every person. Telling your brand story is mission critical in forging relationships with a generation that desires to buy into more than just a product, but into a narrative that gives meaning and pleasure to their daily lives.

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Why are Stories So Important?

With the explosive growth of content marketing and integrated online and print media campaigns, the opportunity to sell your company through story has become a strategic priority. Good stories give big voices to every business venture.

Brand stories are like a friendly introduction to your company, allowing prospects to peek behind the curtain of your business. This narrative style shifts marketers away from a message focus to a more optimal people focus: not communicating “at” your audience but communicating “with” them. As a conduit between you and your audience, stories allow brands to demonstrate confidence and vulnerability in ways that intrigue and inspire loyalty. Why is this so effective?

A 2014 Edelman Brandshare survey found that the majority of consumers are suspicious of a brand's intentions. Only 30% believed that companies had a sincere commitment to their customers, but 87% of consumers said they would like a more meaningful relationship with brands.

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Research indicates that on a neural level, your brain responds to story by synchronizing your mind with the subject of that story. This influences the sensory and motor cortex of the brain so that you not only hear a story but you feel a story. Princeton researchers found that the listener's brain activity will mirror the speaker's activity! This produces greater comprehension, understanding, and receptivity. Rather than feeling vaguely suspicious (or unsettled by the pressure of a premature sale), stories give prospects more confidence, so they feel empowered to choose for themselves. People buy in to what they trust!

The information age presents marketers with a new consumer dynamic:

PEOPLE RESIST:	INSTEAD, THEY CRAVE:
Interruption marketing	Engagement marketing
"In your face" one-way communication	Conversational or two-way communication
Relationships that feel "transactional"	Messages that show your brand cares about or "gets" them
Brands focused solely on customer conversion	Brand-consumer relationships built on trust and mutual respect

People want to feel their relationship with your business is not merely transactional, but that your brand "gets" them and cares about them beyond their conversion into customers. Brand stories help you treat customers like intelligent individuals with unique and creative style.

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Millennials are more likely than any other demographic to be brand loyal. But millennials don't choose which brands to be loyal to at random, instead, they are highly attuned to the story that a brand tells, as well as the values that brand exhibits. Generally, millennials choose to vote with their wallets for brands that tell inspiring stories, conduct business ethically, or contribute to their personal brands.

— Josh Ong,
Director of Marketing &
Communications at Cheetah
Mobile, the #4 mobile app
developer in the world

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Ultimately, brand stories are about delivering the type of message your audience wants or needs to engage with.

Crafting Conversations that Count

Brand stories ease people into the sales stage of a relationship, creating the best possible experience so people are ready to buy. This begins with an intentional focus on the audience, not on your company. To create meaningful consumer connections, brands must intentionally discover who they are talking to. This may mean creating specific audience personas or crafting a buyer mindset which details exactly what your target prospects think about and value.

Ask yourself:

- ✓ What do clients need, want, or enjoy?
- ✓ What are their pain points or struggles?
- ✓ What are their aspirations and interests?
- ✓ How can your company solve their problem?
- ✓ In what ways can you provide a delightful customer experience?



Chipotle's Mexican Grill is a brand known for serving "food with integrity." Chipotle has labeled itself "as real as it gets," using only 51 ingredients and no heat lamps, freezers, or microwaves. A recent print ad includes the line: "For real foods. For real actions. For real change." Chipotle seeks to fulfill people's desire for clean eating, and to change the way people think about fast food. The core of this ethos includes respect for farmers, animals, the environment, and through transparent displays of ingredients and producers on every menu. Tipping toward satire, the brand's recent "51 ingredients" billboard campaign featured this phrase: The only ingredient that's hard to pronounce at Chipotle is "Chipotle."

All About the Persona

Ultimately, brand stories are about delivering the type of message your audience wants or needs to engage with. Your communication is about them, not about you! By starting with audience personas, you'll find common ground to connect with people about what they value and how your products can bring them pleasure or relief. Personas give you a launchpad for asking prospects the right questions and giving them the power to "win" as they choose for themselves. In the words of Jeffrey Gitomer, author of *The Sales Bible*:

"People don't like to be sold to, but they love to buy."

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The Essentials of Exceptional Brand Stories

Story-based communication is not telling people what you want to sell but creating something they want to be part of, including a brand message they can be loyal to.

After identifying a target customer persona, you're ready to explore the narrative. Think of your brand story as a collection of many stories, each contributing to the overarching personality that defines your business and generates emotion from an audience. Your brand story consists of four things:

- ✓ What your brand says about itself
- ✓ What your brand does in the world
- ✓ What others believe and say about your brand
- ✓ How people interact with your brand

Story-based communication is not telling people what you want to sell but creating something they want to be part of, including a brand message they can be loyal to. This may include things like your history, mission, inspiration, goals, and can be shared through direct mail pieces, photography, banners, blogs, radio spots, and any kind of communication that touches people in authentic ways.

Building Your Narrative

Who: Founding characters or key leaders, company mission, goals, unique corporate values or personality, strengths, and weaknesses

What: Quality of products, unique competitive advantage, or the experience your brand represents

When: History (including your "Aha!" moment or journey in business); critical mistakes, discoveries, or turning points of growth; your passion to serve

Where: Areas you are evolving, where you are headed in business, the legacy you are building

Why: Who you want to help, why you want to help them, or why you would enjoy working with them

How: Functionality, unique features or benefits of your product/service, tension or pain points that you can resolve, a brand "hero" your audience with identify with or cheer for, success stories from real customers

What is important to us today and as we move toward the future?

As you begin, ask questions like . . .

- ✓ What is our ultimate reason for being? Why do we come to work each day?
- ✓ What was the "Aha!" moment that inspired our vision?
- ✓ What makes our product or service different?
- ✓ How have we failed, grown, or evolved?
- ✓ What is important to us today and as we move toward the future?

Five Keys to an Extraordinary Story

Now that you've laid a foundation, it's time to sketch in some detail. To give your story maximum impact, make it captivating, concise, concrete, consistent, and conversational.

Captivating

A story is nothing if it doesn't capture attention. What reaction will your story provoke? Do you want your audience to experience a sense of fear followed by relief? Perhaps you'll evoke the nostalgia of home or romantic wanderlust. Grab them with stories or characters in tension and take them along for the ride. This may include real-life examples (like Subway's Jared), fictional characters like the Energizer Bunny, or a nod toward history like Moleskine paper products took:

"The Moleskine brand was created in 1997, bringing back to life the legendary notebook used by artists and thinkers over the past two centuries, such as Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway, and Bruce Chatwin."

Captivating stories may also use a slice of life angle: accounts from the customer viewpoint, narratives from an employee perspective, or a side glance at reality from an inanimate object or a family pet. Make them laugh, make them think, or make them wonder. Captivate your audience and make them thirsty for more.

Concise

It's not a bedtime story, so don't put them to sleep! As you craft different versions of your narrative, cut it once, twice, and a third time. Get to the point quickly and efficiently, without burying the lead too deep in the text. An energetic, fast-paced tone will assure them that continuing with your content is worth their time.



**Be relevant
and relatable
in every way
you share.**

Concrete

While your story may have fictional characters or heroes, your product message needs to be based on truth. This may include interviews with clients, case studies with prospective buyers, designs rooted in research, and stories that flow from real customer feedback. A brand story that is fake negates the purpose of storytelling itself. Susan Gunelius, President & CEO of KeySplash Creative marketing and communications, says confusion or inauthenticity are brand killers:

“Honesty and transparency are important in brand storytelling. Yes, you’re crafting ‘stories,’ but they need to be rooted in the reality of your brand, products, and industry... (and) must adhere to three primary steps of brand-building: consistency, persistence, and restraint. If your brand stories are inconsistent, they’ll confuse consumers who will turn away from the brand in search of another that meets their expectations... Be creative but don’t stray too far from your brand promise.”

Consistent

Your brand story can take many forms, but it needs to stay consistent across all mediums. This means your values or company culture should be shared in every brochure, graphic, blog, or customer service call. These interactions are not just isolated touchpoints but a DNA sample of your identity. The only thing worse than no brand story is a disjointed or inconsistent message that muddies your image.

Conversational

A message is not only what you say but how you say it. As you communicate with your target audience, consider what format they will relate to most. This means using an appropriate tone, vocabulary, or reading level. Typically, connections come through humility as you speak in ways that aren’t overly formal, arrogant, or flashy. Be relevant and relatable in every way you share.

Making Your Message Public

Consistent and Cohesive

Your brand story should infiltrate every message from your letterhead to your largest billboard campaigns. While you may know the key words and concepts you want to share, doing this in a cohesive voice can be challenging. Communication templates (sometimes called style guides) help you stay organized. Here is one example to consider:

Communication Template

- **1. Audience**
Who is the target of this communication?
- **2. Goal of this content**
What should they learn or experience through this piece?
- **3. Concepts to communicate**
What key words or concepts will be shared?
- **4. Emotion**
What feelings will you produce? What tone or style will best evoke that emotion?
- **5. Perspective**
Will you use first, second, or third person voice? Should the language be formal, ultra-casual, or somewhere in between?

Whether you're producing large-scale displays, mounted core values, or social media content, your communication template can ensure your story stays consistent across mediums. Keeping attributes simple and clear will allow consumers to recognize you in every setting and to feel at home with all your brand stands for.

How (and Where!) to Share

Remember, a brand story is a collection of many stories, each contributing to the essence of your business. Think of your story as a steady IV drip of content that will be delivered to multiple audiences, over many years, in a variety of formats.

Storytelling content can include:

- ✓ Articles or case studies
- ✓ Brochures or direct mailings
- ✓ Presentation folders or catalogs
- ✓ Webinars or white papers
- ✓ Ads or industry publications
- ✓ Corporate charitable giving campaigns

Paint a Picture:

Visuals communicate faster and more effectively than words. Businesses that respond with visual storytelling will grab people in a way that bypasses logic or language. Colors, product packaging, logos, arresting photography, and clever graphics all create a compelling message in a consistent voice. If you have a fabulous identity but present it through substandard design, your message will be muted. Superb design can humanize your story and make it leap off the page.

Harley Davidson is arguably the world's most iconic motorcycle brand. They've spent decades building passion and loyalty among customers, many of whom have permanent Harley logos tattooed on their bodies! Harley offers customers a story of passion, power, and courage: riding a Harley is for those who were "born to be wild." In a recent campaign, Harley sought to build on this message through a print ad promoting its custom-made bikes. The ad depicted a chiseled, determined face that was fashioned from a smattering of dismantled motorcycle parts. Harley's story of freedom and adventure (available through its individually customizable bikes) was summed up in two hand-scrawled words: "Build Yours."

Conclusion

The beauty of a brand story is that it is never static; it will change as you tackle new territory, overcome bigger challenges, or solve the problems of tomorrow. As you continue to find customer connections, tell your story, and take it to the masses you will generate sales while solidifying your reputation as an industry leader and a trusted friend.

You'll never run out of ways to tell your story because every company is a work in progress! Tailor your story to your unique identity and integrate it into every customer touchpoint. Remember, good stories give big voices to every business venture.

About Your Sponsor

Story-based communication is not telling people what you want to sell but creating something people want to be part of, including a brand message they can be loyal to. Do you want to build a dynamic customer relationship while featuring a more authentic side of your brand? We'd love to help.

Sharing your story should be fun! Whether you're brainstorming ideas or integrating your narrative into captivating visuals, we'll employ a wide range of formats to communicate the essence of your business. From concept to complete packaging, we'll bring a work-in-progress partnership that puts your best foot forward through print.

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