



How to
write your story
and put it to work
for you

WODEN

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WHY TELL A STORY?

Human beings crave stories. From the first etchings our ancestors made on cave walls, storytelling has been at the heart of everything we do. But there's a misconception that storytelling exists only in the arts; like literature, movies, television, and the stage. While storytelling certainly dominates these arenas, stories are all around us. They help us organize and bring meaning to our lives.

Smart businesses understand this value to storytelling and approach their marketing as if they

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were telling a story. There's no better way to make people care about what it is you do.

It's been proven that we are more engaged by a story than by a list of facts. This is perhaps intuitive, but science explains why: When we examine data, we're just using the cold, rational language centers of our brains. But when we read a story, our brains respond as though we are truly experiencing whatever we are engaging with.¹ Maybe that's because we are. And this enhanced brain activity means higher profits and faster growth.



Take, for example, a company called Significant Objects, a “literary and anthropological experiment” that aimed to show the power of storytelling. With the help of more than 200 authors, Significant Objects wrote short stories to accompany a collection of thrift store objects and then auctioned

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them on EBay. Simple trinkets with an average purchase price of \$1.25 sold for a total of more than \$8,000 purely because of the stories attached to them!²

But you don’t need to be a novelist or screenwriter to make stories work for your business. Although every story is unique, there are a few constants for successful storytelling. Here are a few to get you started.



PULL THOSE HEARTSTRINGS

Just like in the movies, character-driven stories with emotional heft, stories that resonate on a human level, tend to work best for businesses, too. When audiences empathize, their behavior changes. In a study of Penn State medical students, researchers found that when they were told stories about difficult patients suffering from dementia, their attitudes toward these patients improved.³ For marketing



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and business, the implications for consumer recall, engagement, and loyalty are dramatic.⁴

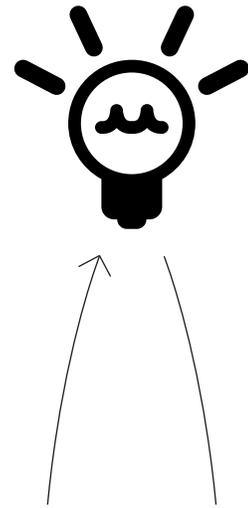
Get creative when looking for ways to evoke emotion. Coca-Cola is a master of this, regularly employing adorable polar bears and babies to rack up views in the millions for its ads.⁵ Others, like AT&T, IBM, and Mastercard, use similar approaches.⁶ But because everyone loves an underdog (and an underdog story), enterprising start-ups with new ideas or scrappy family businesses are often the best placed to tell compelling stories.



HOW ARE YOU UNIQUE?

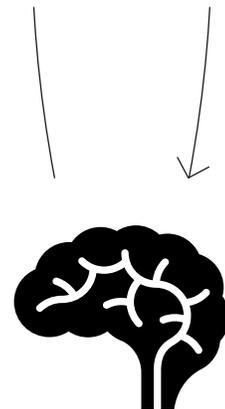
To stand out in a crowded marketplace, identify what makes your brand unique.⁷ There's no limit to the ways that this can be achieved, but one of the best methods for a new start-up or small business is simply telling your own story of development. Highlighting how you turned your vision into a reality will not only set you apart, but will also capture your audience's attention – people naturally respond to tales of invention and ingenuity.

You can also focus on your business' unique corporate culture or outlook, or your product's



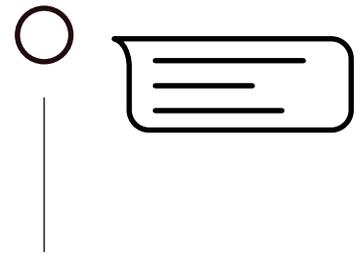
People naturally respond to tales of invention and ingenuity.

or service's features and benefits. How are you different in spirit from the competition? How have you improved on what the other guys are selling? Apple didn't invent the handheld MP3 player, but it did make it ubiquitous by showing consumers what made its version unique.



WHAT GOT YOU HERE?

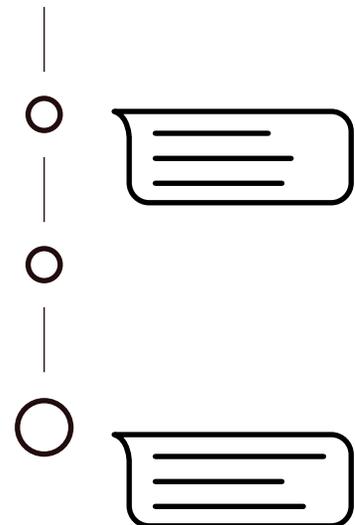
Stories without some kind of struggle are usually quite dull, so yours should always include a setback or challenge (or several). What problem did you set out solve when you launched your product? And what new ones have you encountered along the way? Start-ups and small businesses are blessed and cursed by the fact that struggle is core to their



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experience: the going gets tough at times, but damn if it doesn't make for a great story.

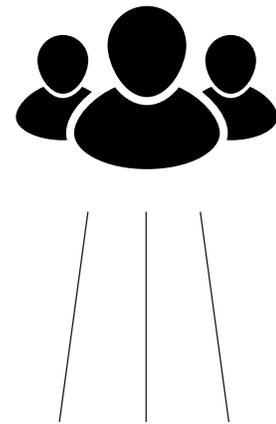
Remember: Casting yourself as the hero of your own story is a quick way to turn people off. Instead, focus on lessons learned, people you've met along the way, and the significance of the journey itself. Make the players involved, or even the audience itself, the real heroes in your tale. If the audience sees some kind of struggle that they can relate to, they will want to be a part of your journey, too.⁸



INVOLVE THE AUDIENCE

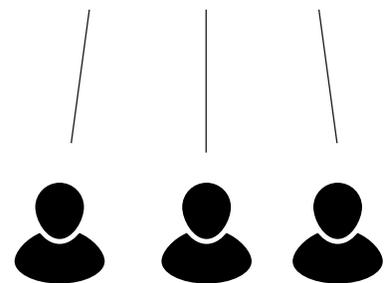
Many of today's A-list startups have found that involving their audience in their company's story is surefire path to marketing success. For Airbnb, adventure and hospitality are core tenets of its business, so it shares real stories told by real people using its service to explore exotic locales.⁹ This is a great example of using customers to engender trust, build enthusiasm, and produce powerful content that's relatable to everyone.

Even if your business is not a multi-billion-dollar tech powerhouse that caters to jetsetters, you can still use customers to involve your audience in your story. If you're still in business, then you've no



Testimonials make you approachable and trustworthy to new clients.

doubt managed to satisfy a few customers along the way. Testimonials make you approachable and trustworthy to new clients, and help old ones remember why they became a client in the first place.



BUILD TRUST

Trust is paramount in this age of digital transparency. There's a tendency in marketing to spin, or misrepresent what you are really selling. Getting caught being less than honest is a quick way to demolish your efforts to build loyalty.¹⁰ People will be more loyal to a product that shouts its imperfections to the world and details the efforts made to improve along the way.

Burton Snowboard's founder, Jake Burton, proudly proclaims that he almost killed himself twice while manufacturing his first batch of snowboards.¹¹ After

Make your story not just compelling, but believable.

being battered by negative press for making its Chicken McNuggets with "Pink Slime," McDonald's released behind-the-scenes footage of its production process on YouTube.¹²

Your business probably doesn't have Burton's death-defying origins or McDonald's' massive PR setbacks, but that doesn't mean it can't also build trust by sharing its true self with customers. Lifting the corporate veil can add heft to your story - making it not just compelling, but believable.



TELL YOUR STORY

These storytelling tips should help get ideas flowing about what you are looking for in an arresting corporate narrative, but the next step is actually writing your story and then putting it to work for your business. It's great to theorize about a great story in the abstract, but it doesn't count for much if all that thinking doesn't translate into action. To continue along your journey, tackle a few or all of these steps:

1. Ask questions.

Often, our own perceptions of our businesses and ourselves do not mirror those of our customers and staff, so identifying any disconnects is a crucial first step in writing your story. For instance, you may think that customers buy from you because of your stellar customer service while they actually find the most value in your unique product lines.

To make sure that your story resonates with your audience, take a few hours to speak with some customers and employees. Ask them questions about why they've chosen your company, what they like the most, and where you could improve. You might be surprised at what you learn, and this feedback will add new depth to your story.



2. Write it down!

This may seem obvious, but a story only becomes real once it's shared. Assemble a small team of key stakeholders from sales, marketing, and leadership to craft a 200-300 word story that encapsulates your business's core values and expertise. At Woden, we

Use the creation of this document to inspire interdepartmental dialogue.

call this a Story Kernel™ — it's similar to the “About Us” section on a website, but instead of a bland collection of corporate niceties, it's structured like a story and utilizes the components listed above.

Incorporate your learning from speaking with customers and staff. Go back and forth together over a few rounds of changes and edits. Use the creation of this document to inspire interdepartmental dialogue — you'll be surprised at the new insights you'll glean from working together in this context. The resulting document is not meant to be a definitive account of everything your business does. Instead, it is the foundation for engaging marketing activities.



3. Spread the word.

Social media is a great place to share your story. You are probably already using social media in some form now, but your newly penned company narrative will bring a fresh perspective, and heightened audience engagement, to your efforts. Edit your account descriptions across all of your social pages so that they reflect this new story and begin posting content that complements it. Whenever possible, consolidate your social accounts so that fans and followers receive a unified message from your brand.

Don't worry about putting together all new original content to reflect your brand story. Thoughtfully curated third-party content works just as well when it comes to driving social engagement and impressing

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your story on your audience. Your learning and writing exercises should have taken you beyond the products you sell or services you offer into deeper values and motives. Join the social media conversation by sharing information and articles related to these values with your fans and followers.



4. Align it.

Social media accounts are the easiest properties to align with your story. Editing descriptions can be done in an instant by virtually anyone. Once your social presence is aligned with your brand story, the next step is making sure that your website and other customer-facing collateral also reflect your overarching company narrative. Just as with social media, your website is a very important element, since this is often the first encounter customers will have with who you are.

Start with just a few sections of your website to align with your brand story. “About Us” pages, mission

Other customer-facing collateral should also reflect your overarching company narrative.

statements, or corporate histories are a great place to focus. You can also revise customer-facing sales and marketing collateral to align with your story. While you might not be able to get a new batch of one-sheets printed tomorrow, you can certainly edit any PDFs or other digital collateral.



5. Get creative.

When it comes to telling a great story, the only limit to the action is the author's imagination. This is true for your corporate story, too. Once it's written and you've aligned your consumer-facing properties to reflect it, the fun part truly begins. Since this new corporate narrative is the rocket fuel for your marketing efforts, you can now begin using it to propel new creative initiatives, along with employee and customer incentives!

Our brains produce a chemical called oxytocin that signals when it is safe to approach someone or something, and it's released when we are shown a kindness or when trust is expressed. When told the right way, a great business story also will produce that particular signal among your audience¹³. These principles and actions will get you started on the path to employing a story for faster growth and higher profits.

Need help?

If you'd like an expert consultation, give us a call. At Woden, we believe strongly that customers don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it, and that your business's story is the why behind it all.

We believe that every type of business has a great story to share, and that their story is the best possible way to engage the hearts and minds of every type of customer.

If you agree, then we're here to help.

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