The art of brand storytelling: What's your corporate story?

Category: Branding
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People don't fall in love with businesses.

The loyalty, obsession, and engagement of a good consumer/brand relationship comes from the deeper relationships that exist between a customer, and the people behind a company. No matter your industry, the chances are that the end goal of your brand is to appeal to people.

As a business, you should be all about solving problems, alleviating pain-points, and providing a more comprehensive customer experience. Whether you're selling designer shoes, or the latest hospital technology, you'll find that your revenue is a by-product of a strong business model, positive customer interactions, and a sound brand manifesto.

So, how do you convince your audience that there's more to you than meets the eye?

You need a story.

What is brand storytelling?

Storytelling is an effective, and powerful technique that builds customer/brand relationships. It's a concept that has existed throughout the ages, bringing people together and keeping them connected. It doesn't matter whether you're a small business or a huge enterprise, a brand story gives volume to your voice.

The important thing to remember when asking "What is brand

storytelling?" is that your brand story is far more than just a narrative. It's about what makes your business unique, and that goes beyond the text used to present your company to investors, or show your value to customers.

Brand storytelling is complicated. It's not limited just to what you tell other people, but also what those people believe about you based on the manifesto of your company, the reviews surrounding your brand, and the signals you send as a business. Your story is the complete image of your business made up of facts, interpretations, feelings, and ideas. In other words, you only control a fraction of your corporate story.

As careful as you may try to be with your company background, website "about" page, and social media platforms, the truth is that everything you do – from the colour of your product packaging, to the staff you hire – makes up a chapter in your brand story. That means that you need to be constantly cautious that you're reflecting the right "truths" about your company to your audience.

So how do you tell your own brand story?

How to tell your brand story

Stories aren't new. We've loved them ever since the first caveman drew the first pictures on a wall to describe his latest hunt.

From a scientific perspective, stories are designed to create emotions. We love them because they prompt chemical reactions in our minds that help us to feel pleasure, empathy, excitement, or interest. When you hear about the scrappy little underdog business who made it to the top, you naturally want to root for them.

A brand story is a narrative that's made up of all you do, and

all you are. From the history of your company, to your manifesto, your goals, your audience, and your very reason to exist. Your story is the people you interact with, the places you go, and the ideas that keep the heart of your business pumping.

Brand storytelling transforms your company from four walls and a handful of employees, to a living, breathing, relatable entity.

You can tell your brand story through a range of mediums, but you need to be careful about consistency and continuity. Holes in the narrative make your story appear inauthentic – a danger we'll address further a little later in this article. At the same time, your story will need to resonate with people at a level that goes beyond the tangible (the features of your products or services), and into the emotional.

Telling your brand story means creating something that your customers want to be a part of. That means answering questions about how you came to be, what makes you special, and where you're going.

What is brand storytelling? The questions that define your brand

If you want other people to share the image you have of your company, then the first thing you need to do is clarify that image. Know the "why" behind your company, and figure out a way to articulate it in a clear, relatable way. Ask yourself:

- What matters to you?
- What makes your product different?
- What are you trying to achieve?

Once you have a clear, corporate idea of why you're in business, you'll be able to start crafting a story that

resonates with your audience. To begin, start by asking these questions:

1. Who is your audience?

Ultimately, your brand story is something you build for your audience, not for your company. In other words, you need to make sure that the narrative you're telling is the one that your customer wants to hear. Pretend you're having a conversation with your ideal customer. Ask yourself what you know about their daily lives, needs, and challenges. How do your customers consume media, what situations do they relate to? Keep asking questions until you can envision the perfect customer in your mind, and remember – be specific.

Ultimately, you want to decide how your brand can be a solution to your customer's problems, or the answer that simplifies their lives.

2. Who is your brand hero?

A good story needs a hero. Brand storytelling is all about creating an image for your company, and you need someone, or something that seems to represent that image perfectly. People are more likely to act if they feel as though they can relate to a human aspect of your business. Ideally, your brand hero should be your ideal customer. If you can convince brand advocates to tell your story alongside you, then you instantly become more relatable.

Remember, when it comes to humanising your brand, the most powerful stories use emotion to connect with their audience. Figures and facts are often persuasive, but emotions are more memorable. A video of a child hearing her mother's voice for the first time thanks to your medical innovations is far more powerful than a handful of case studies.

3. Can your brand story be shared?

Brand storytelling works best when it’s shared. Everything you put out into the world has an opportunity to build a commonality among people, developing a unique community for your business. To make your story more shareable, ask yourself:

- Are you using content that makes people feel, or think? Ask yourself if your story makes people rethink what they know, or feel warm inside? Maybe it just inspires them to take action. Whatever the response, customers should have a reaction to your story.
- Does your story make it easy to define your brand, and does it work alongside the rest of your brand messaging? Consistency is key. The last thing you want is a schizophrenic brand persona.
- Does your story empower your customers? Whatever your message, you should be focusing on creating a story that your customers want to help you tell.

Positioning is crucial

Once you’ve pinpointed your ideal customer, your brand hero, and your sharing potential, you’ll need to determine how to position your brand. To create your positioning statement, fill in the blanks in this corporate story template:

1. My brand story appeals to (your target customer
2. It’s appealing because (what makes your product unique)
3. My (product name) is a (product category)
4. It (statement of key benefit)
5. Unlike (competitor alternative)

How can you benefit from telling a brand story?

Brand storytelling can be a lot of hard work, so you might be asking yourself, where's the benefit?

The simple answer is that exceptional storytelling is the perfect differentiator for your brand. Imagine you're in a room surrounded by different types of the same object. Without any story to add context, how would you know which item is the most effective, which is the best for the environment, or which smells nicest?

People like to make decisions quickly, and it's easier for them to choose the item that appeals most to their specific requirements if your product has a message that resonates with them. Let's explore the benefits of brand storytelling a little further.

1. What is brand storytelling? A memory creation tool

Humans are naturally pre-disposed to remember stories. When we're young, our parents read us rhymes and tales that are designed to teach fundamental morals. We use stories for these life lessons because they're interesting, and memorable. In the same way, strategic storytelling from a brand perspective will help you to create the memories you want your customers to have about your brand.

Your story doesn't have to be an award-winning novel to have an impact, either. It's not about having your customers laugh out loud, or shed a few tears (although that can be useful), it's more about helping your customer see their role in your story.

2. What is brand storytelling? A motivational marvel

Think back to your favourite advertisements. The best ads all start out with a great story. Usually, it's something visual, personal, and emotional that drives a primary message. With a couple of images, a great song, and a few words, these marketers are motivating you. They've designed that advertisement with a precise goal in mind, and every element of it serves a purpose.

Stories are a natural boon to marketers because their job is to get people to act. The best way to make sure that your story has the right motivational impact, is to simply learn as much as you can about your audience. Understanding what motivates them best will help you to tailor your narrative accordingly.

3. What is brand storytelling? A relationship device

In a modern world that's all about building connections, relationships are gold. Any individual who feels a connection with your brand is likely to become a repeat purchaser, and a brand advocate too. After all, if you like something about a brand what do you do? You tell your friends, your family, and even your colleagues about it. The trick, is to select stories that your ideal customer can relate to directly.

To facilitate these strong relationships, you'll need a detailed range of audience personas for each of your customer segments. Understanding your audience is what transforms a good story into "the" right story. It's the difference between telling a tale, and crafting a narrative that your audience can't resist.

4. What is brand storytelling? A content creation tool

Every business is different. Some companies are naturally entertaining and interesting. For instance, people in the entertainment industry know how to create content that their customers want to hear, see, or read. Unfortunately, other industries are a little blander. However, if there is a market for your business, then storytelling is always a way to make your content more interesting and engaging. The reason is that stories tap into the motivations and emotions that characterise the people in your industry.

Today, all companies need to create, and share content to thrive. Whether it's the content on your website that shows the background of your company, or the content that you post on your social media channels. Storytelling can add life to otherwise boring information, transforming white papers into inspiring blog posts, and case studies into company-branded videos.

5. What is brand storytelling? A subtle way to promote yourself

Finally, one of the biggest benefits of brand storytelling is that it helps you to stand out in a pretty saturated market. No matter the industry you're pursuing today, the chances are that you have a huge number of competitors all hoping to get their hands on your customers. It can be challenging to think of something new to add to the environment. You don't want to be just another "me too" brand that reflects all the opinions and ideas of your competitors.

A brand story helps you to boost your image, or "toot your own horn", without being too obvious. It's a more palatable way of promoting yourself that doesn't rely on messages that simply say that your brand is better than all the others. A story

helps to outline all the positive aspects of your company, and supports those aspects with case studies, content, videos, marketing materials, and even customer testimonies.

Brand storytelling: Authenticity is key

So, you know why brand stories are so effective, and you know how to start creating one. However, before we give you some examples to use in creating your own brand story template, there's one golden rule that needs to underline every aspect of your storytelling strategy. All brand stories must be authentic.

Today's socially-savvy, digitally-focused customer can smell a lie from a mile away. The slightest inconsistency in your brand image, or fault in your story instantly defines you as a faker. Unfortunately, the moment someone suggests that your brand story might not be authentic, your entire image is ruined. The trustworthiness of your brand dissolves, and you're left with a huge question mark hanging over your identity, scaring away customers.

Where many companies go wrong with their brand storytelling efforts, is that they take the "story" concept too far. In other words, their corporate identity becomes nothing more than a work of fiction – something they assume their customer wants to hear.

So, how do you make sure that no-one questions the authenticity of your story?

Simple. Create a narrative that's personal, compelling, and factual. Think about how your brand was born, and what inspired you to create the company in the first place. Focus on your personal, emotional missions (not just your desire to make money), and think about the needs of the audience you're

speaking to.

Ideally, your customer should be the main character in your story, with your company serving as the supporting character. In other words, your audience is King Arthur, and you're Merlin, helping them reach success.

To boost the authenticity of your story, remember the value of social proof. Testimonials are often one of the most powerful weapons that companies can use to build customer loyalty. When used correctly, your testimonials can even tell stories about your customers that add to your own narrative, making it more complex and involving. When you ask for a review, ask for how your product changed that person's life, and what your employees did to improve the experience.

As strange as it sounds, it can even be helpful to humanise your brand further by drawing attention to the ways you might have failed in the past. Showing people how you stumbled along the path to success, and transparently embracing your weaknesses helps customers to connect with you on a more personal level. Even Henry Ford failed regularly during his early business, losing his fortune five times before creating the motor company we know today.

What is corporate storytelling? Case studies:

Some of the biggest brands in the world, such as Coca Cola, Lego, and Google, have all become icons in their industry because of their storytelling capabilities. Coca Cola's story has long centred on community and sharing, while Google focuses heavily on empowering their customers. When you're finding a story for your brand, your aim should be to choose something that doesn't just float along with other big brands in your industry, but helps you to get noticed.

Why? Because people remember a good story. The right brand story personifies your company, and positions you at the head of your industry, as a name that's difficult to overlook, or forget.

Here are a few examples that might help you create the template for your own corporate story.

1. High Brew Coffee

Visit High Brew Coffee's website, and you'll quickly start to get a feel for their story. The founder, David Smith, came up with the idea to sell cold-brewed coffee when he was on a six-month rafting journey in the Caribbean.

The action-first instincts that inspired the brand highlight what makes the Company special today. From the tagline "For those who do", to the focus on a brand manifesto that's all about quality over speed, High Brew Coffee focus on delivering something that's unique and relatable

They know that most people won't have life-changing experiences rafting in the Caribbean, but they build on the universal idea of preparing to take a chance.

2. BeardBrand

High Brew Coffee appeal to their audience by touching on a global idea, and showing off where they came from. Part of telling a successful brand story, as we outlined above, comes from understanding your ideal audience, and knowing how to reach them.

BeardBrand, as the name might suggest, is a company that sells beard-care products. They sell a host of grooming kits and oils that simplify the act of maintaining different shapes and sizes of beard. The founder first began his journey into business with a YouTube channel and blog. It was through his content sharing efforts, that Eric Bandholz learned all about

the urban beard-man culture.

Eventually, Bandholz created a story that allowed him to leverage the subculture of beard-loving men into a powerful tribe, eager to buy his products. Since he already had a presence online, his customers instinctively trusted his guidance when he began selling.

3. Monzo

Monzo frequently share their story with their customers through a regular journal of email updates. The story behind the brand began in February 2015, when the company was nothing more than a group of people sitting on “borrowed desks” and sketching ideas on whiteboards.

Monzo helps to create a feeling of human connection with their customers, with an under-dog tale that’s all about hard work, passion and perseverance. Their story focuses on the sleepless nights that went into creating a bank that “helps people”, and that makes it hard not to root for them.

Additionally, the CEO and co-founder of Monzo, Tom Blomfield, works to ensure that his customers and clients feel personally involved in the brand journey. At the end of his emails, he invites them to join him on the journey ahead, and keep working towards a brighter future.

4. Blue Apron

Finally, one of the essential aspects of your brand story is your company purpose. Defining your reason for being is the ultimate way to lay the foundations for your corporate story, which can then reflect in your service, messaging, and advertising solutions.

Blue Apron is an expert in creating a brand story that’s all about their mission. The company delivers gourmet ingredients to their customers, along with guidelines for meals that can

be made quickly, and easily at home. The process is simple. You sign up, and you receive a certain number of meals each week.

Blue Apron tells the story of a company that's dedicated to making gourmet food accessible to the masses. They provide the recipes and ingredients, and you cook the food. It's as simple as that.

Communicating a simple, authentic, and relatable purpose with your brand story helps to make your company far more engaging and intriguing. Remember, for a corporate story to be appealing, it doesn't have to be complicated. All you need to do is find something that resonates with your customers.

Using a brand story for talent acquisition and retention

Before we finish up this article, it's worth drawing attention to the hidden benefit of storytelling that's often overlooked in an environment obsessed with marketing.

While brand awareness and marketing are obvious benefits of brand storytelling solutions, having the right corporate story can also generate a positive impact within your company too. After all, the world of recruiting is no longer transactional, but creative. Companies don't just "hire employees" anymore, they "acquire talent", and the competition for top talent is building.

As various organisations come together to battle over the same skill sets, companies are being asked to rethink the ways that they can stand out from the crowd, and attract new talent. This emerging landscape places further pressure on HR teams who want to make their businesses seen through the noise and chaos of the talent market.

Storytelling has emerged as a successful tool in recruitment,

because it helps to make corporate values, culture, and traditions more tangible to outsiders. Stories offer companies an original way to communicate information, and appeal to the target groups that are best suited to their industry. If the talent that you hire shares the same fundamental values and ethos as your company, then you're far more likely to end up with a stronger team, and better employee retention.

Storytelling bridges the gap between prospective employees and brands in the same way that it simplifies the disconnect between brands and customers. Complicated issues are simplified, and candidates get an idea of what working for a company really means.

How to live by your brand story

Brand storytelling can bring life to a company, humanise a brand, electrify marketing, and engage the company culture. All companies need to do, is figure out how to tell their story in the right way.

Today, almost any medium can be used to tell your story. From blogs that share information about your company and industry, to videos, print, social media channels, and even multi-media creations. Each medium promotes a different reaction from a different audience, which means that you need to find not only the right way to tell your story, but the right platform to tell it from.

Once you've solidified your brand story, and you know what makes your company unique, it's up to you to champion your own ideals. Live by your brand story and show your customers that you're not just telling them what they want to hear. If your company claims to put experience first, then use evidence to show how that's the case – with case studies, an innovative team of employees, and a forward-thinking customer service approach.

At the same time, listen to your audience so that you can gain a better understanding of their concerns and desires. As your story unfolds, it’s crucial to listen and gauge the reactions of your audience. Every response will dictate how your brand evolves, and as your goals and objectives shift, you’ll need to plan new ways of propelling your story forward.

Emotion, inspiration, and authenticity is what great storytelling is all about. Learn how to tell a truly compelling story, and you’ll learn how to speak to your audience in a way that inspires loyalty, and commitment.

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