

How to Use Storytelling as a Success Strategy

Podcast #17 Transcript

Phyllis Mikolaitis

Hi, it's Phyllis Mikolaitis, welcome back to our weekly podcast. Today, I am excited to talk to you about how storytelling as a Business Strategy is emerging as an essential skill for both leaders and sales persons in companies of any size. For any company, they need to create a strategy or a path to follow and share their brand story in multiple channels. It's the only way to build a sustainable business for the future. Choosing the right strategy is important. When executives look out at the marketplace, they see that the target audience and the means of communication in today's world have changed. We see people connected electronically in many ways and also we see people disconnecting from network television and newspaper delivery as we once knew them. People want to have a voice and share their opinions. Collectively these opinions are powerful and can have a tremendous impact on the success or failure of a business. People are also more mobile today so communicating in the way that business did in the last century doesn't work any longer. Data reports show that 89% of email messages are SPAM or Junk mail. Also, there are 255 million websites, and people see between 3 and 5,000 marketing messages per day. So, how do companies stand out in the sea of information useful and otherwise to reach this audience and differentiate themselves?

Companies have to get their brand message heard above the noise and through an array of channels. Research from Harvard and John Hopkins Universities provides evidence that classic storytelling tops everything. So some companies have even hired what is called the corporate storyteller or director of corporate narrative. Other companies have hired outside agencies to tell their brand story. Some companies have even hired Hollywood screenwriters and film directors to help them communicate their story. Whichever of these options you choose, the message is most effectively communicated when told in a story. Experts like Seth Godin, Daniel Pink and Robert Cialdini tell us that stories are remembered 22 times more than facts. That's because

they connect with both the hearts and minds of the customers. Brands that tell a compelling story flourish. Let me tell you why it works.

It is natural to tell stories, and it is natural for us to listen to stories. Life happens in the stories we tell one another, and when we hear stories we want to know what happens next. Storytelling has been around for over 27,000 years. Since the days of the cave paintings, stories have been a means of communication.

Did you know that before the days of writing, successful communication was measured by how much of the story listeners remembered. In communicating your brand message, you want people to remember you. Not for a few minutes, not for a few weeks but for years. Storytelling is an art and you can master the structure that has connected to and engaged audiences tracing back to the days of Aristotle. He said persuasion has three components ethos which appeals to credibility accounts for 10%, logos which appeals to logic accounts for 25% and the greatest appeal was pathos at 65% which appeals through emotions. Stories address all three of these components and allow your brand message to reach both the hearts and minds of customers.

Research shows that when you tell your brand story, it evokes strong responses in the brain. Let me share with you what happens in the brain of the customer when you tell your brand story. The visions and emotions in your story reach out and connect with the emotional right side of her brain. This side is creative, imaginative and empathetic. It focuses on the big picture and how it makes you feel. Your story comes to life in this side of the brain as it is being told. That's important because it's here that decisions are made. When you weave the important facts into the narrative of your story, they reach left side of the brain. It's logical and analytical. It focuses on details and organized scientific data, the stuff PowerPoint Presentations are made of. Here in the logical left side, your customer justifies the decision the right of her brain side has already made. So, good stories are powerful because they connect with both the right and the left side of the brain.

Let me take a minute and walk you through the structure of a good story as Aristotle, Shakespeare or Andrew Stanton creator of Toy Story and Finding Dory would organize it for business.

A great story has certain key elements that make it both compelling and persuasive which is just what you want. All great stories have heroes with names and characteristics to bring their hero to life. They generate emotion because they contain details about the people involved and how they felt about the situations and challenges they faced. They allow the customer to feel that emotion and envision what would happen if the hero didn't take action. They feel that emotion in terms of a lost opportunity or negative impact on the business. The feelings and the details then spark the customer's imagination, and they get transported into the story without even realizing it. In their mind, they can see the action occurring, and they can envision themselves in the same situation.

Next, complications occur. Here is where good stories are authentic, and therefore customers believe them. Change is never easy. There is always some doubt, conflict or tension so you have to include it or it won't seem real. For example, your customer may be worried about the cost or the business owner may be hesitant about the return on investment. Perhaps one partner just doesn't see the need for change at this point.

Then as a result of his journey, your hero gains an insight. In the movies, this is where the hero meets Yoda or encounters another catalyst. This causes internal conflict. The hero sees the value, but something is holding him back from making the decision. Then something creates a turning point where the hero must make the change. Perhaps a compelling event has arisen, and your hero makes the decision. As a result, he or she undergoes a personal transformation, or they transform their business. Your brand story tells of unique or key brand characteristics that contribute positively here.

There is then the falling action or movement to the resolution or denouement. In the end, there is a lesson or value to the story. What did your hero gain as a result of the decision to make the change or purchase?

If you tell a story about a previous customer to make the point, the main character is then the hero who led the company through the transformation. If you tell a story as a transformation coach, it is the person who decided to make the purchase. For example, the hero was a couch potato. You coached him and helped him realize he needed to make a change to a healthy life style. Eventually, he realized the value of exercise and

healthy eating. He opened a fitness center and is now prospering as an advocate for fitness and healthy living.

Professors of neuroscience at several universities have studied the impact of stories using this structure had on the brain of listeners using fMRI to study their brain waves. They found that the same areas of the brain are illuminated when a story is told as when the person actually experiences the emotion. They also found that the brain of the storyteller and the listener experienced the same response to questions regarding the content of a story. That means by telling a story, you will put your listener in sync with the struggle of the hero. Stories are the best way to package ideas, keep your prospect open-minded and generate interest because they want to know what happens next in your story.

If you doubt the impact of a story, just imagine your favorite movie. Were you hoping he or she would win over the villain? Of course, you were. That's what makes a story work. Your customers want to be engaged, and you want them engaged, and retelling your brand story.

Carmine Gallo, the author of *Talk Like Ted* and *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs* says that "ideas are the currency of the twenty-first century and customers are willing to exchange time and money for ideas. Stories are the way to package ideas, keep your prospect open minded, and generate interest because they want to know what happens next in a story

Now let me tie this back to your strategy and a unified company message. You not only want your customers telling your story, you want your employees engaged, and telling your story. That takes two elements. First, you have to have created a strategy and a unified business story. There can't be different interpretations of the company mission and values. This is an age of transparency. It seems people share everything. So, when you have different stories circulating, people may share half of a story or the wrong perspective of a story. And with the ease of sharing on the internet or a call-in media program, it can be disastrous to your brand. So you need to create a story or narrative that provides a structure or skeleton that includes your mission and values. Along with it should be some example stories that demonstrate the values in action.

Second, it is important to create an environment in which employees are engaged and feel appreciated. You can find more about that in our blog posts or in reading the book *Joy Inc* by Mike Sheridan. When employees are engaged, feel valued and happy. They share your brand story without asking them to do so.

It's amazing what can happen when customers and employees are happy. Just ask Zappos. Customers and employees came to its defense with great positive stories when Kanye West made some negative remarks about Tony Hsieh and Zappos products in a podcast.

Brands that have told a good story and live that story flourish. We are connected more now than ever before. When you have a clear and compelling message it is shared over multiple media channels.

I'll give you a few examples of companies that are sharing their brand story and reaping the benefits. Menlo Innovations, a software company in Ann Arbor Michigan changed the environment and created one of Joy for the employees. These employees developed innovative products that in turn had customers telling their story and profits soaring. People come from around the world to discover their business style and insights.

The Virgin Air brand story tells how they make flying good again. They have reinvented domestic air travel and gained loyal fans in the process. Sir Richard Branson started his original Virgin airline out of frustration. He flew airlines with poor food and entertainment, less than friendly crews, and lacked flat beds in upper class. So he chartered a second-hand Boeing 747 and started offering flights dramatically improved all of those things. He built a loyal following and a thriving business while his competitors have gone under. Then he started Virgin Blue in Australia in 2000 and Virgin America in 2007. Now customers are sharing the brand story on multiple continents. If you look, Virgin has a uniform strategy built on the same values. It not only shares the brand story in its strategy, but it lives that story throughout all of the Virgin Airlines.



You can join these great companies and create a strategy that incorporates your brand story and get customers and employees sharing your story. As a result you, your employees and your business will flourish and your customers will be delighted.

Well, that wraps up our podcast for today. Thanks to my producer and audio engineer John Switzer, for his great work with me on today's podcast. Join me next week when I'll share more hints and tips. I appreciate your feedback so please send your questions, comments or topic suggestions to me at Phyllis@salestrainingolutions.com.

Visit our website @ [www.salestraining solutions.com](http://www.salestrainingolutions.com); there are resources available under freebies. You can also join our bimonthly newsletter and get our Free eBook on Storytelling: the Secret to Sales Success. The link is on our website next to the podcasts and blog posts. Watch for our FREE mini-course on sales and storytelling for business. They are absolutely Free and filled with tools, tips and resources to help you achieve your personal best.