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Does Your Brand Tell a Powerful Story?

Brilliant's not enough in today's economy—you need a compelling story so people will remember you.
By Mary van de Wiel | October 19, 2009

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One of the best ways for an entrepreneur to get a leg up in this competitive climate and distinguish yourself from the rest of the pack is to tell your brand story.

Story is how we connect with one another. Wonder why the emerging social networking sites are so popular? The answer is because people crave the emotional and powerful connection that comes through telling a story.

The best brand stories are irresistible, compelling and provocative in a way that your target audience is going to hear, seamlessly and effortlessly. Telling that kind of brand story will position you and your company as a leader in the marketplace.

The most memorable brand stories tell the unexpected, speak directly to the heart or dare you to live life to the fullest. Take Nike, for example. Its brand story challenges people to be empowered, to adopt a maverick spirit in life and "just do it." That story inspires, continues to be popular and provocative, and consistently strikes an emotional chord with Nike's fans and customers around the globe.

Why is storytelling so important to your business?

- An authentic brand story makes you memorable.
- It differentiates you as desirable.
- It brings your brand to life.
- It gives you a distinct competitive advantage.
- Your target market becomes hugely responsive.
- It positions you as a visionary in your field.

Take the role of brand guardian seriously. This role is critical. Like the captain of a ship, you're steering your brand through stormy seas. Be mindful of your brand's behavior, intention, tone and attitude. Right now, your brand story may be transmitting subliminal messages and telling a story all its own. As brand guardian of your business, pay attention to every kind of signal your brand is conveying to your target audience.

Taking the role of brand guardian seriously doesn't mean you have to be stodgy. The great brand guardians also have a great sense of humor. If you're not having enough fun with your brand, go back to the drawing board and tap into why you started your business in the first place.

Raise your brand energy levels. What comes to mind when you think about brands such as Apple, Target, Virgin or Nike? You probably sense big personality, boundless energy or major magnetic appeal. Now, imagine you can feel the "pulse" of any of these brands. You'd pick up that they were clearly alive, pumping and showing strong vital signs, right?

Your target audience has an uncanny ability to pick up on your brand "pulse" or brand energy. Start raising your brand energy levels, because a slow simmer won't cut it here. Look at the language you use across your marketing communications. Is it bland or does it have a dynamic, knock-your-socks-off energy? After all, there's something very attractive and contagious about brands that feel totally energized, passionate, idiosyncratic and that reflect your personality. It's a clue that the entrepreneur, CEO or brand guardian is paying close attention to embedding his or her individualistic energy and passion into the business.

Make sure all aspects of your brand are in alignment. Just as a car runs best when the wheels are aligned, your brand communication needs to be aligned, too. I'm talking about consistency—across all the ways you get the word out to the

market. For example, if the messages on your website are not reinforced by and aligned with your tweets or press releases, the way you answer the phone, the way your staff welcomes clients or the way you shake a client's hand, then your brand is out of alignment.

Kaira Rouda, founder and president of Real Living and author of [Real You Incorporated: 8 Essentials for Women Entrepreneurs](#), talks about the power of story. "In today's business world, relationships drive successful sales, and your network is your net worth. You must tell your story." Rouda goes on to say, "For your business brand to resonate with customers, it must be based on something truly genuine: your reality, your passions."

Be Clear

If you're ready to start shaping your brand story, remember this tip: If you want others to recognize you, the best way to do it is to recognize yourself first. Before you tell your brand story, recognize the kind of message and meaning you want to embed in your story.

Your character is going to define exactly what happens in your story. Be as true to yourself, compelling and believable as possible. What makes you unique and different? What makes you stand out?

- Your personality shapes your brand story. I'm talking about your personal values, integrity, core beliefs and ethics. Think about what inspires and motivates you. Wrap this around your brand story; it will bring your brand to life.
- Define what your character stands for in your story. Why do you do what you do? What is your purpose? What's most meaningful in your life and business?
- What actually happens in your story? What's the compelling action (or series of actions) that makes other things happen? What's driving your story forward?
- Think about how you want your audience to react to your story. What's the outcome—the object lesson here? What kind of conclusion do you want them to reach? Think about the pulse of your brand. Are people going to pick up your brand's vital signs in your story?

So, is your brand story doing justice to your business?

As branding expert and co-author of [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Branding Yourself](#), Sherry Beck Paprocki says, "If you don't brand yourself, Google is going to do it for you!"

Mary van de Wiel (Van), founder, CEO and global brand therapist of A New Brand Landscape & Co. and [ZingYourBrand.com](#), helps entrepreneurs and startup CEOs leverage their irresistible Zing Factor, embed it in their brand, and then build an entire business around it. In a former corporate life, as founder and CCO of an award-winning agency with offices in New York and Sydney, Australia, Van led national brand campaigns for Fortune 500 clients in four continents. Her 'What's your Zing?' methodology helps clients ultimately impact the bottom line through her consulting work, brand audits and online brand marketing services.