

WHY DO YOU NEED A GOOD STORY

WHEN YOU HAVE A GOOD BUSINESS?

Can you describe your product or service using the words *first*, *best* or *only*?

If not, what do you really have? What makes you think anyone will consider your company more than a “me-too”?

Let’s face it, most businesses are me-toos. Many survive and some thrive. Look around at all the me-toos you use in your business and personal life: cameras, scanners, PCs, dry cleaners, restaurants, office supply stores, cookware, cars, bicycles and clothes. The list is endless.

What you might not realize is that being first, best or only is over-rated. While we all strive for it, the truth is that many of us won’t achieve it. We can still do well. And we can look at many first, best or only companies and see that they never approached our success. Did you know the first commercial computer was a UNIVAC, designed by Presper Eckert and John Mauchly? Where are Eckert, Mauchly and UNIVAC now? Some of the first commercial vacuum cleaners were Hoovers. In fact, Hoover did so well that the brand became the de-facto name for vacuuming for many years. But do you use a Hoover?

For me-toos like most of our businesses, and even for many first, best or only companies, the world is filled with products and services that look and sound just like ours. With so much noise, the competition is brutal. You need to distinguish yourself. This is where your stories make the difference.

EACH OF US HAS A STORY. YOU PROBABLY HAVE MANY.

You’re likely to tell some of your stories. But unlike your parents, who were eager to hear your stories as you learned to tell them, most people barely listen. Of the stories they listen to, very few, if any, are remembered. And when we say “very few,” we’re being optimistic. Consider your personal and business acquaintances. Pick three who aren’t in your immediate circle of friends and family – quickly. Picture them. Try to remember one or two stories about each of them. If you can, you’re unusual – and probably a good listener.

Or you have fascinating acquaintances. But chances are, neither of these is the case.

The point is that good stories are a rare pleasure, and when we hear one, we tell it over and over again. We even tell it to people who don't care. We even tell it when we're not good at storytelling, and we know that people won't enjoy and remember it the way we did. Why? Because it's a good story. Everybody loves a good story.

BUT LET'S FACE IT, THE AVERAGE STORY IS DULL AND FORGETTABLE.

The worst are unendurable. The good news is we're all in the same boat. Not only do our stories sometimes lack substance, but even when they're good, we often don't know how to tell them.

Even the word "story" doesn't mean much anymore. People who toss around that word use it to describe anything from a headline to a tweet. There's even an online tool called Storify. The tool allows you to search for social media content from Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Instagram and more, arrange them, comment and contextualize, and build a story. It's a great idea: People can conduct research in the media they care about most and use that research to create a story. Unfortunately, most people lack an understanding of what makes a story. The Storify site shows examples of real stories being delivered through Storify, such as a moment-by-moment story about a raging wildfire. But it gives little insight into what will make the story compelling or memorable.

A wildfire is interesting by its very nature – our brains are programmed to respond to things like wildfires, if only for self-protection. But not all stories benefit from such a hook.

One "Storify" story, at the time of this writing, is entitled: "The Best Romney Car Elevator Gags – Here are a few of the many Twitter jokes about how the Republican candidate's house is outfitted."

There's nothing wrong with delivering such content to audiences. But it's not a story, and using the "S" word indiscriminately confuses the people who wish to create compelling and memorable stories

for their businesses. How can a marketing manager be expected to create great content when he doesn't even know how to define great content? How can CEOs help choose the stories that best showcase their business' capabilities when their employees think that any content can be used to make a story? Some even think that tweeting about a product update is tantamount to producing content that customers will love and remember? And what's the point again?

WHY DOES MY BUSINESS NEED GOOD STORIES?

Jack Welch, longtime Chairman and CEO of GE, credits part of his success to the fact that he's good at telling stories. Why should this matter to you?

- If you want your customers to keep you top-of-mind...
- If you want customers to refer you, and prospects to remember you...
- If you want employees to talk about your organization in memorable ways...
- If you want to make an impression that lasts longer than a conversation...

Then you need good stories.

But how do I do it? I don't even think I have good stories, and how do I pick from the ones I do have?

Hold on to such questions, and add a couple: Which stories are worth telling? How do you make sure your stories reach, touch, move, inspire, humor, or change your audience in some way?

This book answers such questions, and we wrote it because we have seen how great stories can help businesses and organizations. In fact, we've been lucky enough to help our clients craft some of those customer-moving stories. Understanding, building and deploying your business' stories may be the single most important thing you do when it comes to marketing yourself or your organization. With this book's help, you will turn your stories into rocket fuel for your business.