

A Non-Writer's Guide to Storytelling



FOUR SHIFTS TO BETTER MARKETING THROUGH MESSAGING

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If you're in marketing, you're a storyteller. Whether you're tweaking online ads or dreaming up the "Case Study That Disrupted the Industry" — and whether or not you're even aware — you're storytelling. As the publisher of persuasive ideas, you'll do a better job when you apply more spit and polish to your writing skills.

How could something as basic as writing make such a difference to the consumer decision path? Because poor writing is a mental speed bump. When readers are jarred from in-the-moment enjoyment of shared understanding, of illumination, of converging thought, they're bumped back to a mindset of skepticism. Or worse, they bounce. Anything that creates a feeling of "this isn't for me" at any stage of the user's brand experience is a lost opportunity. When you clear the path of obstacles with transparent, generous and intriguing messaging, you create a real relationship with readers that extends beyond page or screen.

Even better than the "we're in this together" feeling that good storytelling creates is the fact that YOU created it. Here are four mental shifts you can make today to be a better marketer by being a better storyteller. You'll see immediate improvement in connectivity, clicks and conversions.

Poor writing is a mental speed bump.

1. Pass the B.S. Test

Readers can tell when you're trying to manipulate them. How many times have you heard in a meeting, "But what are we trying to get them to do?"

For all the eye-pattern tests and CTA-button conversations that go on, the real road to connection is authenticity. And the way to get to authenticity in copy is to ask yourself continually,

"But why?" Peel back the layers of justification to reveal the kernel of what you're offering and what you're asking in return. Transparency forces you into a WIIFT (what's in it for them?) mentality. You'll shift naturally to using the word "you" more often, and your messaging will shed language that doesn't sound like the way real people talk.

Talk in truths. Truth builds trust; trust builds relationships; relationships build business.

2. Make it a Mashup

A mashup is when two seemingly disparate things come together. Think the a capella songs in the Pitch Perfect movies. Layering the song "Just the Way You Are" by Bruno Mars with "Just a Dream" by Nelly infuses new melodic texture and meaning to lyrics with which we're familiar (or with which our kids are familiar).

Now apply that idea to messaging. When you create a messaging mashup, you're layering metaphor with a marketing pitch. Applying metaphor to a story arch gives it the structure it needs. Better yet, it automatically makes your content more accessible to the reader.

Mashups are shortcuts to understanding. They smooth the speed bumps, leading to the metrics we so love in marketing, such as increased time on page, social sharing and clicks.

3. Create Within Confines

"Draw your frame," the professor said on day one of Drawing 101. At the time, I thought it was redundant to draw a border within the border of the sketch paper. Soon I came to see the method to his making-me-mad-ness, and I learned a larger lesson — creativity thrives within parameters.

Tight turnaround times, limited color palettes, compliance regulations, word-count maximums — these are the realities of our industry. When you reframe these "frames" into creative challenges, you switch your brain's track from check-the-box mode to problem-solving mode.

To turn on your creative, problem-solving self, try these self-imposed practices:

- Write with economy.
- Edit with impunity.
- Artificially shorten deadlines.

- Limit the types of graphics under consideration.

You'll create opportunities to intrigue and engage with the sheer unexpectedness of creativity.

4. Think in Fractals

Good marketing is like fractal geometry, where smaller patterns are reflected in the makeup of a larger pattern. When every user interaction both reflects the whole and stands out singularly, you're headed in the right direction.

Make sure each piece of collateral and every part of the reader journey reflects the larger roadmap you're setting forth for your audience. There are simple ways to do this, and they relate back to the previous tips.

START STORYTELLING

Probably the hardest part about becoming a better storyteller is embracing that you're in charge of perception. Second hardest is embracing your unique skills at crafting story. At risk of a Swiftian slip, I encourage you to shake it off and just start. Start with a foundation of authenticity and transparency — that's being generous with your reader. Layer on metaphor that's meaningful to your demographic, which provides shared context and predictive clues. Create purposefully within the parameters your team agrees on to rev up creativity and, therefore, response.

Whether you're a natural storyteller or find yourself responsible for messaging as part of your role, writing for marketing should feel like an anticipated journey when you execute these ideas. You'll connect more genuinely and more often.

Kirsten Longnecker oversees corporate communications, PR, social media, content strategy and client panel research for Kasasa (formerly BancVue). From her early days writing rhymed pentameter for Hallmark Cards to architecting communication for a highly regulated industry, Kirsten trusts that creativity thrives within confines. At Kasasa, she and her badass team drive engagement for community financial institutions while maintaining brand awareness for the Kasasa suite of free reward checking and savings products designed to give the megabanks a run for their money.