Tomorrow People
Public Relations

How to tell your brand story in the changing media environment



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Create a brand story that generates loyalty and use it across today's marketing channels.

"Sometimes, reality is too complex. Stories give it form,"

says film director Jean-Luc Godard - and this is never more true than in the world of marketing.

Consumers are fickle, easily distracted and have poor memories, making it hard to make a lasting impression. Increasingly, the job's made even more difficult by the need to communicate across many different channels, from traditional PR to social media.

This is where a brand story comes in. A strong brand arouses an instant emotional reaction that's strengthened every time the branding's seen, driving customer interaction and creating loyalty. And a good brand is invariably built on a story that says "this is why we're different; this is why we're the best choice".

If you don't create that story yourself, the chances are that someone else will do it for you. Think EasyJet, for example, which would like to be known simply for low-cost flights. But "low-cost" on its own isn't an unusual claim, or a particularly compelling image; and, instead, the brand's probably associated far more with travel hassle than with a comfortably full wallet.

So what makes a brand story truly compelling?

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Consider your audience's desires

A good brand story doesn't come from nowhere - and the best starting point is the customer. What do your customers want? What sort of people are they? What issues do they identify with? How can you align your story with theirs?

If you get it right, your customers will do half the work for you. As author Philip Pullman says, "After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world." A good brand story is one that resonates with customers, telling them something they want to hear and, generally, reinforcing their beliefs.

One easy way of creating this identification with a brand is to focus directly and openly on the customer - either through the creation of a 'typical' customer, such as Asda's pocket-patting shopper, or through the regular use of real customer case studies.

ntroduces your new positioning. Gently changing their mindset by giving them some useful information – whether it's a fun infographic or an informative white paper. Of course, that metric – how many responded – is measurable.

Ask: "What makes us different?

Take a good look at your organisation, its history and culture, and mine this information for a story.

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Is your product particularly reliable?

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Does the company have interesting origins?

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How did your service come to be?

An excellent strategy can be to hitch your wagon to some sort of campaign or moral issue. Think Innocent Smoothies, for example, whose 'Chain of Good' fundraising campaign chimes perfectly with the company's brand story of benevolence and good health.



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Use every channel you can

Every interaction with a customer is a chance to share your brand story - whether that be through marketing emails, blog posts, or traditional PR - not forgetting the customer help centre. The particular channels you focus on most may reflect your brand story - for example, social media for a young, cool start-up or white papers for authoritative industry leaders.



Social media is hugely important in building a brand story. A survey carried out by Experian last year found that 22% of time spent online by UK adults was accounted for by social networking and forums. Much of this activity involves sharing - and a good brand story is readily sharable. Photos and videos work particularly well.

Say it once, say it twice

Like all the best stories, brand stories benefit from repetition. A research study by Edelman last year found that two-thirds of consumers need to hear information from a company three to five times before they believe the message. You may also need to let your story evolve.

To pick an obvious example, there's only so long that an organisation can present itself as the new kid on the block. Microsoft was once the disruptive company that made computing personal for the first time; now its strategy is to present itself as the market leader and safest option. But think ahead and be careful about what you post online - unlike traditional marketing, it stays there for ever. Your strategy, though, might change - and, if it does, you don't want to have painted yourself into a corner with your brand story.

Consider your tone of voice

The tone of voice you use for marketing communications should align with the brand story - chatty and hip for a tech start-up, say, or measured and authoritative for a financial institution that's building its story on trustworthiness.

But it also needs to be aligned with the channel: tweets, obviously, need to be short and snappy; meanwhile blog posts are a particularly good opportunity to put across a brand story in a friendly, compelling way. Keeping things appropriate but still consistent will mean producing a style guide for writers and other marketing staff.

Include the right keywords

How do your customers find you? Quite likely though a web search, meaning that your brand story needs to align with and include the specific terms they're using. Your customers themselves are likely to be the best source for these keywords, so look carefully at client surveys and customer communications as well as social media. When you've come up with a list, these words can be used to reinforce your brand story across all marketing channels, as well as forming the basis of your SEO strategy.

Get everyone on board

There's no point creating a brand story that then exists in a vacuum. Alongside the marketing department, product managers and executives should be aware of it - as should customer-facing staff such as the sales team and support departments in particular.



It's these staff that are the real face of your organisation, which means that they need to embody the values you aim to promote through your brand story. Think John Lewis and customer service that 'goes the extra mile'. Staff are often, too, a fantastic source of anecdotes that reinforce your brand story; encourage them to share these stories with the marketing department.

Needless to say, staff will only be good ambassadors for your brand story if they can genuinely engage with it: a company that's unpleasant to work for will have a hard time pitching itself as a happy, friendly organisation. And remember: there's little chance of staff engaging with and reinforcing the brand story unless senior management does the same.

Combine content marketing and PR to tell your brand story to increase lead generation.

Increase lead generation with PR and content marketing

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