

The *B2B* Natural Storytelling Cookbook

From forage to feast in just 4 easy steps

Learn how to use the natural story ingredients in your organisation to bring new flavour to your brand

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Welcome to the

Natural Storytelling Cookbook



At the heart of everything you do in marketing - from PR to inbound to events - should be the natural stories that make your organisation what it is.

These stories are your brand's essential ingredients. Yet for many in B2B marketing they can get lost in reams of convenient, mass-produced content that's created for ease and speed, rather than high-quality storytelling aimed at reaching the right target audience at the right time in their buying cycle.

This Natural Storytelling Cookbook gives you easy to follow recipes that will help you rediscover your brand's true flavour and share it with those people you want to influence and ultimately sell to.

Recipe one

Why Natural Storytelling?

Why should you consider baking natural stories into your brand?

Method

1 Swap fake food for free food

It takes time and effort to build compelling natural content from scratch but doing so really pays off once you have baked this content into your various marketing programmes and campaigns. This is where natural storytelling comes in.

2 Forage through the undergrowth

Natural storytelling is at the heart of your brand. It's the stories that exist throughout your organisation, the ones that are told by the water cooler, hidden within company data or as a unique operating process within a business function. But many companies don't even know they exist – and they often underestimate their importance.

3 Why do natural stories taste better?

It's simple: B2B customers are increasingly overwhelmed with content, but genuine and honest stories tell a different tale. They build trust. And by building trust you can move customers from discovery to consideration and through to purchase.

4 Natural stories engage

We're all looking for content to work harder and deliver more return and natural stories foraged from within are a great source of energy for all communications channels. Whether you're raising awareness through earned media, creating advocacy on your own media channels, or need a creative for paid media, natural stories are about your business and the space you occupy in the market.

Essential ingredients

- **Healthier alternatives**
  Keep an open mind, stories can take any form.
- **Keep your eyes peeled**
  A natural story may not be instantly obvious.
- **Dinner guests**
  Remember which audiences you're cooking for.
- **Serving suggestions**
  Think how stories might work with different channels?

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Recipe two

A simple process

What tips and techniques do you need to master to find the best natural stories?

Method

1 Preparation

To get started, you need to do your prep. Identify key personnel within the company that could hold the key to the larder of great natural stories. These individuals are often not the most obvious. While marketing, sales and senior managers will be good sources of stories, cast the net wide and consider front line customer support personnel, office managers, or finance. These colleagues are often party to trends, market observations, even market evolution and the part your company is playing.

Start talking: request interviews, brainstorms and discovery meetings. Probe and ask questions and then keep asking questions. You never know where you'll end up.

2 Lay out your ingredients

Once you've identified a number of stories you need to document it all - whether it's about unexpected market growth, an unusual professional accreditation, a R&D project with a surprising outcome or even an interesting business process that could be a case study. Ensure that you detail who the audience is, which marketing channels it could work for and most importantly which objective it meets. This step is really important to your story turning out just right.

3 Sort the wheat from the chaff

While you initially harvested many story ideas, now you need to narrow those stories down. Each natural story needs to assessed to evaluate its place within and on the content calendar. Your checklist for doing so should place value on what your target audiences consider to be engaging and useful to them. Think about what you want your audience to know but also feel about you as a company. As importantly check the story against marketing goals – while a story might not be a great brand message it could be great for building high domain links to your site if used as PR.

4 Turn up the heat

Once you've identified the natural stories you want to use, it's time to cook them up and see what palate pleasers you can create. To do so determine the most appropriate channels for your story. Don't constrict your ability to create a show stopper. Think about what creativity you can apply: is it visual, working best as an infographic or video, or does it lean towards greater explanation and the written word? Decide which channel will be the most appropriate – can you use it on earned media, or would it better on a paid for or owned channel – or can you maximise its potential across all three channels in a variety of different formats. Use your story index and scorecard to map on to your content calendar.



Essential ingredients

- **Leave no stone unturned**
  Be investigative, story ideas could be hidden anywhere.
- **Write out the recipe**
  Ensure you document your story correctly.
- **Test your palette**
  Make sure that they hit marketing objectives.
- **Get cooking**
  Decide how and where the stories will appear.

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Recipe three

From farm to fork: how to make storytelling even tastier

What are the tips and techniques you need to master to find the best natural stories?

Method

1 Cook up a story telling culture

Your colleagues are the heart of your natural storytelling capability. But how do you keep sowing the seeds to be able to farm more and more stories? Create a company-wide story culture. Communicate internally the importance of natural stories, show the results that it can bring, and reward those at the heart or the source of the story so they are encouraged to keep coming forward with ideas.

2 Experiment with street food

Don't stop at just internally sourced stories though. Cast the net externally as well. Talk to partners, shareholders and most importantly customers. Natural story sources from other 'external' sources often bring a different perspective and insight that can add a new element to your story telling. Why not run a foraging focus group with your top three customers as a 'feedback exercise' for instance?

3 Staple foods

Not all stories have to be highly creative. There's a place for those that give solid 'bread and butter' information and advice to potential customers so that they can see you are a safe and risk free brand to do business with.

4 A balanced diet

While natural stories build trust and credibility, they need to be supported by depth and breadth of additional resources. If a B2B buyer reads an article about how the company has created a product line because one of its engineers has built on an innovation or stumbled across a new product, that customer is still going to need a data sheet on how it works.

Essential ingredients

- **Recipe sharing**
  Create a story sharing (book) club.
- **Extra nourishment**
  Look externally as well as internally.
- **Special diets**
  Niche stories have a place in your content calendar, just remember the channel.

Recipe four

From appetizer to digestif: map your stories across the sales cycle

Once you have your natural stories, how do you ensure that they meet your audiences' needs?

Method

1 Proof of the pudding

Stories can help nurture leads into sales. They can be used to demonstrate alignment of your brand with specific industry sectors, key industry issues as well as product and service expertise. Use these stories to match up content to each stage of the sales funnel.

2 Hundreds and thousands

For customers at the top of the funnel, you'll need stories that grab attention and can build awareness. These stories need to resonate with the masses so shouldn't focus too closely on specific products or services, rather they should position you as a thought leader in your market.

3 Step by step recipes

As customers move through the sales funnel, you'll need your stories to help nurture them. Content that builds your position as a trusted advisor offering practical guidance is imperative. Use stories that highlight your experience, or can detail easy to follow guides.

4 Food critics

Once your stories have created an environment that recognises your brand as a trusted advisor it's time to build advocacy. Which stories, from inside or outside of your organisation, best demonstrate your capabilities? Think about using case studies, success stories or even performance statistics or data.

Essential ingredients

- **Try the taster menu**
  Natural stories can be used to support the full sales cycle.
- **Be the head chef**
  Use stories to create awareness and authority.
- **Cookery club**
  Use your best advocates to create stories that demonstrate your capabilities.

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From the author

Natural stories are all around you - hidden within people, products, processes and much more.

Building natural storytelling foraging processes and developing a framework for distilling and disseminating those stories can help companies to communicate more honestly and genuinely with customers.

For those potential buyers and influencers who don't know you well, natural stories provide an understanding of a topic, whereas for those already considering your products or services, they can help reinforce your credentials as a potential supplier; and for those close to buying who need reassurance of your capabilities natural stories nurture that relationship.

But it doesn't end there. Those customers who have already bought from you and are happy with their purchase can also become another valuable source of natural stories themselves - as they then help to support your content programme.

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About the author

Skout is a specialist B2B PR agency passionate about helping businesses build strong relationships, exceed marketing goals and sell more through the power of natural storytelling.

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