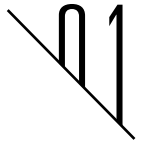


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FROM THE CAMPFIRE

Making Sense of the World through Story

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Humans have an innate ability to take disparate events and connect them together to create meaning. This is how we understand the workings and threads of the world. A quick peek into prehistoric archaeology reveals that this is how we've pretty much always done it. In 2012, a team of archaeologists from the University of Bristol studied 11 subterranean caves located along Spain's Cantabrian Coast. In one of those caves, El Castillo,¹ they discovered the remains of the earliest-known cave paintings.² They are a million years old. An unrelated archaeological discovery, this one in Wonderwerk Cave in South Africa, has recently unearthed findings of the earliest solid evidence that our ancient human forebears were using fire. That's right, the first known campfire, which also dates back to a million years ago. From these discoveries, it is surmised that cavemen and cavewomen gathered together seeking to share experiences and to narrate and record their stories as much as they gathered for the physical warmth of the campfire.

Today, the early origins of those campfire scenes are often used as the obvious illustration of the history and communal value of storytelling. Although that illustration may be helpful, we believe the caveman himself and the origin of language is the more appropriate example to illustrate the value we humans get from stories. Envision a world before structured language, where grunts, frowns,



and actions that included a hell of a lot of pointing and hand gestures did all the communicating. We can make the guess that back then literally showing someone something was the very best way of explaining it. Please park that concept in your head for now, and we will show you how actions and experiences are also important elements of communication. Before structured language, it was very difficult to express complex thoughts. Even today, it is challenging to string together multiple ideas or even simple concepts without a system or pattern. We use stories as a figurative glue that solidifies a pattern and hardwires it into our brain. Stories are our way of making sense of the world. We relate to places, events, people, objects, and ideas through stories. Religions are powered by stories, wars break out because of stories, and your children are shaped through stories. Just try to make sense of a series of events, or describe something monumental that happened in history, or simply tell us about yourself without leveraging a story. It's difficult. Stories help us understand and organize just about everything. Why is your favorite place your favorite place? Chances are because there's a story there. Or what about how your favorite room in an old family house makes you feel transported. Why does that happen? It's probably because of the pictures in your mind, some might say, the storybook memories you created in that space. How do we choose our friends? Who attracts us? What connection do we make when something makes us feel good? The answer is story. Story is how we connect to place, to space, to people—always serving to help us make sense of the world. From million-year-old campfires to cave paintings to epic Greek odes, we've used story for a long time to make sense and sort through this existential miasma of meaning and survival.

The Box with 8 Crayons. Back to the basics to formulate a structured foundation. When creating anything, obviously, step 1 is to start somewhere. If



you're a business owner just starting out and resources are minimal, stick with the basics and start by building a super-strong foundation from which you can grow and embellish. If you're a well-oiled marketing machine, it might still be a fun exercise to revisit the basics—for story, “the basics” = structure. Fortunately, all kinds of information on the structure of story has been researched and shared, and it's just a matter of getting familiar with what already exists and works for plotting a brand's story. We will briefly review some foundational aspects as seed for when you ramp up for Storyscaping. This is where strategy and Systems Thinking first come into play when creating an engaging story. Let's review this valuable groundwork.

We all know stories are structured. Stories have a plot, settings, characters, and narrative point of view. We often see these patterns even when they are not there. Have you ever intuitively predicted what would happen next in a book or a movie? In storytelling, structure is either something you deliberately design or something that unfolds organically, but it's always in there. Think of music with a verse, a chorus, and a bridge. Structure in this context does not mean creativity plays a backseat or that your work is formulaic. Think about these structures as building blocks for creativity. You design a structure to highlight the type of story you're telling. You have choices and creative license with your story and also with the determination of its structure. Structure is where you marry your craft with your art. Think of it as properly laying out the pieces of your model airplane before you glue it, paint it, and send it for flight.

British journalist and author Christopher Booker analyzed myths, folktales, literature, films, and a few soap operas for good measure. Seven hundred pages of his thorough study revealed some repeating patterns, patterns



that distinguished seven basic plots,³ which have been remastered over and over for all of story eternity. Do any of these sound familiar: overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, rebirth, comedy, tragedy? Which plot is structuring your marketing today? Are you selling by way of *Beowulf*, *King Kong*, or *Aliens*, where you have a clearly identifiable evil, or “monster” who poses a threat to a group of people? Is your hero battling the monster, experiencing some losses over the course of action and then ultimately conquering and returning peace to the land? The fact is that some story structures, lend themselves more effectively for connecting brands and consumers and evoking real participation and social currency, similar to some musical structures, which lend themselves more to enticing people to dance. Some stories are more likely to get passed on from person to person and generation to generation. Joseph Campbell, the American mythologist, uncovered that very structure known as the hero’s journey in his work.⁴ Campbell suggests that, in this structure the audience connects to the hero through values such as community, justice, truth, and self-expression. We actually see ourselves as the hero in these stories. This formula is perfect for creating brand-consumer connections. Two contemporary examples of the hero’s journey formula can be observed and explored in *The Wizard of Oz* and *Star Wars*. Both start with an unlikely hero, one who is ordinary and perhaps even helpless. Both Dorothy and Luke want to live out their higher values (they want justice in the world) but feel powerless to do anything about it. Then, through an interesting twist of events, they meet a mentor who gets them to realize that so much more is possible. The mentor gives them a magical gift—a pair of ruby red slippers or a lightsaber—and sends them off on a dangerous quest of self-discovery. During their adventures, which are filled with trials and tribulations, they both meet the



source of brokenness in their world and they both seize a treasure or knowledge that they come back and utilize to heal society. Through this process, they ultimately learn much about themselves and the world in general. Now, imagine Dorothy or Luke as your customer and the mentor is your brand. Can you see how that could create bonds? The biggest mistake brands make in storytelling is to believe they must play the role of hero. This is just plain arrogant. Your product or service should play the role of those magical ruby slippers. TOMS Shoes is a great real-world brand example. TOMS is a company with a higher Purpose of “helping others in need.”⁵ Its business is simple; for every product you purchase, TOMS will help a person in need by donating a pair of shoes—you buy one; TOMS give one. The company started with shoes and quickly used this successful hero model to expand. TOMS is now also helping to restore sight by selling eyeglasses. The customer (the hero) and TOMS (the mentor) share a set of values, and the magic lies in the product (gift), which empowers customers to live their values by participating. Does your brand behave like a mentor? Does your company make or offer to give a gift?

Whether it’s Neanderthal elbow rubbing or social media socializing, story is central to what it means to be human, and the best stories, the stories with mythic potential, all include a hero within their structure. Even the hero herself is structured: She needs to leave her normal life, face insurmountable obstacles, fall into the abyss of despair, receive supernatural intervention, and eventually return with some transformed aspect or trophy as proof of results of her transformative journey. Finding a way to make your customer the hero can be a scary place for many marketing professionals who were taught to make the brand the hero and the customer the target or “audience.” You can empower your customers by



making them the hero of your brand's narrative landscape. This is how you become part of their story—make your customer the hero and frankly, who better to tell your brand story than the hero herself?

Step Up to the Big Box of 24 Crayons. Beyond the basic structures, what's the next evolutionary leap for story? Well, there are certainly some exciting advances we can use to help bring story to the next level! Following the evolution of J. K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series, from storyteller to Storyscaper serves as a supportive illustration. Although Rowling initially imagined the world of Harry Potter through a series of books (words and pictures), she has successfully taken Harry from the imaginary space to the physical and virtual space. In the world's eyes she is a great storyteller—in our eyes, she is also a great Storyscaper. To make the transformation, she didn't have to forget what she knew. Rather J. K. Rowling evolved by partnering with Thierry Coup, Sr. VP of Universal Creative to create the park experience, thereby expanding her palate to include space and environmental design, game design principles, application of sounds, smells, and a ton of creative technology.⁶ She now colors with many more crayons, the way we all need to.

Our desires haven't changed much from universal story themes. But our methods of expressing a story have far advanced handprints, books, and movies for that matter. So why haven't all marketers or agencies kept up? Technology has made it possible for us to stretch the tool of "writing a story" into an ability to create immersive experiences and emotional engagements that are unprecedented. It's not hard. It just takes the right approach, the right model, and the right foundation. Nothing supersedes the human desire for meaningful experience. Our need to express our experience to



others has simply migrated from cave drawings to tweets and posts. And they are still about the same experience of marking an existence, of expressing a human desire to connect with others via the camaraderie of experience. Taking a photo with your favorite pair of kicks is the most modern version of a cave painting from tens of thousands of years ago. It is the modern method of connecting with global citizens who also know what it is to love that same pair of sneakers. Keep in mind; most narrative is now interactive. Your customers have come a long way since scratching charcoal buffalos on cave walls as a way of expressing themselves. Marketers must refresh their approach; it's time to move from just creating universal stories to delivering ever-innovative ways of placing consumers at the center of these stories. The most successful marketing groups are reassigning consumers from the role of audience to the role of protagonist. It's their journey that matters.

Let's face it, everyone connects to story because in essence, we are story—we exist to see and to do and to be known. A story says simply, “I am here. See me.” That's what is depicted and mythologized in the earliest forms of visual expression—campfire stories offered as cave paintings—the caveman's way of begging to not be forgotten.

You could say, when it comes to stories, there's just no telling. Oh, we still stand by the inherent value of a thousand-plus years of storytelling as one of the most important and impressionistic tools that we use as marketers to change perceptions and drive behaviors—that has *not* changed. Take what you've learned about story and move forward with it. Advertising needs to advance from just telling a story to affecting the experience or product. When you merely tell a story, you are not making a full connection. Evolve, engage the power of story, and now



focus it around creating immersive experiences that you share with your consumers and that they'll want to share with their social circles. Enlist story as your currency for connection, and take it to a much more encompassing dimension: Elevate it using the power of experience. Remember, people are much more likely to remember and share their personal stories than they are to remember or spread yours.

Story Is Our Currency. We interviewed some brilliant people for this book to learn how other successful companies use story as currency. Coca-Cola's perspective proved particularly enlightening because of how steeped in story it has been for more than 125 years. Coca-Cola *is* story,⁷ It is a brand more widely recognized and more widely distributed across the globe than any other. And story is as important to its business today as it has ever been.

Some companies have storytelling as a fundamental part of their heritage, and of course, some don't. Brands need a real Purpose and we often find that Purpose is connected to the great stories of the company. But today, the challenge extends through to how you leverage the power of stories and storytelling to propel your company.

At Coca-Cola, you can find one of the world's most valuable and most extensive branded archives. And for a deeper experience, there is the World of Coca-Cola in Atlanta. New employees start their careers at Coca-Cola by spending time immersed in the stories from the archives. Story, after story, after story reveals how the company was founded, how the company was built in America, how the company was built overseas, and how the company then started to build different brands. Storytelling is a genetic part of the company's DNA.



Not all companies stand for a set of “company” stories. Instead, the brands of the parent company have stories. When structured this way, it’s a different challenge because the creative agenda resides in the brands, not the parent.

Understanding the relationship between core company stories and core brand stories has had a really dramatic effect on my belief on the power of storytelling. A powerful metaphor I often use when workshopping new ideas is one of the spider plant. If you can fill the central pot, i.e., the company, with great stories, then that will act as a fantastic fertilizer for all the baby plantlets, i.e., the brand stories that the mother plant will birth.

—Jonathan Mildenhall, Vice President of Global Advertising Strategy and Creative Excellence, The Coca-Cola Company

Within many stories, the Coca-Cola Company has a Purpose or ethos, or a defining story; a powerful platform that translates and filters down into the individual brands.

The company’s overarching story and Purpose are very simple. “Coca-Cola is committed to *refreshing the world through moments of optimism and happiness, while creating value and making a difference wherever it goes.*” Coca-Cola’s is a story of refreshment, happiness, optimism, and value. It’s a strong and focused story, one that then flows into all of the brands. The folks who work with the brands ask questions such as, “Is this brand leaning into happiness? Is this brand leaning into optimism? Is this brand leaning into value? Is this brand leaning into refreshment? Or is this brand leaning into a cultural difference?” Asking these



questions ensures that there isn't anything in the Coca-Cola Company that doesn't start from the company premise. In other words, the company won't do anything that doesn't refresh—no snack foods, no chips. Chips aren't refreshing, but juice and iced tea are. This is how the brand story follows the organizing discipline set by the parent company and then flows across the entire company. If it doesn't refresh by creating value through optimism and happiness, it's not being made by the Coca-Cola Company.

Today's consumer looks at a company's ethos and holds it and its brands to that ethos. This is especially the case now with the expectation and reality of transparency—we have to face facts; people know us beyond what we are saying in our marketing. They know exactly what we're all doing, how we treat employees, where we get our supplies, along with everything else. So it's more important to make sure you're focused not solely on how you communicate the story but also on the way that you behave. Take a moment and assess how well you and your company are addressing the challenge of behaving true to your Purpose.

As an example, look at the now long-standing cultural trend that is leaning toward a theme of environmental care. People want to be greener—or be seen as being greener—and they want to leave the world better than how they found it. Have you noticed the many companies that now position their products or services around that idea? Have you questioned whether or not they're actually behaving that way? Some of them don't align their behavior. And people notice and then vote with their wallets. Your stories and behaviors need to be aligned and aligned not just with each other but with consumer perception and expectations. Don't be like an oil company that talks about



what it's doing to save the rain forest; it's hypocritical. Work toward gaining a common connection in business behavior, consumer expectation, and Brand Purpose.

Double This and Half That. When a big company plans to double the size of production, the shareholders are feeling great and seeing dollar signs while the environmentalists get that sinking feeling in their stomachs. Unilever recognized this imbalance. So when Unilever came out with a stated ambition to double the size of its business over the next 10 years, it coupled that with the ambition to also reduce its carbon footprint by 50 percent. One of the ways it's going to do that is by using biodegradable packaging for all of its products. Consider how much packaging and waste Unilever will eliminate across its entire supply chain—this is a significant effort that will make a positive difference, a real impact. The fact that Unilever immediately put measures in place to ensure a significant reduction of its carbon footprint can be viewed as a system-wide story and system-wide agenda-setting plan that satisfies all of its stakeholders.⁸ And, it all starts with the power of a story on improved business.

We believe that really audacious leaders of companies should tell these bold stories to challenge our way of working, whether every chapter has been written yet or not. Such opportunities present possibility when you partner with the right people to fill in the pages.

We learned from James Cameron that sometimes you have to tell a story from the technology point forward, versus creating the story and waiting for technology to catch up. He thinks in both directions. Google is a bit like that. Google's Purpose is to organize the world's information.⁹ Is



there another company that can have as big of an ambition as what Google expresses? It truly takes a great story and technology. Google aims to achieve this worldwide organization by figuring out new ways to code things—how it works will potentially become a great story. And we say “potentially” because sometimes the technology exists but the wrong story is told about it. Presenting the story in a new way is sometimes how it catches on. Perhaps that was the case with Google+. The technology hasn’t really shifted, but the first time Google told the story, it didn’t catch on. But now, after revising the story, Google+ is enjoying solid growth. What is evident here is that you have to artfully connect both the story and the expedience—that’s key.

We all believe in and live out the power of story each day. That power is turbocharged when infused with the power of experience. And, they go hand in hand—the only way to share a personal experience that you’ve had in your life is to share it through a story. The dictionary definitions of *story* and *storytelling* describe a portrayal of a series of events and include experience as an element. Part of our thesis is that this experience element is incredibly powerful and often underleveraged. People are much more likely to remember stories that happened in their own lives than the ones that happen to others (or to brands). The more compelling a story is, the more likely people will connect with it or remember it. We encourage you to ask yourself some pointed questions: How do I, as a marketer, think about the experience element? Is my brand forming an emotional connection? Does my brand, product, or service become part of my consumer’s story?

Talk About Ripple Effect. Rarely does a marketing effort start with an experience. Most often, the expectation is to communicate a message.



The way most agencies work is from a storytelling perspective versus a story-experiencing perspective. When you aim for experiential storytelling, it's easier to turn that into exponential storytelling. The creation of an experience for 100 people and then the subsequent online viewing of that experience by a million people is a highly assessable possibility to just about anyone. This is an increasing trend known as splashes and ripples, and it should be leveraged more. But when you're looking at your media plan, it's not from this perspective. Today it could be the splash of an event and the ripple of the response, the content, the reviews, and so on. Looking at the metrics of experiential event marketing doesn't give us the return or impact of the ripples. Therefore, when trying to optimize your marketing investments, remember that there's a shifting of value across those things; don't think solely about what it costs to generate that splash without accounting for the value of those ripples.

We challenge you to look to create a splash for great content and then amplify that content around the world. Some splashes live in real-time dialogue for years after the event is over. Nike created a 3-minute production for \$20 million to generate splash on YouTube and its Facebook for two days. By all media measures it was not just a splash; it was an atomic bomb that immediately stirred up world sentiment about the World Cup—and Nike wasn't even an official sponsor. Then there was ongoing dialogue that rippled everywhere because Nike inspired you to be part of it.¹⁰ It extended the conversation and ripples right through the tournament.

There is more power in starting your story from a little concept that we call the Organizing Idea, an idea that is an active expression meant to inspire experiences, not a brand statement.



PART ONE: *Great Storytelling Alone Won't Save Your Business*

A great example is Coca-Cola's "Open Happiness." This is an active expression that can drive participation and experience. It connects with people, and these people become part of the story or contribute to it.

Let's do a simple brand marketing comparison to get you thinking about the point we are making here. Take Pepsi's "Taste of a New Generation" and Coke's "Open Happiness." Think about each expression. Where could you take the marketing for each? Does one seem more actionable than the other? Is one easier to relate to, connect to, and engage with?

Coca-Cola's "Open Happiness" marketing platform is more than storytelling; it is storydoing. This is because if you're going to "open" happiness, you have to actually do something.

"Increasingly, consumers expect brands to do more than what is just suggested by the category they're in. They certainly expect Coca-Cola to do more than just refresh them from an intrinsic point of view. Our commitment to local community programs reflects this. We are champions of female equality and run extensive female entrepreneur initiatives. We proudly distribute HIV and AIDS medicine across Africa. We invest in creating fresh drinking water for kids in the different jungles of Brazil. Teens and mums alike are like, "Yes, we're going to buy your beverages, but you better be doing lots of things in my local community to make my local community better!"



“I think that’s a mandate for a lot of brands to move from storytelling, however rigorous or inspirational that storytelling is, to actual storydoing, as there is a growing need for brands to occupy positive spaces in different communities around the world.”

—Jonathan Mildenhall, Vice President of Global Advertising
Strategy and Creative Excellence, The Coca-Cola Company