

Sustainable development: Innovations in business

Robert Romanowski
Editor



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9.

STORYTELLING IN BUSINESS—HOW TO INCREASE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT?



Iwona Olejnik

Poznań University of Economics and Business

Abstract: Storytelling, as a marketing innovation, is the market communication tool that allows present the facts in a coherent and attractive way so as to stand out from the competition and more effectively influence the consumer's imagination and engagement. It can be concluded that the history of storytelling itself dates back to the beginnings of mankind, when humans started to transfer knowledge from generation to generation. The chapter indicates that storytelling evokes emotions in customers, and these in turn affect commitment and action.

The most important and primary elements of storytelling include superior message, conflict, characters (the archetypes) and plot. Each good story can be based on a few important points, which are well described by the concept proposed by American writer Joseph Campbell. In addition, the chapter also presents examples of sources of inspiration for storytelling. Among them, it is worth mentioning, for example: history of the company's founder or president, the beginnings of the company, employees' stories or milestones (successes or failures).





The last part presents two case studies of the use of storytelling by enterprises. These are examples from the Polish market regarding the use of storytelling in employee recruitment and customer engagement.

Keywords: customer and employee engagement, storytelling, sustainability.

9.1. Introduction

As defined by National Storytelling Network (2020), **storytelling** is “**one of an ancient art form and a valuable form of human expression**”. According to David JP Phillips, the history of storytelling began 100 000 years ago (Table 9.1.).

Table 9.1. History of storytelling

<p>100 000 years ago—people started developing the language; they started using storytelling to transfer knowledge from generation to generation</p>	
<p>27 000 years ago—people started transferring knowledge from generation to generation through cave paintings</p>	
<p>3500 years ago—people started transferring knowledge from generation to generation through text</p>	
<p>31 years ago—PowerPoint was born</p>	

*Pictures from: <https://pixabay.com/>

Source: (Phillips, 2020).

Storytelling is a technique of stimulation of the listeners' imagination with the help of a story (Stączek, 2014). The stories conveyed in them should evoke emotions, i.e., fear, anger, surprise, disgust, pleasure, and sadness (Tkaczyk, 2017),

and create images in the imagination, i.e., activate the right cerebral hemisphere, which affects engagement and better remembering (Table 9.2.). **Emotions motivate to involvement and action;** hence the rules of storytelling (used in show business) are nowadays more and more often adapted in the marketing activities of enterprises. Considering the fact that traditional information transfer mainly affects the left hemisphere, the inclusion of factors influencing the right hemisphere in the message implies tangible benefits, e.g., it allows for remembering or taking actions in the way that is faster, more pleasant, and accessible for the consumer.

Table 9.2. Hemispheres of the brain

Left-brain functions	Right-brain functions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Logic and number skills - Daily activities - Language and grammar - Reasoning - Memory - Analytic and detail - Science and math - Written - Strategy - Facts - Words of songs - Right-hand control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creativity - Feelings - Concentration - Photo memory - Visualization - Imagination - Decision making - Multitasking - Intuition - Arts, music awareness - Active listening skills - Insight - 3-D forms - Left-hand control

Source: Own elaboration based on (*Neuromyth 6, 2021; Left and right hemisphere of the brain, 2021*).

Shaping the brand image is one of the basic tasks of storytelling. It should be added that there is a fundamental difference between simple telling about a product and telling a story about a brand. This is because ordinary facts about the product are difficult to remember (e.g. I was at a market, I bought apples and baked an apple pie from them), but if we add emotions to them, the story becomes much more pleasant; it is easier to assimilate it, and feel what a given character in the story has experienced (e.g. I was at the marketplace early in the morning, I bought delicious apples from an old, grey-haired lady, and then a wonderful apple pie was made from them, ...can you feel the taste of this apple pie now?). Storytelling allows for the synchronization of the brain of the storyteller and the listener, and thanks to this, dopamine, the happiness hormone, is released. Emotions also motivate to change. Thanks to the emotional history, people wonder what they can change in their lives and in their beliefs, the stories create role models to follow. It is also easier to go back to a given story if the story is accompanied by emotions. So instead of selling banking services, free access to money to make your dreams

come true can be offered, instead of selling insurance—it is worth offering family safety in unforeseen situations, and instead of selling coffee—offering relaxation and a sense of pleasure in a leisure moment.

As mentioned above, storytelling influences the emergence of emotions, and emotions, i.e., the consumer's engagement. **Customer engagement (CE)** is a new perspective in managing customer value, and at the same time an element of modern relationship marketing. According to Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2012, pp. 127–145) this concept means the intensity of participation (and connection) of the current or potential customer in the offer and activities of the organization. This participation and relationship can be initiated by both the consumer and the organization, based on customer experiences with products or the activities of these organizations. Engaging the client involves not only their behaviour, but also the psychological (including especially emotional) aspects of those behaviours.

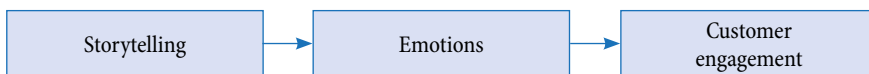


Figure 9.1. The relation between storytelling and customer engagement

Source: Own elaboration.

Consumers' engagement and the use of their experiences is more and more often used not only at the stage of improving existing products, but also in creating new ones, as well as testing and improving them (Baruk, 2020). In generating ideas and concepts of new products, enterprises use various methods of marketing research (qualitative e.g., focused group interviews, and quantitative e.g., surveys). Obviously, using knowledge and experience of consumers, as well as their engagement may concern not only product-related areas, but also other elements of the strategy (Lüttgens, Pollok, Antons, & Piller, 2014). The use of customer experience and engagement in the brand storytelling that has been abovementioned is one of the most important of them. The benefits of this approach include in particular:

- the conviction that the brand promise becomes real;
- building trust in the brand, and the company through consistency in all interactions created with customers;
- creating positive memories related to the brand;
- recognition and increase in brand value.

Skillful use of the **active participation of customers and their engagement in the company's activities**, as well as basing the organization's policy on the **customer's perspective** is an immanent feature of **storytelling as a marketing innovation**.

Customer engagement in creating new products, modifying the existing offer, or even selling products can take various forms. They include for example the following:

- activities enabling the creation of personal relationships with the brand (e.g., asking the customer their name and writing it on the mug by a barista at Starbucks or tattooing the logo of a beloved brand);
- communicating, in the message, the values that build the brand, and not the properties of the product, while focusing on the context of use and importance in the customer's life and experiences (e.g., in one of the campaigns Nike decided that instead of talking about the functional properties of the latest running shoes, it will manifest the values that are close to it);
- inspiring customers to act, by spreading awareness of important problems, helping others, engaging them in the game or entertainment that ends with rewards for selected participants;
- encouraging buyers to present ideas and answer questions, to test products virtually, participate in discussions, competitions, events, etc., as well as to express recognition for support from customer;
- asking the client questions and responding to their needs, listening to them—through qualitative and quantitative research, questions in social media or in the newsletter.

9.2. Storytelling—how to use it?

When starting our considerations regarding the use of storytelling in business, it is worth starting with its basic elements. The most important and **primary elements of storytelling**, include (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010):

- **superior message** is a certain universal truth known to people, which they should be reminded from time to time, in order to maintain certain values; it is also a moral statement that determines the direction of the whole story, e.g., in the Dove message—Real beauty, beauty has many faces;
- **conflict**, which is the driving force behind the story; without conflict there is no story at all. If there was no conflict (there would not be fight between good and evil, no hero versus villain), or it would be too low, the story would be too harmonious, predictable, and therefore boring. In the case of a brand, it helps to understand what ideals or values the brand defends, and who or what it is against, e.g., the Harley Davidson brand shows liberation and life on the road versus mediocrity and imprisonment at home; Dove is true beauty versus stereotypes created by media; creative play with Lego blocks versus passive and limiting entertainment;

- **characters**, they are primarily heroes who want to achieve a specific goal (e.g., company founders, their employees), their opponents who stand in the way of achieving this goal (e.g., market competitors, negative public opinion), beneficiaries (someone, who will benefit from the hero's achievement of the goal, e.g., the clients, their relatives) and other characters supporting the hero or the opponent. In this case, it is worth using the **archetypes** set, i.e., the basic model of a mythological character that connects all the stories of a given brand and that can be transferred from generation to generation. The most important archetypes include the hero, the innocent, the wizard-mage, the jester (the clown or the joker), the rebel (the outlaw), the sage, the lover (the seducer), the everyman, the ruler (the lord), the caregiver, the explorer and the creator;
- **plot**, i.e., description of how the story should develop. In the basic structure, first the background is determined, i.e., the scene in which the story will take place and its protagonist are presented, which attracts the viewer's attention, and a foretaste of what will happen next is shown. Then there is a certain change that results in a conflict, and a goal that the hero faces. The latter is challenged with a choice that will determine the development and outcome of the whole story. As the action develops, the conflict intensifies, and it lasts almost until its resolution, at the end of the story.

An interesting approach to storytelling was presented by American writer Joseph Campbell. He described the points on which each good story is based (Bronzite, 2021). They are presented in Figure 9.2.

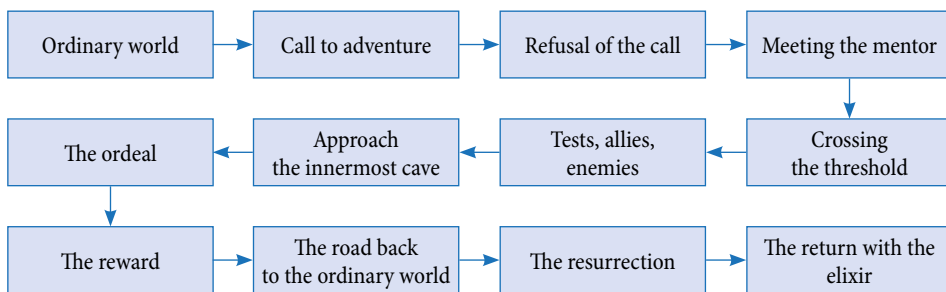


Figure 9.2. Monomyth—the Hero's journey by Joseph Campbell

Source: Own elaboration based on (Bronzite, 2021).

Each story begins in the **ordinary world**. Describing the context of the story, the ordinary world in which the Hero lives is presented. We learn the most important details about our Hero: where he/she exists, everyday life in his safe place, his nature—as a human. The hero's adventure begins with a **call to adventure (call to action)**. This may be related to a direct threat to the peace and safety of himself,

his loved ones, and even the community in which he lives. In the third stage—**refusal of the call**, the Hero will have fears and doubts that need overcoming. The problem that must be solved may seem too difficult to solve. **Meeting the mentor** is an important turning point in the hero's journey. The Hero needs the support and guidance from the mentor. It can be some especially important item (thing), a conversation about the dilemma facing the protagonist, wise advice, practical training (activity), as well as self-confidence. All these things received from the mentor are designed to get rid of the hero's doubts and fears and give him courage to continue the journey.

Crossing the threshold means that the Hero is ready to act in accordance with the call to adventure—physical, spiritual, or emotional. This means that he crosses the line between the world he knows and the world that is new to him.

The Hero needs to show commitment—it could be leaving home, changing jobs, using a product for the first time in his life, doing something he never did and was always afraid of. The next stage **tests, allies, enemies**—these are increasingly difficult challenges for the Hero. These can be not only physical obstacles, but also enemies who want to eliminate his actions on the way to his final goal. The Hero must recognize who his friend is and who he can trust, and who the enemy is. In this phase, his power and skills are checked. Afterwards step—**approach to the inmost cave**. The deepest cave is, for example, an inner conflict or the actual location of the Hero (most often in great danger), just before making the last leap into the unknown. **The ordeal** may be, for example, a dangerous test, encountering a mortal enemy or a serious inner crisis (fear) which the Hero has to face in order to survive. This is the culmination of the Hero's journey—because everything that is most important to him in life is put on the line.

After defeating the enemy and winning, the Hero changes, i.e., becomes a stronger person and receives a **reward**. The reward is usually some important item, solving a mystery, greater knowledge, or reconciliation with someone important to him. **The road back** is the hero's return home with a reward—into the Ordinary World. The penultimate stage in the hero's journey is his **resurrection**. The hero faces the biggest problem, an obstacle, and even death on his journey, and at the same time the most dangerous time. The last and the most difficult battle could have extraordinary consequences for his ordinary world and for those he left behind in it. He bears a heavy burden, but in the end, he succeeds in destroying the enemy completely and becoming reborn himself. The final stage of the hero's journey is **the return with the elixir**. The changed Hero, returning to his ordinary world, will live differently. He knows a lot of new things, is bolder, starts a new life, brings optimism and hope to those he has returned to. So, we can say, the ending of every good story is a punch line. It brings catharsis to the listener, and makes the story remembered and passed on.

An important question and issue in the use of storytelling in business is where to get ideas for it? **The sources of storytelling** can, for example include (Hajdas, 2011):

- history of the company’s founder or president;
- the beginnings of the company;
- employees’ stories;
- milestones (successes or failures);
- stories from opinion leaders, contractors;
- product.

The story of Karol Wedel who gave his son Emil a chocolate factory as a wedding gift is a Polish example of storytelling using the history of the company’s founder or president, and the origins of the company. Other famous world examples are the story of Steve Jobs, who left Apple as a result of a conflict, but returned after several years (almost like a prodigal son in a biblical story), or Richard Branson, who loves extreme sports and adventures, and he used it for a passion for taking risks in business (type: explorer). It is worth adding that in order to be able to base storytelling on the leader’s history, the founder/president should, among others have an unconventional approach to business; an idea that managed to change the way of conducting a business; an interesting personality, charisma, something that attracts other people; or a passion that helps in creating great things (brands like e.g., Rolex, Mercedes).

“The last bottle” is a remarkably interesting Polish example of using storytelling based on the employee’s story. A 94-year-old gives back a bottle of Baczewski vodka stolen during the war. The man “with a sparkle in his eyes and visibly moved by the experience, he spoke of his job as a warehouse worker at the Spirits Plants in Kraków, the destination for entire shipments of Baczewski’s wares pillaged from Lvov by the Germans. In order to provide for a decent living for himself and his family, he would take a bottle of vodka every day from the warehouse (...). He handed the surviving bottle over to Managing Director of J.A. Baczewski in Poland. Ultimately the company decided to entrust the Polish Vodka Museum in Warsaw with this prize. The bottle (...) is seen by many as a symbolic reflection of the fortunes of Poland” (*The last bottle*, 2021).

In turn, the products that have the greatest potential for creating brand storytelling are products with a long and rich tradition, e.g., Patek Philippe watches, which have been cultivating the traditional Geneva watchmaking artistry since 1839 (“Independent, family-owned Genevan manufacture”). It uses multi-generational storytelling and talks about the ambitions of every man to extend the family and have an heir. They can also be products manufactured in a way that is accompanied by specific (somewhat magical) rituals (it is used by brands such as AXE, Walt Disney, FedEx, Harry Potter) or which in some way change people (physically, mentally, or spiritually), e.g., brands like Dove, Nike, Gillette.

Another important **source of storytelling can be customer engagement or customer stories**. A great example of a company that used customer engagement

as a source of storytelling is Heineken. These company uses random customers to convince them to do the impossible—in return they will receive tickets for the championship. For example, in *The negotiations* football fans try to convince their girlfriends in a furniture store to buy stadium seats for their home. If they managed to convince the woman to buy these two seats, they got two tickets for the Champions League final (*The negotiations*, 2021).

Storytelling, like any marketing activity, should be subject to efficiency assessment. In this case, the following can for example be evaluated:

- brand (or advertising) awareness and perception;
- attitudes towards advertising, company's products;
- perception of quality;
- shopping intentions;
- involvement in the content of the ad.

The use of storytelling influences consumers' brand experience. For example, the results of qualitative research conducted by Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, and van Riel (2013) indicate, that “consumers who were exposed to the story described the brand in much more positive terms and were willing to pay more for the product”.

9.3. Case studies

This section presents examples of the use of storytelling in various spheres of business activity.

9.3.1. Join the medical imaging project at Future Processing, and help us create the better future—storytelling in employer branding

Storytelling can be used in building the employer's brand in the eyes of employees, i.e., in employer branding. Especially nowadays, when the labour market is an employee's market, additional activities are undertaken in order to distinguish the company. Core value which is the salary / wage, turns out to be insufficient incentive. Potential employees are looking for additional, extended values (Stefańska & Olejnik, 2021), especially those that may contribute to improving the reality.

Based on the above assumptions, Future Processing company, with its headquarters in Gliwice, Poland, used storytelling in the employees' recruitment process. The company intended to recruit several high-class specialists to work for them. Highly specific competencies were required when competing for potential new employees with companies from the medical industry. The need to hire new

employees was related to the implementation of a specific project on the border of IT and medicine, aimed at increasing the effectiveness of imaging diagnostics in the treatment of cancer. In the recruitment process, the recruiters prepared a short film using the association with Rembrandt's *Anatomy lesson of Professor Nicolaes Tulp*. Future Processing did not apply the classic recruitment notice but showed how technology supports people and how a candidate can contribute to it (Koc, 2017).



Figure 9.3. Print Screen of scenes from Future Processing's recruitment video

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80z3yr7wOBo&feature=emb_logo

Evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling in recruitment, knowing that during the 4 months of the campaign, Future Processing received 75 CVs and hired 13 employees. Can the storytelling used in Future Processing during recruitment be used in the company's further activities and in what way? Suggest possible solutions.

9.3.2. How has Zelmer brand made the dream of a 4-year-old boy and an old lady come true?— storytelling and customer engagement

Thanks to social media monitoring, the manufacturer of the Zelmer brand noticed in 2016 a 4-year-old boy—a fan of household appliances, especially vacuum cleaners (Głowacka, 2016). The boy's mom posted on social media a photo of a birthday cake prepared for him. It was in the shape of a Zelmer vacuum cleaner. This allowed the company to reach the user and to make her child's dream come true. Together with

his older brother and mother, the boy visited the Zelmer factory, saw how vacuum cleaners were made, received small gifts, and the company recorded a short report of this visit. The boy could therefore make his dream come true and see how his favourite devices are made in the company's factory.

The film with the boy had 40 thousand views, over 250 likes and 27 shares, with only positive comments (as of 2016). After finding the boy's mom's entry in social media, brand managers did not limit themselves simply to online congratulations for the cake-vacuum cleaner with the Zelmer logo. By organizing the visit of the child to the factory, they positively and long-lastingly strengthened the image, not only among those directly involved.

The story of an old lady whose granddaughter shared the information on the brand's Facebook that her grandmother could not imagine cleaning without her 46-year-old Zelmer vacuum cleaner is another example of consumer engagement and using it as the basis for storytelling. The producer prepared a surprise and invited both women for a photo session. Details of this event were also presented in a short video.

Both of the stories presented above, telling about people strongly engaged in the relationship with the Zelmer brand who belong to two different generations, inspired the announcement of a contest in which consumers could share their experiences with Zelmer equipment.

Questions / tasks

1. Find examples of organizations that use different sources of storytelling in their business (history of the company's founder or president, employee stories, the beginnings of the company, milestones, stories from opinion leaders, contractors, or product). If and what archetypes do they use in them?
2. Find an example of using storytelling in a company's strategy and discuss it using Joseph Campbell's concept of the Hero's Journey.
3. Discuss the use of the Joseph Campbell's concept in storytelling used in the example of *The last bottle*: <http://baczewski-vodka.pl/en/the-last-bottle/>
4. What conditions must storytelling meet to be an effective tool in employer branding strategy?
5. Evaluate the activities of the manufacturer of the Zelmer brand related to the use of consumer engagement in creating a story about the brand.
6. Watch, discuss and evaluate the use of storytelling by the Domino's Pizza. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AH5R56jILag>
7. Based on the concept of Joseph Campbell, create your own story that you could use to present yourself, or your own (future) company.

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