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Building Your STAND-OUT STORY

What you say – and how you say it – can turn casual shoppers into loyal customers. BY MARK OKUN

Since the dawn of humanity, stories have been an integral part of the way we communicate with each other. While so many sales and marketing professionals – including myself – have been espousing the wonders of today’s digital world, we must remember that every digital platform is only a delivery system. It takes words and images to communicate any message effectively.

When it comes down to the face-to-face influencing of customers, employees, or even industry partners, storytelling is the most impactful tool we have in connected marketing and increasing sales. The reason that stories work so well as part of our sales and marketing strategy is that they always evoke an emotional response way.

STORYTELLING IS STICKY

People remember stories. It could be a lesson learned from an old Saturday morning TV show when you were a child, or the details of a different time told in a story shared by a grandparent. These stories are remembered for decades.

The stories used in our marketing and sales efforts can have the same type of retention, but the best results come from the energy put into creating them, and how they are told. There are mountains

of paper dedicated to the research and discovery of memory retention and storytelling. In short, we retain the information relayed in stories because it lights up parts of our brains.

According to cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner, people are 22 times more likely to recall a fact that has been expressed in story form. The story recall comes from the release of two hormones in the brain: cortisol and oxytocin. Cortisol is the stress hormone, and oxytocin is called the empathy hormone that causes an action as it relates to the story.

STORYTELLING BENEFITS

The hormones cortisol and oxytocin are very

“There’s no business that’s not show business.”

—Barry Tatelman,
Jordan’s Furniture



influential when the goal is to affect a prospect’s or client’s actions as they impact both emotion and logic. This gives the sales and marketing team the opportunity to introduce ideas and outcomes to clients by sharing the success or failure in the story about another. When you have the customers’ attention, you are making both personal and emotional connections with them while increasing rapport.

THAT’S ENTERTAINMENT

The Shakespeare quote, “All the world’s a stage” is very real and proven out daily when you work face-to-face with customers. As an always-connected society, our attachment to our devices has created a population that seeks out entertainment on demand. It also requires that the sales/marketing stories we create are not boring.

Each story developed will have elements of comedy sprinkled in. Many people have time invested in their sales career and have experienced funny situations that can be shared. Humor knocks down barriers and objections the client may have while creating a positive emotion that leads into positive feelings toward you, the showroom, and the products or services presented. Humor will hold customers’ attention even when they may want to focus on something else.

Laughter is not the only goal. When time is invested in building a series of emotionally driven narratives, the result is a collection of stories that will disarm, inform, persuade, and engage your customer. Once you have built just one story, practice it and work on the delivery so the story flows and is adapted for the listener in front of you. A well-told story paints a picture of the future.

IT BEGINS WITH A HOOK

Each story you create needs a hook at the beginning that draws the client in. This is often based on a relatable stressor that clients face or a piece of information about your showroom that solidifies your expert status. The pain points clients experience during their buying journey have the most impact; therefore, emphasize those that will solidly anchor the agony of the “hero” in their minds. One hook that underscores the importance of using a showroom is when the customer is under a deadline.

The scenario may be like this: “Having a delayed business opening/house closing is very costly in both time and money, isn’t it? Our client (state their name) was faced with a very similar issue, and when they came to us, it seemed hopeless. However, (showroom name) has been involved in this industry for XX years and we know how to navigate those choppy waters for you.”

Clients never want a delay in the “owning” or completion process once they have made up their minds. Having a delay that costs both time and money is a stressor that gets the cortisol flowing. Stressors can be derived from any real-life situations that have happened to people you know, possibly a poor or missed design feature, customer service failures, quality of goods shortfalls, and anything that can cause stress to the client.

Next, we need to get the client involved in the story by asking a simple question that will increase their cortisol level, such as “Have you ever had an experience buying something that has let you down?” Most of the time, the answer is “Yes.” Even if you get a “No,” you can keep the story moving forward.

When the answer is “Yes,” you can respond with; “I understand, and this is what happened to (client’s name with a similar issue) and how they were able to overcome their problem.” For a “No,” the response is similar, but with a twist: “You’ve been lucky to have never had a problem like that. Here is what happened to (client’s name) and how they were able to overcome their problem.”



“Select one or two of the characteristics you offer that your competition can’t or doesn’t provide and use props to provide supporting evidence.”

This is the bridge phrase that allows you to introduce the oxytocin and get those feel-good emotions going. As you build your story, your clients will go on an emotional ride that makes them conscious of the pitfalls that could occur. Of course, they are thrilled to be working with a professional like you that can smooth out this bumpy road.

ACT TWO

The next part of a well-planned story is the body. This is where you incorporate the story into your selling conversation with all the logical reasons why your showroom provides the proper solutions; it reinforces to them that this is the correct place to make their purchases.

Pull out all the stops and list every reason you can think of that will anchor those logical statements in the client’s mind. Select one or two of the characteristics you offer that your competition can’t or doesn’t provide and use props to provide supporting evidence. Props can be in the form of a client review or proven technical or educational skill that you, or the showroom, possess relative to solving the client’s problem or shows you’re different from the rest. Your wording should be based on the characteristics you want the client to focus on.

Being proficient with Act Two is about adeptly weaving your story into the sales conversation. When the client expresses pause, objection, or concern, it is time to draw on a story to help them see beyond the roadblock. This part of the story creation process must draw on your experience with the most common objections or concerns. Once identified, take that objection and express it as a story around how another client (hero) felt the same way and benefited from working with your showroom.

THE FINAL ACT

This is when you ask the client to move forward with a buying decision. Begin by summarizing what

has been said. An effective summary includes the important emotional touchpoints that resonated with the client. Because these points have been brought up by the client – or are ones the client acknowledged were vital to them – it is essential that you revisit and re-affirm that the positive result they want is what will occur. Reiterate touchpoints, assure the client wants to benefit the same way.

The final act is not the time to use a hard close. The customer is responding that they want to be like the hero in your story. You will succeed most often when the client is only reminded of the story highlights; do not bore them with details by re-telling the whole story. Once the final act has been played, you must ask for the order.

THE FIRST STORY

In every face-to-face sales interaction, there is time between greeting the customer and presenting products that are perfect for telling a particular story. It is the first story you must create and say to every customer. That story is about the showroom you work for, their history in the industry, their commitment to the community, and their investment in their sales teams to make sure they are the top experts. The outcome of the story is to develop customer confidence in the local showroom above all competition.

We are competing with many points of distribution, and many of these have solidly built their digital reputations as low-price leaders or being very easy to deal with. This is the reason to promote the showroom first – people will buy where they are most comfortable, and the majority still prefers to buy locally. It is a sales team’s job to make the customer comfortable and confident, and stories do that.

The first story begins with a standard question: “Have you been here before?” The response is one of two you would expect (either yes or no). If the client has been in before, the story starts with, “Great, then you must know..” and move forward with your story. If they have not visited before, say “Great, welcome! It is important that you know...” and lead into your story.

While fair price, quick delivery, and easy-to-work-with policies have become the minimum standard for every type of retailer, the showrooms that can emotionally deliver stories that will move the client will be the ones to succeed.

As Always, Happy Selling ❖

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- ➔ Ideas on how to improve one aspect of the lighting industry?
- ➔ A viewpoint on a hot industry topic?
- ➔ Ideas on how technology can improve your lighting sales?

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