

By Mark LeGrand

The Power of Stories in Business

Stories will help you
sell more



LeGrand
Coaching
Consulting



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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Why Stories Captivate Us	6
The Hero's Journey	9
Stories in Your Business	17
Sales and Stories	20
Story Selling	22
What It Looks Like to Do It Right	28
Google	29
Apple	31
Old Spice	34
Pampers	35
Nike	37
Mercedes Benz	39
We Will Always Use Stories	42

Introduction



Throughout all of human history, we have used stories to communicate with one another. Ever since we could paint on the walls of caves, we would tell stories of great hunts and battles.

Stories are the primary way that we teach, inform, and entertain each other.

Just think about it:

- You go to see a movie - it's a story.
- You listen to a motivational speaker talk about his near-death experience - it's a story.
- You hear a chef talk about how he created a new recipe - he's telling a story.

Stories are absolutely everywhere. You can't go a single day, maybe even a single hour, without being exposed to stories.

Stories activate chemicals in our brain called oxytocin, dopamine, and cortisol.

These are the same chemicals that are activated through drug use and intense moments of happiness. **We are literally hard-wired to listen to and love stories.**

Consider all of the major religions in the world: what are they built on? Stories. Whether you consider those stories to be true or not is up to you. But you can't deny the unbelievable power that those stories have been able to generate.

When it comes to business, you would be foolish to ignore the incredible power that stories can have on your target market.

In fact, stories are the best way to connect with your audience and move them from stranger to prospect to customer to a loyal follower.

In this guide:

- We are going to be covering exactly how stories can be used in business and how crucial they are to your brand and your bottom line.
- We're going to dive into why we connect with stories so much and we will take a look at the story structure that is responsible for nearly every big-screen

movie that comes out and how you can harness it to connect to your audience.

- After we have a good grasp of the chief story structure, we will take a look at how we can apply that to different parts of your business.
- Following that we'll take a look at some real-world examples of businesses and business leaders using storytelling to build their companies and connect with their audiences.
 - We'll look at smaller businesses like single-person coaching businesses, and then we'll also take a look at multiple brands that are pulling in multi-million-dollar revenue numbers from their story-centric marketing campaigns.
- Finally, we'll wrap it all up by talking about why storytelling is essential to

business and why it isn't going anywhere. In fact, we're going to become more reliant on storytelling for our businesses in the coming years.

With that, let's go ahead and get started with why we connect to stories so well.

Why Stories Captivate Us



All over the world and for as long as we can remember, humans have told each other stories. Sometimes those stories were drawn on cave walls. Sometimes they were told

during a Fortune 500 sales pitch, while other stories are told around a campfire.

Stories are the most powerful way to inspire, persuade, engage, and connect.

And yet, we don't really stop to appreciate the power that stories have over us or the influence a good storyteller can have.

Consider these reasons of why stories have such a deep impact on us:

- Usually, when we meet a new person, we use stories to connect with each other. We remember people and make connections much easier when information is connected to a story. **People always seem to remember impactful stories more than data or facts.**
- Remember those brain chemicals mentioned earlier? It turns out that the brain interprets imagined scenarios the same exact way it would interpret real

scenarios. When your brain is releasing cortisol during the stressful part of a story, your brain thinks it's real.

- Our brains interpret experiences through the lens of a “story.” It's how our brains recall memories and information.
- Stories provide structure and order our life events in a way that is easy to convey, while at the same time creating a sort of predictability and comfort.
- Stories are the chief way in which humans share truths and connect traditions and ways of life.
- **Our emotions are engaged and stimulated during a story.** Having our emotions involved helps us to display empathy and understanding.
- Stories trigger our imaginations and allow us to access our creativity more easily.

Obviously, stories have incredible power. But not everybody is a born storyteller. Not everyone can tell stories, parables, and tales.

But luckily you don't have to build a new story every time. **In fact, there is a single story structure that is behind almost every movie, TV show, and book you've ever experienced, in one way or another.**

It's called The Hero's Journey. Once you master this storytelling outline you will be able to build out stories for your business on-demand.

The Hero's Journey

Before we dive into how to use the hero's journey, it's important to understand exactly what it is and how it came to be.

The outline of the hero's journey has been around for over a millennium, from the

Odyssey and *Iliad* all the way to the Hebrew Bible.

But it wouldn't be until the Mid 1900's that Joseph Campbell would actually formulate the outline as we know it today.

The traditional model has 17 separate stages. **Most of the time, storytellers do not employ each and every stage of the outline.** Abbreviated versions of the hero's journey usually serve as the basis.

Let's cover the entire journey first, break down each section, and then we'll discuss the abbreviated version and look at some real-world examples that you're definitely familiar with.

Here are the 17 stages of the Hero's Journey:

1. **The Call to Adventure.** The hero begins in a completely normal situation. **Some new revelation or event acts as a call to action for the hero.**

2. **The Refusal of the Call.** When the hero first hears the call, they are reluctant to heed the call until another event happens, forcing them into action.
3. **Supernatural Aid.** The hero will be aided by a wise mentor who gives him items or departs knowledge to the hero that will aid them on their journey.
4. **The Crossing of the First Threshold.** This is where the hero actually ventures out beyond their normal safe limits and enters a new environment full of danger.
5. **The Belly of the Whale.** The belly of the whale represents that final moment before the hero separates themselves from their prior life completely and is willing to undergo a major change in response to their call.
6. **The Road of Trials.** The road of trials represents the different challenges and obstacles that a hero will come face-to-

face with and have to overcome (or survive) before the transformation can occur.

7. **The Meeting with the Goddess.** This is the point in the story where the hero acquires something that will help them in their journey.
8. **Woman as the Temptress.** This is where our hero faces temptations that would have them abandoning their quest if they were to indulge. **It does not necessarily need to be represented by a woman,** but a woman is a strong metaphor for the temptations a hero will encounter.
9. **Atonement with the Father.** The Atonement with the Father represents the stage in the hero's journey where our hero must confront and maybe even be intimidated by whatever force holds the power in their life or their world. **This**

marks the beginning of the hero's metamorphosis.

10. **Apotheosis.** This stage is where the hero has a moment of realization and attains a greater understanding of themselves and of their quest.
11. **The Ultimate Boon.** In this stage, the hero achieves their goal. **All of the earlier steps, obstacles, and challenges have been leading up to this moment and our hero is finally victorious.**
12. **Refusal of the Return.** Having attained their goal in the adventure world, our hero may not want to, or may find it difficult to, return to the world they left behind when they embarked on their journey.
13. **The Magic Flight.** Sometimes the hero must escape the adventure world with their prize in order to give this prize to their fellow citizens in the normal world.

14. **Rescue from Without.** This stage is just like how the wise mentor had to aid the hero before venturing into the adventure world. Sometimes the hero needs help readjusting to the normal world and everyday life. This is especially true if their journey left them weakened in some way.
15. **The Crossing of the Return Threshold.** In order for the hero to complete the journey, they must reintegrate with their normal world and somehow integrate the wisdom and success they found on their journey with their life once and for all.
16. **Master of the Two Worlds.** This is where our hero becomes a master of both the physical as well as the spiritual - even going so far as to take on the mantle of a wise mentor and help another hero on their journey.

17. Freedom to Live. This is where our hero loses the fear of death and is, therefore, free to live fully and untethered.

That's the long and drawn-out version. There are a lot of steps in the fully fleshed-out version of the hero's journey!

Usually, a modern story will follow a much shorter version. Something that looks like this:

1. Ordinary World
2. Call to Adventure
3. Refuse the Calling
4. Meeting the Mentor
5. Crossing the Threshold
6. Tests, Allies, and Enemies
7. Approach to Climax and Confrontation of Self
8. The Ordeal
9. Reward, Seizing the Sword
10. The Road Back
11. Resurrection
12. Return with Elixir

There are countless examples of stories that follow these steps. Stories like:

- Star Wars
- The Lord of the Rings
- Harry Potter
- The Hunger Games
- The Matrix
- Spiderman
- And a whole lot more

You're probably wondering how any of this is applicable to your business though? These are all works of fiction. While that may be true, **the structure and the principles of the hero's journey are still relevant to you.**

In the next section, we will be discussing the different parts of your business and the different stories that can be used.

We will also be looking at the overarching story of your business. This is the story that most closely resembles the hero's journey.

Stories in Your Business



Now that we've covered just how important stories are to humans in general and gone over the hero's journey, it's time to talk about how you can use stories in your business.

Almost every component of your business can be supercharged by using stories.

Let's look at a few simple examples before we get to the marketing and sales side of things.

When it comes to every business, consumers want to know why your business exists and what it stands for. **People love connecting with the companies they buy from.** They want to feel aligned with them.

Sometimes this particular story is referred to as the mission statement or the brand vision.

A great example of this is the Black Rifle Coffee Company. They've nailed their target audience (conservative coffee drinkers) and they don't pull any punches when they state what they're about and what they stand for. Their entire brand and company are based on the story they've been telling for years.

Besides the story of the business, it's just as important for the founder and owner to have their own story.

In fact, sometimes it's a lot more important for the founder to have a moving story than the business itself does. This is especially true for entrepreneurs that are the face of their business.

The founder's story is the origin of the brand. It shows the audience how the founder created the product and why it matters, both to the founder and the consumer.

Think of Colonel Sanders and the story of how he created his 11 herbs and spices recipe. Or the story of Versace and the drama that went down with that family.

Every founder needs to be able to articulate and use their story when promoting their business, giving a speech, hosting an event, or even giving a high-end pitch. **The emotional connection it creates is essential.**

Now we're getting into sales and marketing. This is where storytelling becomes a heavy hitter for revenue numbers.

Let's start with sales since it's the simpler of the two.

Sales and Stories

People buy with their emotions, and they justify their purchases with logic. This is one of the principal tenets of marketing, but it applies to sales as well.

For most low-ticket product companies, you don't have to talk to a salesperson at all. The marketing hooks you and then you buy the product. But for those multi-thousand-dollar purchases, people want to talk to real people about spending those amounts of money. That's where a salesperson steps in.

During the course of a sales call or a sales pitch, there are numerous places where a story

can be used to increase your rapport and build buying intent.

The key moment to share a story during a sales conversation is when the doubt and apprehension first show up.

This is an opportunity to share a story that revolves around social proof. Social proof is the most powerful asset any business has when it's trying to acquire new clients or customers.

Being able to show a prospect that someone just like them, with the same problems, was able to overcome and conquer their obstacles is a powerful persuasive tactic. It's reassuring and re-positions your solution as the cure for this particular prospect's problem.

This means that the salesperson needs to be well-versed in a multitude of different stories that they can pull from when different situations come up.

Now we're going to transition to marketing. Marketing is going to be the biggest arena of storytelling in your business.

There are so many different ways to tell stories with marketing that it's hard to really do it justice in a short venue. So, we'll be focusing on the storytelling surrounding one specific industry: the coaching and consulting industry. And while you might not be in the coaching and consulting space, the information and strategies are transferable.

For this segment, we will be tying in the hero's journey with marketing stories to give a holistic perspective on how you can incorporate storytelling into your marketing plan.

Story Selling

The most important part about telling stories in your marketing is that you are not the hero in this story.

- You're not the hero.
- Your business isn't the hero.
- Your product isn't the hero.

The one and only hero for your story is your customer. They're the ones that are going on the journey. They have to leave their normalcy and go on the journey.

That journey might be as simple as your sales funnel, but it's still a journey.

So that begs the question: where do you fit in?

That's easy enough. **You're the wise mentor.** The Yoda, the Obi-Wan, the Gandalf to your hero, the customer.

That means that the story that you tell throughout your marketing needs to focus on the story that your customer is living through right now.

Let's say that you're a coach that helps new freelancers get their first clients and make their first \$5k online.

This freelancer is in their normal world where they can't seem to find freelance clients. They have the skills. But for one reason or another, they just can't get clients.

All of a sudden, they get fired from their job completely unexpectedly. Nowhere else in town is hiring for that position, so they need to make money online now.

They get frustrated and a little scared. Freelancing can be hard. There are a lot of challenges in the beginning. But then they see an ad from you. Your marketing is so on point that they buy your course/program/coaching. You have now become the mentor to this young hero.

Now with you by their side, they cross that scary threshold and start sending pitches to clients.

- No responses come in.

- Then a punch to the gut when a prospect tells the hero to get lost.
- This freelancer is losing hope and they don't think that this will ever work for them. It's hopeless.
- You dig deeper with them. You discover that they aren't as confident in their skills as they should be. And that's coming across as timidity in their messaging.
- They realign and start again.
- This time they start getting responses. People are excited to talk to this freelancer.
- After stumbling through outreach and fumbling through sales calls, our freelancer lands his first client.

He celebrates. You celebrate. **It's the climax of your hero's journey.**

- He now takes his spoils (the new client) and returns to his normal everyday life.
- He gets accustomed to being a successful freelancer and pulls in win after win.
- He then goes on to help other budding freelancers to achieve their dreams.

That's your hero's journey. That's the story that you tell with your marketing - your ads, emails, sales pages, and more.

You have to be careful and make sure you've nailed your client avatar, or this won't work at all. Everything has to be in alignment, and once it is, the results are overwhelming.

You attract the exact clients you want: the kinds of clients that you can get results for, clients that will take what you teach and apply it. Now, this was only an example of a hero's journey story in the coaching and consulting space.

Every single industry can generate powerful results from creating a story like the one we just made.

In the next section, we're going to be looking at a few different brands and companies that have a fantastic grasp of storytelling and are using it incredibly well.

What It Looks Like to Do It Right



In the last section, we created a scenario. And that was great for illustrating the point. But we need real-world examples. We need to see real companies and real entrepreneurs that are using storytelling to create their brands.

And the brands that we're going to be talking about aren't just internet coaches. This applies to every business. And so, to illustrate that, we're going to be looking at the storytelling prowess of some of the biggest brands on earth - from Apple to Mercedes Benz.

These companies are doing billions of dollars in revenue, and they still rely on the same old storytelling strategies that local mom-and-pop stores and internet businesses are using.

The first company that we're going to be looking at is the search engine that you're probably using right now - Google.

Google

Google is actually a pretty young business. They were founded in 1995 and, believe it or not, they were actually called Backrub when they first started. After changing their name, the search engine dominated all the competition, and they came to be known as the search engine we know today.

Google's success is all due to advertising, and yet, they rarely advertise their capabilities when you're using the search engine.

But even when they do advertise, there is no hard sales pitch. Instead, **they choose to focus on human stories**. Their commercials typically focus on minimal branding and they don't really ever include a CTA.

A fantastic example of Google's advertising was a Super Bowl ad called *Parisian Love*:

- Within the ad we see a three-act story being told about a young man who initially visits Paris to study abroad. He then goes on to fall in love and start a family.
- In the story, we never actually see the young man. All we see is the Google screen, and this young man's search history, while there is gentle piano

music being played in the background.

- **The secret behind this ad was the emotional impact that the story provided.** The short and minimalistic story shows the audience that their product, Google itself, can make a lasting impact on someone's life.

Apple

Most of Apple's most significant product launches were teeming with Steve Jobs' idea that "It's better to be a pirate than to join the navy."

Just like Google, Apple decided to make a big move with their Superbowl ad. They even had the famed director Ridley Scott direct it. This ad, which would later go on to become iconic, was created by the agency TBWA/Chiat/Day.

This one single ad was aired one time on television. It cost Apple \$650k.

**The ad was based on George Orwell's
Dystopian story, 1984:**

- It featured droves of men marching towards a large screen that was displaying the speech of a dictator.
- A single female athlete with a sledgehammer runs to the screen, winds up her throw, and hurls the sledgehammer at the screen, which explodes when the two make contact.
- There is a whirl of wind and energy. The screen fades and a voice reads these words from the screen: "On January 24th Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984."

This ad sought to bring an emotional response from the people that saw it. They wanted people to take a risk.

Likewise, businesses need to be able to adjust their story during different points in the company's lifetime. For example, a business that just got a round of investor A funding is going to be telling a very different story than Amazon.

Apple's ad made powerful statements in a few different ways:

- For starters, it was aired during a very tense political climate.
- It was also aimed at their competitors at the time - IBM.
- The ad didn't want to just say they were different or better. They wanted it to say that Apple was revolutionary.

The ad did not do well with the initial test groups that it was shown to. But both Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak loved 1984 and the ad so much that they decided to air it anyway - to

take the risk they were asking consumers to take.

Today, that ad is remembered as one of the most memorable Super Bowl commercials in history. Even though it would be 1997 before Apple adopted the “Think Different” slogan, the 1984 ad certainly planted that seed.

Old Spice

Old Spice dates all the way back to the 1930s. It was originally created by William Lightfoot Schultz, who founded the Shulton Company.

William wanted to go with a nautical theme for his new product, and so the sailing ships and nautical designs came along. Even though Old Spice is owned by Procter and Gamble now, those sailing ships and nautical themes are still around.

But Old Spice wasn't making connections with newer generations. They had been marketing to the old crowd for decades and they needed to get a foothold with the new generation.

This is when Wieden and Kennedy stepped in. This is where we got the: *The Man your Man Could Smell Like* campaign.

The story and the promise of the ad are that Old Spice couldn't turn your man into the perfect man. But they could make him smell like the perfect man.

The whole goal of this ad was to target a new audience in a fresh way. Old Spice had phenomenal success with this campaign, and it has spawned many offshoots and spin-offs of the original.

Pampers

Victor Mills was a researcher at Procter & Gamble, and in 1956 he set out to create the first disposable diaper. He was completely unsatisfied with having to change his grandson's cloth diapers over and over again and wash them. This is the origin story of pampers.

Nowadays pampers is a brand that has a ton of loyal followers and is trusted amongst parents everywhere. **The core story of Pampers now is the healthy and happy development of babies.**

The story in this idea permeates absolutely all of their ads, their branding, and their marketing.

Even now, Pampers is developing new stories for their marketing.

In a recent ad, they had John Legend changing his baby's diaper. This was done with Pampers diapers all over the place with a group of singing dads supporting them in the background.

This new story by Pampers is seeking to change the status quo. They are wanting to dismantle the social stereotypes that say that men can't change diapers.

They've even used celebrities like John Legend, Chrissy Teigen, and Adam Levine.

Nike

For over 30 years, Nike has had an instantly recognizable brand story. "Just do it" is a powerful and direct call to action that Nike has used to build its followers and customer base for decades.

But in 2002 they had a new product to launch: the Presto shoe.

And the brand story they had been using for all of these years just didn't quite match what they were going for with the Presto shoe.

This is where Wieden and Kennedy show up (you're seeing this name a lot in this section of the guide because Wieden and Kennedy is a globally recognized advertising agency. You should look up some of their work).

They introduced a weird ad that doesn't make sense on the surface:

- The ad is narrated by a Frenchman, which was later translated into English, and it follows a simple narrative.
- A man has somehow crossed a chicken and made the chicken extraordinarily angry with him.
- The chicken begins to follow the man. We're not quite sure what will happen to the man if the chicken catches up to him. But it's probably safe to say that it wouldn't be anything good.
- He can't seem to outwit the chicken, but eventually, he's able to escape.

So why did this convert so well?

Because it was still sporty. The man was jumping around and doing parkour to try and get away from the chicken. It's very clear in the ad that the Presto shoes help him do this.

They even show the man scaling a wall with the help of the shoes.

But what really sets this ad apart is that it's completely different from anything else being shown by a sporting company, and that makes it memorable in the eyes of their customers.

The funny story of an angry chicken chasing a man is just a bonus.

Mercedes Benz

Mercedes Benz is synonymous with elite and expensive. The company has been around for well over a century, and it advertises itself as the standard for high-end luxury vehicles. Even the name “Mercedes Benz” means “the best or nothing.” For years people have associated the brand with exclusivity and status.

But In 2016, Mercedes Benz, with the help of Merkley and Partners, set the bar with an emotional story called *Snow Date*:

- The commercial begins with a young boy anxious to go on his movie date. His father is standing by the window and tells the boy that it's snowing too much to be able to get there. The mom looks up from the couch and tells the dad to take him in an empathetic tone.
- The garage door lifts, and the Mercedes headlights and logo are illuminated.
- The father and son are driving in the snowstorm, and the father comments that it's really coming down, but the boy assures him that she'll be there.
- They pull into a desolate parking lot at the movie theater, and the boy runs in excitedly. The lobby and concession area are barren except for a single worker. He runs into the auditorium and finds it completely empty as well.
- He walks out visibly upset and approaches the car with his dad

following behind him.

- When he's almost at the car, he sees the illuminated headlights and logo of another Mercedes Benz. His date steps out of the car, and the boy smiles a huge grin.

This story works so well because it hits us with an emotional roller coaster. And it demonstrates to us that Mercedes Benz will get you there when no other car can - that they're more reliable and dependable than anything else. This is the kind of emotional story that gets people to act almost irrationally in favor of the brand.

And all of the great stories being told by these businesses have one thing in common: the company isn't the hero of the story. **They have a hero that relates to their target audience and they demonstrate that their product changes people's lives for the better.**

That's the power of storytelling in business.

We Will Always Use Stories



Storytelling in business isn't a fad. It's not a hot new strategy that will be outdated in a few years' time.

Storytelling is intrinsic to who we are as human beings. **It is by far the most powerful way in which we communicate, teach, and inform one another.** Our brains are literally hardwired to be receptive to storytelling and to elicit strong emotional responses to good stories.

Businesses have been using storytelling to grow ever since there were companies that needed to grow.

In this guide:

- We covered why storytelling is such a powerful asset to businesses and why it's so effective.
- We learned the basic outline for effective storytelling, as well as how storytelling can be adapted for different parts of your business.
- We talked about the hero's journey and how you need to make your customer

the hero in your story.

- And finally, we gave some great examples of businesses that are using storytelling in a fantastic way to build their brands - from small business owners to multi-billion-dollar corporations.

People will always love stories and they will always be mesmerized by them. They will always be persuaded and impacted by them.

This includes your stories. **What stories will you tell your future customers?**

You have the knowledge. You have the framework. All that's left for you to do is figure out your own story and how you're going to tell it.