

May 2011

Dear Friend,

Everyone likes a good story. Whether it's a joke someone's sharing in front of the water cooler in your office or a book your 2nd grade teacher read to you many years ago, it's easy to remember stories.

That's because they stir our emotions. They create pictures in our minds and draw us inward, upward, downward - any direction the writer (or storyteller) wants to take us!

But what does storytelling have to do with messages about your business? Quite a lot, actually - especially if you're serious about using content marketing to help your business grow.

A good story can help your customer see your company as authentic, creative, and unique. It will also stir their emotions in such a way that they're far more likely to *WANT* to take action (i.e., buy your products and/or services).

This month's issue will show you how stories can take your marketing to a whole new level - and make it a lot more fun!

## Tell a Story ... and Watch Your Business Grow

*by Chris Wilson*

Like many of you, I've always loved stories. Because of that, I learned to read at a very young age. And as I grew, I discovered that I also enjoyed reading to others. (My husband sometimes complains about this, when I'm reading something to him: "You know, I *DO* have a library card.")

But stories come in many forms, not just books. Live plays and puppet shows (two art forms I enjoy) are also storytelling. So are movies, TV, videos, and photos put together artistically in a scrapbook.

Think back to your earliest memories of preschool or elementary school. Or your favorite books. What made those stand out? The story line, right? Interesting vs. boring.

Positive emotions like excitement, sympathy, and laughter help you appreciate more than books in a classroom. They can also put a spark into the materials you write for your business. Which, in turn, helps others remember you and the message you're trying to convey.

### **Other Reasons to Use Stories**

- A story illustrates the value of your product, and is often the way your prospects and customers explain to others what you do.
- You can make your company's message more exciting.

- You also won't overwhelm your audience with a bunch of "dry data."
- Readers are prompted to take action by being led down a path (not forced) toward the desired goal.

## Two Examples of Stories that Work

**CASE STUDIES** - These are basically feature stories about people who have had a positive experience with your business.

When potential customers can identify themselves with someone who has actually used your services, they're much more open to taking that step themselves. It also helps them see how others used your product or service to solve a problem similar to one they may have.

(For more information on writing case studies, see the September 2009 issue of [The Write Stuff](#).)

**REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES** - These are what you see at the beginning of *Reader's Digest* articles - brief glimpses into someone's life, usually in just one or two paragraphs. The examples are then followed with the "meat" of the article (your content marketing message).

At the end of these articles, the problems mentioned at the beginning are typically shown as having been resolved - thanks to your company's expertise!

## How to Create a Good Story

So what's the secret to creating a story that will not only grab and hold people's attention, but also keep customers coming back again and again?

According to Dan and Chip Heath, authors of the best-selling book, [Made to Stick](#), there are six principles to keep in mind. (By the way, these principles were the common factors among hundreds of "sticky" ideas they studied.)

1. **Simplicity.** Be a master of exclusion. Relentlessly prioritize.
2. **Unexpectedness.** Violate people's expectations. Be counter-intuitive.
3. **Concreteness.** Use sensory images so people will remember. And so your ideas will mean the same thing to everyone in your audience.
4. **Credibility.** Help people judge your credibility for themselves. Don't merely give them a list of statistics; ask them to think back on their own experiences to validate what you're saying.
5. **Emotions.** Make people feel something. We're wired to care about people, not abstractions.
6. **Stories.** This might seem redundant, but according to Dan and Chip, when people hear a story, they're more likely to respond quickly (as when experienced firefighters talk about an experience, helping newer firefighters know what to do when they're in the same situation themselves).

Prompting your target audience to take action, however, does not mean forcing them to do so. Instead, you lead them to the destination where you want them to arrive. Through stories that stick.

## RESOURCES

[\*\*Writing Copy for Dummies\*\*](#) (pages 221-223), by [Jonathan Kranz](#). These three pages do a good job of breaking down the different parts of human interest stories and case studies.

[\*\*Made to Stick\*\*](#), by [Dan and Chip Heath](#). To give you an idea of how popular this book is, it has 291 5-star ratings on Amazon! The authors have even created a [website](#) devoted entirely to the subject of "stickiness."

"[\*\*The Importance of Storytelling in Marketing\*\*](#)" by [April Dunford](#). Although this online article was published over two years ago, it's still very relevant. Dunford provides a lot more resources than I've included in this issue. She also gives tips on how to create a good story about your product.

[\*\*Storytelling is Not Just for Campfires\*\*](#). This infographic does a great job of illustrating the different things a good story can do for your company's brand.

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Need help creating stories that get people excited about your company and what it has to offer? I'll be glad to help with that! Just give me a call at **916/801-0480**, or e-mail me at [cwilson@worddesign.biz](mailto:cwilson@worddesign.biz).

To your success,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris".

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