

eTips #171 contents:

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Hello elizabeth,

1. Let Your Stories Do Your Marketing!

Four years ago, Sharon Livingston asked for my help telling stories.

Although Sharon now focuses much of her attention on training professional coaches, for decades her main work was in market research: helping companies learn how their customers feel about products, on a subconscious level.

Sharon had used stories and archetypes as tools for learning about customer attitudes. But she wanted to be better able to write and tell stories herself.

In one of our first sessions, I asked Sharon how she goes about learning customers' deep associations with products. I heard fascinating stories about sunglasses, prescription drugs, bandages, and much more.

A STORY DESERT

One day, between our sessions, I went to Sharon's website (which she has since replaced). There I found this description of her market research work:

Hearts & Minds

Qualitative and Quantitative Research are like the Yin and Yang of Discovery - We do both.

Market Research is the foundation upon which all of our brand development efforts are built. We do it better than anyone else in the business.

The key to the Livingston Group's success is providing clients with meaningful, actionable market research. We ask the right question and read the right data to address your specific needs.

Dr. Livingston carefully designs research to provide the flexibility, insight and accurate information you need for strategic planning and development of your product, service and advertising campaigns.

I was stunned by the difference between the fascinating stories she had been telling me about her work, on the one hand, and this bland, conventional description, on the other. So I asked Sharon whether she had considered using some of her wonderful market research stories in her publicity.

"I can't," she said. "All this work is done under strict confidentiality agreements. Many of my clients are household names—as are some ad campaigns that grew out of my work—but I can't mention them!"

HOW ABOUT THIS STORY?

In spite of Sharon's concerns about sharing any of her market research stories, I knew from working with other clients that it's usually possible to tell the core of a story without breaking confidentiality. After several tries to help her tell a story powerfully without revealing the product or the manufacturer, I asked her permission to write one up for her.

Here's what I wrote:

Dr. Sharon Livingston knows how to dig deep into the psyches of customers. Consider the pharmaceutical company that was prepared to launch ads highlighting the safety of their new drug, which had fewer side effects than the market leader but was equally effective.

In a focus group, Sharon asked physicians to imagine Planet Safety, where everything was set up to prevent mishaps. Doctors described soft roads and pillows everywhere. Next, she took them in their imaginations to Planet Effectiveness. They described hard roads with great traction—and no stop lights.

Finally, Sharon asked the doctors, “Which planet would you rather live on?” Overwhelmingly, they chose Planet Effectiveness. Interviewing them further, Sharon discovered that these doctors viewed safety primarily as an impediment. Sure, they wanted safe drugs, but their loyalty was to medicines that effectively cured diseases and reduced symptoms.

The company took Dr. Sharon’s recommendations. They ditched the “safe” campaign and promoted their drug as fully equal in effectiveness, but with fewer unwanted symptoms that would disturb patients. The ad campaign was an unequivocal success. Sharon’s cleverness, skill, and empathy with the doctors made the difference between profit and loss.

Once Sharon had an example of how to convey the essence of a story without using revealing detail, she was off and running. She had learned a key skill of marketing: to let your stories do the marketing for you.

HELP YOUR CUSTOMERS IMAGINE

The “customer success story,” like Sharon’s about the doctors who chose the Planet Effectiveness, is a workhorse for convincing marketing.

Why? Because it helps your potential customers imagine you helping them.

As a customer, I’m not likely to spend money on a goal I can’t quite imagine. (What, specifically, is “flexibility, insight and accurate information”?) But if I can experience in my mind how you have helped someone else—and believe that the “someone else’s” needs are similar enough to mine—then the story enables me to see, feel, and hear my goal being achieved in my mind.

In other words, I imagine (consciously or not) you helping me in the same way. I think, “That’s the kind of help that I want.”

BEYOND THE SUCCESS STORY

Customer success stories are so powerful that it behooves each of us to develop several of them, each highlighting a different kind of customer, a different kind of problem, or a different form of help we know how to give.

Other kinds of stories are vital to our marketing, too, such as “origin stories” (how I came to do this work and why it’s important to me).

Equally importantly, each kind of story can helpfully be created in several versions of different lengths. Like Sharon’s story above, they can focus on a single episode. Or they can include several episodes, building up the customer’s problem, the difficulties of solving it, and the long-term effects of solving it.

So a powerful story like Sharon’s “Planet Effectiveness” story can become longer and more detailed by adding optional scenes to it.

LET YOUR STORIES DO THE TALKING

The next time you need to write a product or service description, scan your memory for a customer whose important problem was solved by that product or service.

If you think, “I don’t solve problems; I just tell stories,” then ask yourself, “How do my stories change my customers?” From there, ask further, “Why are my customers hungry to be changed?” If you are still struggling, check with yourself who your “customers” are: Are they the people who listen, the people who hire you to tell to others, or those who provide the funding? One or all have problems that your stories help solve.

Don't worry if your product is new and hasn't been used yet in its present form; you probably based your new product on experiences you had with customers in the past; tell the story of one of those customers.

Finally, don't dismiss stories out of hand simply because they may raise confidentiality issues. Sharon's final version of the "Planet Effectiveness" story, above, omits identifying details such as the company's name and location, when the story happened, and the type of condition that the drug helped. Yet the details about the "two planets" give readers a vivid image of Sharon's creative methods - and their powerful results.

Want to share this article? Or add comments? I've put it here:

<http://www.store.storydynamics.com/articles/let-yo...>

2. Free Workshops Near Springfield MA!

Pam and I now live in Longmeadow, MA, just below Springfield, MA and only 25 minutes from Hartford, CT! (We're also within striking distance of Albany, NY, Brattleboro, VT, Boston, and even New York City.) In two weeks, I'll be presenting a workshop, "How to Write the Story That Brings You Audiences and Jobs" at the Power of Words conference (in Saco, ME, Aug 18-20; <https://www.tlanetwork.org/conference>) In preparation, I'm offering a **free "shakedown" workshop** on your choice of four dates:

- Option 1: Thursday eve, August 10, 7-9pm
- Option 2: Saturday morning, August 12, 10am-noon
- Option 3: Sunday afternoon, August 13, 2-4pm
- Option 4: Tuesday eve, August 15, 6-8pm.

Each group will be limited to 6 people. If you can stay a few minutes after the free workshop, I'll appreciate your feedback on how it went.

You can reserve a place by registering (free) here:

<http://www.StoryDynamics.com/free>

It would be great to see you here!

Yours in Storytelling,

Doug Lipman

P.S., If you are close enough, sign up for one of the free workshops:

<http://www.StoryDynamics.com/free>

Your marketing will never be the same!

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