KLAUS FOG
CHRISTIAN BUDTZ
BARIS YAKABOYLU

Storytelling

Branding in Practice

Springer

Storytelling
Branding in Practice

Klaus Fog · Christian Budtz
Baris Yakaboylu

Storytelling

Branding in Practice

Springer

Klaus Fog
Christian Budtz
Baris Yakaboylu

SIGMA
Wilders Plads 13A
1403 Copenhagen
Denmark

Klaus Fog
kf@sigma.dk

Christian Budtz
cb@sigma.dk

Baris Yakaboylu
by@sigma.dk

Original Danish edition published by Samfundslitteratur 2003 with the title Storytelling-branding i praksis (Klaus Fog, Christian Budtz, Baris Yakaboylu), 1. udgave 2002, 2. oplag 2003. Translation by Tara Stevens.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for

Library of Congress Control Number: 2004114981

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Bibliothek
Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available in the internet at *http://dnb.ddb.de*

ISBN 3-540-23501-9 Springer Berlin Heidelberg New York

Cover design: Erich Kirchner, Heidelberg
Production: Helmut Petri
Printing: Narayana Press

SPIN 11334644 Printed on acid-free paper – 42/3130 – 5 4 3 2 1 0

Contents

PART TWO: STORYTELLING APPLIED

Foreword

Today's world is overflowing with fancy buzzwords. The vast majority of them however, refer to short-lived phenomena that have been invented for the sole purpose of selling hot air. They are gone as quickly as they arrived. Others, are a product of the times, but have deeper roots. They touch upon something familiar, but contribute to a new consciousness, and take a firm hold in our future vocabulary. "Storytelling" is one of them.

At the European based communication unit SIGMA, we have been helping companies to build their brands by finding their unique story since 1996. At that time, it was called PR, communication, advertising or marketing. Today the lines dividing those categories have blurred. But at the very core of all that we do, is our deep belief in the inherent power of telling a company's unique story. Along the way, we have found that companies are increasingly interested in this subject, but, that there is also confusion as to what the term actually means when it comes to its practical application. For this reason, we have written a book, which shares our experiences of branding through storytelling, offering practical tools that provide a good starting point for companies to tell stories of their own.

The book came to life in a bustling loft in Copenhagen, Denmark, during the heat wave of the summer of 2002. It is the result of years of experience, new ideas, ups and downs, late nights and early mornings, praise and criticism. Many people have been involved in its conception. First and foremost our thanks to Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, CEO, the LEGO Company, Lars Kolind, former CEO of Oticon, and Torben Ballegaard Sørensen, CEO of Bang and Olufsen for their courage in taking our advice to heart; that a good story is the key to global success.

Their faith, meant that we at SIGMA received confirmation of the powerful effect a story has when told in the right way, to the right people at the right time.

We must also thank Morten Jonas, Hanne Andersen, Klavs Hjort and Claus Moseholm, who during their time with SIGMA, contributed thoughts and ideas that form the basis of this book. Also a heartfelt thank you to Tara Stevens and Kurt Pitzer who on many occasions have travelled to Denmark from London, L.A., Bosnia and Barcelona to help us in our search for the good story. Thank you to all the people at SIGMA who have contributed with input and support. A special thank you to Tue Paarup for his keen model development and his critical and clarifying feedback. To Trine Mollgaard for constructive criticism, Peter Thielst Jessen for inspired graphic design, Thomas Thorhauge for his amazing illustrations, to Julie Thygesen for research, and to Tara Stevens and Niels Blom for translating the book into English.

For comments and feedback we must also thank Eva Lykkegaard, Christian Schou, Glen Jacobsen and Christine Antorini. Thanks to Ken Harper for inspirational dialogue on digital storytelling and Henrik Schjerning from Samfunds-litteratur. And to futurologist Rolf Jensen for his pioneering work in bringing storytelling to the attention of the business community, while we were busy implementing it in practice.

Finally we owe a debt of heartfelt gratitude to Julie, Lykke, Iluuna, Markus, Anna, David, Sarah and Tine for their patience, love and support.

This is our contribution to everybody who makes it his or her daily task to chase the good story.

Happy hunting!

September 2004 – SIGMA, Copenhagen, Denmark

1 Branding Through Storytelling

"It was an unusually busy afternoon at the local Domino's Pizza in small town America. Orders were coming in at a blistering pace, the kitchen was at maximum capacity and the blue-uniformed delivery boys and girls were working overtime to get pizzas out to hungry customers. It was just then that the unthinkable happened: they were nearly out of pizza dough. Stocks were so low in fact, that if orders kept coming in at the frenzied pace they had been doing so, the kitchen would simply run out. Action was needed, and fast.

The manager grabbed the phone and called the national Vice President of Distribution for the US, explaining the situation. A chill ran down the spine of the Vice President as he thought of the public embarrassment if one of Domino's outlets could not deliver as promised. Springing into action, he did everything in his power to solve the problem: A private jet was dispatched at once, laden with Domino's special deep pan dough, and all the while local employees battled against the clock, as their inventory of dough dwindled.

Unfortunately, all their efforts were in vain. Even a private jet couldn't get the dough there on time, and that night Domino's Pizza was forced to disappoint many hungry customers. For an entire month afterwards, employees went to work wearing black mourning bands."

It is not a particularly happy ending, but we are left in no doubt as to the importance Domino's Pizza place on their ability to

deliver. After all, it is their commitment to this promise that the brand is built on. And the message within this particular story resonates strongly throughout the organisation giving employees a very clear idea of what their brand values are, while showing consumers exactly what promise lies at the heart of the Domino's brand.

Herein, lays the true power of a good story. Even this relatively small anecdote has depth, credibility and a punchy message applicable to both internal and external listeners. It makes it easier for us to believe in Domino's vision: to be "the best pizza delivery company in the world". By telling a story like this, both employees and consumers understand what it really means to be the best.

As a concept, storytelling has won a decisive foothold in the debate on how brands of the future will be shaped. Yet, there is still a conspicuous lack of critical insight as to how and why storytelling can make a difference. For most companies, storytelling remains an abstract concept, at best reserved for PR and advertising executives, at worst, wishy-washy claptrap with no real value: What's the point of telling stories anyway? What makes a good story? And how do you go about telling it so that it supports the company brand?

As a concept, storytelling has won a decisive foothold in the debate on how brands of the future will be shaped.

Concrete answers are few and far between, and the debate for now is largely academic. The aim of this book is to make storytelling tangible. In the following chapters, we hope to turn abstract notions of storytelling into practical tools by giving real-life examples of how storytelling can be used as an effective branding tool.

This book is written for those of you who are fed up with lofty talk, and for those of you who are interested in using storytelling as a branding tool within your company.

Once Upon a Time...

In days of old when we were still hunters and gatherers, and our social lives took place around the glow of a campfire, women prepared the evening meal while their men folk swapped stories of the day's hunt. It was here too, that the tribe's elders handed down the myths and legends surrounding their gods and ancestors and where knowledge and experience was exchanged and passed along the generations. These stories helped shape the identity of the tribe, gave it values and boundaries and helped establish its reputation among rivalling tribes. It was storytelling in its purest form.

In many ways the modern company resembles these tribes of old: the stories that circulate in and around the organisation paint a picture of the company's culture and values, heroes and enemies, good points and bad, both towards employees and customers. By sharing our stories, we define "who we are" and "what we stand for". And just like the elders of the tribes of old, the strong leaders of today's companies distinguish themselves by being good storytellers; voices that employees listen to, are inspired by and respect.

Indeed, storytelling is an integral part of what distinguishes us as human beings. The esteemed writer and movie director, Paul Auster, once said that telling stories is the only way we can create meaning in our lives and make sense of the world. We need them in order to understand ourselves and communicate who we are. And by sharing stories of our experiences, we can better understand the conflicts of our daily lives and find explanations for how we fit into this world.

Since time began, religious stories have provided people with deeper meaning in life.

Since time began, religious stories have provided people with deeper meaning in life, offering insight into why we are here and how we should live, and providing comfort in our darker times. The Bible is perhaps the most obvious example of this.

For over 2000 years, through parables and teachings it has given us a set of guidelines and moral laws to uphold which remain deeply entrenched in the act of being human. Karl Marx once said of religion; "It is the opium of the people". What he meant was that religion was the propaganda used by those in power to seduce the working classes and keep them from staging a revolution. He juxtaposed this by telling a story about the uprising and victory of the working classes, counterbalanced by the downfall of capitalism. In religion, as well as in politics, stories have often represented a turning point in changing the way we think. From Gandhi to Martin Luther King to Nelson Mandela, many political and spiritual personalities have had one thing in common: they could tell a spellbinding story that made a difference and gave meaning to people's lives.

Throughout time stories have brought together and inspired tribes, cultures and nations. The "American Dream" is a classic example of a man, who, by working hard goes from rags to riches and fulfils his dream. It continues to seduce people from all over the world who continue to head for America in search of happiness. Today, the USA is a melting pot of different religions, races and ethnic groups. Yet, as American citizens they come together as one when they place their hands over their hearts and sing the same national anthem about "the land of the free and the home of the brave." The song tells the story of freedom, hope and the courage to fight for what you believe in. The message is so powerful and universally appealing that people from all over the world can come together under its theme.

When Emotions Take Hold

As human beings stories have always formed a crucial part of our ongoing evolution. And in a Western market economy that is increasingly driven by our emotions and our pursuit of the "the good life", our need for them seems to get stronger and stronger. It is no coincidence therefore, that an ancient tradition

like storytelling should appear in a new form - as a tool for brand building.

Sociologists and social scientists say that we are experiencing increased levels of fragmentation in today's society. That the value systems that have traditionally served as guides for us are coming undone; in part caused by the lack of a dominating authority such as science or religion, to dictate what values we should adhere to. We are no longer subjected to a fixed set of traditions, but can pick and chose as we see fit. There is no final truth for us to turn to in structuring our lives. With so many choices, no one telling us what to do or think, and so much freedom of choice, the world is quite literally, our oyster.

Each one of us has to figure out for ourselves what to believe in. One of the ways we go about this is by surrounding ourselves with symbols that signal our values and lifestyle, including products and brands, the way we live, spend our spare time or travel. It is not random that we prefer the bohemian apartment in a trendy city neighbourhood say, to a house in the suburbs. Or, that we prefer a bucket and spade package holiday to trekking in the Himalayas. It's a choice that makes a statement about who we are.

We navigate our world using symbols and visual expressions that signal our personality and our values. And strong brands are one of the means by which we do this.

We navigate our world using symbols and visual expressions that signal our personality and our values. And strong brands are one of the means by which we do this. A pair of hiking boots from Timberland and a Kevlar jacket from the North Face for example, signal an outdoorsy, active type. But this also works the other way around, such as when we boycott companies that fail to live up to our moral expectations. Increasingly we are using the shopping-cart to "vote", expressing ourselves through our purchases. And strong brands are becoming an important tool for communicating these beliefs.

What we wear, eat and surround ourselves with increasingly signals how we see ourselves. And it is also a way in which we seek social acceptance. Lifestyle experts have turned these apparently "superficial" choices into a science that determines who we really are. Futurologists likewise, are also spotting trends in our purchasing patterns, which point to a different outlook: we are becoming increasingly immaterial and are more strongly influenced by our emotions. This tendency is illustrated by turning Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs upside down: In the Western World all our basic physical needs have been met. A high standard of living is taken for granted and focus has shifted to realising our own potential.

What a Difference a Story Makes

The West is a world of material excess. We are swamped with choices, yet, companies continue to manufacture products and provide services that are basically the same. They have failed to understand that we do not want more products and that demand is shifting toward products that provide us with unique experiences: products that appeal to our dreams and emotions, and add meaning to our pursuit of "the good life".

It is time for companies to stop their habitual thinking and business-as-usual approach. This is especially true for companies that have been entirely product driven, desperately seeking rational arguments as to why we should buy their products over someone else's. In the long run this is naive. A quality product at an affordable price is no longer a decisive factor or advantage, merely a basic qualifier for success. Products' features like design or technical finesse are becoming easier to imitate as still more competitors have access to the same production technology at the same costs. Competition is ferocious, not only from the local rival, but from international giants with bottomless financial resources. Tough times lay ahead for

Tough times lay ahead for companies that shut their eyes and continue to compete only on product and price.

companies that shut their eyes and continue to compete only on product and price.

The brand story gradually becomes synonymous with how we define ourselves as individuals, and products become the symbols that we use to tell the story of ourselves.

The challenge facing companies today is to build solid values into their brand. This is where storytelling fits in. When companies and brands communicate through stories they help us to find our way in today's world. They address our emotions and give us the means to express our values. In other words the brand story gradually becomes synonymous with how we define ourselves as individuals, and products become the symbols that we use to tell the story of ourselves. They help us communicate who we are. And this is where branding and storytelling form a perfect partnership.

Ask yourself honestly: can you tell a captivating story about how your company makes a difference?

Values and Emotions

A brand is the perceived added value that a company or product represents, making us loyal in our preferences both to the company and to its products. A strong brand is a combination of facts and emotions. We rationalise and legitimise with our brains, but we buy with our hearts, be it shampoo or insurance. The product has to be up to scratch in order for us to rationalise our choice, but it is the heart and not the head doing the persuading when we buy expensive Maldon rock salt instead of ordinary table salt. The taste is pretty much the same, but the experienced value is different.

The story is what drives the bond between the company and the consumer.

In order to retain the loyalty of your customers in today's competitive environment, you have to create an experience that is relevant and differentiates your brand from others. The physical product no longer makes the difference. The difference lies in the story, because the story is what drives the bond between the company and the consumer. As human beings we actively seek

stories and experiences in our quest for a meaningful life. Likewise, companies need to communicate based on values, and clearly illustrate how they make a difference. It is these fundamental aspects of our modern society and marketplace that have created the natural link between branding and storytelling.

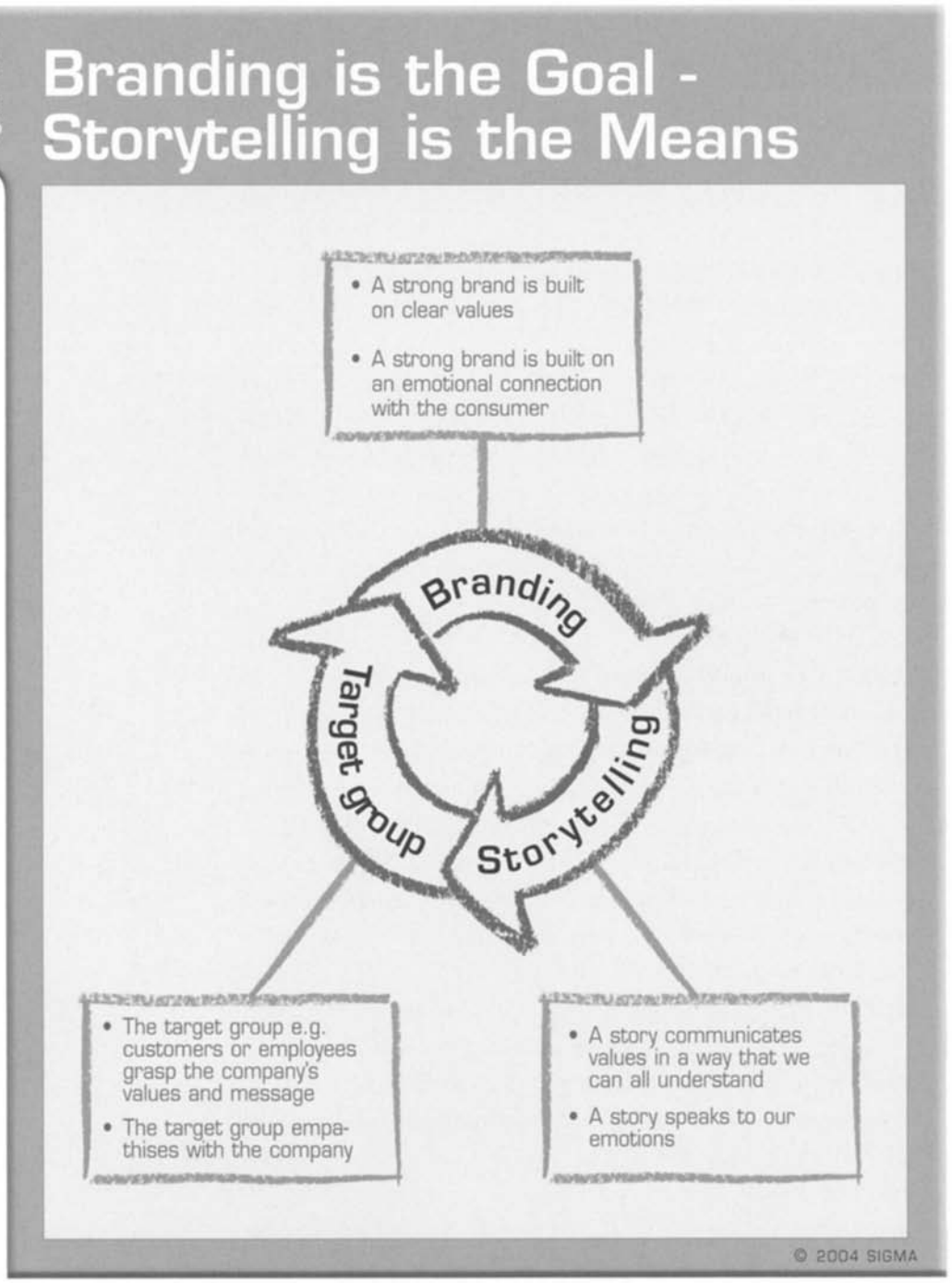
Companies need to rethink. They need to understand the logic of storytelling in order to build an emotional bond with the people they communicate with: their consumers and their employees. Employees increasingly demand that their employer has values that they themselves can identify and feel comfortable with. We would rather earn slightly less and feel good about what we do for a living. It needs to make sense as part of the bigger picture. As such storytelling is as relevant for internal branding and towards other stakeholders, as it is towards the end consumer.

At their most simple, storytelling and branding come out of the same starting point: emotions and values. A strong brand builds on clearly defined values, while a good story communicates those values in a language easily understood by all of us. A strong brand exists based on its emotional ties to the consumer or employee, while a good story speaks to our emotions and bonds people together. Ultimately, storytelling has the power to strengthen a brand both internally and externally.

Storytelling has the power to strengthen a brand both internally and externally.

With luck, this chapter will have made you think: How can I work storytelling into the infrastructure of my company? And, how can my company tell a story that will make a difference to our employees and customers? This is the theme for the rest of this book.

Figure 1.1


Branding is the Goal - Storytelling is the Means
• A strong brand is built on clear values
• A strong brand is built on an emotional connection with the consumer
Branding
Target group
Storytelling
• The target group e.g. customers or employees grasp the company's values and message
• The target group empathises with the company
• A story communicates values in a way that we can all understand
• A story speaks to our emotions
© 2004 SIGMA

How the Book is Structured

PART ONE: THE TOOLBOX

The aim of the first part of the book is to clarify the concept of storytelling. What does storytelling actually entail, and why is it relevant in relation to branding? In the course of the first five chapters you will receive concrete tools and guidelines as to how you can start using storytelling in your company.

Chapter 2: The Four Elements of Storytelling
Over centuries, storytellers have used the same basic structure and tools for creating captivating stories. Chapter 2 defines the four elements for creating a good story and with those in the bag, we are ready to begin targeted work with storytelling.

Chapter 3: Storytelling in Business
In order to counter any possible confusion as to how storytelling can be applied as a tool for companies to build their brand, chapter 3 shows how storytelling works on two levels: Storytelling as a strategic branding concept and storytelling as a communication tool.

Chapter 4: The Company Core Story
In order to create a strong and consistent brand your company needs to formulate one core story that forms the basis for all communication. Chapter 4 details the process of how you find and develop your company's core story.

Chapter 5: Authentic Raw Material For Storytelling
Once your company has developed its core story the foundation for your brand is in place. Now the core story has to be "translated" into concrete stories to make the brand relevant for the company's stakeholders. Chapter 5 provides guidelines as to where and how you can find the genuinely good stories about your company.

PART TWO: STORYTELLING APPLIED

The second part of the book is structured around a number of actual cases that illustrate how storytelling can be used as a tool to strengthen the company brand: both internally and externally, and towards employees, clients and media channels.

Chapter 6: Storytelling as a Management Tool

First and foremost, a strong brand is created from within. The second part of the book details how storytelling can be used as a management tool, while chapter 6 focussing specifically on how storytelling can be used to communicate values and strengthen the company culture.

Chapter 7: Storytelling in Advertising

Chapter 7 takes us outside company boundaries and shows how storytelling has been used in traditional advertising and mass communication. Here stories are used to create an emotional bond with the customer, at the same time building a long-term platform for communicating the company brand externally.

Chapter 8: When Storytelling Becomes Dialogue

With the widespread penetration of digital media, companies have lost their monopoly on getting stories across to customers. Instead, customers have easy access to other opinions and can easily tap into a worldwide audience. Chapter 8 outlines how digital media provides new possibilities for exchanging stories and opinions with your customers, and shows how you can strengthen the company brand through dialogue.

Chapter 9: The Media as a Storytelling Partner

Independent sources add credibility to your company story. Through understanding what makes the media tick, companies can gain a powerful co-storyteller in its communication with

the public. Chapter 9 provides guidelines on how you can work with storytelling based on the premise of the media.

Chapter 10: Tearing Down the Walls

In order for storytelling to achieve the largest possible effect as a branding tool, companies need to think holistically and bring all the different communication disciplines together under one roof. All too often these separate disciplines fail to co-ordinate their messages, so you end up with a host of different messages coming out of the same company. By tearing down the walls that conventionally separate these disciplines, companies open the doors to fully integrated communication, paving the way for a more powerful story. Your company's core story must stem from top management and be integrated across all those departments, which typically see themselves as isolated areas of the company's communication strategy i.e. marketing, sales, PR and human resources.

PART ONE:

THE TOOLBOX

The Four Elements of Storytelling 2

Like the four elements of nature - earth, wind, fire and water - there are four elements that make up the core basis of storytelling. The following chapter outlines the underlying mechanisms of a good story.

Ever since we were children we have been told stories. Now, even as adults, we continue to hear a multitude of stories every day; over the breakfast table with our families, from our colleagues at lunch, from friends over a cup of coffee, or through the media and the many commercial messages that deluge us on the TV, radio and Internet at any given time. So it is easy to spot a good story when we hear one. But it is this same instinctive understanding of storytelling that causes confusion when we speak of storytelling and branding. Because it is often assumed that we have a shared understanding of what makes a good story, the fundamental premises for storytelling are often left unexplained, and this can cause confusion as to what the concept of storytelling actually entails. What constitutes a story in the first place? And what is it that makes a story good?

Unfortunately, there is no fixed formula. And it would be naive to assume that a narrow interpretation of what makes a story good will help us to become better storytellers. Storytelling encompasses so many different factors that need to be fine-tuned to a specific audience and a given situation, that it is virtually impossible to lay down a hard set of rules. However, there are some basic guidelines that can be used. A peak in the annals of literary history shows that most stories - from Aristotle to Hans Christian Andersen - entail at least some fixed basic elements. These elements can be mixed, matched and

applied in a variety of ways depending on the context in which the story is told, and its purpose.

In turn, these four elements can be used as checkpoints when you develop stories about your own company, helping to ensure

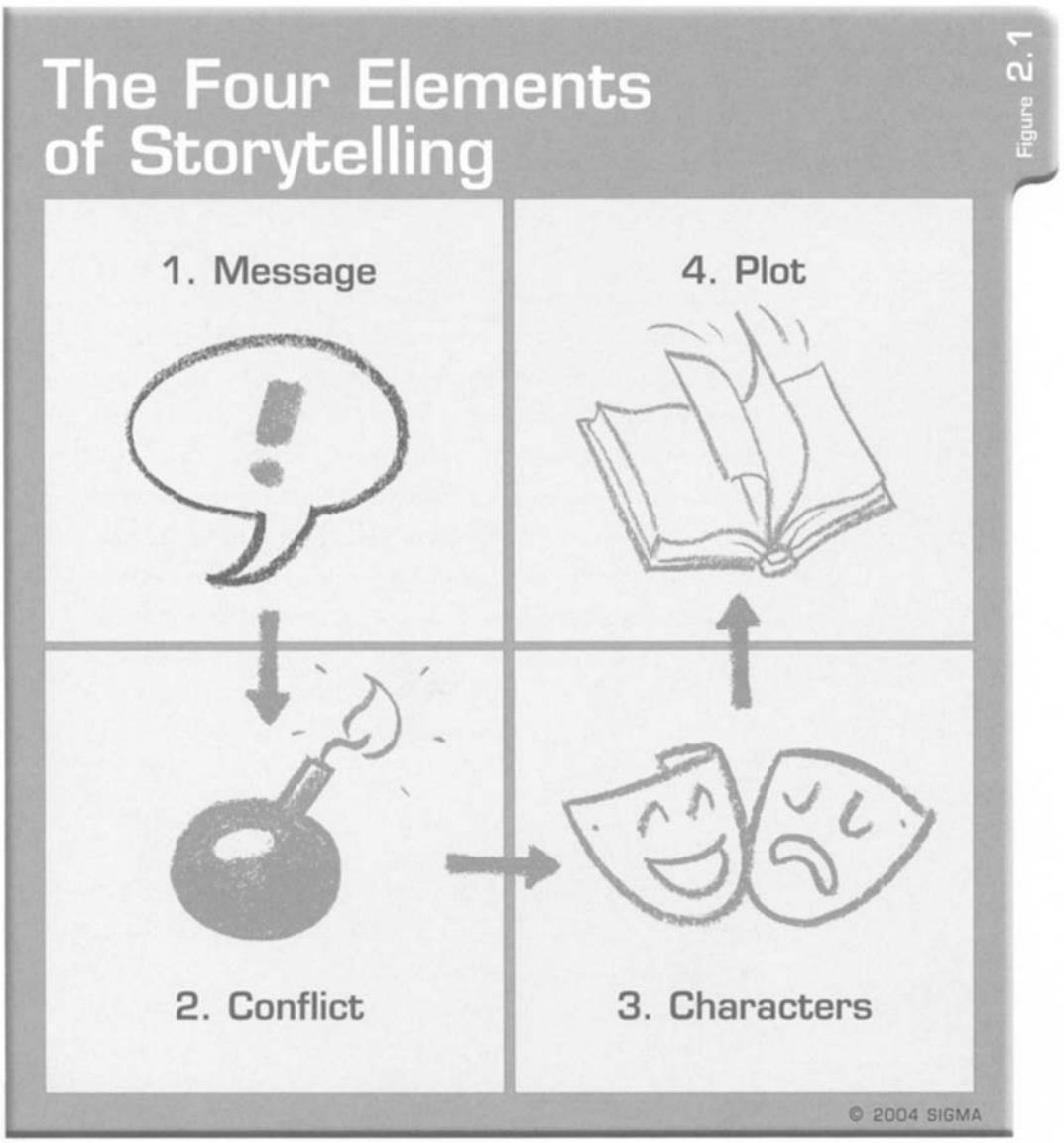


Figure 2.1

that the story has what it takes to be a good one. Figure 2.1 shows the four elements that we are going to discuss in detail on the following pages.

The Message

Without a clearly defined message there is no reason to tell stories – at least not with a strategic purpose.

Storytelling as a branding tool is not about telling stories just for the sake of it. Rather, for most companies storytelling is about using stories to communicate messages that reflect positively on the company brand. But first you must develop a clearly defined message. Without it, there is no reason to tell stories – at least not with a strategic purpose.

Among storytellers – screenwriters as well as authors – the central message, or *premise* of the story, is an ideological or moral statement that works as a central theme throughout the story. In the tale of the hare and the tortoise for example, the tortoise wins the race because he is slow and steady, rather than speedy but careless: The moral of the story being that "arrogance backfires". The story itself becomes proof of the premise – the central message – and through it, the audience can better understand and internalise the message.

Try to stick to one message per story. If you want to communicate more than that, you need to prioritise. A story with more than one central message runs the risk of becoming messy and unclear.

The Conflict

Imagine *Jaws* without a hungry white shark, *Superman* without kryptonite, or the tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* without a ferocious wolf: the teenagers would have had a great summer at the beach, Superman would not have a worry in the world, and Little Red Riding Hood would visit her grandmother and then go home. Boring and predictable springs to mind! Movie director Nils Malmros once said, "Paradise on a Sunday

afternoon...sounds great, but it sure is boring on film." In other words, too much harmony and not enough conflict makes for a story that is about as exciting as watching paint dry.

Conflict is the driving force of a good story. No conflict, no story.

Conflict is the driving force of a good story. No conflict, no story. But why is this the case? The answer lies in human nature. As humans we instinctively look for balance and harmony in our lives. We simply don't like being out of tune with our surroundings and ourselves. So, as soon as harmony is disrupted we do whatever we can to restore it. We avoid unpleasant situations, feelings of stress or anxiety. If we have an unresolved problem with our loved ones, or our colleagues it bothers us until we clear the air and return to a state of harmony. When faced with a problem – a conflict – we instinctively seek to find a solution. Conflict forces us to act.

Thus, a story is set in motion by a change that disturbs this sense of harmony. In the story about Domino's Pizza in chapter 1, this change occurs when they discover that pizza dough is running low. Fear of disappointing customers and failing the company's exacting standards and basic promise to those customers lurks in the background. Harmony is in danger! These factors – change and fear – form the basis of the conflict and challenge in the story: How can the people at Domino's get hold of more dough before it is too late? The conflict forces action to be taken in order to restore harmony. This is why good stories captivate us. They address our emotional need to bring order to chaos.

The story comes to life during the transition that takes place from the onset of change until the conflict has been resolved. Without this transition the story would grind to a halt. If Domino's had had plenty of dough they would have been baking and delivering pizzas as usual. No story! As a rule of thumb, a good story always centres on the struggle to attain, defend or regain harmony. The very lifeblood of a story lies in

the field of tension between the two outer poles: unpredictable chaos and predictable harmony. Like the hero who ventures out in search of adventure and returns home safe and sound in the end.

As storytellers, we get our message across through conflict and its resolution.

As storytellers, we get our message across through conflict and its resolution. When the Ugly Duckling becomes a beautiful swan and is finally accepted into the flock of swans, the conflict is resolved, and Hans Christian Andersen succeeds in showing that heritage is more important than environment in shaping our personalities. In the classical fairy-tale, conflict often manifests itself as a battle between good and evil: the hero versus the villain. Through the struggle between good and evil the story communicates the narrators point of view, communicating its values and message to the audience. In storytelling, conflict is not negative. It is a fundamental premise on which the narrator can communicate his perception of right and wrong.

In storytelling, conflict is not negative.

In the classical fairy-tale the conflict is often permanently resolved. Invariably the hero and heroine live happily ever after. By contrast, many present day stories have a less definitive ending. Often the conflict is only partly resolved, or a new conflict appears prompting further reflection by the audience. This is particularly true of thriller and horror genres, where audiences are kept on the edge of their seats throughout. Consider Henrik Ibsen's classic, *A Doll's House* where, in the end, Nora leaves her family and marriage. Nora disappears out of the front door and we are left with numerous unanswered questions. Where did Nora go? What will happen to her? An open ending is a powerful and provocative tool, providing food for thought that forces the audience to think about what might happen next.

The greater the conflict the more dramatic the story will be.

However, the conflict should not get so over-the-top that it becomes confusing. When a story becomes chaotic, it is difficult to keep an audience captivated. Complete chaos is as dull as total harmony. There is no set recipe for the right balance. But in order to judge if a conflict will work or not, you can try "measuring" your story on the Conflict Barometer.

TEST

The Conflict Barometer

The aim of this test is to scale the conflict of your story to the right level. Remember, when working with conflict you are dealing with the central turning point of the entire story. The following are a set of guidelines for creating a good conflict.

1) Try formulating the conflict explicitly and to the point. Is it a conflict at all?

2) Consider how the conflict can be resolved. Good conflict is created through a problem or challenge where there is no immediate solution. If the conflict has only one obvious solution, the audience will quickly figure it out. If the story is predictable it becomes boring.

3) Are there many smaller conflicts besides the central conflict? Too many sub-conflicts can easily focus attention away from the main conflict making the story less clear.

4) Can you identify the hero and his/her opposing forces with in the story? How are their relative strengths matched? Too unevenly matched e.g. when the hero is too strong, or opposing forces too powerful, the story quickly becomes tedious or confusing.

5) Are you having problems identifying the conflict in the story? If so, take another look at the basic message: Is it clearly defined? If the basic message is weak, e.g. "it is nice to be at the beach" or "nature is delightful", so too is the foundation for a good conflict.

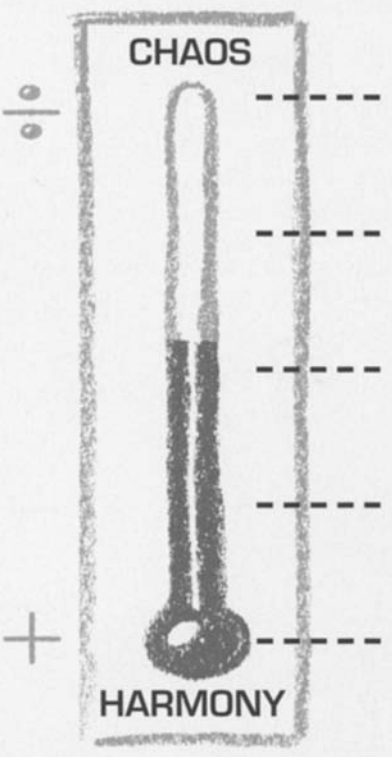
Based on the scenarios laid out in the Conflict Barometer in figure 2.2, the conflict in your story should be in the top half to ensure a good story.

The Characters

Another basic element in storytelling are your characters. We have seen how conflict marks the turning point in the story,

Figure 2.2

The Conflict Barometer



5. The end of the world is nigh. Evil has the upper hand. The Heavens are colliding. The sea is bubbling furiously. And our hero cannot swim.

4. A mountain of challenges tower in front of our hero. It will take a superhuman effort to make it through. The odds do not look good.

3. Our hero is faced with a dilemma. There is no apparent solution.

2. A small challenge stands in our hero's way, but with his superior strength he can no doubt solve it blindfolded.

1. Everything is going as planned. The birds are singing and our hero has his feet up taking a nap.

but in order for this conflict to play out, you need a cast of interacting and compelling characters.

The classical fairy-tale is built on a fixed structure where each character has a specific role to play in the story, and each person supplements each other and forms an active part of the story. This classical structure can be found in storytelling traditions throughout the Western world - from old-fashioned folk tales to Hollywood's action packed blockbusters. The structure of the classical fairy-tale (figure 2.3) highlights each individual character, and their functions and roles in relation to each other.

A classical structure can be found in storytelling traditions throughout the Western world – from old-fashioned folk tales to Hollywood's action packed blockbusters.

A story typically starts out with your main character or *hero* pursuing a *goal.* Let us say, the hero is Robin Hood fighting for justice and freedom in England. The hero has one or more arms of *support*, in this case, Little John and his merry men. But he also has certain special skills; an acute sense of cunning, and a bow and arrow, which also support his quest.

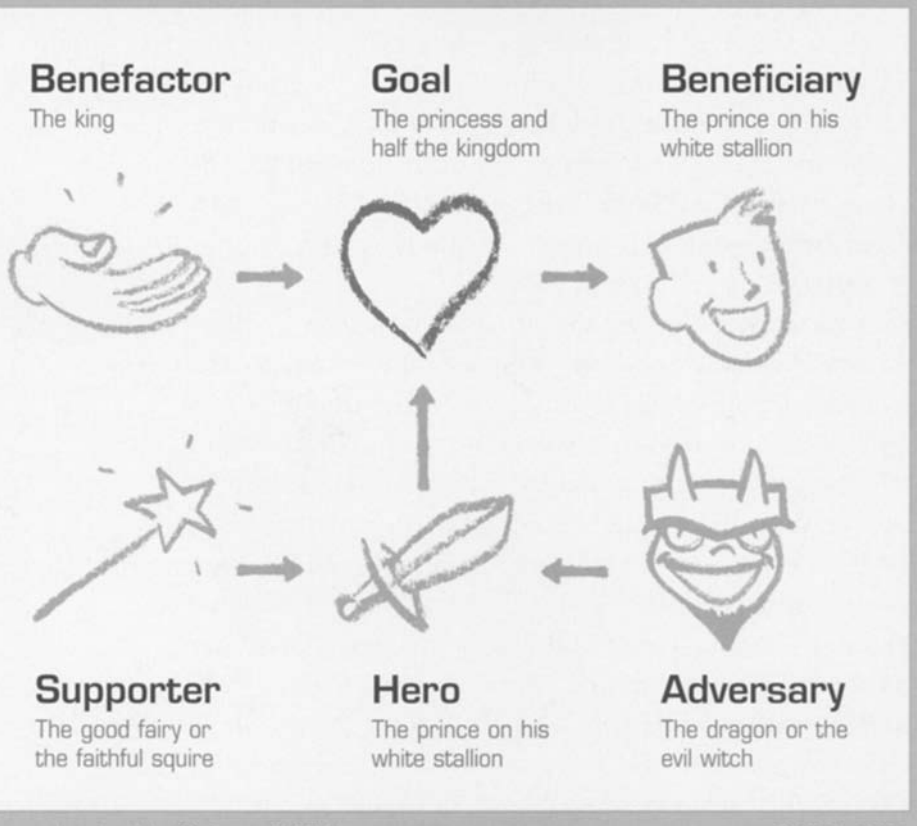
The hero's path to achieving his goal, however is not problem-free. There is always an *adversary* who tries to work against the hero, thereby establishing the conflict. In the case of Robin Hood, his adversaries are Prince John and the Sheriff of Nottingham who must be defeated in order for justice to prevail. A deeper interpretation is that Prince John is a personification of cruelty and the abuse of power in England. *The benefactor* is King Richard, who, in the end returns from the crusades establishing peace and justice in England. And *the beneficiary* in this story is England, in particular the poor and oppressed who have suffered under the yoke of Prince John's rule. In short: A classic cast of characters that give the story its structure. When developing your own corporate stories, you can benefit from using the Fairy-tale Model to check if your story has the necessary characters to pull the story together.

When developing your own corporate stories, you can benefit from using the Fairy-tale Model to check if your story has the necessary characters to pull the story together.

Generally speaking a successful conflict needs a hero and a villain with opposing agendas. The adversary can take on many guises, both physical and psychological. It could for example be a static obstacle such as a mountain that must be scaled, but on a deeper level shows the real adversary to be the fear of climbing that mountain.

Figure 2.3

The Fairy-tale Model



Source: Inspired by Greimas (1974)

In the case of a company, the adversary could be customers who lack confidence in the company's product, or the employees' lack of faith in their abilities.

The adversary might also appear in the shape of a villain: the selfish boss for example, who is afraid of losing his job and because of it attempts to hide or trample on his employees' criticism. As a driving character, the adversary stands in opposition to the hero's quest. By battling against the adversary, the hero is able to struggle toward his own personal development and resolve the story's conflict. The resolution of the central conflict is proof of the story's message, as the hero attains, or fails to attain his goal.

In order to get personally involved with a story, we, as readers or listeners must be able to identify with the characters. This happens especially when we recognise a little bit of ourselves in the characters in the story. Here, it is important to keep your target audience in mind. The audience must be able to identify with both the hero and the problem. Based on our need to have balance in our lives we will usually empathise with a person faced with a conflict. We recognise feelings like sorrow, despair, joy, fear or hope. But we also have to understand the motivation behind the person's actions. Why do they do what they do? Why do they fight for what they fight for? Ultimately, a story's progress must seem likely and credible.

Applying the Fairy-tale Model to Business

Once your story has been identified, the Fairy-tale Model can help to determine whether the story has the basic structure needed to give it action and conflict. It does not have to be an epic; the Fairy-tale Model can also be applied to small, everyday stories. Let us take an example from the real world. Here is a story from a large US company:

"It was an ordinary morning and people were gradually starting to show up for work at one of Americas leading IT-companies. A big black limousine silently crawled up the drive and parked in front of the impressive entrance. The CEO stepped out. He was actually one of the founders of the company, and as usual he walked up the stairs to the main entrance. He was just about to step through the large glass doors when he heard a voice say, "I'm very sorry sir, but I cannot let you in without ID". The security guard, who had worked for the company for many years looked his boss straight in the eyes showing no sign of emotion on his face. The CEO was speechless. He felt his pockets to no avail. He had probably left his ID at home. He took another look at the motionless security guard, and scratched his chin thinking. Then he turned on his heels and went back to his limousine. The security guard was left standing, not knowing that by this time tomorrow he was going to be promoted to Head of Security."

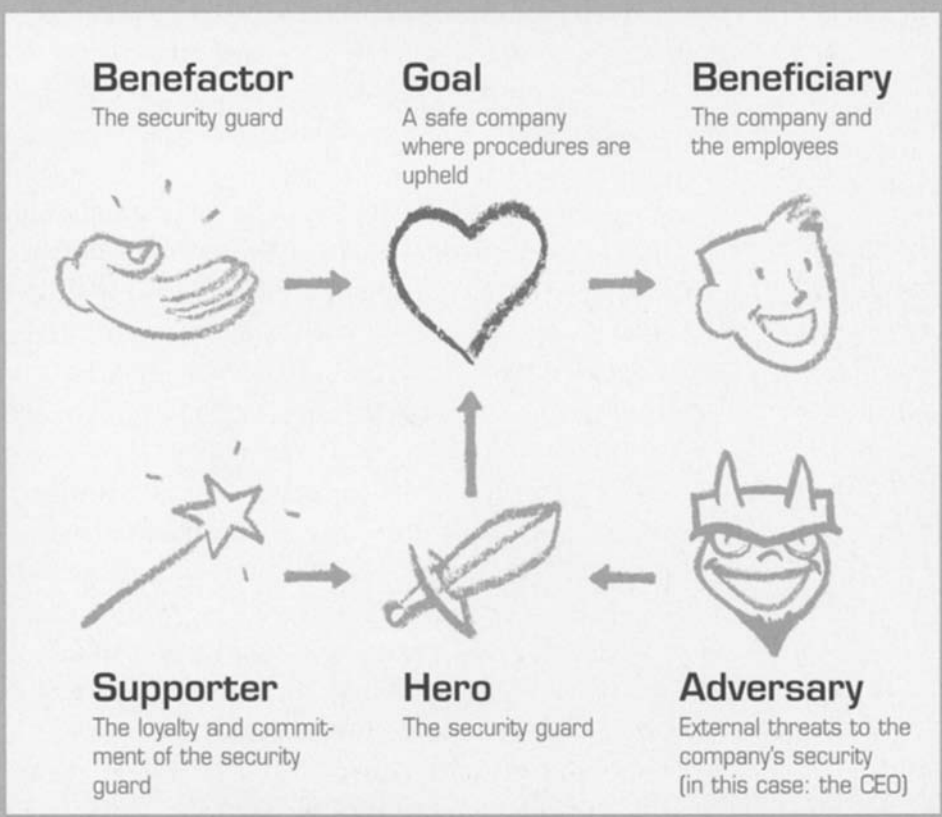
This story still stands as a bastion of the values of the company: The loyal employee who is rewarded for his uncompromising commitment to company security, despite the fact he denied the CEO himself, access to his own building. As the story has been told and retold by employees it has become a fixture in defining what qualities make "a good employee". As readers, we instinctively know that it works as a story. A conflict appears and is resolved. And the surprising ending delivers the message. This is confirmed when we look at the story through the Fairy-tale Model (figure 4.2).

This is a true hero's tale. The security guard takes on the role of the hero and in turn, is rewarded for his vigilance and bravery. Even if the CEO is not a villain as such, he represents the adversary who disrupts harmony and creates conflict: the external element that threatens the safety of the company. The guard draws on his personal strength and stands firm.

But the conflict also has a comical twist, in the ludicrous notion that the guard should actually deny entry to his boss. This further emphasises the extreme loyalty of the security guard and makes the story even more compelling. The conflict is resolved and company security safeguarded. The receivers are both the company and its employees who benefit from the guard's loyalty. As this example illustrates, the same character

Figure 2.4

The Fairy-tale Model



Source: Inspired by Greimas (1974)

can take on several roles, expressing the forces at work that pull in different directions and ultimately create the action.

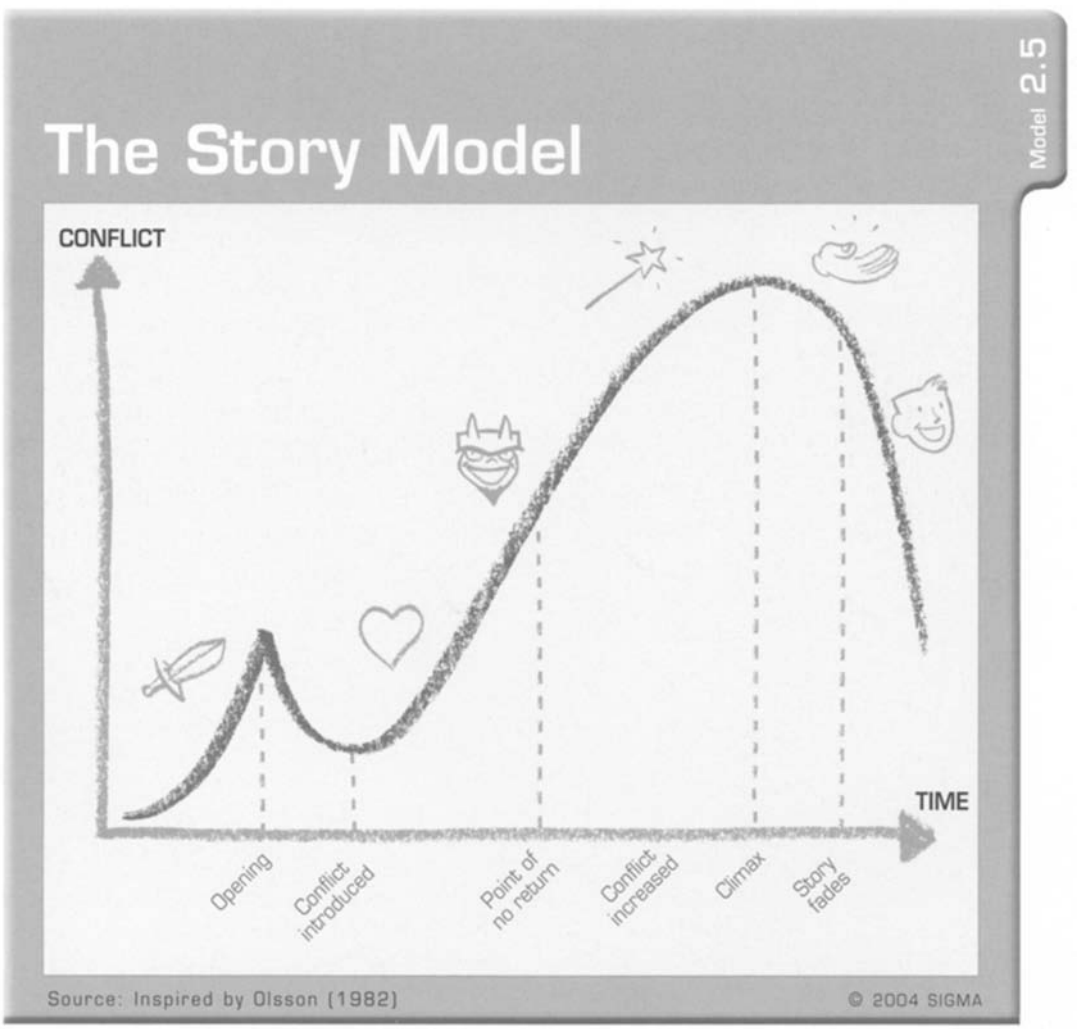
The Plot

Once your message, conflict and cast of characters are all in place, it is time to think about how your story should progress. The flow of the story and its events are vital to the audience's experience. Given the fact that we can only tell one thing at a time, and that a story exists only as a progression of events within a given time span, the sequence of events needs careful consideration. It must have a precise structure to propel it forward and maintain audience interest. Generally speaking a traditional story can be segmented into three parts; beginning, middle and end. First, the scene it set. Next, the progression of change creates conflict and sets the parameters for the rest of the story. The conflict escalates but is finally resolved, marking the end of the story. This basic flow characterises even the simplest of anecdotes. In a more comprehensive story, we can look to a more elaborate but still classical flow of events. A good lead, will grab our attention and give us a taste of what is to come, setting the theme and tone of the story. Religious stories in particular, go all out for a hard-impact opening. The first sentence of the Bible reads, "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth". The tone is set for a very good read.

Generally speaking a traditional story can be segmented into three parts; beginning, middle and end.

Once the conflict has escalated to the point of no return, the hero usually has to make a decisive choice, which will influence the outcome. Now, it is the escalation of the conflict and the development of our hero that drive the story forward, building up to a climax e.g. where the hero, finally confronts the villain. In most Hollywood productions, the story will end positively, re-establishing harmony. Of course, this is not how all stories end. Endings can surprise you. But in any event, the end of the struggle marks the story's fade out.

Figure 2.5 outlines the relationship between the conflict, the cast of characters and the flow of events when telling a story. The Y-axis shows the tension curve and conflict development. The X-axis shows the timeline and the curve shows at what point the characters are usually introduced and how they influence the story.



Having discussed the four elements of storytelling, we are now ready to delve deeper into the relationship between branding and storytelling and shed light on how storytelling can be applied by companies.

TEST

Tell a Tale

Once the conflict and cast of characters are in place, you need to consider how the events and story will unfold. Try telling your story based on the following questions:

- How does the story *open*?
- How is the *conflict* introduced?
- What is the *point of no return* in the story?
- What is the *climax* of the story?
- How does the story *fade out* – how is the moral of the story presented?

Storytelling in Business 3

So how do companies go about using storytelling when it comes down to business? In the following chapter, we will take a closer look at storytelling both as a strategic branding concept, and as an operational communication tool.

In the last chapter we discussed the four elements of storytelling, outlining the process of putting a story together. The following chapter shows how companies can use this process for several purposes; both on a strategic management level, and on an operational level in day-to-day communication with employees.

Storytelling as a Branding Concept

As storytelling increasingly catches the eye of the business community, the mantra has become: companies must tell a story that beats a path to the heart of the consumer. The best storytellers will be the winners of the future. But what does it actually mean for companies to "tell a story"?

At the beginning of the book, we talked about how a strong brand represents a story. Harley-Davidson for example represents the story of "freedom", while Nike, represents the "will to win". In this way, storytelling becomes an effective tool for creating an entire brand concept: one that stays with us, because it touches our emotions.

The story that is closely tied into a company's corporate brand, is the core story.

The story that is closely tied into a company's corporate brand is the *core story*. The core story expresses the fundamental

theme, or, the central nervous system that ties all the company's brand communication together: The silver thread, if you like. Nike's core story about the "will to win" therefore, means that all Nike's communication is structured on that one, common theme.

By analysing Nike's core story using the Fairy-tale Model (figure 3.1), we can see that it has both a clearly defined conflict and a strong cast of characters. Basically, it has all the elements necessary to make a good story.

By comparison the LEGO brand represents a story of "learning through creative play". Here, the goal is to encourage creative development in children. The heroes are LEGO Company employees, support comes in the form of LEGO bricks which stimulate creativity and imagination, and the adversaries are represented by passive entertainment, such as television.

A core story charts the course for the entire corporate brand.

A core story charts the course for the entire corporate brand. It should act as a compass directing all company communication both internally and externally. And it is precisely here that storytelling becomes a strategic tool for top management. Chapter 4 goes into more detail about how management can find and develop the core story of their company's corporate brand.

Corporate and Product Brands

Storytelling is useful both on a corporate and on a product level.

Storytelling is useful both on a corporate and on a product level. The crucial factor being that the company keeps a firm eye on its long-term brand strategy.

Within businesses there are a number of basic brand strategies. Nike and Procter & Gamble represent opposite poles of the spectrum. Nike's brand is a corporate brand that exists independently of the individual products, yet, these products e.g.

Nike Air, also support the overall Nike corporate brand; the essence of what makes Nike, Nike.

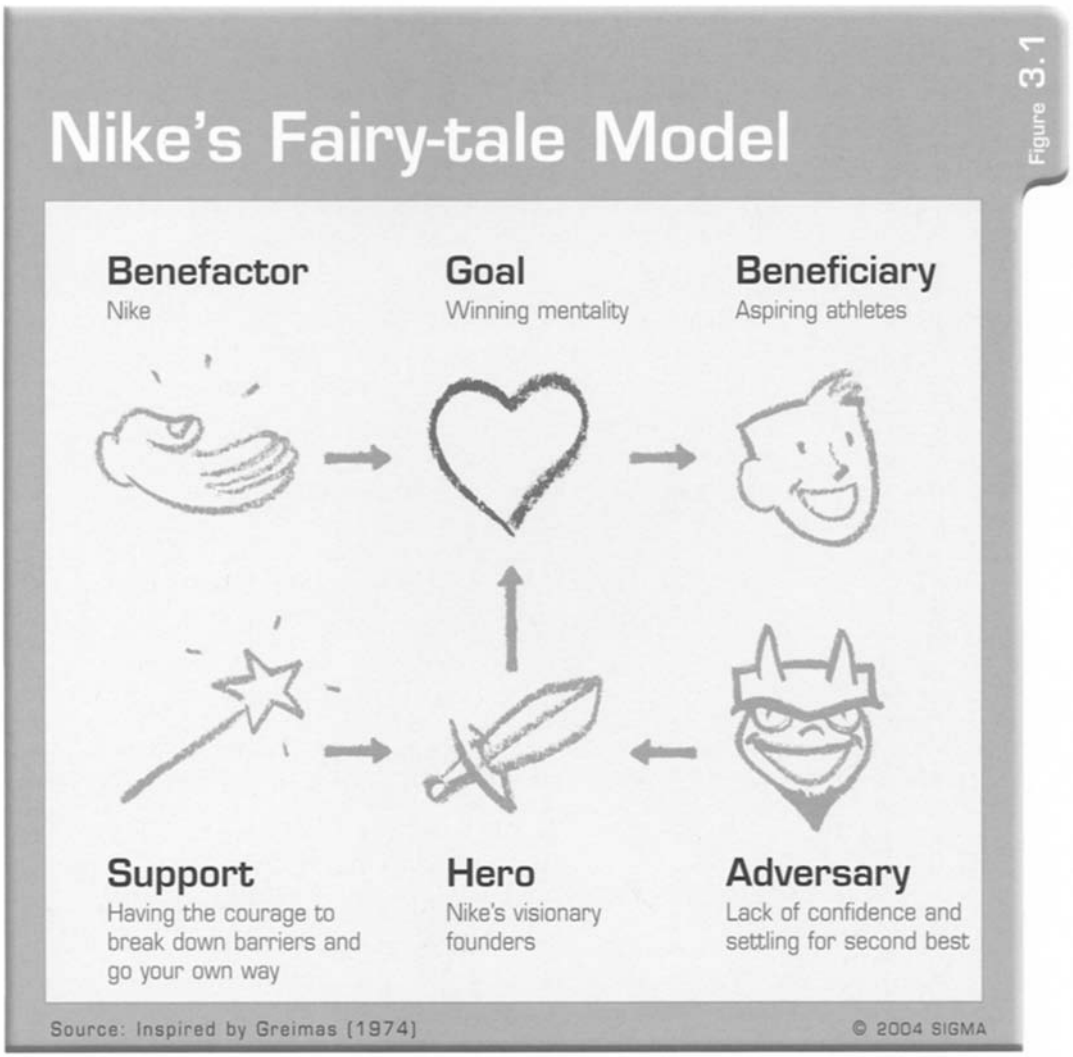
A range of strong product brands like Pampers and Pringles on the other hand, drives Procter & Gamble. These product brands exist independently within their own clearly defined identities, while corporate Procter & Gamble stays quietly in the background. For a company like this, the strategic challenge is to create strong core stories for each of its product brands in such a way that they do not conflict with each other, or with the corporate brand.

We will not go further into this discussion, however, all the evidence points to an increased focus on corporate brands and what they stand for. In part; this is due to the fact that companies can no longer hide behind corporate walls. The consumer is more switched on, and has more access to information via publications, television and the Internet than ever before. In turn, this information can be exchanged and discussed in a public domain leading to a far more transparent market place. Add to this heightened consumer awareness about ethical behaviour in the global market, and consumers are in a powerful position to make informed choices on the brands they buy into that transcend need and desire alone. Effectively, they are making a statement about their own set of beliefs. Companies therefore, need to offer brands that help the consumer navigate and make choices in the marketplace of tomorrow.

Storytelling as a Communication Tool

Along with its strategic value as a branding concept, storytelling can also be hugely effective in operational communication purposes. One example is when we use stories to communicate our purpose in a given context e.g. a simple anecdote that we share with our colleagues when explaining a point, or reinforcing an argument. Even the smallest anecdote contains the four key

Figure 3.1



elements of storytelling and it easily travels by word of mouth. Remember the story of the security guard who refused his boss entry to his own company for not having valid ID?

Throughout the course of this book, we aim to show how companies can use storytelling as a dynamic communication tool in a number of different situations, both internally and externally.

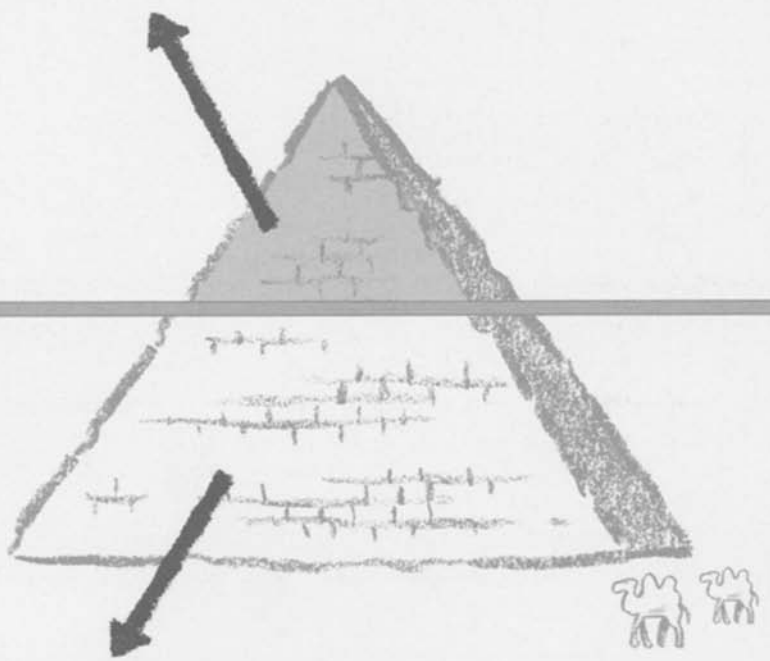
Figure 3.2

The Storytelling Pyramid

Storytelling as a Branding Concept

STRATEGIC LEVEL

The company's core story creates consistency in all company communications - internally as well as externally. As a branding concept storytelling can be applied on both corporate and product brand level.



Storytelling as a Communication Tool

OPERATIONAL LEVEL

Stories and anecdotes can be used when communicating the company's message internally and externally. As a communication tool storytelling can be applied in a variety of contexts - e.g. in a presentation or a commercial.

At an operational level, those individual stories will become blocks in the brand building process. The Storytelling Pyramid (figure 3.2) illustrates how this book divides the storytelling concept into a branding concept and a communication tool.

A Holistic Approach to Storytelling

The most effective use of storytelling as a branding tool is to adopt a holistic approach.

The two applications of storytelling in no way exclude one from the other, on the contrary, they support each other. The most effective use of storytelling as a branding tool is to adopt a holistic approach and seek to use the two approaches in ways that support the central brand message. In doing so, the core story becomes the common denominator for the company's internal and external communication.

The reason why the core story of Nike is so strong, is that they have managed to steer all of their communication towards supporting the one underlying core story of having "the will to win".

As consumers, we see the biggest sport stars doing what they do best wearing Nike products. Likewise, each of them, in their own way embodies the wining mentality that Nike wishes to associate with its company and products. Internally, different sets of stories are being told, but they too support the core story. The following anecdote is about the legendary track coach, Bill Bowerman, who together with Phil Knight, founded Nike:

"As a track coach Bill Bowerman was in every sense of the word a winner. He saw it as his personal mission to provide his athletes with the best possible conditions, including giving them the best possible running shoes. But Bowerman was not satisfied with what was available on the market. For some time he thought about what he could do about it. Then, one morning in 1971, as his wife was making waffles it hit him. In their distinctively shaped pattern, Bowerman saw the basis for a new

breed of strong, flexible running shoe sole. When he got home the next day, he took the waffle iron from the kitchen and locked himself in his study. Here, he experimented by pouring liquid rubber into the waffle iron and slowly developed the magic formula for the new sole. Bill Bowerman's experiments with the waffle iron in his study, paved the way for the characteristic Nike "waffle sole" that can be found on many of Nikes classic running shoes."

This small anecdote may be a far cry from the modern TV-commercials starring Ronaldo. But it still strikes at the core of what Nike is all about: being the best no matter what. In order to be the best you have to be innovative, think outside the box and challenge conventions. Nike uses storytelling both internally and externally as a tool to support their key message. And this kind of consistent interplay between the company's core story and the individual's "hands on" stories, lie at the heart of creating a strong brand.

The Brand Tree

Figure 3.3 illustrates how to build a strong, long-term brand through holistic storytelling. The solid trunk of the tree represents the company's core story – its foundation – ensuring consistency in all company communication both internally and externally, thus differentiating it from its competitors.

The job of company managers is to safeguard and nurture the stories and anecdotes that spring from the core story.

The job of company managers is to safeguard and nurture the stories and anecdotes that spring from the core story; just as branches and leaves spring from the trunk of the tree. The more actual stories being told about the company that support its values, the more they will nourish the company's core story. Just as leaves give nourishment to the tree.

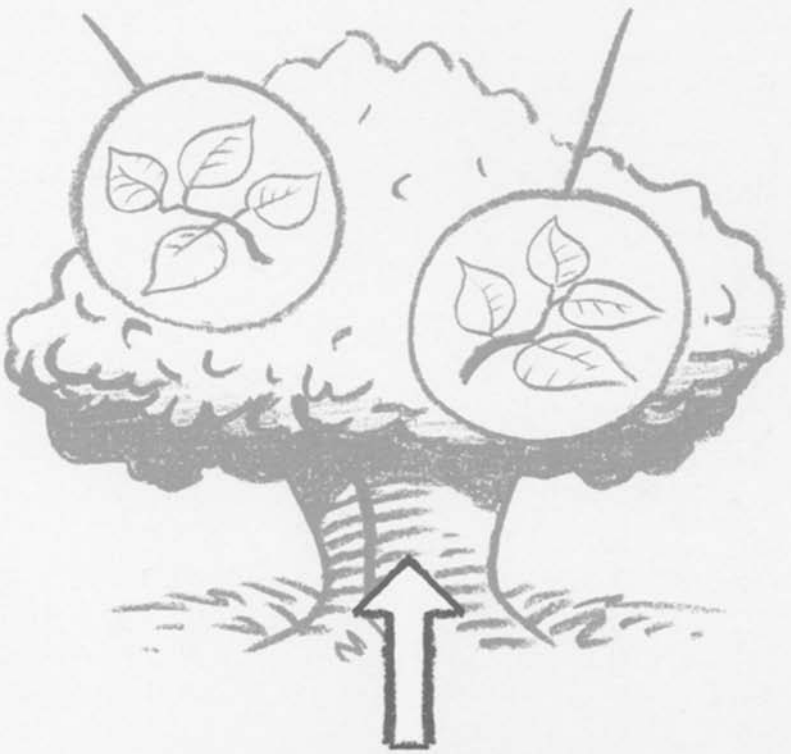
In this chapter we have gone into detail on the basic principles of the storytelling concept, on which the remainder of this

Figure 3.3

The Brand Tree

External Stories are e.g.:
- Media coverage
- Advertising
- Customer stories
- Stories from partners

Internal Stories are e.g.:
- Employee stories
- Articles in the company newsletter
- Stories from management
- Stories about the company's product



Core Story:
The core story is the "trunk" of the company's brand. All the stories being told in and around the company should stem from this one core story - just as nourishing leaves grow from the branches of the tree.

The interplay between those two dimensions is the starting point for companies in their work with storytelling in the branding process.

book rests. Storytelling can be employed both as a branding concept and as a communication tool, and has both a strategic and an operational dimension. The interplay between those two dimensions is the starting point for companies in their work with storytelling in the branding process.

With this in mind, we are ready to set sail and embark on our journey into the storytelling universe.

The Company Core Story 4

In order to stay in the game, companies need to work with their brand as if it is a continually unfolding story. This chapter takes a closer look at how companies can use storytelling as a strategic branding tool and at how they can develop the core story of their brand.

"Once upon a time a man out on his morning stroll came upon three bricklayers busy at work. The man was curious to know what they were building and asked the first bricklayer what he was doing. The bricklayer replied irritably that he was busy laying bricks. What did it look like? Since this really gave the man no further insight into what they were building, he went on to ask the next bricklayer. The bricklayer gave him a quick glance and answered that he was busy building a wall. The man moved on and reached the third bricklayer who was whistling merrily. He decided to ask one last time. The bricklayer stopped working, mopped his brow and replied proudly: "I'm building the towns new cathedral".

This story shows how important it is to our motivation and self worth, to know that our efforts contribute to something with a deeper meaning. In a simplified way, it shows why it is so important for companies to have a core story: something that becomes a motivating beacon for employees, and ensures the company communicates a clear and consistent message.

Building a Foundation Starts From Within

For management, the first step in developing the company's core story is to create a shared mental image of the company's reason for being. This image needs to address both head and

heart, and it must clearly define the path the company is treading; one that enables employees to feel they make a difference. In this respect, it is not enough to simply strive for higher profits, or, to become the biggest fish in the pond. Who can honestly say that they get really deep satisfaction just by lining their stockholders pockets?

Who can honestly say that they get really deep satisfaction just by lining their stockholders pockets?

To get the feeling of adding value, there must be a cause or belief that propels the company forward: A driving passion. If employees can identify with the company's core story they will also proudly share that story, just as the bricklayer shares the story of the cathedral he is helping to build. It makes him part of something far greater, and more valuable than laying bricks alone.

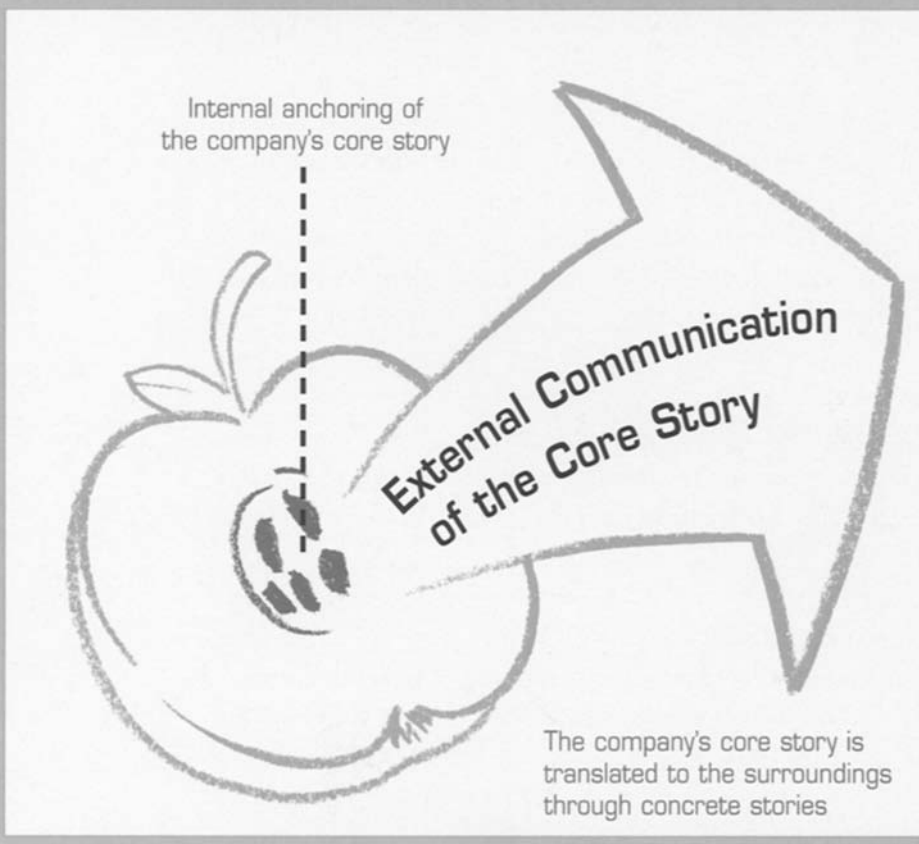
After all, why should customers be expected to be loyal to one company as opposed to another if not even the company's employees are able to explain how their company makes a difference?

A strong brand always starts from within, with its employees, if it is to have a long-term effect externally. If Nike's employees were unable to identify with and advocate their belief in having "the will to win" by constantly pushing themselves to develop new and better sporting equipment, it would only be a matter of time before the high profile commercials would seem empty. Sooner or later it would backfire. Because of their close relationship with the company, employees are the single most important ambassadors that a company brand has.

The Apple Model (figure 4.1) shows how internal ownership of the company's core story, forms the basis for external communication.

Figure 4.1

The Apple Model



The Perilous Quest of Companies

Again, the classical fairy-tale provides useful inspiration for companies looking to develop their core story. A company's quest in business, in many ways resembles the fairy-tale where the handsome prince rides off to rescue his damsel in distress and lives happily ever after. Instead of a princess of course,

companies are usually fighting for an idea; e.g. Apple Computer fights to provide us with the means for creative expression through user-friendly digital technology. In the business world, it is not dragons and demons that stand in your way, but nevertheless, the adversary can take on many guises. It could be "diabolical" competitors, or it could be the companies themselves - those lacking the ability to innovate for example, or those battling against negative public opinion that must be swayed if they are to survive.

A company's quest in business, in many ways resembles the fairy-tale where the handsome prince rides off to rescue his damsel in distress and lives happily ever after.

Using the principles of storytelling helps a company to paint a picture of a challenge, or an "adversary", that employees need to overcome through teamwork, by applying their own unique skills, or through some kind of "heroism". It is well known that a shared challenge or enemy creates a stronger sense of togetherness. It reinforces the spirit and culture of the company, at the same time sending a clear message of what the company's values are to its wider surroundings.

By using a story as their strategic focal point, management has a more acute means of motivating employees, and letting the environment know exactly how their company makes a difference. The following example shows a strong core story that really was centred on a perilous quest.

NASA's Core Story

CASE

The United States space program embodied by NASA - the National Aeronautics and Space Administration - achieved dramatic results in the 1960s, thanks in no small part to the fact that NASA employees had a clear-cut and very compelling core story that they could all relate to. This change in outlook occurred during the early part of the decade, when President John F. Kennedy announced to the world that America would be the first nation to put a man on the Moon, and that they would do it before the end of the decade.

By introducing the possibility of sending a man to the Moon, President Kennedy created a strong, shared vision that made sense both to NASA employees as well as to the American public. It triggered dreams of achieving the impossible. Meanwhile, back at NASA the story captured the hearts and minds of employees, creating a shared value system based on innovation, creativity and no compromise. Values that were essential if this dream were ever to come true. Externally, Kennedy could justify significant increases in public spending on space exploration, and throughout the 1960s, the NASA brand became synonymous with the dream of journeying to the Moon.

Throughout the 1960s, the NASA brand became synonymous with the dream of journeying to the Moon.

Kennedy's story had a clear-cut conflict. There was no mistaking the identity of the adversary: the USSR and communism. And the hero? NASA of course – defender of democracy. The story also had a clearly defined message and a clearly defined goal that would require an extraordinarily heroic effort if it were to be achieved. In a race against the clock, the dream shared by President Kennedy fired up employees of NASA to bring out their strongest characteristics; steadfastness, creativity and above all courage. Many sacrificed their lives on this long and perilous quest. But in 1969 NASA achieved the impossible, as the first human being ever, Neil Armstrong, set foot on the Moon. The USA had won a mighty technological and ideological victory over the dragon from the USSR.

Regardless, in the years after this magnificent achievement, NASA's core story began losing the conflict on which it was built. The quest that NASA fought to achieve – to put a man on the Moon – had been accomplished. Pressure from the Russians had dissipated. Without communism to defeat, or the Moon to land on, NASA's purpose became clouded. And ever since the end of the Cold War, NASA has faced an increasing relevancy crisis. Space travel has become almost routine, and NASA has made no new breakthrough discoveries. New generations that

Figure 4.2

NASA's Fairy-tale Model

Source: Inspired by Greimas (1974)

never watched the Moon landings in 1969 are only vaguely aware of what the space programme actually does, apart from sending astronauts into orbit or making occasional fatal shuttle launches. Something indicates that it is time to reinvent this spellbinding story, at the same time revitalising the NASA brand both internally and externally: A story that clearly shows why NASA remains relevant now and in the future.

NASA may not be lost in space much longer, however. President Bush's announcement that the USA is determined to put a man on Mars has marked the beginning of what could be a new story for NASA to tell. The Mars adventure could make NASA's core story of the ultimate space exploration, relevant in the future – at least for the next 25 years. However, as we become increasingly desensitised to space travel, we will need bigger and brighter stories to fire our imaginations. Should NASA discover life in space for example, they will perhaps have hit on the biggest story of all time. ■

The case of NASA shows the strength in purposely thinking of brands in a captivating story context that embodies vision, mission and values.

The case of NASA shows the strength in purposely thinking of brands in a captivating story context that embodies vision, mission and values. But it also illustrates that a core story cannot last forever. There will be times where it is necessary to reinvent a company's core story in order for it to remain relevant for both employees and the surroundings.

From Values to Story

Seeing storytelling as a strategic tool triggers a natural evolution in the traditional thinking behind brands. When the classical branding concept is fused with the logic of storytelling, we move from perceiving a brand as a set of brand values to working with the brand as a living, core story.

Values in themselves are just words, devoid of any real content.

The explanation is simple. Values in themselves are just words, devoid of any real content. So when a company's values are presented as a list of bullet points in the Annual Report, at executive meetings or in an image brochure, they become anonymous and irrelevant, speaking to the mind but not to the heart. When you tell a story on the other hand, those terms come to life through powerful images and place your values in a more dynamic context. Bingo! Suddenly everyone knows and understands what you are trying to say, because you're giving them something that they can actually apply in daily life.

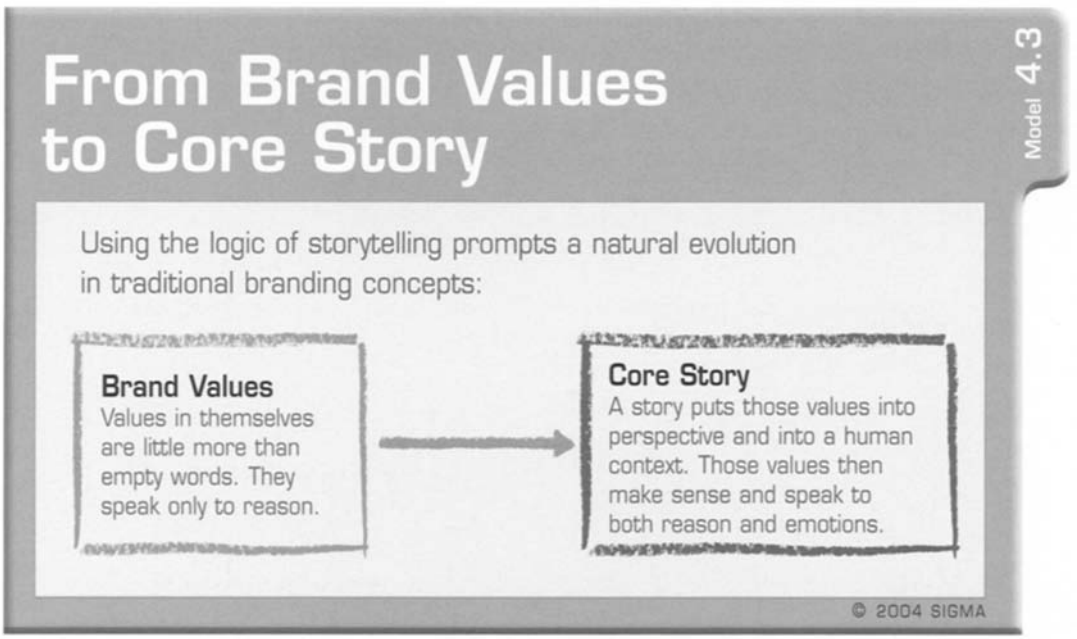


Figure 4.3 illustrates the development in the perception of brands. Effectively, a core story equals brand values transformed into a single, unifying and meaningful message. Basically, they are wrapped up in prettier, more easily digested packaging. It is unlikely that President Kennedy's message would have got the same results, had he just pushed NASA to work harder and left it to the American public to pay the bill. Instead he got people involved by capturing their imaginations, at the same time increasing motivation and spurring growth in the US economy.

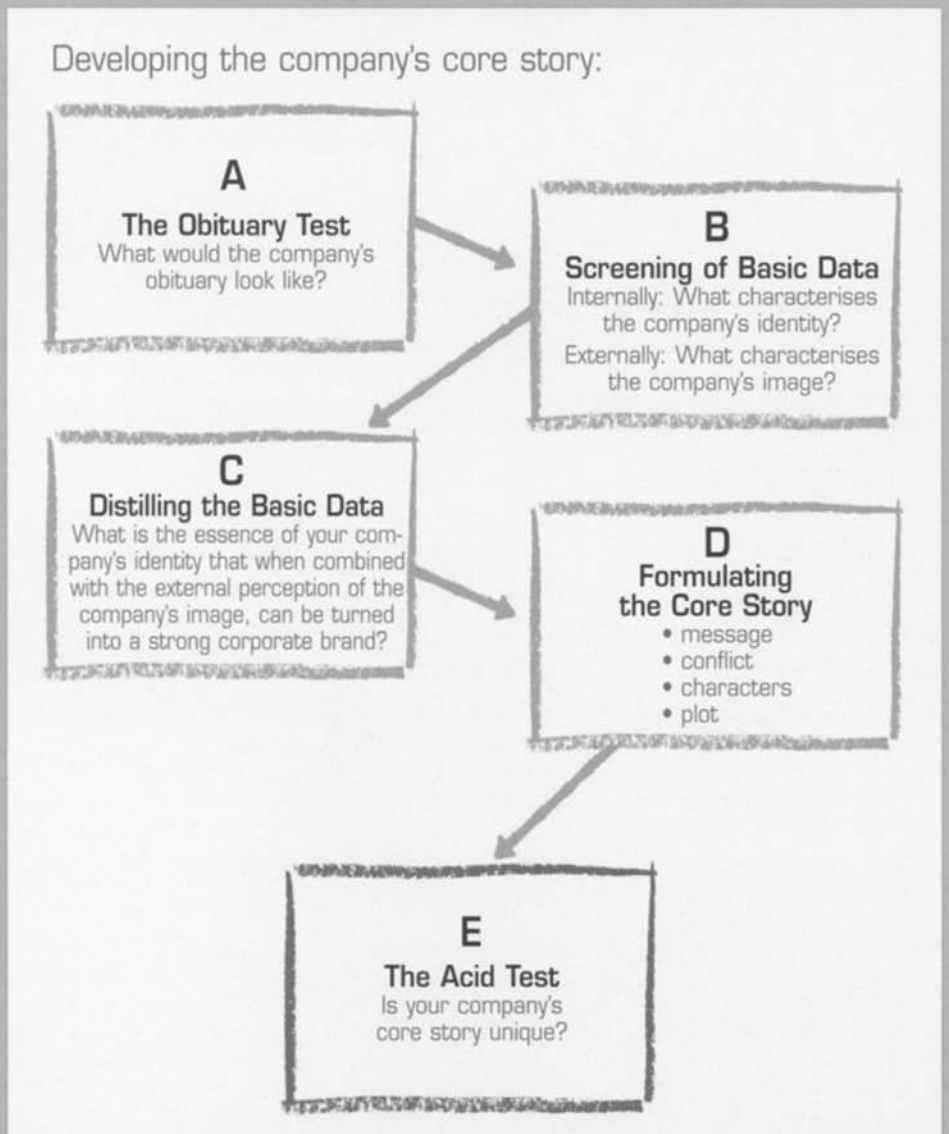
The remainder of this chapter takes a closer look at how companies can start developing a strong core story for their brand, starting with a trip to the lab.

StoryLab: Developing the Company Core Story

Imagine yourself dressed in a white lab coat and protective glasses, surrounded by test tubes and sizzling flasks. You are

Figure 4.4

The Laboratory Model



in fact standing in the laboratory for storytelling: *StoryLab*. Armed with the four basic elements of storytelling, it is time to start experimenting with the core story of your company – the strategic communication platform for your company's brand. It must express your company's distinctive character. Why are you here? What are you fighting for? What would the world be like without you? In short, it is about finding out your company's reason for being.

It is about finding out your company's reason for being.

The experiments carried out in the StoryLab are intended to plant a seed that will grow into a strong basic framework – a tree trunk – for your company brand. With the four elements of storytelling, you already have some of the ingredients necessary to put you on to the right path. But first you have to do some solid groundwork.

The Laboratory Model (figure 4.4) illustrates the process of developing the company's core story, while the remainder of this chapter will discuss each step of the process in detail.

Would Your Company Be Missed?

It may sound morbid, but the Obituary Test is crucial in identifying and formulating the company's reason for being. This is precisely what the core story must express if it is to concisely communicate the company brand.

Most of us have had the unfortunate experience of being dumped by a lover. A classic case of not realising what you've got until it's gone. All too often, it is only when we have lost what we really cared about, that we realise what it was that made it so special. The Obituary Test is centred on this argument, forcing the company to take a long, hard look in the mirror and honestly consider what, if anything, would be missed should the company die.

Honestly consider what, if anything, would be missed should your company die.

It is not the most pleasant of tasks, granted, but the Obituary Test is the most effective means of starting the process.

It is worth keeping in mind the Obituary Test throughout the entire process of finding your core story. When push comes to shove, a strong brand is all about making a difference, and this will be your guiding reference point throughout your journey through StoryLab.

TEST

The Obituary Test

To begin:
Write down your company's obituary.

How would the obituary read if your customers were to write it?

How would the obituary read if your competitors were to write it?

Some useful questions:
What would the world look like if your company did not exist?

If your company were to close tomorrow, who would miss it? Why?

Has your company made any real difference for its stakeholders?

CASE

Coca-Cola's Real-life Obituary Test

Entirely by accident, the world's leading brand, Coca-Cola came very close to taking a real-life Obituary Test back in 1985, when it decided to change its original formula.

The early 1980s found Coke dangerously close to losing the cola war to Pepsi. In fact, Coke's market share in the US had been shrinking for decades, from 60% just after World War II to

under 24% in 1983. Worse, carefully monitored blind taste tests showed that in more than half the cases, people preferred the taste of Pepsi. Coca-Cola's solution was to introduce a new secret formula coke that tasted smoother and sweeter than the original. More like Pepsi, in fact. The Coca-Cola Company spent 4-million US dollars on market research and tested it on 200,000 blind tasters. It was a winner. People liked the new Coke far better than either the original Coca-Cola or Pepsi.

On 23 April 1985, Coca-Cola introduced the new formula marking the first formula change in 99 years, at the same time ceasing production of the original formula. The "old Coke" was gone forever...

The reaction from consumers however, wasn't quite what Coke executives had expected. There was outrage. Consumers quite literally panicked, filling their basements with cases of original Coke. One man in San Antonio, Texas, drove to a local bottler and bought $1,000 worth of Coca-Cola. Calls flooded in to the 800-GET-COKE phone line, and to Coca-Cola offices across the United States. By June, the Coca-Cola Company was getting 1,500 calls a day on its consumer hotline, compared with 400 a day before the big announcement. People seemed to hold any Coca-Cola employee personally responsible for the change. Of course, the executives had to take their share of the beating. Coke CEO Roberto Goizueta received a letter addressed to "Chief Dodo, The Coca-Cola Company." Another angry customer wrote to him asking for his autograph because, in years to come, the signature of "one of the dumbest executives in American business history" would be worth a fortune.

Pepsi, naturally, jumped on the bandwagon and gave all their employees the day off to celebrate, on the premise that by changing their formula Coke had publicly admitted that it wasn't "the real thing". Around the country protest groups popped up with

tag-names like "Society for the Preservation of the Real Thing" and "Old Cola Drinkers of America", which claimed to have 100,000 supporters, all of whom demanded the "old" Coke back. The Coca-Cola Company got the hint. On 11 July 1985 the "old" Coca-Cola formula was returned to store shelves as "Coca-Cola Classic". The story made the front page of virtually every major newspaper. The television network ABC even interrupted *General Hospital* to break the news. In just two days after the announcement, the Coca-Cola Company received 31,600 telephone calls on its Hotline. Anger melted into forgiveness, and then turned to celebration.

Looking back on this incident, one can't help wondering what on earth Coca-Cola were thinking about. To put it simply, they made the mistake of focusing only on the physical feature of the product - the taste - while completely ignoring the emotional attachment forged between the brand and the people. They had forgotten the fact that Coca-Cola had been an integral part of American life for more than a century. That it was part of the American identity. Coke was much more than a cola flavoured drink; it was an American institution - a national icon.

It took the loss of the beverage people had grown up with and fallen in love over, to remind them how much it meant to them. Gaye Mullins from Seattle, Washington and front man of the activist group Old Cola Drinkers of America said simply; "They can't do it. It's un-American. We've fought wars to have choice and freedom. I couldn't have been more upset if they'd burned the flag in my front yard". At a press conference announcing the return of the original formula Donald Keough (then the company's President and Chief Operating Officer) admitted: "The passion for original Coca-Cola – and that is the word for it, passion – was something that caught us by surprise. It is a wonderful American mystery, a lovely American enigma, and you cannot measure it any more than you can measure love,

pride, or patriotism". Coca-Cola Classic kept gaining popularity and by early 1986 it had reclaimed the cola crown from Pepsi.

There are not many brands that would be missed the way people missed the original Coke. But think about it. Would anyone even bother if your company or your product were gone tomorrow? Or would your customers just move next door to your competitor without giving it a second thought? If not an outrage, how would people react if your company were gone? What would they miss? This question is key in getting to the core of what your company is all about. Coke learned the hard way. And that is exactly why the Obituary Test is a vital kick-off for developing the core story of your company.■

With this in mind, we can proceed to the next phase of gathering and screening your company's basic data.

Screening the Basic Data

When it was first revealed that the Earth was not in fact the centre of the universe, it caused outrage among the authorities and scholars of the time, and did not do much for the popularity of Galilei. Today, we know that Galilei was right, but he took a huge risk in challenging the conventional thinking of the time. It takes the same kind of courage as a company goes in search of its core story. In the process, you will most likely have to face some hard truths, and revise entrenched beliefs as to how the company culture works. But in order to find your core story, your company must gain a solid understanding, warts and all, of its situation and how it is perceived, both internally and externally.

Internal Basic Data

In order to define your company culture you need to find out what makes it tick internally.

In order to define your company culture - basically, your identity within your business - you need to find out what makes it tick internally, which in turn, provides the foundation for your

company's core story. The following areas are fundamental to this process:

1. Company vision, mission and values
What is your company mission and what is the vision behind it? What values does your company consider to be most important and why? How do those values manifest themselves in actual company activities? And how are they communicated internally and externally?

2. Company milestones
How can you factually describe the company's historical development? Why was the company founded and what were the circumstances? Which have been your company's most significant events, failures as well as successes? What anecdotes about important people and events are still being told within company walls?

3. Employees' stories
What do employees say about the company? Which stories do they tell about the work place? Which stories do they share in their coffee breaks? Which events and experiences do employees use to describe the company? What is it that makes the company a special place to work? Where do employees feel that the company makes a difference?

External Basic Data

The purpose for screening your external basic data is to map the company's position in the market.

The purpose for screening your external basic data is to map the company's position in the market and to identify your strategic opportunities and challenges. However, its primary purpose is to find out what kind of image your company has in the hearts and minds of your customers, and the environment at large. Here the following areas are relevant:

1. Market trends
How do current market trends manifest themselves? What do they mean in terms of where your company is positioned now? What does the market of the future look like?

2. Customers and key decision-makers
What stories are your most and least loyal customers telling about your company? What do your competitor's customers say about your company? How is your company positioned compared to other suppliers on the market? Who are the actual decision-makers in the market - and which factors are decisive parameters for their actions?

3. Partners
What are your key partners saying about your company? What projects have been solved together with those partners? What do these projects say about your company's values?

4. Opinion leaders
Which persons or institutions are opinion leaders in your company's field of business? What do relevant trade and news media say about the company? Do opinion leaders from other fields of business derive any meaning or inspiration from your business practices? What do they say about the company?

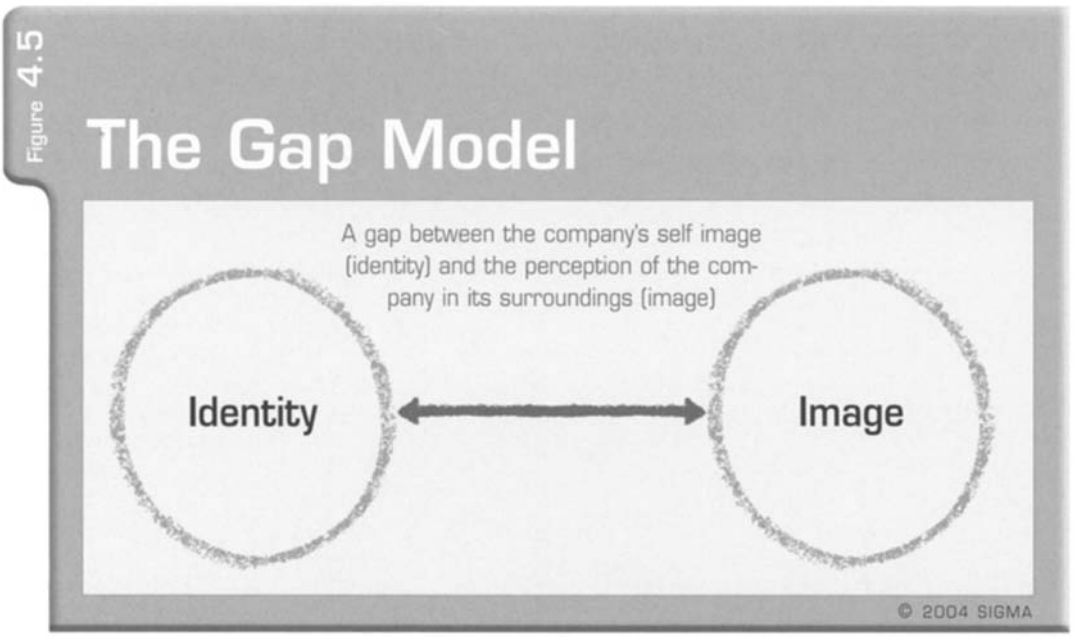
Distilling the Basic Data

Once the basic data of the company has been screened, we are left with a mass of material that has to be processed. At this point you need to cut to the quick and hone in on the true essence of what makes your company special.

The goal of the core story is to establish a consistent image of your company brand both internally and externally. In other words, you streamline the company's identity with the external perception of the company. This is the essence of a strong

The goal is to streamline the company's identity with the external perception of the company.

Figure 4.5

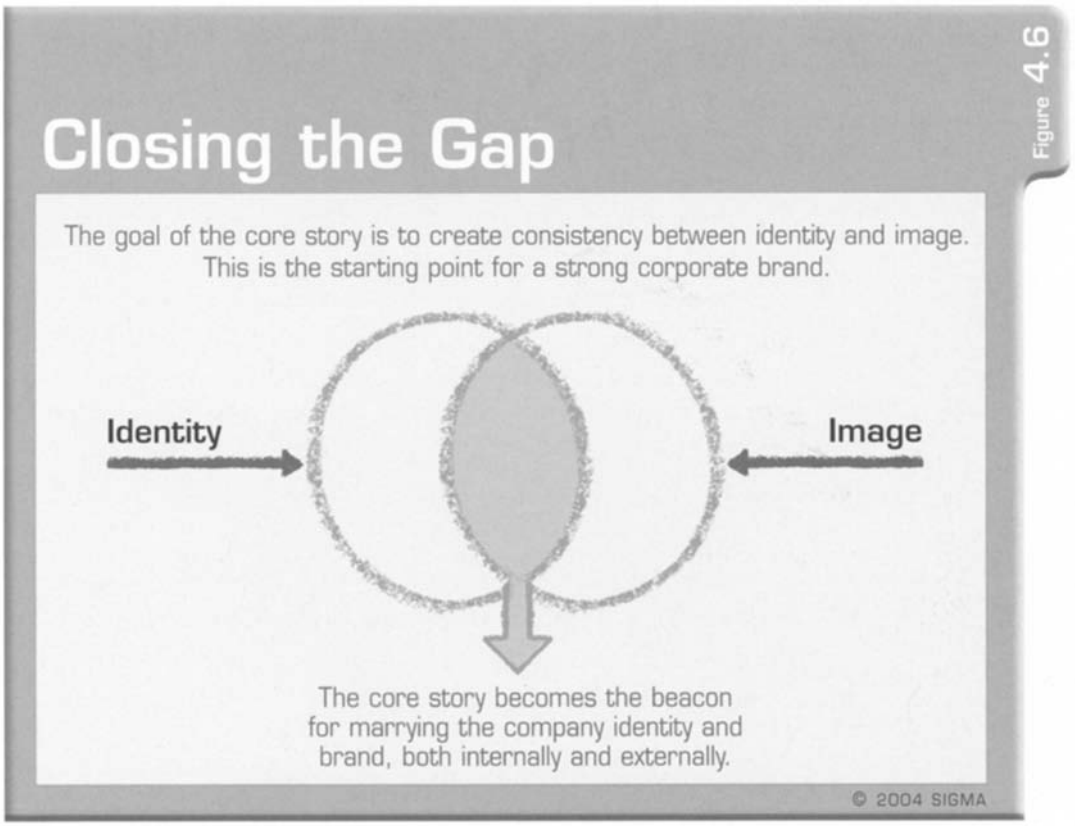


brand. But before you can start developing your core story you need to know the nature of a possible gap between the company's identity and its public image.

Here, it is important to identify the differences and similarities between internal and external data. Does your company's self-perception differ from public perception? Are there similarities between the way you would like to be seen and the way your surroundings perceive you? If so, what are they and why is this the case?

Many companies will experience a visual gap between identity and image. The Gap Model (figure 4.5) illustrates a situation where the company's identity is completely different from public perception of the company.

There may be several reasons for a gap between the identity and image of the company. Often, it is simply a communication



problem boiling down to the fact that the company has failed to show how it makes a difference, or, adequately explain what values it holds. In cases such as these, by distilling your basic data, you can identify areas that should be emphasised in future communication in order to pull your identity and image together.

But the explanation for this gap may run far deeper, relating to substance or content e.g. when the company fails to deliver relevant or quality products or services to the consumer. In this case communication or storytelling can do little to help. This is a fundamental problem, demanding radical changes to the company's overall business plan.

However, once you know what the differences between identity and image are, you can start working on bringing the two areas closer together (figure 4.6).

The question of relevance for the company's stakeholders is a vital reference point when distilling internal and external basic data. Are there common denominators in what employees, customers, partners and opinion-leaders consider to be relevant in relation to the company? If you can identify and list three criteria of relevance, which transcend the various groups, then you are well on your way to narrowing your focus and building a strong foundation for your core story that unites your company's identity and public image in one, holistic brand.

At last, the process of formulating your core story can begin. Here it is helpful to experiment with the four elements of storytelling to ensure that your story complies with the basic rules of storytelling.

Formulating the Company Core Story

The hero in our fairy-tale ventures out in pursuit of happiness. Indiana Jones defies evil, Nazis and poisonous snakes in order to find the Holy Grail. NASA astronauts risked their lives to put a man on the Moon. What does your company fight for? What is its Holy Grail? If your company does not stand for something more profound than making money, then it probably does not make a memorable difference to employees or customers either.

The dynamics of a strong brand exist precisely because the company is constantly battling to overcome challenges and adversaries in order to achieve its cause.

The dynamics of a strong brand exist precisely because the company is constantly battling to overcome challenges and adversaries in order to achieve its cause. A "cause" does not necessarily mean that the company has to pursue an ideological quest, but it does mean that your company needs to make a difference in the business in which it operates. You need to think about what added value, experiences and dreams your

customers buy into as well as the actual product or service your company offers. Basically, what kind of a story does your customer take part in? Before you move on, try putting the book down for a few minutes and answer the following question concisely:

How does your company make a difference?

It can be difficult to give a short, simple answer. But it has to be simple. Supposing you are the person who knows your company best, if you cannot give a simple answer, then how can anyone else? Your first challenge is to sum up your company's core story in one sentence. Let us start the process by going through the four elements of storytelling one by one.

If you cannot give a simple answer, then how can anyone else?

Your Message

Your message should not be confused with a pay-off or a slogan. A pay-off is a short, catchy expression that encompasses the message typically used in company advertising. For example "Just Do It" is Nike's pay-off, however their message is that every game is about winning, and if you want it badly enough, with effort and determination, you can be a winner too.

But what Nike is fighting for, is to help us believe in ourselves. If we believe in ourselves, throw caution to the wind and just go for it, then we can all be winners. Nike is fighting against compromise and the seeds of defeat that lie in our lack of confidence and our tendency to settle for second best. Nike says; if we want to be the best we need to go all the way. During the Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996, the whole city saw large billboards go up, all expressing a message in sharp contrast to Olympic ideals: "You don't win silver, you loose gold".

Likewise, when Anita Roddick founded The Body Shop back in 1976, she created a hard-hitting message to go with it. The

company, and by association both employees and customers, stood for something important. Besides fighting for a number of political and charitable causes, The Body Shop took a stand against animal testing, a taboo that had plagued the cosmetics industry for years. By contrast, in The Body Shop universe, cosmetics and skincare are a guilt-free experience. It is our decision whether we are willing to suffer for beauty or not, but animals need not suffer.

The message in the company core story is the moral of the story. It is a company's sense on what is right and wrong.

To stay in storytelling jargon, you could say that the message in the company core story is the moral of the story. Basically, it is a company's sense of what is right and wrong. For Volvo the most important thing is not to get there fast, but to get there safely. Volvo buyers first and foremost buy into a story about safety. It is the same story that Volvo employees stand by when they strive to develop stronger, safer cars that can handle even the toughest crash test. The same is true for Alfa Romeo, though their message is quite different to that of Volvo. The essence of Alfa Romeo's message is one of driving pleasure. A passion that is as much about enjoying the journey as it is about getting there. In the Alfa Romeo universe, driving is one of life's great leisure pursuits, and it doesn't hurt to look the part while you are doing it.

In essence, your message needs to mirror either your cause, or, the experience you are trying to sell. For renowned Danish shipping company A.P. Moller - Maersk Group, the central message has always been that discipline, punctuality and thoroughness is the foundation of a sound business. In return, their customers can be safe in the knowledge that things are always in order. The founder of the company used to express his message in two words "punctual perfection", a term that to this day, is firmly rooted at the heart of the company and its core story.

Of course, it is difficult to boil your message down to its very essence. One way to get started is to widen the question by asking yourself, what your core story is actually about. Here are some examples of other company's *core stories* that may serve as inspiration:

- A.P. Moller - Maersk Group is about punctual perfection
- Harley-Davidson is about freedom
- Apple Computer is about creative diversity
- Greenpeace is about fighting for the global environment
- Kodak is about capturing and preserving life's special moments
- Virgin is about following your dream, and challenging convention
- LEGO is about stimulating children's learning through creative play
- Bennetton is about conflict and harmony in the global society
- MTV is about global youth culture
- Volvo is about safety designed with families in mind
- Your company is about _____?

Your Conflict

Once you've decided on a possible transcending message for your company core story, the next step is to assess the level of conflict within that message. How big a difference does your cause actually make, and what are you fighting against?

Remember, it is conflict that creates the dynamics of a good story. Keep in mind that the sharper your definition of the conflict, the more dynamic your story will become. And that conflict is the barrier that needs to be overcome in order to achieve your goal. Through this conflict, your company can make its stand while expressing its core values at the same time. Effectively, it is a question of building contrasts and opposites just like the

Through conflict, your company can make its stand while expressing its core values at the same time.

battle between good and evil, sweet and sour, or fun versus boring. In the case of business, a conflict is not necessarily a negative, rather the catalyst for creating a distinct brand. Often it is easier to explain what you do not represent, rather than trying to explain what you do:

TEST

The Black & White Test

Developing a conflict is about defining two opposites. And defining what is the complete opposite of your brand - everything that it is not - can help to close in on the company core story. Here are a couple of examples:

Apple Computer:
Creative diversity >< Anonymous uniformity

Nike:
The will to win >< settling for second best

The LEGO Company:
Creative play >< passive entertainment

Virgin:
Challenging the establishment >< Business as usual

IKEA:
Making quality design accessible to everyone >< Design for the small elite

Your company?

Without conflict, it is incredibly difficult to build and maintain a strong core story. If what your company is fighting for constitutes customer needs that have already been met, there is no strong adversary to drive the story forward. You could say, that if we were all born winners, what would we need Nike for? You need to face reality and reassess where your brand is heading in the future.

Charitable organisations fighting for human lives in the Third World have plenty of conflict built in. The same is true of the small company challenging the dominating giant. The small state-owned brewery Budvar from the city of Budejovice in the Czech Republic illustrates this point precisely. For more than a century Budvar has been selling their beer under the name of Budweiser, just like Anheuser-Busch. This wasn't a problem until the fall of the Berlin Wall saw Anheuser-Busch expanding into Central and Eastern Europe, and Budwar expanding into Western Europe, leading to a year-long battle over legal rights for the trademarks Budweiser and Bud.

The dispute has often been reported as a classic David and Goliath case, in which the evil Western Multinational Corporation oppresses the plucky local producer. Budvar admits the long-running battle has helped define their brand strategy, enabling the company to tap into other markets that would have been otherwise difficult to penetrate. It has also given consumers an interesting story to talk about in the pub, generating further loyalty: the local Czech brewery that cherishes traditional brewing methods versus the global money machine from America. Who would get your support?

But it is rare to find such clear-cut conflicts. The quiet paper mill out in the countryside, which is just going about its business as usual has little potential for conflict. Neither is there much conflict in a company that sells exactly the same thing as everybody else. Yet there are many such companies doing exactly this, often built on the promise: "You'll feel a bit better doing business with us". This simply makes no difference. "You'll feel a bit better" is the message of a typical *me-too* company, which has not taken a stand.

"You'll feel a bit better" is the message of a typical me-too company, which has not taken a stand.

The Conflict Barometer

Take another look at the Conflict Barometer introduced in chapter 2, and try to place your company core story on the axis. This gives a decisive visual indication of your conflict's strength. Dreams also make a good driver in a core story. It may be far fetched to claim that Harley-Davidson is fighting for a cause, but there can be little doubt that the renowned American

motorcycle manufacturer is selling a dream. Harley-Davidson's concept of freedom is contrasted by the norms that society places on us, and the obligations that follow. This is where the Harley-Davidson conflict lies: Life on the open road versus the straightjacket of "normal" life. The conflict lies in the tension rich field between freedom and prison, and appeals to all who believe in the American Dream. Harley-Davidson is as much a symbol of Americana as Coca-Cola.

Is it possible to create conflict, even in a company selling a dream of domestic bliss and an old-fashioned lifestyle?

But is it possible to create conflict, even in a company selling a dream of domestic bliss and an old-fashioned lifestyle? Hovis Bread for example sells nostalgia. We dream ourselves back to the country where we could enjoy the home baked bread of the village baker. On first sight, it doesn't seem to hold a lot of conflict. But, in a modern society of affluence and plenty, stricken by complications and stress we often seek comfort in the good old days of our Grandparents, believing that life was easier back then. Those comforting memories are in stark contrast to the anonymous and stressed life of modern society, where rapid developments create uncertainty as to what the future will bring.

Most companies sell goods or services that aid us in our struggle to attain a better, easier or more fun life. But this doesn't mean the happy times will last forever, or that the journey getting there will be easy. The road is often long and difficult. Sometimes, the desired state can only be achieved in our imagination, which is what makes it a dream in the first place. Take the Lottery for example. Week in and week out they sell us the dream of what could be if only we hit the jackpot. But in reality, only one in many millions ever gets lucky. The rest of us are left dreaming, and buying into that dream over and over again.

Another way to zero in on the conflict of the core story is to ask which dream you would like to sell to your customers?

Which longing or desire does your company provide customers with the opportunity to pursue? This is another means by which you can identify the conflict in your core story, as well as the outline of the cause or dream that your company fights to achieve.

The old saying still holds true: trying to please everybody makes nobody really happy.

Either way, the song remains the same. You must be passionate about making a difference. You have to have the courage to step on some toes along the way. The old saying still holds true: trying to please everybody makes nobody really happy. And if you do try to make everybody happy, your message is likely to become so weak, it becomes irrelevant. You need to make a choice, even though you may loose a few customers along the way. By contrast, with a strong core story firmly in place, you are likely to gain a far more loyal customer base than ever before.

Remember the Obituary Test? Would your customers notice if your company suddenly no longer existed? If they believe that your competition can offer the exact same thing as you, the likely answer is "no".

If this is the case, you can assume that your company has not succeeded in delivering the added value that addresses your customers' feelings and that transcends the physical product. The bottom line is that there is no story for them to identify with and remember.

Your Characters

Having addressed the issues of message and conflict, it is time to look at the next step in the laboratory process: casting your story. A classical cast of characters provides a well-proven structure for driving any story forward. Using the Fairy-tale Model introduced in chapter 2 as a starting point, it is reasonably easy to make a rough outline of the company's key characters.

Goal:
What is your company's cause? It is not sufficient just filling the coffers of your stockholders. Passion must be your driving force. Your company must strive to make a difference.

Adversary:
What or whom is your company up against? Your adversary can take on many forms, shapes and sizes. It can be found both internally (e.g. lack of innovation) and externally (e.g. pressure from competitors).

Hero:
The company will often take on the role of hero in its quest to get the princess and half the kingdom. What are the traits of the hero? Remember, your hero can also be the customer seeking to achieve a goal.

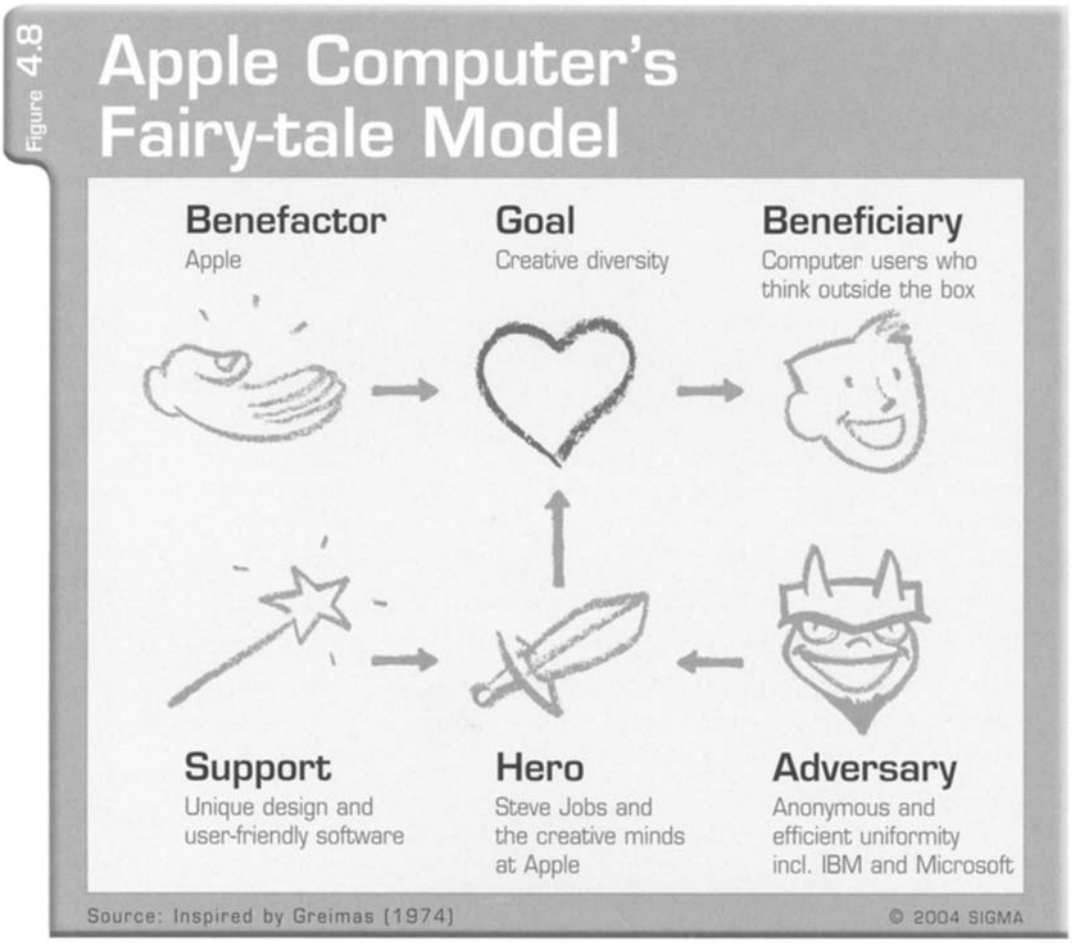
Support:
The means and tools needed by the hero to reach the goal often play the supporting role. In short: How will your company go about defeating the dragon? If the customer is the hero in the story, the supporting role can also be filled by the product or service that helps the customer to fulfil his or her dream.

Benefactor:
The company often takes on the role of benefactor (as well as hero): by helping your customers fulfil their dreams.

Beneficiary:
The beneficiary is the person, or, people who benefit from the hero achieving his goal. Typically the customers take on this role, benefiting from the company's efforts in its struggle to achieve its goal.

Each individual role must be as clear and concise as possible in order to achieve a dynamic and captivating story. Below, a break down of the core story of Apple Computer shows how individual characters are clearly defined.

Figure 4.8



Once your characters are established, the task falls to making each character as well defined as possible. Just like the hero in a fairy-tale, your company also has a set of skills and passion driving it towards its goal. In order to make the role of the hero more pronounced, it can be useful to look for some well-known images to describe your hero's personality.

The Classical Hero

Greek mythology is the scene for an astonishing array of classical heroes. Homer's classic, *The Iliad*, recounts the Greeks' yearlong war against Troy. His heroes are out in full force and in all their glory. Hercules, son of the god Zeus takes on the role of the brave and valiant *hero*. He is the strongest and most fearless of all the Greeks, and can solve the most impossible of tasks. Odysseus is the *adventurer*, who on his ten-year long journey home from Troy encounters all kinds of imaginable and unimaginable challenges, including an encounter with the one eyed Cyclops. The Greek commander Agamemnon is your archetypical *ruler* who single-mindedly charges ahead dominating his surroundings. Achilles on the other hand, is the archetypical *rebel*. In the story, Achilles dares to defy the great Agamemnon, challenging his ruling power by following the beat of his own drum. Among the Greeks, Nestor represents the *wise* hero. In Greek mythology age and wisdom are often one and the same, and Nestor is the oldest of the wise men. When he speaks everybody listens. Even the most powerful commanders dare not object. The greatest of the Trojan heroes, Hector - slain by Odysseus - is portrayed as the *caring* hero. Before going off to war he says an emotional goodbye to his family and comforts his weeping child. Another Trojan, Paris, takes the role of the archetypical *lover*. A hot-blooded and seductive warrior, he abducts the fair Helena and marries her, despite the fact that he is already married to another.

Each hero represents a set of values and is driven by his passion.

The point is each hero has a strong set of personal skills and character traits. Each represents a set of values and is driven by his passion. Some seek freedom, rebellion or adventure; others seek love, caring and acknowledgement. The classical hero figure thus appeals to very basic wants and needs that are deeply embedded in human nature. It is no wonder that the hero figures of ancient Greece are still alive and well in today's world. Just take a look at the entertainment industry. Here the adventurer

Figure 4.9

Outline of the Classical Heroes

Hero figures	Characteristics	Goal	Opponent
The Brave Hero i.e. Nike and Red Cross	Brave and headstrong with a firm belief in him/her self	Fighting for a better world - believing everyone can be a winner	Fear, weakness, and evil at large
The Lover i.e. Alfa Romeo and Antonio Banderas	Hot-blooded and sensual	Following your heart - satisfying your emotional needs	Reason, or lack of passion
The Adventurer i.e. Virgin and Indiana Jones	Curiosity and daring	Exploring the world, journeying into new territory	Narrow-mindedness and the constraints of daily life
The Creator i.e. the LEGO Company and Steven Spielberg	Imagination and creativity	To create and develop new ways of expressing oneself	Repetition and passiveness
The Joker i.e. M&M and Jim Carrey	Humour and joyfulness	To entertain others and enjoy life	Boredom
The Innocent i.e. Disney and Meg Ryan	Honesty, innocence and a big heart	To uphold truth and justice	To do wrong
The Magician i.e. 3M and Harry Potter	Full of ideas and surprising	Making dreams come true and showing that nothing is impossible	Stagnation, or, lack of control
The Rebel i.e. Harley-Davidson and Jack Nicholson	Rebellious and uncompromising	Going against the grain and breaking the rules	The system and dominating norms
The Ruler i.e. Mercedes and Bill Gates	Ability to lead, authority and class	Gaining control, security and order	Rebellion and disorder
Everyday Hero i.e. John Goodman and People magazine	Earthbound and straight forward	To find tranquillity in being part of the community	Lack of acceptance by your surroundings
The Caregiver i.e. Volvo and Mother Teresa	Caring and giving	To support and help other people	Selfishness
The Wise Hero i.e. Barnes & Noble and Albert Einstein	Intelligence and expertise	The search for truth and exploring life's great mysteries.	Ignorance and lies

Source: Inspired by Pearson & Mark (2001)

e.g. Harrison Ford, the lover e.g. Antonio Banderas, and the rebel e.g. Jack Nicholson are used time and again in slight variations on the same theme. Figure 4.9 outlines the most common hero profiles and clarifies the type of hero the company becomes in its core story. By using these profiles as a point of reference, your company has an alternative tool for describing its values. The hero figure literally adds flesh and bones to the company's role in the story universe. At the same time, it also sheds light on the conflict and the passion that drives the brand forward.

The hero figure literally adds flesh and bones to the company's role in the story universe.

For companies, the challenge is to place itself within just one of these hero profiles, though some of these frameworks do overlap. For example, your hero can be both rebel and adventurer. Richard Branson and his company Virgin are a great mix of an adventurer and a rebel. The important thing, is to narrow down your selection, and stick with the hero figure you identify within your company. It also helps to consider "the hero" from the customer's perspective. Will your customer be able to identify with the personality of the hero? Are your hero and customer searching for the same thing – be it adventure or rebellion?

Your Plot

With your message, conflict and cast of characters in place, it is time to put the final element, the plot, in place. Because a company's core story is a strategic platform for communication, it must be presented in a way that can be translated to actual stories in many different contexts. It is difficult, therefore to speak of plot, as such. Nevertheless, it can be a good internal exercise to try and tell the core story as a fairy-tale, simply to see if it works in accordance with the principles of storytelling. By telling your core story in this way, your company is placed in a sequence of events that can be easily understood.

It can be a good internal exercise to try and tell the company's core story as a fairy-tale.

The management team of SuperBest, a chain of Danish supermarkets used this technique at their annual convention in 2002 for presenting their strategy to their 170 stores.

CASE

The Fairy-tale of Independent Grocers

SuperBest is a chain of Danish supermarkets made up of independent grocers. This basically means that the individual grocer enjoys the privilege of being their own boss and owning their own stores, while under the protective umbrella of SuperBest. By working together in a chain structure, these grocers gain scale benefits in purchasing and have the opportunity to take part in national marketing under one joint name. The business advantages are one thing. But one of the SuperBest chain's continuing challenges is to narrow down and visualise the value-base, tying together 170 individual and ultimately different grocers. What do they actually have in common? And do they make a difference in relation to other, bigger supermarket chains that have everything the modern consumer wants? Supermarket giants are built on a tight, standardised concept. SuperBest grocers on the other hand, have the personal touch. They take personal pride in how their stores look, and what goods they sell. They chat with their customers on a daily basis and adapt their stores to local needs. It is precisely through this personal and localised experience, that SuperBest can make a difference. Good deals and quality products by contrast, are simply basic preconditions for running a modern supermarket.

In order to communicate this message to the 170 grocers at the annual strategy convention in 2002, the management team of the chain office decided to convey the message through a fairy-tale, with the purpose of creating a shared image of the grocery's basic values. The story went like this:

"Once upon a time the grocer was a man we all knew. He was always there with a friendly ear, a good deal, and some timely

advice. He did not need a microscope to know good quality from bad, and he did everything in his power to create a store that his customers were comfortable in. The grocery was a gathering place for local people: the heart of the village.

But one day, everything changed. Large supermarkets moved like a dark shadow across the land of groceries. Economies of scale, effectiveness and unification were the new supermarkets' version of the grocer. They all looked alike: one, large grey concrete box. Customers became little more than a barcode at the cash register. And the virtues of a true grocer turned to dust in the back room. The personal touch was in short supply.

But genuine grocers lived on. Determined to safeguard and uphold a warm, personal and quality shopping experience, they formed a united front against the large, grey supermarkets. Respecting the diversity of their customers they held their heads up high under the parole, "Liberty, equality and good grocering!" Liberty: because they were free grocers, each of whom put their own individual touch onto their stores. Equality: because they had a clear and shared belief in providing quality customer service and good deals. And good grocering: because they hailed the true grocer virtues and knew that satisfied customers always come back.

The revolution had begun..."

SuperBest's core story is about the personal grocer who places the needs of their local customers first. It is these old-fashioned grocer values and the personal service that tie the many individual grocers together. ■

TEST

If Your Company Was a Fairy-tale....

What kind of fairy-tale would it be? Can you find a classic fairy-tale that is similar to the core story your company would like to represent? The advantage of using well-known fairy-tales is that we can all relate to them. Here are a few examples:

David and Goliath:
The Company is small and flimsy compared to its competitors, but thanks to determination and effort, it is able to challenge the big boys and emerge victorious – against all the odds.

The Hare and the Tortoise:
Rather than mindlessly following every new trend, the Company prefers to follow a tried and tested course one step at a time – the results will follow.

Denis the Menace:
The Company is characterised by its unconventional and capricious approach that sometimes shocks, often surprises but never, ever bores its customers. The Company is well liked because it acts honestly and with good intentions, without being fuddy-duddy.

Robin Hood:
The Company fights for justice. Even though it is relatively obscure itself, it is not afraid to battle against the dominating forces in the market. Forces that have created a monopoly, which do not benefit the consumer.

The Ugly Duckling:
The Company that started out as the black sheep that nobody thought would ever amount to anything. Regardless, with unwavering belief in its qualities and skills, it has become a force to be reckoned with, surprising and impressing even its harshest of critics.

The Acid Test

Having developed your core story - a clear formulation with a strong message, conflict and a clear cast of characters - we face the final and decisive test: The Acid Test.

The Acid Test determines whether the company's core story is unique in relation to its competitors.

The Acid Test determines whether the company's core story is unique in relation to its competitors. If we picture ourselves standing on a hilltop, overlooking the world of brands, closer inspection will reveal that a large number of companies are basically the same, representing the same core story with only very slight variations in packaging. What is the difference between Thomas Cook and Lunn Poly? Like most charter companies they are built on a story of families sharing good times together in the sun without a care in the world.

If your company decides to communicate a core story that looks just like the one being told by your competitors, it should only be on the basis that you have a better and more credible way of communicating that particular story. A core story should leave room for interpretation when it is translated into actual stories and campaigns. Therefore, companies often compete for ownership of the same core story. Think about the many credit card companies including American Express and Diners Club who compete for ownership of the story about "the ultimate individual freedom to do whatever you want, whenever you want it."

With the Acid Test, we're talking make or break time. All your competitors core stories and communication must be included in the comparison. If the core story your company has developed turns out to be too generic, you need to take another trip through *StoryLab*.

Authentic Raw Material for Storytelling 5

All companies have authentic raw material for telling their own stories: genuine, real-life episodes that can be used in the continuous communication of their brand. This chapter shows you where you can find them, and how you can use them as a concrete communication tool.

Once your company's core story has been identified and developed, you have created a strategic storytelling platform for your brand; a compass for all internal and external communication. Every time the company initiates a new communication initiative you need to ask: does this story come together as a chapter in our core story? The better the company is at ensuring even the smallest story supports the core story, the stronger and more consistent your brand will be.

The core story must be transformed into a collection of concrete stories.

In short, the core story must be transformed into a collection of concrete stories, which are relevant for your employees, customers and your surroundings. These concrete stories translate the core story into a language that makes it accessible and relevant to your company's stakeholders in a variety of contexts.

All Companies Have a Story to Tell

There is really no reason to invent stories to communicate your company's message if you already have all the stories about your company you need. These genuine stories add credibility to your message, and often they are far stronger than fictitious stories. Everyday stories spread through your organisation like a living organism, providing you with the raw material necessary

for good storytelling. Just think of all the small anecdotes you could find in your daily working life, regardless of whether the sign on the door reads "The Coca-Cola Company", or "Backwater Office Supplies". It's all a question of knowing where to look, and knowing what your starting point is. You need to be clear about what these stories need to say before you start looking. At the same time, you need to be aware of the fact that storytelling is a dynamic and continuous process. First, the stories have to be identified and collected. Then they must be sorted and processed. Finally, they need to be communicated in the right way and in the right context.

Everyday stories spread through your organisation like a living organism, providing you with the raw material necessary for good storytelling.

Figure 5.1 illustrates the sources and places that are most likely to contain the raw material needed for storytelling.

Within the company itself, you will find an abundance of stories from the simple day-to-day running of the business. It can be difficult to spot these stories because you live them on a daily basis without being aware of their existence. But these little anecdotes, seemingly insignificant at first sight, may very well be the stories that most effectively show why your company is special.

Let us take a closer look at each of the areas in the model.

Employee Stories

Most company stories are about the values and culture that naturally spring from the heart of your company: your employees. These are the people who embody your company values on a daily basis. Equally, "rank" or the position of the individual employee is unimportant. A good story can be found with anybody; the receptionist, the product developer or the bookkeeper. Digging up stories is detective work. It requires research, patience and most importantly trust.

The employees are the people who embody your company values on a daily basis.

Figure 5.1

Here are a few tips and tricks:

- Begin by interviewing employees that you already know to be great ambassadors for the company i.e. those people who best represent the company's values. Start with employees who have a natural gift for telling stories and who like to do so.
- Ask about their experiences within the company, good and bad. Which stories do they tell their friends or colleagues? And what stories do their colleagues tell them?

- Are there individual accomplishments where an employee has stood out, or made a difference - either socially or professionally? This can also be a good lead into other stories.
- Be prepared to get new leads during the process. You will often hear bits and pieces of stories, where you will need to find the original source in order to get the full picture.
- Always consider what the stories say about your company values.

Nothing is Too Much Trouble

CASE

ALL FOR YOU
Comwell

Comwell is a Scandinavian hotel chain where providing exceptional service is the very core of the business. The company core story is about the calibre of employees who will overcome any obstacle to make a guest happy. Comwell has put together a small folder called "All For You". In it, a number of employees recount personal experiences where they made an extra special effort to make their customers happy. A female secretary at Comwell, Denmark tells the following story:

"It was Midsummer's Eve and we were hosting a large wedding between a Danish bride and an American groom, at Comwell. The wedding party comprised 70 people who were invited to take part in traditionally Danish, Midsummer's Eve bonfire festivities on the beach close to the hotel. Unfortunately, that summer the fire department and the harbourmaster had put a ban on all private bonfires on the beach. The bride was in tears. She had desperately wanted her new husband and their guests from America to experience the festival. That same evening my husband and I had been invited to spend the evening with some close friends of ours, Ulla and Carsten. They had collected plenty of firewood for a huge bonfire in the garden of their home in the country. It occurred to me to give them a call. Happily, they had no objections if we brought along some extra guests. They had plenty of room in the garden, so seventy-four instead of four posed no problem. And this is how the bride

got her groom and her traditional Danish Midsummer's Eve with bonfire, speeches and song."■

Stories About the CEO

Stories about the CEO - both negative and positive - are told again and again in the company.

As the front man or woman of a company, the CEO has a symbolic significance in any business as their actions are observed and analysed by the employees and the surroundings. Stories about the CEO – both negative and positive – are told again and again within a company. Sometimes those stories circulate for so many years that it becomes unclear whether the story is real, or mythical. Regardless, the symbolic meaning remains the same.

Former CEO of Hewlet-Packard, Bill Hewlett, was a leader who understood the symbolic value of his actions and of the stories being told about him. One of the classical stories told about his management style goes as follows:

"Many years ago, Bill Hewlett was wandering around the Research & Development department and found the door to the storage room locked. He immediately cut the lock with a bolt-cutter and put a note on the door, 'Never lock this door again. Bill'. "

It is a story about trusting and respecting your employees. To Bill Hewlett, the locked door was a breach of these values and his actions sent a clear message to his employees. That story is still being told today.

A few tips on how to dig for stories about the CEO:

- Most stories about the CEO are to be found among employees. Start with the employees who work with the CEO on a daily basis.
- Consider if there are any "grapevine-stories" about the CEO? Find out what they are, and get them verified.

- Are there particular actions or rituals that the CEO is well known for?
- Has the CEO been involved in any major successes, or has he helped the company through crisis and tough times. How did he or she do it?
- Consider what the stories tell you about management style and the company values.

The Big Bang: Stories About the Founding of the Company

The story of "how it all began" is part of every company's history.

The story of "how it all began" is part of every company's history. Indeed, many of these "founder-stories" are very similar. Who does not recognise the story of the two young up-starts who started what became a globally successful company from their parent's garage. Many of the dot.coms that shot to success during the 1990s and grew to record size in no time were founded in a garage or an attic somewhere in the small hours of the morning.

Another variation of the "founder-story" is the "geek-in-the-garage-story". This is the story of the ingenious engineer who built his company on a unique product, which he developed in his hobby-room. At Danfoss one of the largest manufacturers of thermostats and water pumps in the world, the story of the founder Mads Clausen is well known. Aged just 17, back in 1923, Mads filed the first patent for an invention of his and earned the nickname "Mads Patent". Ten years later, in 1933 Mads founded Danfoss. The story supports and reflects the company's core story of maintaining a "pioneering spirit of innovation"; values on which the company was built, and still rests on today.

Founder stories are variations on the same theme. Compaq (now merged with Hewlett-Packard) was founded by a group of IBM employees who had grown tired of working in a big, streamlined corporation. One day, during their lunch break

they were sketching out ideas on a napkin and the idea for the laptop computer was born. They quit that same day and founded Compaq. Another example is that of the Hard Rock Café, which was founded by two Americans who were deeply frustrated by the fact that they could not get a decent burger in London. They started a burger restaurant where Eric Clapton became a regular. The fanfare for what would become a worldwide success story came the day that Clapton donated a signed guitar to the restaurant, and laid the foundation for the Hard Rock Café concept as we know it today.

Stories about the first tentative footsteps of companies all over the world often touch on the core values and mindset on which the companies rest.

Stories about the first tentative footsteps of companies all over the world often touch on the core values and mindset on which the companies rest. And often you will find the founder was driven by passion and the will to make a difference. It is often said that you are better equipped to face the future if you know your past. Knowing your roots gives you a feeling of identity. It provides ballast when decisions have to be made on the future of the company. Internally, the story of the company's founding has great importance for the identity of the employees. However, management within the company also needs to consider whether the story remains relevant to the company, today and in the future. Developments may have made changes in a way that means the "founder-story" no longer supports the core story.

A few tips for finding stories on the company's founding:

- Start by reading all available material on the company's history and development.
- Interview the founder if he or she is still with the company. Or, talk to senior employees who may have been there since the beginning.
- Ask what triggered the foundation of the company and how it happened?

- What was it that inspired the founder - what was the vision? The dream? And his or her passion?
- Consider if the vision of then, corresponds with the vision of now. Does it still have a relevant, forward-looking message?

Milestones: Successes and Crises

In any company there are always events of special significance, which have been decisive in shaping the company and in determining its future. By scrutinising these events or milestones, we can uncover many stories, which are rich in value content.

A milestone marks a decisive turning point that has subsequently been of great importance to the company: landing a big deal, a buyout, a blockbuster product that took the market by storm, or a lurking crisis that was turned around thanks to a stroke of genius, or true team effort. Milestones are often tied to success stories where the company made an extraordinary performance. But it is not only the successes that have the potential to become a good story. Often, it is when things go wrong and you are in deep crisis that your company values are put to the ultimate test. And where you have most to learn. Critical choices are made when you have your back against the wall. A serious crisis forces companies to prioritise more clearly or to change course completely. If the company stands idly by, it risks bankruptcy. When in deep crisis the company is forced to reach back and examine the reason for its existence - its heart and soul - employees invariably bond together in a common cause. It has to hurt before it can get better.

Often, it is when things go wrong and you are in deep crisis that your company values are put to the ultimate test.

A few tips for digging up stories about your company's milestones

- Start with senior employees or employees who have been with the company for many years and who know its history inside out
- Ask about the times that the company has experienced its greatest crisis. How was the crisis overcome - and what

does this say about the company's values?

- At any point in time has the company gone through a change in course? What prompted the change?
- When did the company experience its greatest successes? What happened?

Product Stories

The company's products are almost always a story source.

The company's products are almost always a story source. It may lie hidden in the way the product was invented, or in the way it is made. Take the story of Rockwool for example. Making Rockwool (a home insulation product) is a complicated process. To explain the process in a way that we non-rocket scientists can understand, Rockwool tells the following story:

"The process used to manufacture Rockwool is a man-made copy of one of natures most impressive phenomena: the volcanic eruption. The idea was born in the 1920s when scientists made a startling discovery. Following a volcanic eruption on Hawaii they found strange tangles of wool scattered across the island. According to legend, these were clumps of hair that the volcano's queen, Pelé, tore from her head in anger. However, studies showed that the lumps of wool had a different, but nevertheless extraordinary explanation. During a volcanic eruption, rocks inside the volcano become so hot that they melt and are tossed up in the air. Before the rocks fall back to earth, the cooling air transforms the rocks to wool. It is this process that is being recreated in the production of Rockwool."

If your product has a long history, chances are you can dig out stories from the past that can add value to the product in the present.

The classic Parker pen dates back all the way to 1892 and played a vital role in world history during the course of the 20th century. In 1945 Dwight D. Eisenhower used his Parker pen to officially

put an end to World War II when he signed the peace treaty in Paris. And when Japan surrendered to the Allies later the same year, the treaty was signed with General Douglas MacArthers old Parker pen onboard the warship "Missouri". The arts have also benefited from the ink of a Parker pen. Giacomo Puccini let his Parker pen dance across the paper, when he composed *La Boheme*, as did Sir Arthur Conan Doyle when he created his infamous mastermind detective, Sherlock Holmes. Many stories can be told about the Parker pen - and many of those would seem to indicate that great people achieve great things using Parker pens.

Another product with a rue story behind its name is Kraft Foods classic sandwich spread, "Miracle Whip", which to this day is made to the same, top-secret recipe. This story begins on a chilly autumn night in 1931 when a Kraft Food-employee entered Max Crossett's café in the state of Washington, USA. He ordered a salad with some of Max's "Xtra Fine Salad Dressing" famed locally for its unique taste. The Kraft employee was so excited about the dressing, that he asked the proud Max Crosset, if he could buy the rights for the recipe. That evening, for 300 dollars the Kraft employee walked away with the secret recipe in his pocket.

Sticking to Max Crossett's original recipe, Kraft Foods experimented to give the product added finesse by putting it through engineer Charles Chapman's new invention, known as "the miracle whip" machine, because of its outstanding whipping technology. It turned Max Crossett's dressing into a light and creamy mayonnaise - perfect for a sandwich.

In 1933 Kraft Foods launched Max Crossett's original recipe as a new sandwich spread. They called it "Miracle Whip". In the dark age of the Great Depression, the taste of Miracle Whip added colour to the lives of many Americans. It became an

instant success. While adding credibility historically, to the statement that Miracle Whip is the "original sandwich maker", this true story also partly reveals the secret behind its unique taste.

A few tips for digging up product stories:

- How was the product developed? How did the idea for it come about? What happened and who was involved?
- How is the product made today?
- How did the product get its name?
- Does this product have something special that competing products do not?

CASE

Kellogg's

Accidental Corn Flakes

Today, the Kellogg's brand is synonymous with breakfast cereals, none more so than Kellogg's Corn Flakes. The story behind this product is well tuned to the company's brand values, despite the fact that the whole thing came about by accident.

First we need to go back 100 years to Battle Creek in Michigan, USA. Here, there was a health sanatorium nicknamed "The San", where wealthy, high-society folks could seek treatment from the effects of the fatty foods of the times. The San was the largest health sanatorium of its kind back then, and was managed by one Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. The patients at "The San", included, among others Henry Ford, Thomas Edison and Johnny Weismüller, who were all put on a vegetarian, low fat, high fibre diet.

In order to make the diet as tasty and attractive as possible, Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and his brother Will Keith Kellogg experimented with the development of grain based products that could be incorporated into the treatment of their patients. In 1894 the two brothers were experimenting with boiled wheat, which they rolled. The result was a very poor-tasting alternative to the foods of the day. Then, one day they were

interrupted during one of their experiments and left the boiling wheat to go cold. When they returned, Dr. John Harvey decided to roll it anyway, and to their great surprise the wheat came out in large thin flakes, which were light and crunchy when baked.

Rumours of these new, tasty flakes spread fast. Many former patients wrote to the sanatorium asking for the wonderful flakes of wheat. So Dr. John Harvey Kellogg started his own production company, the Sanitass Food Company. His brother became president of the company and continued to experiment with different types of grain like corn, which he boiled with malt, sugar and salt. The original Kellogg's Corn Flakes were born, and laid the foundation for the entire Kellogg's brand. ■

Stories From Working Partners

Stories garnered from your partners are always interesting because they are often founded in actual knowledge of your company, and from personal experiences with your employees. Here you will often find raw material in the shape of shared personal experiences that bind you closer together. If you have been working together intensively on a project, or have had a solid business partnership for a long time there will usually be stories, which reflect your shared values.

Stories garnered from your partners are always interesting, because they are often founded in actual knowledge of your company.

A few tips for digging up partner stories:

- Start with the partners with whom your company has good and close relations.
- What characterises the relationship? How does this manifest itself, and what does it say about the company's values?
- Which projects have you done together that both parties are proud of? What happened? Who were involved?

CASE

The Art of Illy

Combining authentic Italian tradition with advanced science and technology, the world famous coffee brand, Illy, has spent

nearly 70 years perfecting the espresso coffee process. Founded by Francesco Illy in 1933, the company today is run under the expert guidance of his son, Dr. Ernesto Illy, and grandson, Andrea Illy.

Illy coffe is special because it is based on 100% Arabica coffee beans. And making a good espresso out of pure Arabica coffee is a very delicate art. It is said, that 60% of the quality is determined by the way the coffee is brewed. So the art of brewing is vital to Illy's success. Thus, they depend on their business partners - such as coffee shops and bars - to ensure that the true Illy-experience reaches their customers. The following story, took place five years ago at a café in the heart of Copenhagen:

"One afternoon an elderly Italian gentleman entered the cosy café Laszlo, took a seat at the bar and ordered an Illy espresso. The young barman however, looked at the man and said: "As much as I would like to serve this espresso to you, I'm afraid I can't. I discovered this morning that our espresso machine isn't working quite as it should, which means that the Illy coffee doesn't taste quite right. So, I'd rather not serve it. I'm sorry, but I hope you understand". The Italian gentleman did not get upset. Much to the surprise of the barman he got up with a big smile on his face and thanked him from the bottom of his heart. It turned out that the Italian gentleman was in fact Dr. Ernesto Illy, the owner of Illy Coffee and one of the most admired people in the entire coffee industry, respected for his vast knowledge and expertise. Dr. Illy was deeply impressed by the professional attitude the young barman had displayed, in particular the way he had safeguarded the Illy brand. Dr. Illy was on one of his rare visits to Copenhagen to give a lecture on coffee and to hand over the special Illy-award for the best coffee shop in town. Thrilled about this experience Dr. Illy asked the young bartender to come along to the award event, which was taking place that evening. When later that night Dr. Illy had

handed over the award to the coffee shop in question, he announced an extra Illy-award for an individual barman who had showed an outstanding sense of quality and professionalism. Recounting his experience from that afternoon, he asked the young barman from Laszlo to step up and receive the honour."

Even though the coffee was never served, the story sets a great example as to what the Illy brand is all about. The barman could have easily served the Illy espresso and made the sale, even though the coffee would not have had the right taste. Yet, he never compromised his professional integrity. He displayed the Illy values by taking pride in his work and showing deep respect for the art of brewing coffee to perfection.

The story is well known by people in the café and coffee shop business in Copenhagen. Yet, it would be easy for Illy to systematically tell it to their sales force; to set an example and show the kind of commitment they expect from all their business partners.

Stories From Customers

In South America several schools use LEGO bricks as a teaching tool. Studies have shown that alternative teaching methods using LEGO bricks increases children's ability to learn. It not only motivates them to come to school, but also has such a positive effect on them that they cannot stay away. In a school in the Brazilian State of Bahia, a teacher came to work one Monday morning to discover that there had been a break in over the weekend. Bizarrely though, nothing had been stolen. As it turned out it was a couple of the school's students who were behind the break-in. They had forced their way in, in order to continue working on the LEGO models they had started building in class the Friday before. When they were finished they had cleaned up, put away the LEGO bricks and closed the door behind them as they left.

Your customer stories add a universe of experiences, which reach beyond the physical properties of the products themselves.

If your company has loyal and happy customers, then let them speak! It is your customer stories that add a universe of experiences, which reach beyond the physical properties of the products themselves. Your customer's experiences bring your values to life; they show in real terms how you make a difference. The story of the students in Brazil illustrates LEGO values - enthusiasm, creativity, play and learning which make up the very core of the LEGO brand. When your customers show how and why your company makes a difference, it has far more credibility than when you praise yourself.

For several years now, American Express has been building its brand under the pay-off "Do More". The underlying core story is about the ultimate freedom to do what you want, when you want. There is no situation good, or bad, that the holder of an American Express card cannot cope with and at one time you could read small customer stories on the company's web site. One of them went as follows: "Passengers on an Air Zimbabwe Boeing 707 from Harare to London were spared an embarrassing delay in Marseille thanks to the holder of an American Express card. During the stopover the pilot asked the surprised passengers if anybody could cover the 2,700 Euro landing fee charged by the airport. After a moment of silence a passenger offered to put it on his card."

A few tips for digging out customer stories:

- Gathering customer stories requires dialogue with your customers. If you do not already have such a dialogue, you need to consider ways in which to get direct feedback from the customers.
- Look for concrete examples of customers who have had an experience with your company or product. What happened? Which role did the product or the company play in the customer's experience?

Consider where your company makes a difference to your customers? Does this manifest itself in the stories?

Stairway to the Stars

CASE

With its prolific address in the heart of Copenhagen just opposite the Royal Theatre and Ballet, Hotel d'Angleterre is one of the finest hotels in Denmark. Here is a little story that reflects not only the hotel's proud traditions, but also its clientele:

"Even though the Hotel d'Angleterre is not quite as old as the legendary King Arthur, a three-metre high statue of the old King has been standing guard at the door of the Royal Suite for many years. A couple of years ago a very prominent singer was staying at the hotel. He simply could not tear himself away from the statue. When he left the Royal Suite in the morning and again, when he came back in the evening, he would stop to admire this antique work of art. After a few days the singer went down to the reception and asked if he could buy the statue. This spawned a flurry of activity behind the scenes. "How much does a statue like that cost? Can we sell it at all? Is it possible to get a copy made?" After considerable deliberation the manager went to his guest and explained with regret that the statue was not for sale. It had been standing in its place for many years and was part of the heart and soul of the hotel. This, however, did not deter the guest, who, in all seriousness asked, "Well how much does the hotel cost then?"

Shoe Love

CASE

Few companies enjoy the privilege of receiving letters from satisfied customers telling their stories and expressing their gratitude. The global shoe brand ECCO, known for its comfortable and high quality casual shoes however, regularly gets emotional letters from thankful customers around the world.

The following letter, which ECCO received from an American customer, is probably about the closest you could ever get to true shoe love:

"I was recently caught in the electricity blackout of 2003, in my office in New York City: 40 miles from home, no subways, not a bus to be found and no commuter trains were operating. I was not allowed to stay in my office building and refused to sleep in the street as many other New Yorkers did that night. Like tens of thousands of people, I began to walk home. From 34th Street in Manhattan up town and over the 59th Street Bridge, across the East River and into the borough of Queens. Five an a half hours later and after walking 16 miles, I finally found two buses which were able to get me close enough to home to be able to call for a ride to my house. I would have never made it, nor would I have tried to make it by foot unless I was wearing my ECCO dress shoes. My feet never hurt, they were never sore, and although the inside of my legs became raw and were bleeding by the end of this hot and exhausting trip, my feet still felt fresh and lively due to the wonderful pair of shoes I had on that night. I was really beat when I finally arrived home (at 1:30 am) and collapsed in my easy chair. I soon fell asleep in my clothes too tired to even change. I didn't even remove my shoes that night. They were as comfortable and as light then, as they were the moment I put them on earlier that day. These dress shoes are more comfortable then sneakers and the soles never wore down a bit. I am sold for life, I tell everyone this story, and promote your product constantly. Keep up the good work. You make an excellent high quality product and thank you for helping me get home during the recent "Black-out". Sincerely, Tom Lennon."

Think about the determination it sometimes takes to write a letter to a dear friend. Then consider how determined the ECCO customer must have been writing this letter to a foreign

shoe company far, far away! His shoes must have meant quite a lot to him. You don't get a story like this unless your company has truly earned it.

Sadly, most customer "love letters" tend to end up in an archive in customer services or in a secretary's desk drawer without anybody ever seeing them. However, one shouldn't underestimate the power of such a story. It could be valuable ammunition for the sales force when facing new customers. And it could boost the company spirit, making employees feel that they actually do make a difference.

Stories From Opinion Leaders

In the 1950s the sex symbol of sex symbols, Marilyn Monroe was famously asked what she wore to bed. Her answer went something like this, "Two drops of Chanel No.5 and nothing else...". Marilyn's racy reply not only triggered the imagination of her male admirers, it also gave a huge boost to Chanel who could now tell the story of Marilyn's preferred bedtime attire. The story was so powerful that Chanel No.5 still lives on the power of the icon and myth of Marilyn Monroe. It emphasises their story of femininity, eroticism and seduction.

An opinion leader is a person, an organisation or a cause that sets the agenda in a given field; for example, Marilyn Monroe was a role model for fashion, beauty and youth. The idea behind digging up stories from external opinion leaders all adds to your credibility when someone who knows what they are talking about recommends your company. The story told by opinion leaders may not be as rosy as if you were to tell it yourself, but the added credibility gives the story far more punch than you ever could have.

The story told by opinion leaders may not be as rosy as if you were to tell it yourself, but the added credibility gives the story far more punch than you ever could have.

An opinion leader does not necessarily have to be known. It could also be professionals or experts within a narrow field who

are not immediately associated with the company. When the company "explains itself" through people from different worlds, whole new perspectives of looking at the brand often appear. Sourcing stories from opinion leaders requires thorough research and legwork, and it may be a good idea to proactively seek to establish a dialogue with opinion leaders either in or outside of the field of business: opinion leaders who may share an interest in the field in which the company operates, or who hold similar values to the company.

A few tips on digging up stories among opinion leaders:

- You should have a clear idea of the message that the opinion leader can contribute beforehand
- Identify the persons who set the agenda in the company's field of business. They will often be the preferred reference points of the media when they need a statement
- Consider if there are opinion leaders from other fields who may have an alternative approach to the company, or the company's product?
- Professional experts must not receive payment from your company. This would undermine their credibility. They need to have a professional shared interest in the company or its product, which in turn becomes the basis for opening up a dialogue. Of course, this means that the company must have the substance or profile that makes it interesting for the opinion leader to get involved in telling the company story in the first place.

CASE

Building Blocks for Life

The core story of the LEGO brand is about "learning through creative play". It is also the story told by people all over the world who have had good experiences with LEGO products. At www.lego.com and in the company's brand-book you can find the following story:

"A Canadian DNA-scientist was approached by a local television station that asked if he would appear in a program and explain to viewers what DNA is, and how it is structured. Naturally the scientist was delighted to take part in the program. The only question was how he was going to explain the complex structure of DNA, so that people - even a child - would understand what he was talking about. He had been contemplating this problem for a few days when he found some of his old LEGO bricks in his basement. This was it - the solution to his problem! By building a model of LEGO bricks in various colours he could clearly illustrate and explain the complex DNA structure in a way that everyone could understand. It worked so well that his DNA model of LEGO bricks was later used in a program on the Discovery Channel."

Even though the DNA scientist is not well known or famous, his professional expertise adds credibility. This simple anecdote emphasises that LEGO represents a universal language, and through the unlikely use of LEGO bricks by a DNA scientist, the product was placed in a new context that supported the brand values.

A Few Rules of Thumb

The various sources for finding your stories, underline the fact that in any company there is abundant raw material for storytelling. But as your research goes on, you will find it is rare to find these stories presented to you on a silver platter. Often, there are lots of fragments and bit-meal pieces of information that need to be processed before they can be shaped into a story.

The following are a few rules of thumb as to what to look for when gathering stories and processing the raw material into actual stories:

A good example
People have a tendency to speak in general terms. "It was a good period" or "We are more innovative than our competitors". Make them be specific. Have them tell stories of specific incidents, events or situations that express the sentiment.

The more concrete the better
Put faces on the characters in your story. What was said? How did they react? What was the mood?

A good story "speaks in images"
If you do not see images in your mind when hearing a story it is not concrete enough. Be sure to get the visual details.

Numbers are boring
Numbers and facts may be very important, but on their own they rarely make for a good story. They must be placed in a context.

Storytelling and history are not the same
"The company was founded in 1899 by a man in Liverpool" is not a good story in itself, but it may very well be the seed for a story.

The StoryDrivers of the Company

In the systematic process of extracting the raw material for storytelling, some hidden and untold stories about the company are likely to be revealed. It is also likely that you will encounter one or more areas that hold a larger concentration of stories, which express the company's core story. Gluts such as this are "StoryDrivers".

A StoryDriver helps express the company core story by making it relevant for the right people.

A StoryDriver helps express the company core story by making it relevant for the right people. The 3M Company is known for its ability to innovate and develop new products. As a brand it

is built on the core story of "innovation at any cost". The core story is brought to life by the many internal stories of how new and groundbreaking products come to life in a unique culture of innovation. It is those stories about product development that constitute the central StoryDriver of 3M, helping to attract new employees and continuously strengthen the culture.

A charismatic and visionary leader who, through his actions becomes an icon for the company's story may also be a Story-Driver. Richard Branson and everything he represents is the central StoryDriver in the story of Virgin – the adventurous rebel who breaks with convention.

The choice of StoryDriver is a strategic decision. It should be grounded in an assessment of what stories best communicate the company's core story. Your authentic stories may not be equally applicable in all situations. Maybe they do not offer a forward-looking perspective on the core story, or maybe they are simply not relevant to some of the company's core target groups; some stories will be more relevant for customers than employees, and vice versa.

Sometimes inventing new stories, or staging some of its stories better serves the company. At Nike it was never authentic raw material that Michael Jordan and all the other star athletes wear Nike shoes. In order to express the core story externally, Nike has paid for this raw material and made it the central Story-Driver in their communication with customers. It works for Nike. But it is also a costly solution that only a few companies can afford. And it is not always credible to buy your stories. In any case, your genuine stories can be used as a starting point, or serve as inspiration for creating or inventing different stories.

Figure 5.2 illustrates the process of finding the company's StoryDrivers.

Figure 5.2

The Company's StoryDrivers

Your choice of StoryDriver centres on finding the focus areas of stories best suited strategically to communicating the company's core story.

Having extracted the authentic raw material for storytelling, we can usually identify one or more areas that hold a larger concentration of stories. With this starting point, we need to ask whether these stories are relevant for the target groups of the company? And do the stories support the company's core story?

StoryDriver

3. For which core target groups do the stories have particular relevance?

2. What areas hold the largest concentration of stories expressing the company's core story?

1. Collecting the necessary raw material.

PART TWO:

STORYTELLING APPLIED

Storytelling as a Management Tool 6

If your company's employees cannot explain how you make a difference, then it is naive to think that customers should choose your company over your competitors. A strong brand stems from its employees; people who have to be strong ambassadors for the brand on a daily basis. In this chapter we discuss how storytelling can be used as a tool to strengthen the brand from within.

The stories we share with others are the building blocks of any human relationship. Stories place words and images on our shared experiences. They help shape our perception of "who we are" and "what we stand for". Likewise, stories are told and flow through all companies. By analysing and interpreting those stories we can uncover the organisations' values, making storytelling an important tool in the internal branding process. Likewise, through these stories, employees come to understand themselves and the company brand. And in turn, these stories help employees understand the reasoning behind the company's values and guide them towards actually living those brand values in day-to-day operations.

Through stories, employees come to understand themselves and the company brand.

Storytelling works as a supplement to traditional management tools. For managers, the task is to use storytelling to anchor the company's values, visions and culture within the organisation. As such, the goal should be to identify those stories, which best communicate the company's core story, at the same time

ensuring that they will be told again and again. This is a continuous and organic process meaning that stories must be identified, developed and communicated on an ongoing basis if they are to get their messages across in a timely and relevant way.

There are two purposes for using storytelling as a management tool:

To strengthen the culture

- Translating the company's values in tangible ways that employees can easily understand.

To show the way

- Showing employees how they should behave in certain situations in order to uphold company values.

The following pages give concrete examples on how companies have used storytelling to achieve these purposes.

Building Blocks for a Strong Company Culture

Managers are often fond of fancy words, listing their carefully considered corporate values on any occasion they get; through the company newsletter, on bulletin boards, in the annual report or on the company website. They sound great, but in terms of actual value creation they are practically meaningless: little more than empty shells devoid of any real content. Typically, they look much like the value list of any other company. By explaining company values through stories however, those abstract values become tangible. The complex becomes concrete. Take 3M for example. Here is one company where storytelling has become an integrated part of the culture. Through stories told about their many inventors and pioneers, 3M and its many employees define what the company stands for, and by actively seeking and using a certain set of stories the culture

By explaining company values through stories the abstract values become tangible. The complex becomes concrete.

of innovation has been maintained. These stories have become the building blocks for the dynamic company culture of 3M.

CASE

A Playground for Idea Makers

"Pioneering work and storytelling has always been an important part of the 3M company culture: the stories about those pioneers forming the basis for 3M's basic message – innovation. And by reading those stories it becomes easier to understand 3M's eagerness to challenge conventions and encourage new, innovative solutions for both small and large problems and needs."

For more than 50 years, the company has been acutely aware of the role that storytelling can play in developing the values and culture.

The above paragraph comes from 3M's website. For more than 50 years, the company has been acutely aware of the role that storytelling can play in developing the values and culture that have enabled 3M to successfully maintain its high rate of innovation.

When 3M was founded in 1902, it produced sandpaper. Today 3M is a highly diversified company doing business in a wide number of fields including electronics, chemicals, construction, healthcare, office supplies and communication. The various divisions of 3M however, all have the same basic passion driving them forward: innovation and finding better solutions in their field. This has made 3M one of the most respected companies in the USA.

The story behind the invention of 3M's classic post-it note, can be found in numerous management books as an example of how a company can further a culture of innovation:

"Our story begins in 1968 when 3M-scientist, Dr. Spencer Silver, set out to develop a new kind of super glue with extraordinary sticking capabilities. The glue was intended for use in 3M's many wallpaper products. But Silver's project failed. At least, that's what they thought at first. In the course of his

experiments Silver came upon a glue of a very different nature; one that had unusually low sticking capabilities. He knew that he had found something quite extraordinary, but he had no idea what to use it for. Over the next five years Silver held a number of seminars for his colleagues enthusiastically telling them about this new glue.

Curiously, it turned out that the real breakthrough did not come from the hands of Spencer Silver at all, but from another 3M scientist who had taken part in one of Silver's seminars. The scientist was Arthur Fry. Fry sang in his local church choir and had an ongoing problem in that the bookmarks in his psalm book kept falling out. In a moment of inspiration, he suddenly remembered Spencer's glue and thought about how it would be perfect for bookmarks. He experimented by putting a dab of Spencer's glue on a bookmark and sticking it into his book. Voila, it worked like a dream. The bookmark stayed in place nicely, but he could easily remove it without damaging his psalm book. Thus the idea for 3M's popular post-it notes was born. An idea which now generates annual sales worth approximately US$ 100 millions."

Another chapter in the story is the clever way in which the idea was pitched to management. Employees started using the little yellow notes within the company, displaying its functionality for all to see. Instead of droning on about why the idea was so ingenious, they let the product talk for itself at the same time letting management see for themselves what it was capable of.

In the story archives of 3M, there are innumerable similar stories. Like the story of the female 3M-scientist, Patsy Sherman, who invented a unique protective agent for textiles. Back in 1953, Patsy Sherman noticed a seemingly unimportant incident. An assistant in Sherman's laboratory had spilled a few drops of an experimental chemical on her new trainers. Naturally the

assistant was upset, thinking that she wouldn't be able to get the stains off. Nothing worked; soap, alcohol or other solvents. Sherman however, became fascinated with the chemicals incredible resilience and began forming an idea, which at the time seemed ridiculous: to develop a chemical that could repel water and oil from cloth fabrics. By 1956, Scotchgard™ Protector was launched, marking the beginning of a whole new range of highly successful Scotchgard™ products. The brand has been the market leader ever since.

These stories are not only about successes, but also about projects that failed.

A popular saying at 3M is that you have to kiss an awful lot of frogs before you find your prince. They are pragmatists. Failing is par-for-the-course when it comes to innovation and product development. These stories are not only about successes, but also about projects that failed.

Internally, it is authentic stories like these that nurture and nourish a company culture where inventors are heroes providing employees with the conviction that the next blockbuster-product is just around the corner. These stories are also used in the recruiting process, to explain to new employees how things work at 3M. Instead of paper mountains describing each step in the process of getting a green light for a proposed project, all new employees are told stories about legendary product developers who challenged the system and got their projects approved. A classic case of, if you believe in something strongly enough, your dreams will come true.

Outside of company walls, these stories give customers and partners an image of 3M as an extraordinarily visionary company, and a leader in innovation: a glowing example of how a core story works as a catalyst for the company's brand, both internally and externally. 3M's core story is about "innovation at all cost". It fights a daily battle to make our lives easier through new inventions. The adversaries in the story are all the things that

stand in the way of innovative thinking, like bureaucracy and narrow-sightedness.

Of course, stories are not the only factors that drive 3M forward. The company has also established a number of symbolic and highly visible activities. For instance management have formed an Innovation Task Force; a team of employees whose only purpose is to spring-clean all bureaucratic red tape that hinders product development. The company also has a 15% rule, allowing all employees to spend 15% of their time on personal experiments and projects. And each year, 3M gives out the Golden Step Award; an award given to any product development team whose new products have achieved sales of more than US$ 2 million in the USA, or US$ 4 million worldwide, within its first three years on the market.

Of course, stories are not the only factors that drive 3M forward. The company has also established a number of symbolic and highly visible activities.

Make Storytelling Your Co-pilot

Our stories explain, "where we come from" and "what we stand for". But stories are also a strong tool for showing "where we are going", capable of guiding employees in terms of how they should act in a given situation in order to literally "live" the company brand.

Stories are a strong tool for guiding employees in terms of how they should "live" the company brand.

Needs often arise where companies need to refocus on their values and competencies, especially when they are trying to change. In cases like these, it is crucial that employees understand why and how they are to behave, given the new conditions e.g. following a merger, or when two companies with different cultures need to find a common ground to work from. Falling revenues may also prompt a change whereby management needs to visualise the company's values and provide employees with a reference point in day-to-day operations.

Sharing the appropriate stories helps employees understand these changes and implement the company's values. And

supported by these stories, employees know where they stand and can make decisions themselves. The next two cases from Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) and the LEGO Company are good examples of this use of storytelling.

CASE

SAS in Moments of Truth

In his book *Moments of Truth* former CEO of SAS, Jan Carlzon, opened one chapter with a simple anecdote that explained the essence of the organisational change he implemented at SAS in the 1980s. In order to best service clients' individual needs, he decided that the decision making power had to lie with individual employees. Carlzon used the following story to explain the basic values of the company: unique customer service and individual decision making powers. Stories like this made it easy for individual employees to understand exactly what kind of service they were expected to deliver in order to live up to SAS's position as *The Businessman's Airline*:

"The American businessman Rudy Petersen leaves the Grand Hotel in Stockholm heading for Arlanda Airport. He and a colleague are taking a day trip on an important errand to Copenhagen, but at the airport Mr. Peterson discovers that he has left his ticket at the hotel. He even remembers exactly where he left it while he put on his coat. You cannot fly without a ticket, but he explains his predicament to the girl at the check in counter. She smiles and says, "Don't worry Mr. Peterson, here is your boarding card. I have given you a temporary ticket. If you will just tell me what room you were staying in at the Grand Hotel and where you are going in Copenhagen, I will take care of everything." Mr. Petersen and his colleague go to the transit hall while the girl places a call to the Grand Hotel. The porter at the hotel goes to Mr. Petersen's room and finds the ticket exactly where Mr. Petersen had said it would be. The girl at check in now knows that the ticket actually exists. She sends a SAS car to the hotel to pick up the ticket. The ticket arrives.

She tears the stub and sends the rest to Copenhagen. As it happens Mr. Peterson and his colleague had been in plenty of time for their flight and the ticket actually made it to the aeroplane before they took off. At Kastrup Airport in Copenhagen, the stunned Americans are greeted by a SAS-employee who quietly says, "Mr. Peterson, I have your ticket, here you go."

Carlzon ends his story: "Naturally, Rudy Peterson was both happy and impressed. Now, unbeknownst to him, he has also become a case that I like to use. His story shows with inherent clarity why we at SAS have to work with decentralised responsibility and give decision-making powers to employees in the field. What would have happened if we had had the traditional hierarchical approach? A man without a ticket; "Let me check the manual. No, of course he cannot get on the plane". At best, "You will have to speak to my manager".

The story supported the brand that SAS was creating at the time: an airline that would do everything in its power to ensure that the busy, travelling businessman would get to his destination on time.

Using storytelling as a guide when your company is undergoing change can be a difficult balancing act. The stories will often describe an ideal future scenario for the company to work towards. But at the same time, the stories have to mirror a realistic balance between the desired future and the present situation. If the company is up the creek without a paddle, and management does nothing but tell rosy stories of a distant future, its communication will be disregarded as non-credible. First and foremost management has to listen to its employees, and crucially, employees have to be able to identify with those stories. They need to be able to see themselves in the stories and become inspired. If not, storytelling risks being labelled as nothing but management propaganda. ■

If the company is up the creek without a paddle, and management does nothing but tell rosy stories of a distant future, its communication will be disregarded as non-credible.

CASE

The Story Hunters

The year 2000 was the worst ever in the history of the LEGO Company. Since the founding of the company in 1932 the products had been selling themselves. It had always been a question of how big the earnings were going to be. But by the end of the 1990s new times loomed on the horizon. In 1998 the company experienced its first ever deficit, and two years later things went seriously wrong as the LEGO Company faced a loss of 134 million Euros. Changes had to be made.

Looking to the LEGO values as a start point, it was clear that the focus had to return to running a healthy business. Management decided to implement a new mindset by revitalising their values with a forward looking perspective, making them more relevant to each individual employee. At the same time the company had to work on increasing its competitiveness in the market, while individual employees had to become better at taking responsibility for his or her actions, and show more initiative and drive.

The LEGO Company launched an extensive development program aiming to strengthen the competencies of managers and employees alike. Based on existing LEGO values, five core competencies were identified and formulated for the whole organisation to work towards improving. There was only one problem. Very few employees understood what competencies such as *Business Drive* and *Consumer & Brand Focus* actually meant, when it came down to the daily workings of the company.

The management team knew that work manuals and long-winded texts were not the way to go. Instead they asked themselves: how do we best explain what the individual competencies mean in everyday operations? The answer seemed straight forward: by using stories about exemplary LEGO Company employees from day to day operations, simple guidelines could be created

showing how the company was going to transform words into action. Management then initiated a worldwide search for stories at all organisational levels.

By using stories about exemplary LEGO Company employees from day to day operations, simple guidelines could be created showing how the company was going to transform words into action.

The result is a treasure chest of video shorts that show through sound and images how challenges and conflicts have been solved in true LEGO-fashion. The treasure box dubbed The LEGO Spirit was distributed on CD-ROM and via the LEGO Company Intranet as inspiration for all 8,000 employees. One of the stories goes as follows:

"The thousands of LEGO models on display in LEGOLAND-parks all around the globe are subject to all kinds of weather; storms, snow, sun and rain. Even though the models can take the punishment, the strong colours of the bricks that the children love, start to fade after about five years. Because of the ever-changing Danish weather, LEGOLAND Billund spends in excess of 270,000 Euros a year, replacing old and faded models with new ones.

Erik Bundgaard, affectionately known among his colleagues as "The Mayor of LEGOLAND", had always considered it a shame to spend so much on replacing models every year, and during a visit to England he had a brainwave. By chance he came across an old fashioned method of shining and polishing church bells that was still employed in the country: hosing down the bells with a mixture of baking soda and water, made the bells shiny and new again. So Erik thought, "Why don't we try this with our LEGO models?" On his return to Billund he immediately ordered a high-pressure cleaner and started experimenting with a faded LEGO boat, from the LEGOLAND Park.

To his dismay however, the mixture did not have the desired effect on the LEGO bricks. Undeterred, he kept on experimenting until he finally discovered that by mixing small grains of sand

and glass with the water, the desired effect was achieved. The method brought back the boat's bright colours.

The discovery meant that all models in the LEGOLAND parks have now doubled their life span from five, to ten years. Today LEGOLAND Billund has two high-pressure cleaners and the other LEGOLAND parks have adopted the method as well. Thanks to Erik's creative thinking, LEGOLAND Billund has saved 80% on maintenance costs."

This short story called *Fading Colours* is used to explain what the competency of *Business Drive* means in day-to-day operations. The message is clear: a true LEGO employee should possess a natural curiosity and have the creativity to continually search for better ways of doing things. And of equal importance: sensible business is nothing without initiative and drive. A different story explaining the competency of *Consumer & Brand Focus*, is a personal story from a young Japanese gentleman who works for LEGO Japan in Tokyo:

"I started working with the LEGO Company eight years ago when I was 22. I had a special reason for wanting to work for them. I was convinced that the LEGO brand had a strong potential for becoming popular among Japanese teenagers. Even at that time I had noticed that designers and musicians had started doing cool things with LEGO products.

Then four years ago, our Tokyo department received a request from a trendy shop named Vacuum Records, saying that they would like to start selling LEGO products. Vacuum Records had also realised that LEGO could become very popular among Japanese youth. At first our Tokyo office flatly denied the request. They had a hard time taking the idea seriously as Vacuum Records was just a small shop. But they did not give up that easily. One day I received an enquiry from their managing director

through our LEGO department in Osaka, where I was stationed at the time. We had a good meeting and as it turned out we had many of the same ideas. This was just the opportunity I had been waiting for.

However, there were still several people in our organisation who were opposed to the idea. I had to fight to convince them. So we took it one step at a time and slowly started working with Vacuum Records. Together we marketed LEGO products to teenagers and young Japanese - LEGO watches, key rings, bricks, T-shirts - spiced up along the way with some cool LEGO events. The interest was overwhelming.

In Japan the LEGO brand has become a hit among teenagers - not just children.

Since then the avalanche has really picked up speed. Today, many Japanese pop-stars are spokespersons for LEGO products - totally on their own initiative. They appear on TV and at concerts wearing LEGO T-shirts, which of course rubs off on ordinary people. It is spreading like ripples on water, trickling down to children. If their role models think that LEGO is cool, then the children will also start to like LEGO products. This just shows that the LEGO brand is for everybody - not just children."

The moral of the story is: listen to what your customers are telling you and do not be afraid to think outside the box and fight for your ideas, as long as they add value to the LEGO brand.

The many stories collected by the LEGO Company take place in a wide variety of contexts, and of course, the individual employee has to relate them to his or her working day. But no matter what, the concrete day-to-day stories still help to translate abstract management terminology into a language that every LEGO employee can understand, all the way from executive level to the manufacturing floor. ■

TEST

Who are the Heroes of Your Company?

The stories from 3M, SAS, and the LEGO Company are all classic hero stories where the main characters represent the "good employee". They follow their hearts and solve challenges in a positive way. The hero becomes the embodiment of the values that management is trying to anchor in the organisation.

Hero stories are important in any company. They create morale and promote a shared image of "what we stand for", making it imperative that they support the company's brand. However, the hero does not have to be one individual person. It could be an entire department, or a team that have achieved exceptional results.

Hero stories help to uncover which values really exist in the company. What are the hero stories told in your company?

- What qualities does the hero possess in these stories?
- What challenges and adversaries does the hero face?
- What characterises these challenges?
- How does the hero tackle these challenges?
- What values lie in the message of the story?
- Does the story support the company brand?

The Symbolic Significance of the CEO

The cases above show how employee stories can be used as a catalyst for the company values in so far as they are systemised and used strategically in internal communication. But the stories of the CEO and those surrounding him or her are also important in the internal branding process. The CEO has a symbolic position in any company, serving as a role model as to how employees should think and act. In order to use his or her position to strengthen the company's brand from within, the CEO has to be aware of the symbolic importance of his or her own actions, which ultimately show the path that the company

In order to use his or her position to strengthen the company's brand from within, the CEO has to be aware of the symbolic importance of his or her own actions.

is following. Especially in companies where personal contact between the CEO and the employees is rare, the staging of the CEO through storytelling is an important factor.

The stories surrounding a leader are often about his or her personal style of management. But they will often also be an expression of the values that the CEO wishes to anchor in the company. Former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, was known as a tough boss who preferred action to words.

Once upon a time, he gave a team of sales people a set of tasks to do. After a couple of weeks he met with the group for a status report. Much to his frustration and irritation, the group had only produced some probing analysis and a few tentative attempts to launch some new initiatives with other departments in the company. Jack Welch immediately adjourned the meeting, demanding that they meet again in four hours time when the group would be given a second chance to deliver a status report. Four hours later the group gathered again and Welch got his report. In those four hours, the group had got more work done than in all the preceding weeks put together.

The staging of Branson's actions constantly provide nourishment for storytelling.

In some companies, the CEO plays the lead role in stories both internally and externally. He or she becomes the StoryDriver of the company's core story. This is often the case in companies where visionary and charismatic founders manage the company themselves. Richard Branson is a textbook example of such a CEO. His personality and qualities form the core of the Virgin brand. The staging of Branson's actions constantly provide nourishment for storytelling, from his courtroom battles with the mighty British Airways, to his daredevil attempts to circumnavigate the globe in a hot air balloon. The core story of Virgin is thus told through the rebel who, with charm and sometimes blatant disrespect for hierarchy, breaks down barriers and challenges the establishment.

The founder and former CEO of IKEA, the Swede Ingvar Kamprad, is also known as a living example of his company's philosophy - but is very different from Richard Branson needless to say. IKEA's central premise is to offer a wide assortment of functional, "designer" furniture at low prices. A concept that is supported by cutting costs wherever possible, which is exactly what Ingvar Kamprad has always done. In the early days of his career, he would typically drive across Sweden to visit the different IKEA warehouses. Arriving in these different towns at night, he would park the car in the centre and walk the streets until he had found an inexpensive hotel. In the hotel room he would treat himself to a cold Coke from the mini-bar. The next morning he would replace it with a bottle from the local drug store. When visiting local IKEA warehouses he would arrive half an hour early. This would give him just enough time to go through the large containers for reject furniture outside the building, checking to see if there was any furniture that could still be used. Much to the distress of local store managers, Ingvar Kamprad would very often find e.g. a chair that he would claim to be in enough good condition to sell. He would confront the manager with his discovery, before going through every detail in the store.

As a CEO Ingvar Kamprad was living proof of IKEA values and he showed the way for employees around the world, occasionally lending a helping hand. Once, a group of IKEA employees were going on a business trip abroad, when Ingvar Kamprad got a brilliant idea for minimising travel expenses. Instead of having the entire group flying back and forth, he arranged that half the group could fly to the destination and take the train back to Sweden, while the other half of the group could travel by train to get here, and then fly back.

Distinctive leaders are driven by their passion. They make no compromises and often go to extremes to achieve their goals.

This "edge" creates potential for good stories because it challenges the ordinary and opens up to the unpredictable and surprising.

In only 40 years Karl Toosbuy created the global shoe brand ECCO, famed around the world for quality and comfort. Today the company employs more than 9,000 people worldwide, yet Toosbuy's passion for shoes runs through the veins of every department in the company. Since the infancy of ECCO, Toosbuy preached that "Everything is possible until proven otherwise". Striving for perfection, he never took "no" for an answer, thus continually challenging the people around him to achieve goals they thought were unattainable. An employee at ECCO tells this story about Karl Toosbuy:

"When we first introduced one of our new production methods a few years back, one of the major problems we faced was changing the moulds. Each time we made a different sole we also had to change the mould on the machine, which took approximately 30 minutes each time. And it cost a lot of pairs in terms of missed production each time the machine stood still. Consequently, Toosbuy presented our production manager with a challenge: Reduce the down time! He thought about the problem for a couple of weeks and eventually came back to Toosbuy's office in very high spirits, declaring that they had reduced the down time to just two minutes! Toosbuy looked at him and said, "I was watching Formula 1 this weekend. It takes them 8.6 seconds to fuel the car, change four tires and wipe the visor before they are back in the race. Are you truly pleased with your two minutes?" The production manager turned on his heels and went back to try again. Today the downtime for a mould change on the machine is less than two minutes".

Toosbuy-stories like this one are being told at ECCO every day. His spirit is deeply embedded in the company and leaves no doubt as to the level of commitment and perfection, which is expected from each and every ECCO employee – be they salesmen, designers, or people in production.

Stories of charismatic leaders catch fire on the grapevine becoming urban myths. They are repeated so often in various forms, that they achieve epic proportions and no one really knows if they are real or not. They become legends. But the symbolic meaning remains.

Take the urban myth of former CEO Maersk McKinney-Moller of A.P. Moller - Maersk Group, the largest shipping company in the world. So the story goes, he once passed an employee on the stairs who was not wearing a tie, and was so incensed that he fired him on the spot. A story like that has an incredibly powerful symbolic message about the culture of discipline at A.P. Moller - Maersk Group.

When a company is changing course, the demands placed on a CEO to lead gain additional importance. This happened in 1991 when Stanley Gault became CEO of Goodyear. He initiated many changes in the company and one of his top priorities was to reduce costs. Besides getting rid of all the company's limousines and five jets, he made another remarkably symbolic act in order to clearly communicate his message. He went through his entire office and removed 25 electric light bulbs from floor, table and ceiling lamps and worked in a darkened office with a mood like a nightclub. Stanley Gault had calculated that this measure would save US$ 230 annually. This prompted other offices and hallways to keep the lights turned off during daytime hours. This symbolic act became a good story that helped Stanley Gault communicate his message.

What is the Message of Your Story?

Any story is open to interpretation depending on the person listening. But the way the story is told and the ending of the story are also important. Hence, we need to bear in mind how we want the story to be interpreted before we start telling it. As storytellers, we must be aware of exacting the interpretation that we want the listener to reach.

How do you interpret the following story:
Once, two young and inexperienced product developers of a large company had what they thought to be a good idea. But despite their passion, management remained sceptical. When they presented their idea they were told to drop the project. But the keen young product developers did not give up. They continued tinkering with their idea in their spare time and when it came time to decide what projects the company was going to prioritise for the coming year, they presented their idea again. This time they succeeded in convincing management to go ahead with the project. Today the product is one of the company's topselling items.

What is the moral of the story?
- That management is incompetent?
- That the company's decision-making process is too slow?
- That willpower and belief in one's ideas pay off in the end?

Would your interpretation of the story change if the last three words "top selling items" were replaced with "biggest failures"? The point is, often it takes only a very few changes to alter the possible interpretations of a story. We need to meticulously work with everything from wording to intonation to get our message across as intended.

TEST

A Tool for Knowledge Sharing

By exchanging stories we also share knowledge.

Stories communicate values. But they also communicate knowledge. By exchanging stories we also share knowledge. It is said, that stories are easier to remember and recount than naked information. This is basically because, in stories, information is packaged in a meaningful context for us to better understand the depth and the relevance of the information being relayed. Some scientists believe that stories stimulate the use of the logical and creative parts of our brain at the same time. This means that we understand the information factually as well as visually and emotionally.

So, storytelling can also be a good way to share and store knowledge in the organisation. Several knowledge-based companies are making targeted use of storytelling as a knowledge sharing or knowledge management tool. In these companies, knowledge is worth millions. Yet, far too much knowledge is lost due to its not being shared across departments and between employees. In order to preserve this highly valuable knowledge, employee stories are being gathered and systemised making them available to the rest of the organisation.

CASE

Sharing Knowledge Through Stories at IBM

IBM has conducted continuous studies as to how and why stories make a difference when it comes to sharing knowledge among employees.

IBM has both internal and external experience with storytelling. Internally, they have made targeted use of storytelling for a number of specific projects. For example, storytelling is used in relation to change or integration processes like the merging of two departments. Additionally, IBM also uses storytelling when sharing and embedding knowledge in the company.

As part of their work with knowledge management, IBM has also conducted continuous studies as to how and why stories make a difference when it comes to sharing knowledge among employees. One of their basic premises is that stories provide a

simple and easily understandable means of communicating a complex problem. The following anecdote has been used many times to illustrate this exact point:

The Slow Elevator
A few years ago, the tenants in a Manhattan office high-rise complained vigorously about the long wait for the elevators. Computer programmers were brought in to change the algorithms, but the complaints got worse. New, faster motors were installed at considerable expense, but the complaints continued and many tenants threatened to move out. In desperation, the owner hired structural engineers to estimate the cost of installing additional elevator shafts. But the cost of installation, along with the reduced amount of rent-able space would have been ruinous. At this point the owner's cousin suggested putting mirrors next to the elevators. They did, and the complaints stopped.

According to IBM, the anecdote describes how we draw hasty conclusions as to the cause of a problem in a given situation. The owner of the skyscraper was quick to identify the speed and effectiveness of the elevators as the problem, instead of looking into how the unpleasantness of the wait could be reduced. This in itself is a complex message, but through the story the point becomes beautifully simple. A story helps us identify the moral and the meaning, and thus it gives us a better basis for making the right decisions.

A story helps us identify the moral and the meaning, and thus it gives us a better basis for making the right decisions..

Based on this philosophy IBM has used storytelling in numerous contexts for sharing complex knowledge between employees. In the USA, IBM has employed a somewhat unusual method for sorting the valuable knowledge gained from finished projects. When IBM initiates and implements large projects in the million-dollar range, the process often spans several years. This makes each individual project unique, and no matter whether

it is a success or a failure each project contributes valuable experiences and insight. In order to keep this knowledge from being lost and forgotten, the employees involved are asked to re-tell the process together. The session is videotaped, analysed and made available to relevant personnel in the company. The result is a catalogue of best practice stories that help IBM to constantly improve its business while strengthening the brand from within. The approach is simple: group meetings in theatrical style. So is the technology: a video camera.

Xerox decided to gather "coffee break stories" and structure them in an easily accessible database.

By digging out stories and systemising them, management can prevent important information from being lost or isolated in specific departments. The large copier manufacturer, Xerox, came to the same conclusion some years ago. An internal investigation revealed that rather than looking in manuals or using expensive training courses, the most commonly used method for Xerox repair and service personnel to exchange information on how to deal with various problems in the field, was to swap stories by the coffee machine or water cooler: a revelation that management soon put to good use. Xerox decided to gather these "coffee break stories" and structure them in an easily accessible database named Eureka: a database for "aha" experiences. According to Head Researcher John Seely Brown, Eureka saves Xerox in excess of US$ 100 million annually.

Spearheaded by Knowledge Director, Dave Snowden, IBM's work using storytelling as an internal management tool has increased the focus on how to counter the increasing complexity of modern organisations. When the complexity of an organisation increases along with the conditions for accurate planning, traditional management methods like scenario forecasting often fall short of the objective. IBM has even established an entire centre - The Cynefin Centre - that only works with management and knowledge sharing in complex organisations. The centre's purpose is to develop tools for problem solving in companies

where traditional management methods have failed. A large database of stories will be a central part of this toolbox. The centre is going to work as a global network based on the membership of both companies and individuals. ■

Kick Starting Your Company's Storytelling-circulation

There are many applications for storytelling in the internal branding process. Stories can be used to communicate visions and values, to strengthen company culture, to manage the company through change and to share knowledge across the organisation.

No matter what purpose the company may have in using storytelling internally, management needs to be clear about one thing: storytelling is a dynamic and continuous process. First the stories have to be identified and gathered, then they must be sorted and processed and finally they have to be communicated to the organisation in the right way. What follows is a continuous effort to make employees take ownership of these stories in order to keep them embedded in the company. The circulation has to be maintained otherwise the long-term effect will dissipate. Before the process can begin however, the company must define a clear objective for the storytelling project. Criteria must be set as to what the stories have to communicate, which values those stories should support, and what employees should gain from those stories?

In order to establish a storytelling-circulation the company has to go through the following phases:

1) Searching
   First the stories have to be gathered. This can be done via workshops or interviews with selected key personnel.

2) Sorting
   The stories are listed and those with depth and relevance for the objective of the project are selected for further processing.

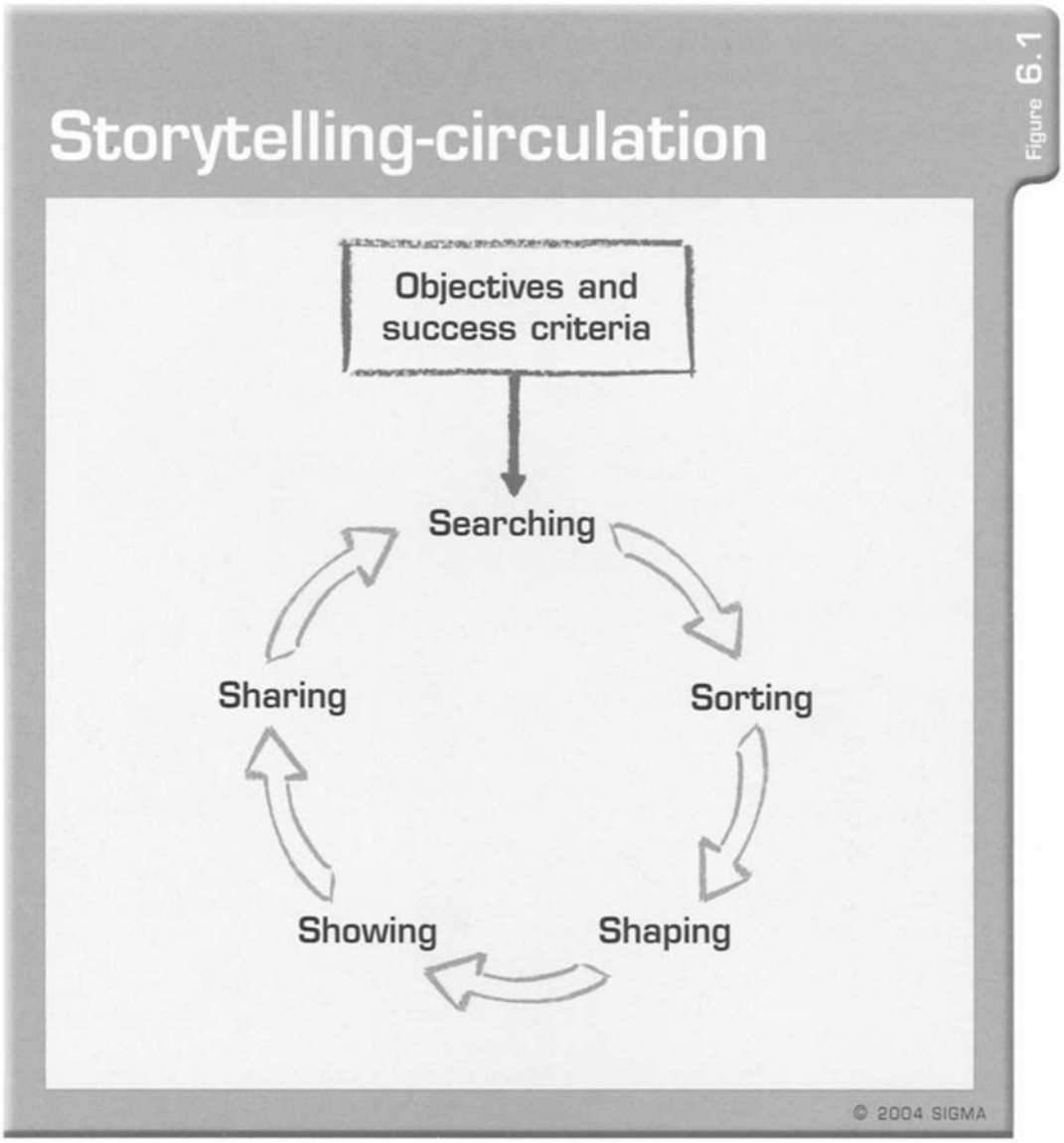
TEST

3) Shaping
The selected stories are processed according to the four elements of storytelling in order to make them "tell-able". Does the individual story have a logical sequence of actions with a conflict? Is there a hero and an adversary? Is the message clearly communicated?

4) Showing
Finally the stories are given a format in which to be communicated to employees. This may be done in the form of small video shorts on the company Intranet, or a story booklet handed out to individual employees. At the same time a strategy should be put in place for introducing the stories to the organisation in such a way that makes them visible and relevant to the right people.

5) Sharing
For management, the task is to ensure that these stories are told continuously and in the relevant contexts so that employees can take ownership of the stories. When employees can see and understand the idea, they will be able to contribute with new stories and collecting company stories becomes an ongoing process: The storytelling circulation has been initiated. Finally, management should consider how the company could establish a forum enabling employees to share their stories.

Figure 6.1


Storytelling-circulation
Objectives and success criteria
Searching
Sorting
Shaping
Showing
Sharing
© 2004 SIGMA


Toms
Peanuts
BARR

7 Storytelling in Advertising

In traditional advertising, storytelling is used as part of the company's corporate branding strategy and as a sales promotional tool to generate recognition and identification. This chapter gives various examples and different angles for using storytelling as the central driving force in advertising.

Within the advertising industry storytelling is a given; an ever-present element in the sense that commercials have always told stories. Likewise, they have always used the four elements of storytelling in their pursuit of achieving consumer awareness and loyalty, be it through television, radio, magazines, billboards, or, on the Internet.

That said increased consciousness of the power of storytelling has also left its mark on traditional advertising. Today, we see commercials using the art of storytelling in its purest form, especially as companies experience an increasingly urgent need to differentiate themselves from the competition, while giving their consumers an added-value experience that transcends the actual products. More and more companies are looking to create a story universe surrounding their products and services. In so doing, their story becomes the driving force behind their brand values, separating them from the grey masses.

More and more companies are looking to create a story universe surrounding their products and services.

The Commercial Serial as a Long-term Platform

A phenomenon in advertising, which was developed during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, is the concept of running TV-commercials as a serial. Inspired by the style and tone

of feature movies and different television formats including soap operas, dramas and sit-coms, the action spans several individual episodes that uphold the overall story. The rise of the commercial-serial seems to be a manifestation of storytelling in the world of advertising that has taken the genre into a realm as creative and sophisticated as filmmaking. The trademark of the serial, is that that the product and price focus is set aside, in favour of a story that aims to entertain and involve the audience emotionally; in much the same way as we become involved in television series and feature films.

The product and price focus is set aside in favour of a story that aims to entertain and involve the audience emotionally.

The strength of a good story is that it can evolve over time. The characters get the space they need to develop their personalities and we get to know them better. If we can identify with the characters, the chances are we will embrace the story. And as the conflict drives the story forward, we become more deeply involved and the commercial message is transmitted more easily, almost without our realising it. Thus, whether the purpose is to sell a product, increase brand recognition or strengthen the company's image, the advantage of the commercial serial is that it creates a long-term platform for the company to communicate its messages, and establishes a long term relationship with the viewer.

The popular television series, *Moonlighting*, which starred Bruce Willis and Cybil Shepherd paved the way for the first commercial serial in 1987, when Nestlé launched their campaign for NESCAFÉ Gold Blend in England. This would later prove to be one of the most enduring and popular advertising campaigns in British history.

CASE

NESCAFÉ

Love Over Gold

Up until 1987, English commercials for NESCAFÉ Gold Blend coffee had focused entirely on the product, emphasising the golden coffee bean as a symbol of their high quality coffee. But

Nestlé was up against a challenge. Even though NESCAFÉ Gold Blend was doing well and had gained a position in the market as a gourmet coffee, the brand was not accessible to the majority of the buying public. It was really only known among coffee connoisseurs, and the rational product-focussed message was only interesting to this limited audience. Nevertheless, NESCAFÉ Gold Blend was widely recognised: a fact, which Nestlé turned to their advantage. The objective was to keep the brand's position as a gourmet coffee, but to reposition it as a coffee with a broad appeal that was accessible to everybody. The solution was to tell a story that would get the consumer emotionally involved in the brand.

The Nestlé commercial serial, Love Over Gold, *was the closest a commercial had ever come to being a soap opera.*

The change from a rational product focus to an emotional universe resulted in a romantic every day drama with wide public appeal. The Nestlé commercial serial, *Love Over Gold*, was the closest a commercial had ever come to being a soap opera. The commercials introduced two main characters - a man and a woman - who were neighbours in an upper-class apartment complex. From the onset it was clear to everyone that they were made for each other, the script oozed sexual innuendo. But each time you thought the couple were going to get together over a cup of NESCAFÉ Gold Blend, small occurrences kept interrupting them and getting in their way. Each episode ended on an emotional high with an unresolved ending, and as the chemistry and the flirting increased, the audience were likewise, left wanting more. This curiosity soon turned into addiction as audiences followed each episode to find out if the flirtation would ever blossom into an actual romance.

The English public took this small every day drama to heart, especially women. The secret to its success? Emotional involvement. The actual product - instant coffee that tasted like the real thing - was a natural element in the story, but it was love and romance that communicated the message.

The first series was so popular that Nestlé decided to make twelwe episodes instead of the original six. They ran for five years. It culminated with a bonanza showing all the original commercials and a fairy-tale ending in which viewers saw the happy couple disappearing into the sunset. More than 30 million viewers tuned in to see our hero finally utter the words "I love you". The next day, the two main characters were on the cover of The Sun. The story of the campaign led to two CDs and a video, and in 1993 a new series was aired, introducing a new couple that repeated the success.

More importantly, since 1987 NESCAFÉ Gold Blend has increased its sales by 60%.

The campaign for NESCAFÉ Gold Blend was clearly structured on the four elements of storytelling, and this example clearly shows how storytelling can make a difference in traditional marketing, provided the story has a solid structure and directly addresses the target audience. Taking its starting point in the values behind NESCAFÉ Gold Blend - "good taste" and "passion" - an entertaining story was told which got viewers' attention. The focus was on the characters and the action while the product took a back seat, though it still managed to play a crucial role in the development of the story. ■

CASE

A French Affair

This was also the case when French car manufacturer, Renault, launched the new Clio - the successor to their long-established Renault 5 - in the UK, March 1991. Renault wanted to build a long-term communication platform that would continue to enhance consumer awareness and create a strong brand position for the Clio.

Extensive research prior to the campaign showed that the British public strongly aspired to the French way of life, believing

it offered a more relaxed, romantic and desirable lifestyle than their own. This was further supported by the fact that 6.8 million Britons said that after the UK, France was next in their preferred places to live, and that 2.2 million Britons visited France in 1990 alone. Another indication was the phenomenal success of *A Year in Provence* by Peter Mayle, which sold over 150,000 copies in the UK and was on the top-seller list for 42 weeks.

Instead of producing a traditional car advertisement focussing only on the product, Renault decided to develop a story universe around the Clio brand.

For Renault, this obsession with French culture was a great opportunity to set the course for a new, creative approach to advertising. Instead of producing a traditional car advertisement focussing only on the product, Renault decided to develop a story universe around the Clio brand. One that was capable of conveying the appeal of French values and lifestyle, thus appealing to peoples' emotions and making the message of the new Clio more relevant to the target group. Renault launched a campaign that told a story about the French and their romances, at the same time introducing the two main characters Nicole, a chic, beautiful young woman, and her father "Papa".

Set in scenic Provence, the first 60-second commercial showed Nicole in a polka dot summer frock, sneaking past her sleeping "Papa" in the garden of their Chateau and driving away in her Renualt Clio to meet with her boyfriend. Having faked his sleep "Papa" then goes off on *his* own rendezvous with a lady friend. Upon their return, they greet each other with "Nicole?" and "Papa!" The commercial ends with the strap line, "Renault: a Certain Flair."

The scene was set and the campaign quickly became part of British life. The following year a sequel was released and eventually the series became a saga, airing for more than seven years. It shot Nicole – 21-year-old actress Estelle Skornik – into national stardom. In 1996, a survey found that Nicole was recognised by more Britons than Prime Minister John Major,

Bob Hoskins or Chris Evans. The cheekiness of the campaign and its play on French culture offered British viewers a chance to escape the drabness of their everyday lives. In short, it became a cult story.

The lives of pretty Nicole and her father were central in making the Renault Clio one of the UK's top-10 automobiles. From the very first year of trading, the Clio helped Renault achieve its largest overall market share in a decade – despite a 20.7% decline in car sales in the UK in 1991 – the worst annual drop in the car industry for 17 years. In total, the Clio found 300,000 British buyers, with year-on-year sales increases up until the end of 1997. Renault believes this also helped in restoring its reputation in the United Kingdom, with the bonus that it also earned the company an image of producing chic, desirable cars. Though this one seemingly trivial piece of fictitious entertainment, this taste of the French lifestyle became an inextricable part of what you bought into when you bought Renault. The campaign won numerous Advertising Effectiveness Awards and the Sofres Automotive study into car advertising, showed that the campaign was the most successful ever, with a record 93% recall figure.

The campaign was the most successful ever in car advertising, with a record 93% recall figure.

With the launch of a new model Clio for 1998, Renault decided to end the Nicole and "Papa" story and announced that Nicole was getting married. In their press release Renault did their very best to keep the story rolling, announcing that: "Thousands of men around the country are reported to be broken-hearted at news of Nicole's forthcoming marriage. Some have even gone so far as to put up "Don't Do It, Nicole" posters in an effort to change her mind". Speculation in the British press grew as to the identity of the groom, providing additional publicity as Nicole's name was tied to footballers Eric Cantona and David Ginola in the weeks leading up to the wedding. Later, Renault said that the groom would be British, prompting speculation

over Hugh Grant and Gary Barlow. Even the broadsheet, the Daily Telegraph devoted its "Comment" column to a discussion of Nicole's final choice.

And "It" girl Tara Palmer-Tomkinson commented: "I can't understand what she is doing getting married. She is one of the most beautiful, eligible girls around. She must be off her rocker. I mean, she had everything going for her, driving around the country in her Renault Clio, all at Daddy's, or rather Papa's, expense. I should be so lucky." Everybody, even the media, "believed" in the fairy-tale.

Nicole went ahead and got married. However, it was neither to a footballer nor to a pop star. Instead Renault had cast two of Britain's most popular comedians, Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer, to battle over Nicole's love at the altar in an idyllic French church. An estimated 23 million viewers tuned in to see Nicole choosing Bob Mortimer, leaving Vic Reeves pursuing her down the aisle as she made her exit. For extra-high exposure, the concluding Clio commercial had been scheduled for prime time viewing at 7.40 p.m. on ITV, during the long-standing British soap opera *Coronation Street*.

One can't help wondering would Renault have achieved the same effect and publicity had they launched a traditional campaign oriented only around the product and its features? Such as one of those advertisements where a sleek, shiny car drives smoothly across a scenic landscape? What do you think?

Comparing the Renault Clio campaign to the NESCAFÉ Gold Blend campaign there are striking similarities: Both were wildly successful in telling an emotional and entertaining story that added real psychological value to the physical product, at the same time making it more relevant and desirable to the right target groups. By telling a compelling story, both companies

were able to create a long-term branding platform and even extend their stories into the media and public environments. This becomes even more interesting when you consider the basic differences between the two brands. NESCAFÉ Gold Blend – a fairly generic coffee – is clearly a low-involvement product, whereas the Renault Clio is a very high-involvement product. They each face very different consumer behaviour and buying patterns. Yet, by telling a relevant story that was credibly linked to the brand in question, they both generated remarkable results, proving that the power of storytelling is not limited to a certain product category.

By telling a relevant story that was credibly linked to the brand in question, they both generated remarkable results.

Before we move on however, it is important to realise that the concept of TV-serials is primarily a matter of form. If the content and story do not work, a company will not achieve a long-term branding effect, either by traditional mass-market communication or through TV-serials.

A good example of failed storytelling in a large branding campaign can be found with Denmark's largest mobile phone operator, TDC Mobile. In 2001 TDC Mobile tried to introduce the company's new name: VIC. The campaign was structured on a fictional story about a unique tribe, the VICs. According to the concept the VICs were a people who throughout human history had excelled at communicating. By telling their story, TDC Mobile wanted to launch the new name and build a brand that appealed to present day VICs – extrovert individuals who love modern day gadgets.

In the story, the VICs had a special hand sign that formed the three letters VIC, and the campaign was launched with a solid opening that succeeded in creating curiosity. Large billboards showed the mysterious VIC sign placed at Stonehenge and among pictures of the ancient Egyptians. Every billboard raised the same question, "Who were the VICs?". The TV-commercials

were presented in historical documentary style, telling the story of how scientists had found the mysterious VIC-signs throughout time and had sought fruitlessly for their meaning.

Unfortunately, with our curiosity thus piqued that was just about all we saw of the VICs. The story did not go any further. So effectively it had a beginning, part of a middle, and no end. Their only goal had been to generate initial interest and establish the VIC name. But it was a one-off; the story had not been integrated into the long-term branding platform. Instead of delivering the next episode of the story, TDC Mobile quickly resorted to product promotions and single concrete sale offers.

The adventure of the VICs ended before it had really begun. People were confused. What was the message? TDC Mobile did not realise that the communication effort had failed until it was too late. Their attempt to create added value and build an emotional bond with customers that could differentiate the VIC brand from other mobile phone operators on the market, had failed. Instead of turning consumers on, it left them cold. TDC Mobile soon afterwards, dropped any further work with the VIC name.

CASE

Hollywood Supercars

In the advertising industry it is part of the creative game to borrow themes, styles and codes from traditional storytelling universes and apply it in commercials. In recent years, this approach has been taken even further by car manufacturers, attempting to enter the realm of feature films as a means to build the right thrill and excitement around their products.

On the verge of the new Millennium, BMW USA contemplated what they could do as a leader in luxury performance cars to move even further ahead and intrigue their customers. Instead of rolling out a traditional advertising campaign, they decided

to let people discover and interact with the brand in the digital world. BMW set out on an advertising quest that would ultimately blur the zone between films, entertainment and advertising. By merging the best of BMW with the best of Hollywood, they created a truly innovative storytelling universe.

By merging the best of BMW with the best of Hollywood, they created a truly innovative storytelling universe.

The solution was radical - and expensive. BMW teamed up with some of the best directors in the world to create a collection of original short films about a mythical driver and his adventures in his BMW. Costs for filming were covered by BMW and while each film featured one of the company's automobiles, the filmmakers were given complete creative control. With their own unique points-of-view each director would create a short film designed to entertain and exploit the power and brand of BMW. Research had shown that 85% of BMW consumers first went online to scope out the company's portfolio, before purchasing vehicles. Therefore, the concept was not to create a mainstream film release for theatres, but rather bring the power and quality of feature-length movies to a format designed for the Internet. Reaching out to a global audience, the collection of short films was to be viewed on BMWfilms.com in superb streaming video quality.

The campaign entitled *The Hire* was launched in 2001 as a collection of five to seven minute films featuring famous faces, sexy cars and high-speed action. Executive produced by David Fincher (*Seven, Fight Club*) the films were created by prolific directors such as Ang Lee and Guy Ritchie. The constant main character in each short film, the hero, was actor Clive Owen (*The Bourne Identity, Gosford Park* and *Croupier*) who features as the mysterious, unnamed driver-for-hire. Hired for his superb driving skills he encounters unexpected obstacles that put his abilities to the test. In each short he gets involved with famous, mysterious clients seeking different destinations while being hunted by thuggish gangs and fanatical paparazzi. On his quest

he is accompanied by a star studded supporting cast including, among others Ray Liotta, Gary Oldman, James Brown and Madonna. Besides creative plot twists, the films of course feature thrilling car chases and nail-biting stunts that display the myriad ability of various BMW models.

BMW's story The Hire *at www.BMWfilms.com.*

Across the States, critics hailed *The Hire* as "groundbreaking". TIME magazine called it the "ultimate in new media, high-end branding". BMWfilms.com was the "advertainment" hit of the year with more than 14 million film viewers registered on the BMWfilms.com site throughout 2001. Throughout May 2002, BMW sales in the US went up by 17.4% compared to the same period the year before. Competitors General Motors and Volkswagen sales meanwhile were suffering.

After the success of these first movies, BMW used the momentum the following year to create a new sequence of films – also as a means to launch BMW's next generation roadster, the BMW Z4. BMW even hired new actors and directors around their hero, Clive Owen to keep the films fresh. The second instalment of *The Hire* added executive producers Tony Scott,

Ridley Scott and Jules Daly, and director John Woo to the dream team.

"*The Hire* is a concept that invites and challenges a director's imagination", said Ridley Scott. "It's great that we are able to partner with BMW on a series which has already had such an effect on pop culture and heavily impacted the world of film and the Internet".

The success of the BMW filmmaking project inspired their backyard rivals at Mercedes to enter into the world of storytelling too.

The success of the BMW filmmaking project inspired their backyard rivals at Mercedes to enter into the world of storytelling too, only this time in a slightly different direction. Mercedes also spent vast sums of money on a celebrity cast that included Benecio del Tory and Oscar-nominated director, Michael Mann. This time the plot centred on a professional gambler named Mr. H who worked the big casinos, eventually attracting the attention of government agents.

The key difference in Mercedes' approach to this world of advertainment, was that their campaign film was presented as a two and a half minute trailer for an upcoming movie *Lucky Star* on ITV, Channel 4 and at select cinemas. All through the trailer Del Toro was shown driving Mercedes' sleek new convertible sports car, the Mercedes logo was never shown and the company's name never appeared. The only connection was the title *Lucky Star* referring to the Mercedes iconic logo, which is among the most recognised brand icons in the world. The trailer finished with a teaser: "*Lucky Star*, coming soon to a theatre near you. See press for details". But there was no *Lucky Star* coming soon to any theatre anywhere. What appeared to be a movie trailer was in fact a commercial for the new Mercedes SL-Class sports car. The link to the Mercedes brand was never obvious to the unknowing audience and the trailer generated plenty of hype before people realised that Mercedes was behind the hoax.

Mercedes collected full data on 14,000 prospective drivers, which ultimately led to the recruitment of 3,000 test drivers.

This approach earned Mercedes the ear of a younger target audience and had some pay-off. The original directors cut of the movie was viewed 50,000 times over a four-week period on the official web-site www.luckystar.com. Mercedes collected full data on 14,000 prospective drivers, which ultimately led to the recruitment of 3,000 test drivers.

Looking at the BMW and Mercedes-Benz campaigns, it seems only a matter of time before one of them produces a full-length feature movie. In that case, however, it would not be the first time. The first company to transform a commercial serial into to an actual feature-length movie was Danish mobile telephone company Sonofon. The story of a naive and loveable hillbilly by the nickname of "Polle" who desperately struggled to figure out how to use his new mobile phone became so popular in Denmark, that the company decided to extend the story and finance a whole movie production. In 2002 *Polle Fiction* hit the big screen, becoming one of the top 3 Danish films to sell the largest number of tickets on the premier night.

Storytelling can take on a variety of forms in the universe of advertising. Largely, it simply comes down to creating a recognisable and relevant universe where the company or its products take on a natural role in the story. But it is the characters and their actions, and the conflicts they try to resolve that drive the story forward. The story however, can only be effective if on some level we can identify with the characters; if we are able to laugh at them or recognise ourselves in the way they behave.

Use Well-known Stories

Many commercials make use of storytelling by referring to, or, borrowing from stories that already exist. By using an already established story, the stage is set for your company to place its product or message in an existing story universe without having to explain everything from scratch. The launch of the

Apple Macintosh computer in 1984 was a strong example of how to use this kind of storytelling in a commercial. The commercial *1984* became a true classic, and was recently awarded the best advertising campaign in the past 50 years by World Federation Advertisers.

CASE

Apple and 1984

In 1976, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak founded the computer manufacturer Apple, in California. Even back in those days, the company already represented the human side of computer technology, breaking with norms and the way in which information was traditionally controlled within society.

The Macintosh was far more than just another new product when it was launched in 1984. To Apple, it was a technological revolution that would change the world. This theme formed the basis for Apple's adaptation of the universe created in George Orwell's classic, *1984*, in the advertising for the launch of the new Macintosh. The science fiction novel describes a totalitarian society where The Party controls all information and brainwashes the populace to adhere to the demands of the system. People are under constant supervision and the fear of The Party's mind police is ever present. But beneath the surface, a revolution quietly simmers.

With reference to the book, *1984*, Apple staged itself as the rebel fighting against the establishment. It became a story of how the new Macintosh would provide information technology on the premise of the individual, giving him or her the opportunity to express themselves on their own terms. At the same time, the story painted a poignant picture of what the world might be like without Apple.

With reference to the book, 1984, Apple staged itself as the rebel fighting against the establishment.

The commercial shows a terrifying, prison-like environment populated by a mass of tragic-looking people all wearing the

same grey uniforms, all with the same expressionless faces, all marching along like robots. Eventually they congregate in front of a big screen projecting the image of an authoritarian leader who is blazing the words, "Our unification of thought is a more powerful weapon than any fleet, or army on Earth". Simultaneously, the mind police start chasing a colourfully dressed young woman who lunges full speed at the big screen brandishing a large sledgehammer, which splinters it with a terrific crash. Cut to the message. "On January 24th Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like *1984*". This famous commercial was shot by one of Hollywood's great storytellers, Ridley Scott.

Choosing a story with such overtly political content was both contentious and risqué. Apple placed itself in the role of the hero as the people's saviour, with more than the slightest suggestion that the adversary in the story was Big Blue, IBM. At that time, IBM held a monopoly-like status on the market and was the natural exponent for the cold unification that Apple was rebelling against. Apple's basic message has not changed since. The company's brand has centred on the story of creative diversity and having the courage to think outside the box.

Apple's brand has centred on the story of creative diversity and having the courage to think outside the box.

In a market where the majority of the players compete on price and technology, Apple still places "people" at the centre of everything they do. Technology has to work based on human premises – and not the other way around. Their soft values of individuality and creativity are reflected all the way through to the company logo; an apple of nature, with a bite taken out of it. In spite of fluctuating economical performance Apple has created a strong core story and an extremely loyal customer base all around the globe. ■

CASE

The Meatrix

1984 is of course a classic in advertising history. But tapping into well-known stories as a communication tool does not have to be expensive or high-profile in order to be effective. That is what New York-based activist group, GRACE (The Global Resource Action Center for the Environment) experienced when they launched a campaign to educate the public on the environmental and health risks of factory farming, while promoting support for sustainable food production.

As a non-profit organisation, GRACE had only limited funds for their campaign. So to get their message across they decided on an alternative approach - both creatively and strategically. Their first challenge was to find a way to explain a complex and somewhat unpleasant message to their target audience, especially young urban voters. Their idea, was to exploit the hype around the third movie of the popular science fiction trilogy *The Matrix* featuring Hollywood star Keanu Reeves, by coming up with an online spoof version entitled *The Meatrix*. GRACE simply wrapped up their message in flash animation that ironically played up the plot of the original *Matrix* movie; namely that we are trapped in a world, which is nothing more than an illusion; a computer programmed world that blinds us to the gruesome reality.

Their idea, was to exploit the hype around the third movie of the popular science fiction trilogy The Matrix.

Instead of Keanu Reeves, *The Meatrix* stars a young pig by the name of Leo who lives on a pleasant family farm...or so he thinks. In reality, Leo is trapped in the Meatrix - a fantasy world where small, family-run farms still exist. Leo is approached by a cow wearing shades and dressed in a long black trench coat. The cow is the wise and mysterious "Moopheus" who leads the farming resistance. He frees Leo from his delusions and shows him the ugly truth about the business of agriculture: That animals are mass-produced on factory farms, which are cruel to animals and destructive to the environment. *The Meatrix* is

the lie we tell ourselves about where our food comes from, Moopheus explains to Leo.

GRACE wrapped up their message in flash animation that ironically played up the plot of the original Matrix movie at www.themeatrix.com.

GRACE's animation argues that many people are still trapped in the Meatrix, believing that farmed animals roam freely on green hills and are gently "put to sleep" before being killed. The reality is, that in many of today's factory farms animals raised for food lead miserable lives.

The pig Leo, eventually joins the resistance to stop factory-farming and free others from the horrors of *The Meatrix.* GRACE asks their audience to do the same by offering a free "Eat Well Guide" at the end of the animation: a national online guide to sustainable-raised meat.

GRACE made a smart strategic move by launching the Internet animation on the same day as the national release of the third *Matrix* movie, cleverly riding the wave of the publicity of the real movie, and thus maximising attention around their own campaign. The low budget production became an explosive online hit. Barely a week after its launch, *The Meatrix* had been

seen by more than 1 million individual web users – an unprecedented success for an online advocacy film. Prior to launch, GRACE said that 150,000 visitors would be a success but *The Meatrix* kept hitting e-mail inboxes nationally and internationally. "The film has gone truly viral", said Diane Hatz, a GRACE activist. "It is becoming a modern-day cult classic and it has enormously boosted our campaign to promote sustainable farming."

Though very simple, the campaign had several characteristics that help to explain its success. First, the actual story about factory farming that GRACE wanted to tell contained the crucial elements of storytelling – a strong message and a massive conflict: the fight against the big bad factories. Communicated as satire through the medium of a blockbuster movie – using its characters and plot – this somewhat prickly issue was made accessible to a broader audience. It clearly illustrates how powerful a story can be in getting a message across, if told in the right way and under the right circumstances. The story of *The Meatrix* created an informative, hard-hitting and very cost-effective public awareness piece. ■

The story of The Meatrix *created an informative, hard-hitting and very cost-effective public awareness piece.*

Telling the Real Story in Advertising

It sounds like a contradiction in terms, but when it comes to storytelling many companies ask whether the stories they use should be real or fictional. To this there is no definitive answer. As a general rule, the most important thing to keep in mind is that the basic premise of the story must be easily accessible to the audience. If the story is fictional, ethically you are bound to ensure that the audience is not misled in this respect.

One thing is certain. A story does not need to be authentic to work. Indeed, within the advertising genre, there is plenty of poetic licence to create fictional stories, which will still be credible and shine a positive light on the company brand. Your audience

is well aware of the fact that the purpose of a TV-commercial is to sell. On the other hand, as consumers become more media savvy, they also expect their commercials to have a certain entertainment value.

In the preceding chapter we showed how your company can identify and extract your real stories – the authentic raw material for storytelling. These stories can easily be used in both traditional advertising and marketing. If these stories have solid content, communicate the right message and are relevant to the target audience they often provide an even greater degree of credibility. Here are a couple of examples of how genuine stories can be used in the company's advertising and marketing mix.

CASE

CARLO MEROLLI

E-wine

A long time ago in Rome, a former pope had the habit of washing his genitalia in a certain type of white wine. He allegedly did this to enhance his virility. Why the pope needed increased virility the story does not say. But the wine wholesaler, Carlo Merolli, used this anecdote to open an e-newsletter that he distributed to customers to draw attention to a couple of wines he discovered on a shopping trip to the fine vineyard of Roberto Trappolini whose vineyards lie on the border between the Italian regions of Umbria and Latium.

Through simple e-mails Carlo Merolli uses storytelling as a targeted sales tool in his daily dialogue with the customers.

Since 1996, when Carlo Merolli started an online Italian wine shop in Denmark, he has written a weekly e-mail containing stories about some of the wines on sale that week. The mailing list reaches wine enthusiasts from around the whole country and the number is slowly rising. Through simple e-mails Carlo Merolli uses storytelling as a targeted sales tool in his daily dialogue with the customers. In addition to good offers on selected wines, his customers also get a small, inspiring anecdote that they can easily share at the dinner table when serving the wine to family and friends. The story could be as simple as why

a wine tastes the way it does, or, something far more complex such as why the wine has a special cultural importance. An offer on the red wine Amarone Le Ragosse 1997, for example, starts with this wonderful introduction:

"In January 1432, the Venetian merchant Piero Querini set sail from the Greek Island of Crete for Belgium. The ship was laden with oil and wine, and with the money he made from selling them, the merchant intended to trade Flemish embroideries and fabrics for the Venetian aristocracy. But the ship was dogged by storms and bad weather and in the Bay of Biscay the main rudder broke. At this point some of the merchants on board abandoned ship seeking to make it to safe shores in a couple of life rafts. Querini and his men continued to drift on the Gulf Stream all the way to Lofoten, in the north of Norway. Following several dramatic days and nights stranded on the reef, Pietro Querini and his men were rescued by fishermen from the neighbouring island of Roest, and were warmly welcomed by her people marking the beginning of a warm relationship between Venice and Roest that would last centuries. Querini brought Norwegian stockfish with him back to Venice and Italy. And today, 90% of Lofoten stockfish (unsalted, dried white fish) are sold in Italy, while several Italian cities have enthusiastically adopted it into their local cuisine."

The StoryDriver in Carlo Merolli's strategy is "the true story behind the product".

The story naturally leads to an offer on red wines that the Italians like to serve with stockfish: Amarone Le Ragose, 1997, for example. In other words the StoryDriver in Carlo Merolli's strategy is "the true story behind the product". These stories make his communication efforts more personal and add credibility to the value of the wines. They create vivid mental images, and, as a reader, you can almost sense the smell of the vines, the warm Mediterranean sun on your face and the taste of wine. Carlo Merolli also tells stories about the winegrowers he does business with in such a way that the readers feel almost

they know personally the man who picked the grapes that made the wine that is being offered at the end of the e-mail. Again, it is the human touch that plays the decisive role. An excerpt from one of Carlo Merolli's e-mails reads:

"Dear Wine friends!
It is a true privilege to know and be good friends with the Sfiligoi family, the good people of the winery *Villa Martina*: Mario, the father and "Harem Chief" as he affectionately labels himself, his wife and four daughters. Wines from his earth spring from the beautiful hills of Collio at the very northern tip of Italy, so close to the Eastern-Italian border that, "The red roofs over there, they are in Slovenia," explains Mario.

Mario is a deeply old fashioned man. His ideas about family were already unfashionable in the Middle Ages. His take on society places him just on the political right of Genghis Khan. Yet, you will not find a shred of fanaticism or bitterness in his spirit. He works hard - 16 hours every day - knows every grapevine and every nook and cranny of his land. Contrarily but proudly, he admits of his daughter's work, "Before the young came, we knew nothing about the art of making wine. It went as it went, and that was that. We couldn't control the fermenting temperature and we ruined good grapes with our ignorance in the cellar". The "young" Patrizia is but 25, yet already has four years of experience as a licensed enologist. In fact, she has total responsibility of the entire wine production. Tempers run high when the "wine fields" and the "wine cellar" form the basis of one of their discussions, but the old man has a venerable respect for his daughter's skills. "I have never made wines as good as this" he admits.

And I haven't tasted wines as good as this coming out of Collio. Of course there are other wines that constitute the district's elite, but the prices vary accordingly and the taste of wood is

often far too dominating. In the wines of *Villa Martina* I rediscovered the human touch. The golden cut of wine, a reflection of the harmonic profile of the hills and a juiciness that is subtly underlined by an almost coy application of the barrel. Lowly wines, wines with character made by people who drink wine with their food."

Carlo Merolli is a fine example of the way that storytelling can be used in many different contexts. Expensive TV-commercials and mass communication are not a precondition for the successful use of storytelling. The medium is not the decisive factor. An e-mail with a small anecdote told in a personal way that touches the listener, can have an equally strong effect given the relevance and context are in tune. ■

Expensive TV-commercials and mass communication are not a precondition for the successful use of storytelling.

8 When Storytelling Becomes Dialogue

The role of companies as storytellers has radically changed. Technological development and new digital possibilities are forcing them to pay attention to what their customers are telling them, whether they like what they hear or not. In the following chapter we take a closer look at how digital media provides new opportunities for your company and customers to exchange stories.

Poul Petersen was an ordinary Dane, with an ordinary insurance policy, from an ordinary insurance company; Almindelig Brand Insurance. But he felt that he had been unfairly treated when they denied his claim of 27,000 Euros compensation, for the serious damages caused to his house by a storm. Their handling of the case in his opinion had been extremely poor. He tried in vain to make Almindelig Brand listen to his point of view, but his attempts fell on deaf ears. Then Poul became so bitter that he decided to share his frustrations with the rest of the world. Poul built a simple website titled *Screwed by the Insurance Company*, where he told his story. It marked the beginning of a nightmare for Almindelig Brand. The story was good, it had great conflict and the rumour of the website spread like wildfire. By the time the site had reached 25,000 visitors, Poul celebrated its success by hosting an event to which he also invited the CEO of Almindelig Brand (who needless to say, didn't show up.) The party caught the attention of the media and the story ended up in the national news, while Almindelig Brand watched in stunned amazement. The site had reached 80,000 visitors before Poul Petersen finally got his money.

How many Poul Petersens do you have among your customers? It only takes one Poul Petersen before the avalanche gets rolling.

Companies are Losing Power

Companies are losing control over the information exchange and opinion forming that creates their brands. The former, one-way communication channel from company to market is long gone. And, with the advent of the Internet, there has been a permanent shift in the balance of power between company and consumer. Companies can tell their stories from now until the end of the world, but if their stories are out of tune with the stories of their customers, they will backfire sooner or later.

Companies are losing control of the information exchange and the opinion forming that creates their brands.

Through the Internet, consumers are brought together in communities where they can share their opinions. Consumers and interest groups now have the power to mobilise far greater numbers and strength, and get their message out more quickly and clearly than ever before. This means that brands can be created and destroyed in the blink of an eye. Today, anybody with access to the Internet can take on the role of a storyteller with a global audience. It has created a whole new dimension for storytelling.

For companies it is no longer just a question of telling, but a question of listening. Instead of retreating, your company should take advantage of the opportunities this shift offers, by listening to the stories your customers have to tell you.

Involve Your Customers in Your Storytelling

Through our own personal stories we approach each other as humans, build trust and create relationships. The same is true of the relationships created between customer and company. These form the foundation of a strong brand. As improved digital developments create new frameworks for exchanging those stories,

they also open up new opportunities for strengthening the company's brand.

The link between branding and storytelling is increasingly pronounced in the digital age.

The link between branding and storytelling is increasingly pronounced in the digital age. The massive exchange of opinions about companies and their products taking place on the Internet is, in itself, a free flowing exchange of stories. They cannot be controlled. But companies can try and catch those stories to get a better picture and understanding of what is being said and why.

Customer stories are a regular oil well, while the Internet offers the perfect drill-bit for accessing them. Several companies have tried to establish a dialogue on the Internet - a sort of organised story or "brand community" if you will. By gathering individual customer stories that can be used strategically in other contexts, your customers get to actively contribute to the making of the company brand. Involving your customers in this way adds serious credibility and substance to your business. Let us look at a few examples of companies that have used the Internet to gather stories.

CASE

The People's Car

Almost half the US population has grown up with a Ford in the family. In the USA, Ford is not just another car. It is a piece of Americana, built on pride and emotional attachment. For a time, visitors to Ford's website were encouraged to contribute their personal Ford-stories - specifically about Ford's four-wheel-drive, off-road truck. One of those stories came from James Flaugher from North Carolina:

"My father and I were going to a job in Northeast Texas and were pulling a gooseneck that was loaded with our sandblasting rig. The two trailers weighed about 17,000 lbs. together. We were following one of the ranchers and came upon a hill about

a half a mile long. It was powder-dry red clay, and on top of that, it was very steep. Dad looked over and said, "here we go" and put his foot to the floor. We made it about three quarters of the way up and buried the duals on both sides. The rancher tried to pull us out, but since he only had a two-wheel drive also, he just dug in the powder and nothing happened. We didn't move an inch. Just then we saw an oil field pumper and he was driving a Ford F-350 4x4 off-road. He came up the hill and offered to try to pull us to the top. He tied us on, and just as my dad started to let out the clutch, the pumper gave it that Powerstroke pull and pulled that entire show up the hill without any help from our truck at all. My father looked at me and said, 'my next truck is going to be a 4x4 off-road'. This all happened in 1992, and in 1994 he bought a Powerstroke 4x4 off-road and loves it. We own 14 Fords of all different makes and models in all, including tractors and 18 wheelers."

For a time, visitors to Ford's website, were encouraged to contribute their personal Ford-stories.

As American as this story is, it speaks volumes of the added value Ford gives to their customers. We sense the true affection that the customers feel for the Ford brand. The following story comes from Brian, in Michigan:

"My friend used to tease me about my little Ford 4x4. But the teasing stopped when I pulled his large Dodge Ram 4x4 out of the mud, twice. The same mud that sucked him in was passed over by my little truck like it wasn't there. It's hard to make fun of someone when you're sitting in a truck stuck in the middle of a mud hole."

When collecting stories for your company, it is important to keep in mind what those stories are going to contribute and how they can be used to specifically strengthen the company's brand and support the core story? Ford did not have a particular strategic aim with collecting these stories. They lie hidden far down the order on the corporate website. But in order for the

When collecting stories for your company, it is important to keep in mind what those stories are going to contribute.

stories to have an effect they need to be visible in the right context. Ford dealers could benefit greatly from a small arsenal of stories such as this to use in their daily sales work. ■

CASE

Topdanmark

Topdanmark's Lucky Heroes

Topdanmark is one of Denmark's leading insurance and pension companies. They market themselves under the pay-off, "Sometimes you get lucky, and sometimes it's good to have Topdanmark". In 2002 the company launched their message with a TV campaign. At the same time people were encouraged to visit the company's website and share a good-luck story from their own lives. Visitors to the site could then vote for the best story and take part in a draw with prize money worth DKK 50,000 (app. 6700 Euros). One of the nominees was a story titled *The Rusty Hand Grenade*:

"When I was 10 years old my friend and I were riding our BMX-bikes in the woods when something in the gravel caught my eye. I stopped and jumped off my bike to take a closer look. It was a hand grenade! I picked it up and showed it to my friend; 'Look, a hand grenade. Cool! I'll bring it to school tomorrow'. My friend told me to get rid of it, but I argued that since the split was missing it would have gone off a long time ago, if ever. On the way home my friend wouldn't ride next to me. He said,' If you are going to bring that grenade with you, then you ride 100 meters behind me'. So I did. We got to my friend's house and went to the kitchen where I placed the grenade in the kitchen sink. His mom came out and I asked if I could borrow a brush. She asked what for, and I told her that I would like to wash the rust from the grenade. When she saw the grenade she went mad and told me to wash it at my own house. I rode home, and on the front lawn my dad was raking the grass. I showed him the grenade, 'Look dad a hand grenade' My dad dropped the rake and yelled at me to put the grenade down at once. I put the grenade in a flowerbox, and my dad told me to get out of there. He ran in the house and ushered the family out

the back door, and then he called the police. The police sent the military to come pick up the grenade, and it wasn't until later that I learned how lucky I had actually been. The hand grenade could have gone off at any moment. The split was gone and all that kept the grenade form going off was the rust. The military took the grenade and blew it up."

How lucky can a guy get? The competition gave Topdanmark a lot of stories, and around 21,000 people, out of Denmark's population of 5 million, voted. If you were visiting the site to vote and were not already a Topdanmark customer you automatically received an offer for new insurance. In this way the campaign had a sales target too. But Topdanmark also secured the rights to the stories sent in, so that they could use the stories in other contexts in the future.

Insurance companies offer very similar products. Therefore they have a difficult time explaining why it is that we should buy their insurance policy as opposed to somebody else's.

As in many other fields of business, most insurance companies offer very similar products. They all look alike and therefore have a difficult time explaining why it is that we should buy their insurance policy as opposed to somebody else's. The solution? You create an "experienced" difference. Topdanmark waved a sizeable prize of DKK 50,000 under the noses of the people who helped them gather their stories about luck, but they also appealed to people's emotions: Tell us about a time when you got extremely lucky. All of us have experienced situations like that. Today we can laugh about them, but when it happened, it was perhaps too scary or shocking to think about. By appealing to those feelings Topdanmark moved the main focus away from their product and created a fresh approach to establishing dialogue with potential customers.

But does this use of storytelling strengthen the Topdanmark brand? Certainly, they support Topdanmark's pay-off. But none of the stories submitted had any specific relation to Topdanmark. None talked about why Topdanmark itself makes a

difference. Basically they were generic stories that could easily have been told by any other insurance company.

A story only gains real substance when it clearly shows why your company makes a difference.

Herein lies an ever-present challenge when companies use storytelling. A story only gains real substance when it clearly shows why your company makes a difference. Otherwise your competitors can simply copy the story. Topdanmark's goal was to take ownership of the concept by having the company brand linked to the idea of being "lucky" or "unlucky". In other words when you think of being "lucky" you should think of Topdanmark. The question is, does this create a long-term foundation for a strong brand? The "lucky" concept is not really rooted in an attitude or a deep felt value anchored in the Topdanmark Company, and it may well prove difficult for Topdanmark to use the concept in the long-term branding process.

The American coffee shop, Starbucks Coffee managed to create a more explicit and natural link to their corporate brand when they launched a similar storytelling initiative in an attempt to establish a dialogue with their consumers. ■

CASE

A Match Made Over Coffee

Over the years employees at Starbucks had heard story after story of customer romances getting started in Starbucks coffee houses. There were in fact stories about people who had met their future wives and husbands at Starbucks - and a couple of times, people had even gotten married at Starbucks. People seemed to genuinely open-up in the casual, laid-back ambience of Starbucks coffee-houses.

The company believed that sharing these human stories would reinforce the idea that Starbucks is a great destination for a date.

So the company decided to try to capture some of these stories and celebrate them with customers and media as part of a Valentine's Day push. The company believed that sharing these human stories would reinforce the idea that Starbucks is a great destination for a date or a chance meeting.

Before moving forward with the idea, Starbucks sponsored a nation-wide telephone survey that included more than 400 singles between the ages of 18 and 44. The survey revealed that more than three out of five adults (62 percent) believed that a couple that met in a coffee-house has a better chance of succeeding in love than a couple that met in a bar. The reason being that bars tend to be noisy and expensive while a cosy café is somewhere safe and affordable.

The message that Americans are opting for coffee rather than cocktails in their search for romance, created a perfect platform for the Starbucks initiative. On January 8th 2003, as Valentine's Day approached, the company launched a national contest they called *Match Made Over Coffee* looking for couples whose relationship sizzled in Starbucks outlets. To participate, entrants had to submit a true, 250-word essay to www.starbucks.com, explaining how they found love at Starbucks. The most creative, romantic and coffee-rich, true-love story would receive an all-expenses-paid trip for two to Vienna, Austria, the coffee capital of the world.

Starbucks received close to 600 entries. An independent panel of judges evaluated each essay based on romance factor (40 percent), creative presentation (30 percent) and the Starbucks Coffee connection (30 percent). A week before Valentine's day, four finalist essays were chosen from the hundreds of coffee courtship stories that poured in from around the nation. On February 14th, the winners were announced: Jacquelyn and John Kuehn from the state of Pennsylvania claimed the grand prize with their endearing coffee encounter. Jacquelyn Kuehn's essay read: "Sunlight poured through the large Starbucks window ... The door opened, and my heart leaped as he walked in. I waved; the smile that lit up his face sent my pulse racing faster still ... John pulled out a chair and sat down close to me. I handed him a Caffé Mocha. 'I hope this is right,' I said.

'Perfect' ... Gently he took my left hand in his ... Reaching into his coat pocket, he extracted a small silver box. As he opened it, the sun lit up the diamond ... Slowly John slipped the cool, fiery ring onto my finger. His kiss melted tenderly on my lips ... 'Stick with me,' he whispered huskily, 'and you'll have exciting times.' 'Excuse me,' said a tentative voice nearby. We turned to see the Starbucks bartender looking uneasy. 'I couldn't help overhearing; are you two just getting engaged?' John grinned. My ring glinted as I spoke. 'John wanted to present this to me over coffee. But actually,' I smiled, 'he just had it cleaned and polished; we're celebrating our 28th anniversary today.'"

The other finalist couples from New York, Maryland and Virginia each received a $200 gift certificate for a restaurant in their city of residence. The couple from Maryland, Patrick and Krissy, met on a blind date arranged by Patrick's mother. "Divorce and dating again is hard enough", wrote Patrick on his entry. "Had I sunk so low that I needed my mother to fix me up on a date? I agreed to meet Krissy at Starbucks on Sunday afternoon... We have been together ever since, and are getting married August 8, 2003".

With the *Match Made Over Coffee* contest, Starbucks hoped to highlight the emotional dimension of the brand, which revolves around their vision of the so-called "third place". The third place is the place between work and home where people congregate to find a sense of community; a place where you can be yourself and hang out – alone, or, with friends and family. In other words, Starbucks is more than quality coffee and handcrafted beverages – it's a certain experience, a certain atmosphere. And through these unique Starbucks stories, customers get to take part in a story about this "third place" – the ultimate Starbucks experience.

By tapping into these otherwise tacit stories, Starbucks invites their customers to become part of the brand, which is much more appealing than anything they could do through traditional advertising. In fact, Starbucks has only spent a modest 20 million dollars on traditional advertising over the past 20 years, during which time the company has grown from a mere 18 shops to more than 6,000 retail locations worldwide.■

By tapping into these otherwise tacit stories, Starbucks invites their customers to become part of the brand.

When Your Customers Become Part of Your Story

Digital technology has opened up a host of new possibilities for branding through storytelling. These new interactive opportunities give your customers the means to get involved and become part of your story. Some companies have even gone so far as to start inviting their target audience to take part in stories that transpire in their brand universe.

This strategy involves customers on an emotional level through entertainment and drama, in order to tie them closer to the brand and communicate the company message indirectly through the story. Lets take a look at some examples of companies that have used interactive media to involve the target group in this way.

Your Pen-Pal is a Calvin Klein Model

CASE

After seven successful years, sales of Calvin Klein's unisex perfume "CK One" started to slip. Something had to be done to reverse the dropping sales curve. And if the target audience - primarily fickle-minded teenagers - were to take an interest in the message, a completely new approach to communication was needed. In 1998 Calvin Klein launched a new branding campaign, moving CK One away from its androgynous image and bringing the brand closer to the universal theme of love. The result was an interesting take on storytelling in the digital age.

The campaign was centred on a modern love drama. The goal being to kick-start a dialogue with the target group and get them involved in the story. At Calvin Klein a number of characters were invented to play out the story through commercials, print ads and billboards. At the same time these characters' personal e-mail addresses were advertised, featuring ckone.com as the host. Robert was introduced with the address robert@ckone.com, Anna with the address anna@ckone.com and so on. It was an open invitation to the target audience to start communicating with the main characters of the campaign.

It was a simple enough concept. If you sent an e-mail to one of the characters e.g. Anna, you got an e-mail back from Anna written as if it came from a friend: informal, confidential and personal. An excerpt from one of her e-mails reads like this:

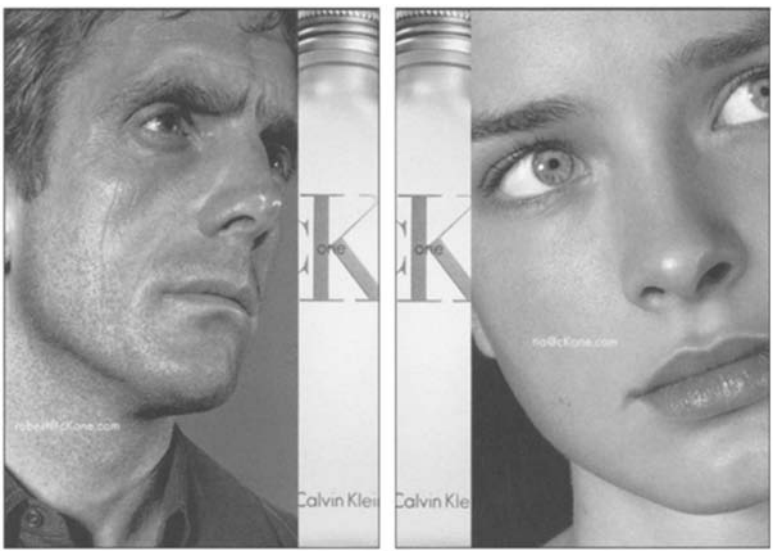
"I would have written sooner but I was scared my mom would walk in on my typing and catch me red-handed. She goes off to the drugstore right now, so I have about a half-hour window. You would not believe how screwed up an idea it was to have a party!"

The basic elements and the conflict of the story had been planned beforehand. The story was set within the world of a TV production company with Robert as the CEO. He was married to Patty and together they had a 15-year-old daughter, Anna, who was crazy about 18-year-old Danny who later became a baseball player. Tia was a producer who worked for Robert. He fell in love with her and left his wife Patty. Ian the Production Assistant also fell for Tia. With the support of Kristy, Ian's best friend, Tia also became keen on Ian – until Ian and Kristy realised that they were into each other...

The story unfolded as a web of intriguing affairs and deceit intertwined in a love drama, which most of all resembled a juicy

soap opera. Inevitably this tantalised the target audience to such an extent that Calvin Klein received hundreds of thousands of e-mails from people who were following the series and desperate to find out what happened next.

Calvin Klein received hundreds of thousands of e-mails from people who were following the series.



Print ads for CK One with Robert and Tia's e-mail addresses.

Traditional mass communication was used for only a brief period of time to create initial attention, but the story that played out through ordinary e-mails lasted more than three years. A scriptwriter was hired to develop the story and continuously write e-mails. He had complete artistic and creative freedom except for a few fixed rules: no drinking, no drugs and no sex among teenagers. Furthermore, references to CK One or other perfumes were not allowed. References to the actual product were completely removed from the story line. The short e-mails were written frequently but with varied timing in order to make it more realistic. And in each mail, the characters revealed new details and secrets from their lives. Who they were in love with, what they dreamed about or what they were unhappy about etc. By giving the main characters of the story the freedom to invite young people into their private universes, the campaign created

an intimacy between the target audience and the CK One brand bringing it close to their lives in a completely new way. The story created a universe peppered with values that were easy for the audience to identify with. They could recognise themselves in the characters' problems, interests and thoughts. And because the whole thing was played out in a form of communication popular with the target audience - e-mail - it contributed to the illusion of an intimate and personal relationship with the characters. Several teenagers tried to influence the story by writing to a character to let them know if the other characters went behind their backs or trashed them. A group of teenage girls from the same school considered Anna their friend, and wrote in an e-mail; "We know that you are really a machine, but you should look out for Danny".

CK One's campaign lasted three years and contributed to a significant increase in sales of CK One.

As a brand revitalisation tool, the story was extremely successful with enough substance to carry a long-term effort. The campaign lasted three years and ran in the USA and several selected countries in Asia, South America and Europe. More importantly, the campaign contributed to a significant increase in sales of CK One. ■

Young generations who have grown up with digital media are an obvious target audience for that kind of interactive storytelling. Motorola, the second largest manufacturer of mobile phones in the world, came to the same conclusion. And as the next case shows, Motorola also bet on branding through storytelling in a digital universe:

CASE

MOTOROLA

Motorola's Virtual Night-Club

Being "in" is a high priority among teenagers and young people, and many of the products they buy are symbols of that. One of this century's most notable "in" accessories is of course, the mobile phone. Nokia has a firm hold on the cool and fashionable crowd in Europe, while Motorola is more associated with the

quiet guy who does not always get past the door when trying to get into nightclubs. To change that, Motorola created an unusual branding tool that used a different approach to storytelling to try to change teenage and young people's perception of them.

Motorola's branding tool was an online game built on a story framework where the user took the lead role.

The tool was an online game, built around a story framework where the user took the lead role: effectively digital role-playing. The game was the driving force of a pan European campaign aiming to strengthen Motorola's image. At the same time it also drew attention to Motorola's new T191 mobile phone with its cool, fun features.

The virtual universe was created within a nightclub named *PartyMoto*; a favourite hangout of the stars. As part of the launch package, the user got to go to the opening bash party and meet the fixed set of characters that made up the regular clientele of *PartyMoto*: fashionistas, models, movie directors, playboys and stars. On the website, you could also read up on the stories behind each of the characters. John Yalla, for example was a notorious playboy and the owner of the night-club. He was famously quoted as saying; "This place is so sizzling hot that if I wasn't the owner, I doubt that even I would get in." Players also got to meet pop phenomenon Virginia Anderson who was famed for her audacious lyrics, husky voice and "bunny girl" attire. And the colourful, creative fashion designer Chiquita Stylez who, based on her glamorous party outfits had created a fashion dynasty of more than 150 employees.

Before the user could start playing he or she had to select a personal character. Male players could choose from a Hip Hopper with baggy pants, a Daddy Cool with a 1970s suit, or a slick Bond-type in a tux. As a girl you got to be a less-is-more Disco Darling, a Hippie Chick with braided hair, or a Bitchy Babe in fishnet stockings. Alternatively you could design your own

character and dress according to your own taste. And naturally, no matter whom you chose to be, you were equipped with a super-cool T191 phone.

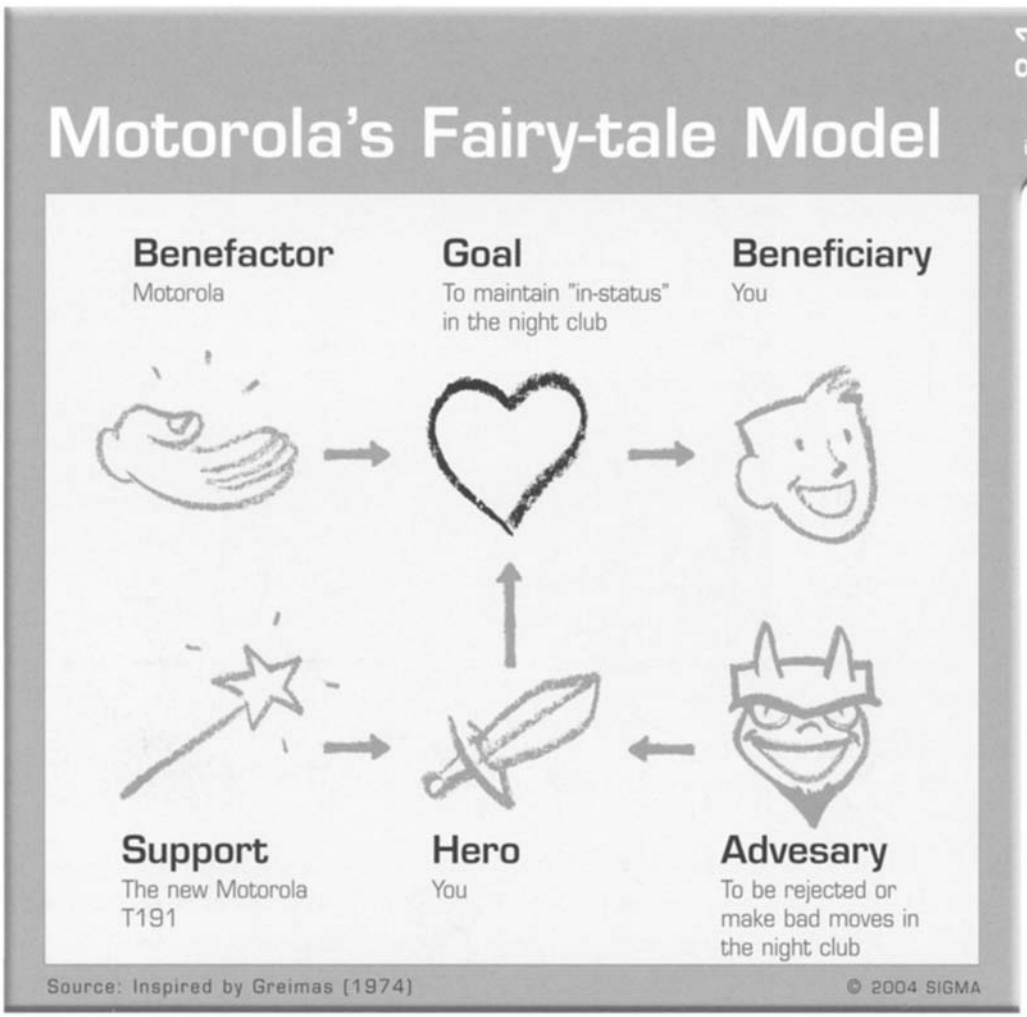
Motorola's virtual nightclub at www.partymoto.com.

Once the game was completed you could use your points to buy accessories for your mobile phone.

The game played out by chatting and sending secret SMS's to other gamers. You collected points depending on how you got along; being ignored or rejected was bad, where as if you managed to charm your target this would pay out well. The more points you got, the more your status rose, until finally you were promoted from "bouncer-level" to "bar-level" to "DJ level"; the top spot being the "celebrity lounge". Once the game was completed you could use your points to buy accessories for your mobile phone, cleverly bringing the storytelling universe back into the realm of product sales.

If we analyse the structure of Motorola's story, based on the Fairy-tale Model it looks like this:

Figure 8.1



The story was driven forward by the challenges the user had to overcome in order to gain points. He or she had to prove whether they were *in* or not, based on whether they could figure out how to win points in the night-club of the stars using the Motorola mobile phone as a means to achieving that goal. The campaign used a number of words and symbols already used by the target audience. At the same time, the story used the mobile phone as a status symbol and a "must-have" when it comes to

Motorola brand has a visible position in the story and is explicitly connected to the "in" status.

successful social interaction with friends. The Motorola brand had a visible position in the story and is explicitly connected to the "in" status, and the ability to manoeuvre socially in cool circles such as a nightclub.

Besides banner advertising, the game of PartyMoto was spread virally as users recommended the game to their friends. In order to participate, users had to register on the web-site creating an even bigger potential customer database for the company to build on. ■

Digital Storytelling – Something for Everyone

At the start of the 1990s when the Internet was still making its first tentative steps, a small movement sprung up in the USA around the phenomenon of digital storytelling.

The examples we have looked at so far show how companies today have begun using the vast array of digital possibilities as a means for creating dialogue with their target audience and getting them involved in a story. But the fusion between storytelling and the digital media is far from new. At the start of the 1990s, when the Internet was still making its first tentative steps, a small movement sprung up in the USA around the phenomenon of digital storytelling.

At first, digital storytelling sounded like one of those fancy management buzz-words, but it was actually a grassroots phenomenon. It began among a group of artists and creatives who were driven by the idea of fusing new digital tools with the need for human beings to tell and share their stories. It was also a rebellion against the established media's monopoly on storytelling.

Digital storytelling is a two-part process: 1) digital production and 2) digital distribution. The digital revolution means that ordinary people can begin producing their own little stories using a computer. By digitally mixing pictures, animation, video, text, sound and music we are given a number of tools to enhance the message in our story. But digital storytelling is also

about using the Internet as a means of distribution. By launching our stories in the "global movie theatre" we can share our experiences with each other.

The Godfather of digital storytelling was the American, Dana Atchley.

The Godfather of digital storytelling was the American, Dana Atchley (1941-2000), who in 1993 took the title of *Digital Storyteller*. Atchley used his own life story as a starting point. He amassed a huge amount of material - old family photos, letters, drawings, music, interviews and old movies and edited the material together on his Apple-computer, eventually ending up with a series of small stories documenting the important events in his life. These experiments became the foundation of an interactive live performance he named *NextExit*.

With *NextExit*, Dana Atchley attained guru-status among the growing number of digital storytellers in the USA. Creative personalities adopted the phenomenon in order to express their art and tell their stories. In 1995 in an attempt to further spread the idea, Dana Acthley set up the first annual *Digital Storytelling Festival*. Here you could see digital stories in the making, as participants learned how to use the digital tools for storytelling. Later Atchley expanded his work as a digital storyteller and started counselling companies in the art of digital storytelling including Apple, Coca-Cola and Pinnacle Systems.


CNN
LIVE
S&P 500
12.79

9 The Media as a Storytelling Partner

The media is a veritable war zone when it comes to storytelling. Everyday the big stories battle for attention on television and the radio, in the newspapers and magazines, and on the Internet. This chapter outlines the basic rules for using the media to tell your company's story.

Journalists are always on the prowl for a good story. Many will even risk their lives to be the first to break an exclusive. The media in general are driven by the logic of storytelling, and rational arguments often fight a losing battle against emotionally based stories.

It is precisely this emotional hand tying that deters rationally thinking businessmen and women from entering a proactive dialogue with the media.

Sometimes, it is precisely this emotional hand tying that deters rationally thinking businessmen and women from entering a proactive dialogue with the media. Likewise, it is often the emotional agenda that causes so many companies to misjudge the media when trying to get their message across. But it doesn't have to be this way. By understanding the logic of storytelling and the mechanisms by which the media operates, companies can use the media as a powerful ally when communicating their messages and stories.

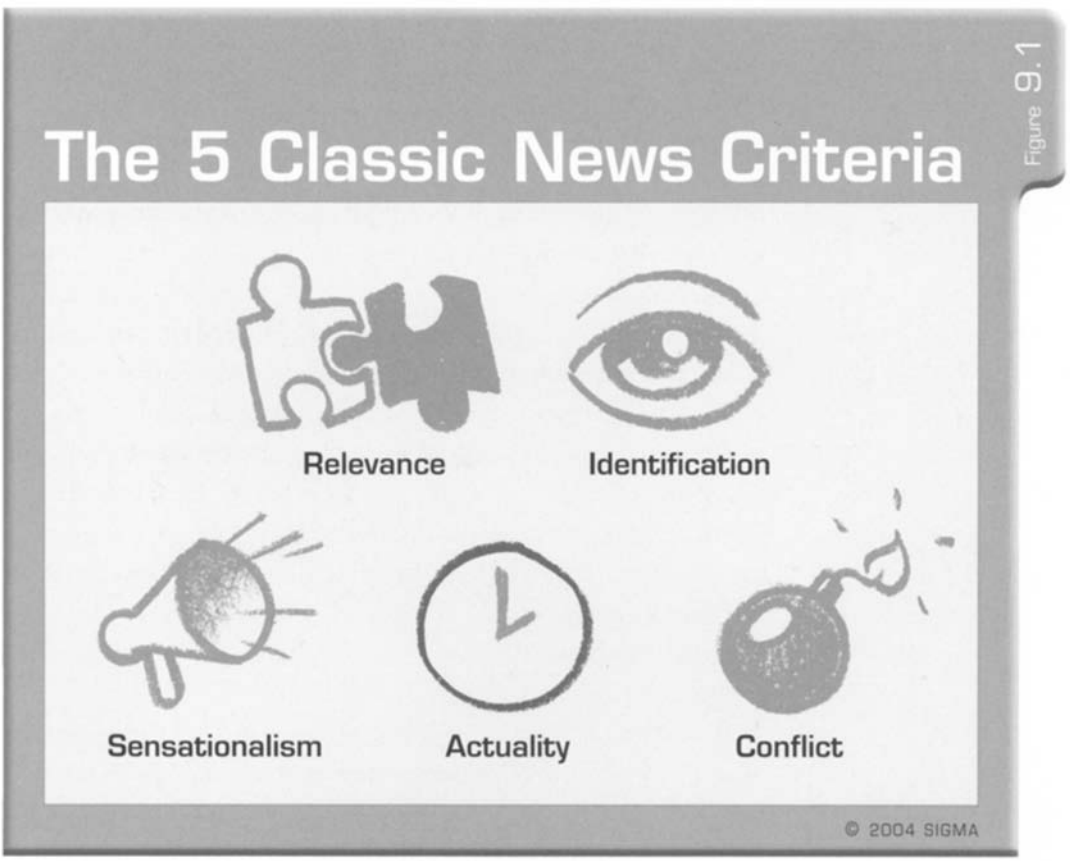
The Journalist's Story

A story about your company told by a journalist will always be more credible than if you tell yourself.

A story about your company told by a journalist will always be more credible than if you tell it yourself. In addition to an increase in credibility, media exposure can also give widespread visibility, which would cost a fortune for the equivalent in advertising. Getting the media to tell your stories is an art form

that can have astonishing results. But remember, for all the positives, they can also work against you if they get their hands on a juicy story that is negative.

The media feed on and live off of good stories. As such it is important to keep in mind the four elements of storytelling (detailed in chapter 2) when you venture into the home playing field of the media. Among journalists, the four elements of storytelling are interpreted according to the five classic news criteria:



The first two criteria are fixed guideposts for journalists on the hunt for a good story; conflict and identification. It is no coincidence that stories of catastrophes and problems outmatch the sunshine stories in the daily news. Likewise, a journalist will always be on the look out for conflict when seeking tomorrow's story; ideally a conflict that centres on people and emotions. That said it is important that the audience can identify with the story. Tabloid editors operate with two main identifiers: positive stories, which allow the audience to dream, "I wish it was me", and negative stories that make the reader shudder, "Thank God it wasn't."

In addition to conflict and identification, a good story needs a twist of something unusual. In an ideal scenario the "norm" will be turned upside down, or have an angle that we might not have seen so far. Journalists have a saying, "dog bites man" is a bad story, whereas "man bites dog" is great. This reasoning mirrors the fact that media are "turned on" by the unusual, or the unthinkable. In short, the closer a story is to a sensation the better. But the story must be current: Especially for news media. The actuality of a story is vital if the story is to be worth telling. And lastly, the story must have a degree of importance or relevance to the intended target audience.

The five news criteria provide a helpful checklist when testing the measure of a story.

The five news criteria provide a helpful checklist when testing the measure of a story, and whether it would be of interest to the media or not.

A Picture Speaks a Thousand Words

Images speak a language we can all understand: the language of emotions. This is why the media is turned on by strong images. They do not necessarily have to be an actual picture, but they could be, for example, a metaphor, an analogy, or a strong headline that creates a mental image when we read the text.

If your story has a strong image you have come far, but it must be an image that promotes the central message of the story. For example, the image could express the conflict of the story. A story will often be about a hero facing a challenge. Here you have the seed of the image already. Try to visualise the challenge: does the hero have to cross a flimsy bridge, or, navigate a minefield of obstacles? Even with no imagination at all, the images automatically start popping into your head.

If your story has a strong image you have come far, but it must be an image that promotes the central message of the story.

The logical and rational arguments of the story have to be in place of course, but in order to harness the interest of the media we need to transform our message through the logic of story-telling. We have to test our story against the five news criteria and the rational arguments of our message, in a compelling story that contains both conflict and emotional content. We also have to think about how we can stage our story with either real or mental images, in order for the message to come across clearly.

Voluptuous Virgin vs. Curvy Coke

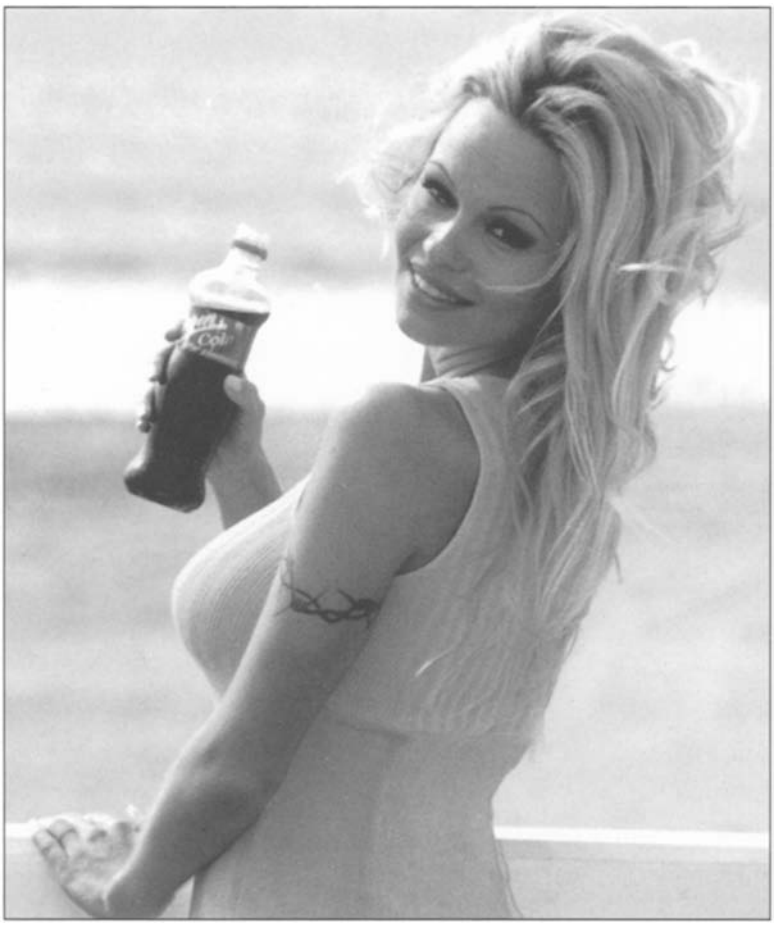
CASE

The media's thirst for strong images illustrates the benefits to staging stories. Richard Branson is a master of staging, as he demonstrated when he launched Virgin Cola, continuing his "David versus Goliath" struggle, a path he has followed in so many of the business areas where Virgin operates. "We hope to give Coke and Pepsi a run for their money. They are near monopolies", Branson said, throwing a punch at the giants. This was the conflict of the story: Virgin Cola takes up the fight against the established powers.

But Branson had been thinking about the story a long time before he broke the news of new Virgin Cola. During the product development stages he was already working the story into the product in a way that would catch the media's eye. The idea for the story was born one evening when Branson and his wife were

During product development Branson was already working the story into the product in a way that would catch the media's eye.

at a dinner party with – among others – the popular Baywatch star and former playmate, Pamela Anderson. In the company of the sex symbol, Pamela, Branson started thinking about the classic Coke-bottle, designed after the contours of the sex symbol of that time, Mae West. Branson must have thought: what better way to challenge Coke than by designing our new bottle after the contours of the biggest sex symbol of our own time, Pamela Anderson? Branson persuaded Pamela to go along with the idea, and the bottle of new Virgin Cola was born, designed after the luscious curves of the Baywatch-babe and marketed under the name *The Pammy*.



Pamela Anderson drinking her own Virgin Cola.

With this move Branson got the strong image he needed to set the stage for his story about new Virgin Cola. With his usual provocative charm he challenged Coke in true Virgin-fashion. Male cola drinkers across the world now had the chance to place their lips on a bottle depicting Pamela's ample curves. Branson himself added, "There's no point in doing business if you aren't having fun doing it."

At the product launch, the story was staged in style: in front of the world press, a smiling Branson arrived with a saucy Pamela Anderson in his arms, who, in turn, was sipping the new Virgin Cola. Branson had a story with plenty of conflict, identification and news value – all boiled down into one powerful image. The show was staged for the global media, and at the same time the story supported the core story of Virgin; that of lust for adventure and rebellion against the establishment. ■

Branson had a story with plenty of conflict, identification and news value - all boiled down into one powerful image.

Staging the Conflict

Richard Branson is not alone in his incredible media savvy. Stelios Haji-Ioannou, the founder of EasyJet, has the same flair for staging a good conflict for the media. EasyJet is just one of many companies in the EasyGroup, whose goal in life is to make life as easy and affordable as possible for the common man. Stelios will go into any field of business that neglects to do business with the customer in mind. All it has to be is simple, inexpensive and easy for the customer. Hence the name, Easy.

When the airline GO appeared on the playing field, EasyJet got a direct competitor on the low-cost routes. A rivalry was soon underway. GO invited journalists on board the airline's maiden flight, an opportunity Stelios was not going to pass up. He booked ten seats on the plane, and when the day for the maiden flight came around, the plane was invaded by EasyJet executives all wearing the same orange uniforms worn by EasyJet's flight mechanics. They lost no time on board busily passing around

EasyJet flyers to the other GO passengers. The story reported in the media about GO's maiden flight, was replaced by a story of the "hijacking" of the flight by EasyJet. Ultimately, the story with the strongest conflict and images stole the show.

EasyJet has since bought GO.

Find Your Angle

A journalist and his protégé once took a walk along the beach in a small fishing village. A black cloud closed in from the horizon. The journalist looked at his young friend and asked him to describe the scene in one headline. He thought about it for a while and then said, "Black clouds on the horizon". The journalist shook his head. "Where's your conflict, or, your readers' point of identification?" and offered an alternative headline, "Deadly storm threatens small fishing village". The young journalist looked at his mentor and asked, "but what if there is no deadly storm?" The journalist counter-answered: "Small fishing village spared from deadly storm...".

The sharper your story, the better your chances it will be picked up by the media.

The sharper your story, the better your chances it will be picked up by the media. This is your angle: the point at which the message of your story is crystal clear. You can't tell everything all at once, so you have to focus on what is most important. The more black and white the story, the sharper the angle. This also illustrates the media's inherent tendency to simplify reality. By using this prevailing logic wisely our story will become stronger.

For example, it is not sufficient that our story is about "love". We have to decide what kind of love the story is about. Is it "unrequited love", "a first love", or a "love is blind" kind of a story. In short, we have to find the angle on our story about "love". If your company wants to announce that it is about to merge with its main competitor, management has to consider

the angle. Are you telling the story of "a new merger that will create the biggest company in the business", or the story of "a merger that will give customers more benefits." Both stories are about the merger, but they have very different angles. If we do not have an angle on the story ourselves, we run the very real risk that the media are not turned on by the story. Or worse, the journalists find a completely different angle that we may not like. The lesson? Find your angle before they do.

It was exactly this challenge that faced the Scandinavian confectionery company TOMS, when they wanted to launch their new website.

CASE

Giant Turtle Turns 50!

Most companies are deeply engaged in their own universe, which is only natural. But most of the events that you and your company think of as hugely important rarely constitute a cover story in the press, unless you understand how to angle the story to fit the logic of the media.

TOMS found this out in the autumn of 2001 when the company launched its new website. The old site had received unusually harsh criticism in Denmark's leading business paper, Borsen, just two weeks before the new site was launched. Consequently, TOMS were anxious to draw attention to their new site. But thousands of companies launch websites every day. This was not news. There was no conflict and no identification. Ultimately, there was no story. In order to find a story that was strong enough to draw attention to their new site, TOMS took a step back in time, to examine the raw material for storytelling within the company. A lot of TOMS products are well-established, classic candies that have special meaning for the Danish population. And this formed the basis of an idea for getting consumers to share their memories about the company and its products, on the new website.

Most of the events that you and your company think of as hugely important rarely constitute a cover story in the press.

How do you tell a new story based on some old-fashioned chocolates? A current approach was needed in order to capture the interest of the media.

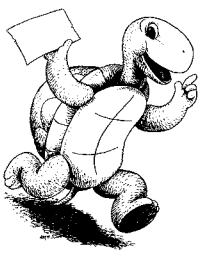
But how do you tell a new story based on some old-fashioned chocolates? A current approach was needed in order to capture the interest of the media. As good timing would have it, TOMS ever-popular Giant Chocolate Turtle turned 50 that year. Here was a current event to celebrate. But the story still needed substance in order to generate interest from the media. By digging deeper into the story, it turned out that the shield of the Giant Chocolate Turtle hid a unique story with deep roots in Danish culture:

Back in the 1950s, there was a popular comic strip called *Rasmus the Ostrich*. However, when a national television station hired the story's creator, the strip was discontinued. After some time, the publisher decided to revive the Rasmus character and publish a book, commissioning the cartoonist Vilhelm Hansen to create a new Rasmus figure. Vilhelm came up with the "Turtle" Rasmus, which he presented to the publishing company, but the publisher wasn't keen on the idea of a hard-shelled turtle. They deemed it too slow and not cuddly enough for readers. They wanted something soft and warm. Vilhelm was disappointed, but he did not give up on his turtle just like that. On his way home from the publisher, he passed TOMS confectionery and offered them the sketches for the turtle to use in chocolate moulding and in 1951, TOMS Giant Chocolate Turtle was born. It was as simple as that. In 1967, the Turtle was upgraded with a delicious caramel crème filling, and it has not changed since. Back at the publishers, Vilhelm Hansen developed the comic-book bear that all Danes have come to know and love as *Rasmus Klump*: A sort of Danish *Rupert the Bear*. Meanwhile, Vilhelm had managed to convince the publisher to give the turtle a role as one of Rasmus Klump's loyal followers in his many adventures.

The story about the Giant Chocolate Turtle's coming about, and its relationship to Rasmus Klump was further backed by

the fact that the 50-year-old Turtle is the favourite chocolate of the Danish population. Danes consume more than 20 million Giant Chocolate Turtles every year, outselling Mars, Snickers, Twix and Bounty in spite of the fact the Giant Chocolate Turtle has not been advertised for years.

The Giant Chocolate Turtle and the turtle from the comic-book Rasmus Klump *- originally the same character.*



© Rasmus Klump ApS/distr. PIB Copenhagen

Here TOMS had a story with identification, actuality, conflict and relevance. Not only that, they had a story about a treasured piece of Danish culture with a 50-year anniversary to celebrate. On top of that it had been leaving the large international competitors in the dust for years. Eureka! TOMS had their story, and on this basis, the PR campaign behind the launch of TOMS new website was born. The story of the Giant Chocolate Turtle was pitched to the media encouraging readers and radio listeners to write to TOMS with their own Giant Chocolate Turtle stories, using the new site to do so.

Danes loved it and it was enthusiastically picked up by the printed press, TV-news and radio stations. In fact, the most popular morning radio show, Strax, which airs for three hours every day from 9 am to noon grabbed the idea and hosted a "Giant Chocolate Turtle Day", with TOMS sponsoring 1,000 Giant Chocolate Turtles. Listeners could call in with suggestions as to who should receive the 1,000 Giant Chocolate Turtles, and the best suggestion would get the honour of delivering the Turtles in person. One listener suggested giving the turtles to a refugee centre as a national symbol of welcome to Denmark.

Media coverage generated considerable traffic on TOMS' new website, with consumers submitting their personal chocolate turtle stories. Using a story of cultural interest, the media helped TOMS to communicate that their new website was out there, in a way that captured the imagination of the consumer. People's emotions associated with the Giant Chocolate Turtle became the StoryDriver allowing the audience to become

Media coverage generated considerable traffic on TOMS' new website, with consumers submitting their personal chocolate turtle stories.

The Giant Chocolate Turtle - a symbol of Danish nostalgia and originality.

involved on a more personal level. And the unique stories behind the products became, almost overnight, something quintessentially Danish, each earning their own special position in the shared consciousness of the Danish people, and ultimately, giving TOMS products a unique position in relation to the large foreign confectionery companies.

The success of the Giant Chocolate Turtle story ultimately paved the way for a whole new brand strategy at TOMS. For more than half a decade, TOMS had been focussing on price and physical product features in their marketing campaigns. But the Turtle story was an eye opener for TOMS' management, realising that the essence of their brand was not about quality chocolate, but about Danish nostalgia and originality. Using their raw material for storytelling as a means to unfold the brand potential, TOMS shortly afterwards launched a new long-term marketing campaign strategy, positioning the brand under the story theme *Danish Originals.* ■

TEST

The Honing Exercise – The Cutting Edge

When it comes down to it, if we are to *sell* our story to the media, it needs to be cutting edge. And in order to adjust the story to fit the logic of the media, honing the content can do much to give the story the necessary edge. Put yourself in the position of a journalist and ask yourself, why should they cover your story?

1. *What is the angle on the story?*

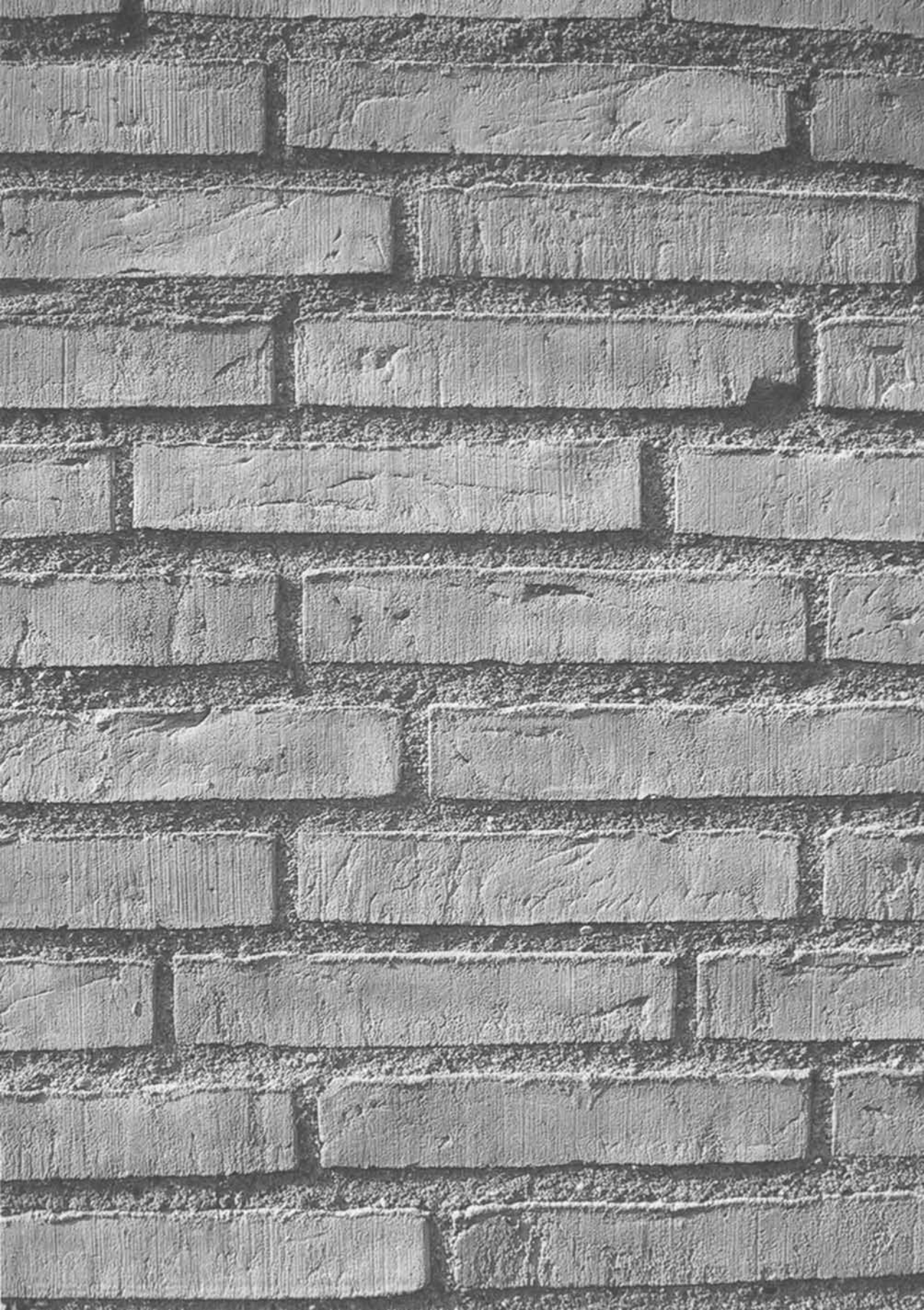
- Accept that a story cannot tell it all. Start by focusing on the truly important issues and most interesting aspects of the story.
- Try formulating the story in one sentence, which concisely says, "this is a story about ...".
- What sort of headline would it carry?
  The more black and white you can make the headline, the

sharper the angle of the story will be.
- Ask the question: What should the audience be thinking once they have heard the story?

2. *Are the five news criteria being met?*
- Use the classical news criteria as a checklist. Try to optimise the story to meet every criterion. But remember, the story does not have to be sensationalist to be good.

3. *Does your story carry a strong image?*
- Your story will be stronger if it *speaks* in images e.g. the story of a deadly storm threatening a tiny fishing village creates a strong mental image.
- It can be difficult to find an actual picture for a story built on facts and rational arguments. Try to invent a mental image or a metaphor for the message within the story.

4. *Is the story tailored to the right media?*
- Based on your target audience you need to select the correct media with the most relevance for the story. There's no use sending a fashion story to National Geographic.
- Of the relevant media, consider which individual editors would be most interested. Is it a business story? An IT-story? A lifestyle story?
- Adjust the story accordingly to make it interesting for the individual media and their target audience. For example, the business aspect of the story needs to be emphasised if it is to be printed in the Financial Times, whereas you will be looking for something more sensational for The Sun.
- Consider how the story works within the context of the media you are aiming for. A story told on TV requires strong images, whereas a story on the Internet can encourage on-line feedback, or a wider debate.
- If you have tailored the angle of the story to individual media, you should be able to sell the same story across various types of media be it radio, the Internet, magazines, papers or TV. The key is in ensuring you have a good story to tell to begin with.



10 Tearing Down the Walls

"...and they all lived happily ever after."

We are all familiar with the ending of most classical fairy-tales. The conflict has been resolved, the moral has been delivered and the prince has won his princess and half the kingdom. This book has no such happy ending. But it does have an open ending that offers further food for thought.

During the course of this book we have come full circle. We have looked at the four elements that constitute a good story. We have seen how storytelling can be used as a communication tool to strengthen the company's brand in various contexts, both internally and externally. And ultimately, we have established that all of a company's stories must point in the same direction in order to support the company's one core story. This is the precondition for creating a consistent brand that can penetrate a rapacious and noisy market.

Storytelling and branding are inextricably linked with another fundamental issue of strategic communication: holistic thinking

Looking at the bigger picture, it becomes clear that storytelling and branding are inextricably linked with another fundamental issue of strategic communication: holistic thinking. In the end, storytelling is a powerful and creative branding tool, yes, but it is no miracle cure.

Stop Thinking in the Box!

Your customers get information about your company from all manners of different sources: the Internet, newspapers, television commercials, through customer services at the store, over the telephone, or, through friends and colleagues. At the same time, they are also in direct contact with your company's products. If all of these contact points do not provide a consistent experience for your customer, your brand loses power and credibility. Your core story is not being consolidated.

To this end, your core story must be anchored throughout the entire organisation and integrated across different departments and sections. This is the only way that the company can create and project a consistent "face" outwardly. But this is no easy task; there are walls, which must come down.

Dividing walls provide an image of the box thinking that separate company departments in more than just the physical sense: marketing are responsible for advertising; sales are responsible for selling and customer care; production are responsible for manufacturing products; human resources are responsible for personnel development and here in communications, we are responsible for public relations. It is true we all have roles to fulfil, but first and foremost the various departments are part of the same brand, and are all equally responsible for its creation and development. To be truly holistic and to put forward a pure, strong message, all departments must share the same values and communicate the same core story, no matter the context.

Dividing walls provide an image of the box thinking that separate company departments in more than just the physical sense.

Every single employee within his, or, her field must act as an individual ambassador for the company brand. If they do not, the brand will disintegrate from within. Your customers don't care what you call it; PR, marketing, advertising, in-store or customer service, the fact is, whenever they come into contact with your company, the impression you make is stored as a mental image in their minds.

Every single employee must act as an individual ambassador for the company brand. If they do not, the brand will disintegrate from within.

Before management considers using storytelling, their first challenge is to knock down those walls.

Often, this proposition catches management off guard; "But this will require a completely new organisational structure," is the common cry. Well, yes, or at least a new perspective on how things are done. Individual departments can easily remain

When each department creates its own-segmented reality, the dilution of your brand is inevitable.

in place, but their dividing walls - the psychological more so than the physical - have to come down. When each department creates its own-segmented reality, the dilution of your brand is inevitable. There can only be one reality and it is rooted in the company brand. Employees across all different departments have to "live" the same core story. In short, the core brand values have to be anchored tightly within the entire organisation. This is the task facing management and in order for it to be successful, it requires a tightly controlled, top-down approach to communication.

If your organisation cannot project one consistent core story, then how are you going to create a strong brand externally?

If your organisation cannot project one consistent core story, then how are you going to create a strong brand externally? A manager's typical reply would be something along the lines of; "That's what we use advertising for." But in today's consumer savvy climate that is a limited solution. If your employees cannot live up to the promise made to your consumers by the marketing department, it is only a matter of time before your message starts to lose credibility. It is not until the core story has been completely integrated into your organisation - from the inside out - that your company is ready for the holistic approach to external communication that safeguards your company's values.

Let us have a look at an example of what happens when walls separate a company's communication channels.

Candy for Breakfast

For the past 100 years, Kellogg's have been telling the same story about getting the best start to our day by eating a nutritious breakfast. Huge sums of money have been spent on maintaining that story. We see it in commercials, on print advertisements and through in-store promotions in supermarkets.

But in the early 1990s, news broke in Denmark about the disturbingly high sugar and salt content of breakfast cereals.

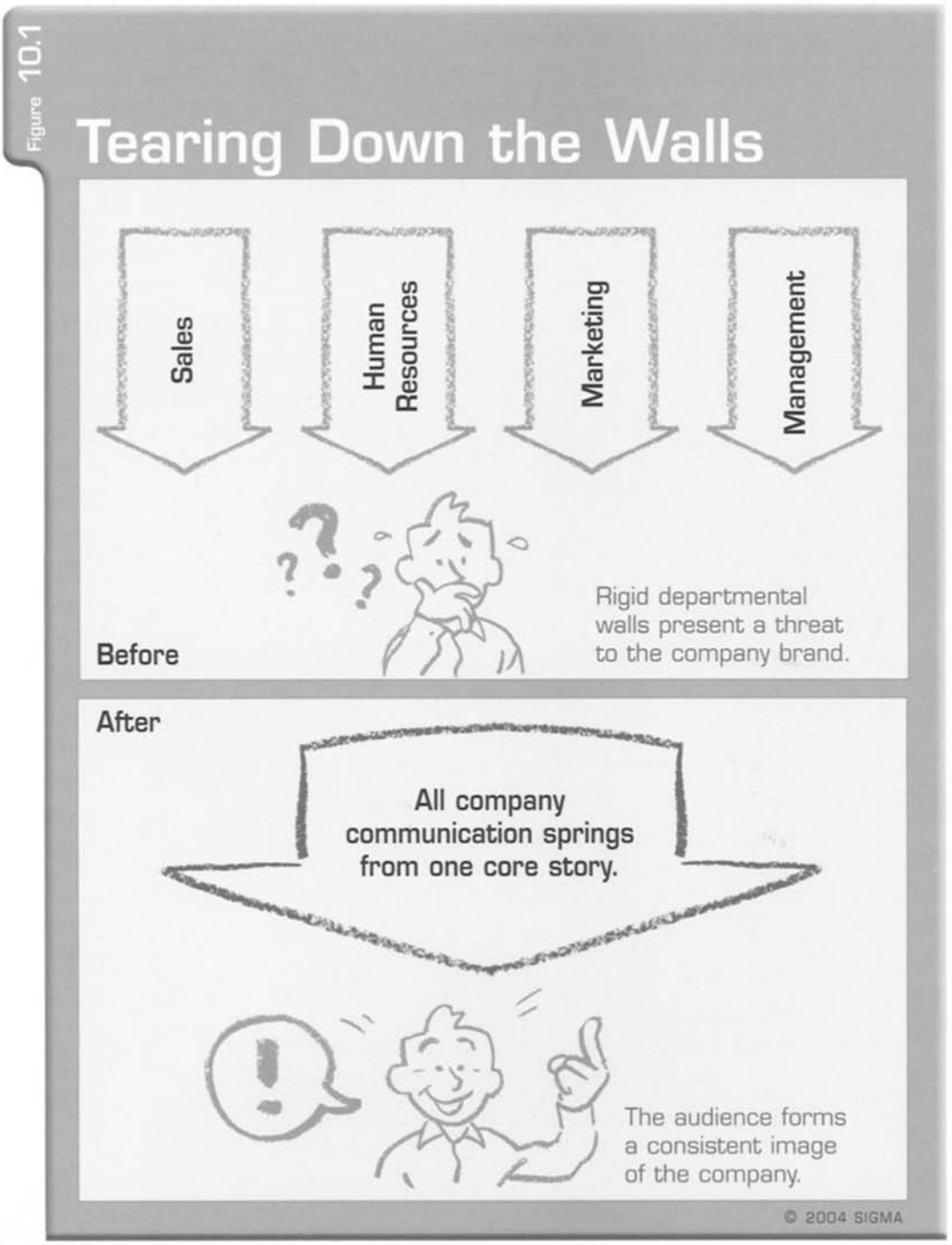
A sinister scene depicting children eating bowls of candy with spoons accompanied the story. A scare scenario followed, drawing attention to the unhealthy junk that kids were consuming every day for breakfast. In the background, the observant viewer could see a cereal box that looked a lot like one of Kellogg's. The reaction from consumers was immediate and furious, and the entire breakfast cereal category was hit hard. As the market leader, Kellogg's registered a noticeable drop in sales the very next day, with Kellogg's Frosties hit especially hard.

What was not shown, was the fact that Kellogg's invest huge sums of money into nutritional research, just as they do today, in order to safeguard the highest standards. Their mistake was that they had not told their consumers about it. In order to turn around this unfortunate development, Kellogg's initiated a proactive dialogue with nutritional experts about conducting an independent test of the available breakfast cereals. It was a safe gamble. Kellogg's knew that their products were of the highest standard. And the results of the test helped Kellogg's restoring consumer confidence.

Creating a strong core story is not just about having a strong marketing concept. Kellogg's advertising and marketing said one thing. The news segment said another. Their consumers, fearing they had been duped, reacted at once with scepticism and outrage.

From this it is easy to see why a company's core story has to be incorporated into every possible situation, especially where the company is in touch with the external environment. And the core story has to be translated in such a way that it is relevant to all of the company's stakeholders. To Kellogg's, advertising equalled branding. But working within this box mentality tricked the company. Kellogg's had overlooked the fact that the brand also had to be consolidated in other contexts if they were

Figure 10.1


Tearing Down the Walls
Sales
Human Resources
Marketing
Management
Before
Rigid departmental walls present a threat to the company brand.
After
All company communication springs from one core story.
The audience forms a consistent image of the company.
© 2004 SIGMA

to ensure a consistent and credible message. Equally, if Kellogg's management team had made sure that the company's nutritionists and marketing department had co-ordinated their efforts and told the same story to their target audience, then Kellogg's could easily have avoided this situation in the first place: instead, internal "box thinking" spilled over into external communication.

Rigid departmental walls present a threat to the company brand.

This example illustrates why such rigid departmental walls present a threat to the company brand. In Kellogg's world, marketing and dialogue with external nutritionists were two separate issues. In reality though, these are just two communication channels that in the end reach the same audience - the consumer.

Once the dividing walls have been destroyed you can ensure one consistent message flowing out into the public arena.

Once those dividing walls have been destroyed however, you can begin integrating the company's core story into the daily working lives of all your employees. Because, until your departments are streamlined, how can you ensure one consistent message flowing out into the public arena?

Are You Getting Your Message Across?

Once your company's core story has been securely anchored within your organisation, it is time to face the second challenge: How to communicate the core story externally?

In his book Permission Marketing, Seth Godin, one of the gurus of Internet Marketing writes that in the course of one year we are exposed to one million commercial messages - that is 3,000 messages every day! 3,000! Just for fun of it, try to think of three commercial messages that you have been exposed to within the last 24 hours? It could be a television commercial, a print advertisement, or a pop-up banner on the Internet. It is not that easy is it? And you are an expert in the field, or at least have some deeper interest in branding and communication

otherwise it is unlikely you would have made it all the way to this chapter. How many messages do you think get stored in the memory of an average consumer, considering they probably could not care less about advertising and sales talk? One or two? Three, if we are optimistic? Three out of several thousand! If this is even halfway true, then there must be a lot of companies out there who are wasting an awful lot of money on ineffective marketing.

There must be a lot of companies who are wasting an awful lot of money on ineffective marketing.

Only the companies that really have something to say, and who consistently communicate their message through one core story have a chance of being remembered. But this is not enough. In order to penetrate the noise and be heard and remembered, you need to communicate intelligently. You need to ensure that media support the story's core message making it relevant and interesting for the company's target audience. And once again, this is dependent on a holistic approach.

Many companies have the misconception that traditional advertising is the only thing that drives branding.

Many companies have the misconception that traditional advertising is the only thing that drives branding. Advertising is important, no doubt, but it is far from being the only driver for branding. A company's external communication can be divided into two main categories: commercial and non-commercial messages. Commercial messages are usually sales oriented and include television commercials and other advertising with the company as the messenger. The company directly controls the content of these messages, which has the advantage of communicating exactly what you want, but at the same time reduces your credibility.

Non-commercial messages do not usually have the company as the direct messenger. Typically they are presented in the form of television news stories, or in the printed press. But experts, opinion leaders or consumer groups, can also deliver them. These messages give extra credibility to your brand by the very

Figure 10.2

Commercial vs. non-commercial messages

Messages	Direct messenger	Media	Credibility
Commercial	The company	TV-commercials and ads	Low
Non-commercial	Journalists, consumers, experts or opinion leaders	Articles, expert panels and TV-news segments	High

fact that it is a third party, and not your company who is communicating them. Your company cannot buy this kind of statement. You need to have proven yourself worthy in order for independent experts to speak in your favour.

To achieve reach and credibility in its communication, your company needs to employ a combination of commercial and non-commercial messages. And for most companies, their commercial messages clearly outweigh the non-commercial ones.

In the beginning, The Body Shop spent virtually nothing on traditional advertising, living off publicity from media, consumer groups and grassroots movements.

The Body Shop is a unique example of a company that has managed to manifest its core story mainly through non-commercial messages. In the beginning, the company spent virtually nothing on traditional advertising, living off publicity from media, consumer groups and grassroots movements. This was the primary reason for the high level of respect and credibility that The Body Shop earned in its early years. Within the company, the chains surrounding individual departments had been smashed, but the strategy only worked because the

founder of The Body Shop, Anita Roddick, had a strong message that pervaded the entire company. That message was backed by action. The story had substance, and employees lived the brand every day they went to work. Interestingly, since Anita Roddick stepped down as Managing Director in 1998, The Body Shop has experienced some difficulties in maintaining the strength and credibility of its core story.

CASE

oticon

Oticon Conquers the World

The highly regarded manufacturer of hearing aids, Oticon, also tore down its walls in 1997 when the company launched the world's first completely digital hearing aid, DigiFocus. A solid combination of commercial and non-commercial messages paved the way for the worldwide success of the product launch. In Scandinavian business circles, Oticon was already known as the "spaghetti-organisation". This was the name given to the hyper-flexible management style of Lars Kolind, the CEO of Oticon at the time, whose intention was to promote innovation, drive and creativity. But only a very few in the rest of the world, knew who Oticon were. Several industry competitors were hot on their tails in the development of similar digital hearing aids. It was all about getting there first. Oticon was under pressure.

Wrapping their message in the story of The Computer in the Ear, *Oticon created a simple yet powerful image of the digital hearing aid.*

Step one was to develop one unified story as the platform for their campaign. Wrapping their message in the story of *The Computer in the Ear*, Oticon created a simple yet powerful image of the digital hearing aid. A crucial factor in the words and pictures package that is so sought after by media.

Then, Oticon set about developing the foundation of their story in order to maximise credibility. They entered into a proactive dialogue with those professional groups who were expected to be the most critical; their argument being, that if you can convince your worst critics to give you the thumbs up, then you have a bullet proof foundation. In addition to testing

the product with consumers - the hearing impaired - Oticon also contacted a number of neurologists, audiologists, brain scientists, IT experts and chip specialists who gave their candid opinion of the product. Their enthusiasm was unprecedented. Experts from a wide variety of backgrounds all jumped to extol the possibilities of the new product.

With this scientific seal of approval and consumer tests as backup, Oticon began to roll out the story six months ahead of the actual launch of the product. Select journalists and media were introduced to the product and the background material. The result was comprehensive global media coverage, which was integrated with commercial messages through TV-commercials, events, direct mails and Internet activities. Through tight management of the communication process, the same unified story of *The Computer in the Ear* was consistently communicated through all channels creating massive interest among trade and end-users, long before the product was even available in stores.

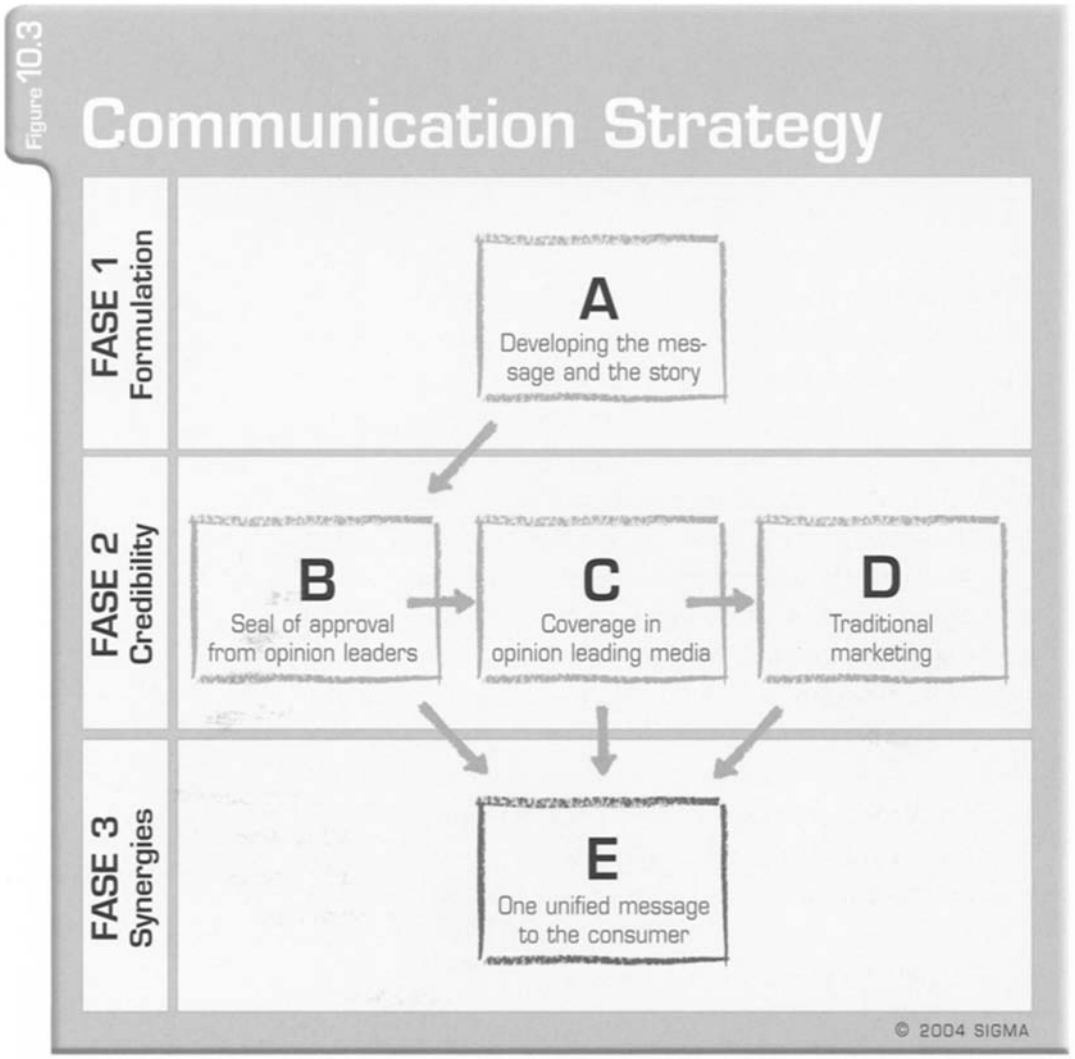
Through tight management of the communication process, the same unified story of The Computer in the Ear *was consistently communicated through all channels.*

DigiFocus became a strong ambassador for the Oticon brand. Oticon was no longer seen as a manufacturing company, but as a pioneer in digital technology. Meanwhile, the company stock rate rose from index 395 to 1,100 in less than a year.

Oticon's stock rate rose from index 395 to 1,100 in less than a year.

An Intelligent Strategy

Oticon's success was no coincidence. The company had meticulously planned an intelligent strategy as to how the story could reach the largest possible audience with the greatest possible impact. First off, Oticon carefully followed the logic of the media. Secondly, the company practised the all important ground rules for communicating one unified message across all media channels, thus ensuring that the audience heard the same story no matter where they went for information.



Oticon is far from being the only company to achieve success using this method. Even though the strategy is difficult to control in practice, the basic structure can be roughly illustrated in figure 10.3.

A. Developing the message and the story

The precondition for communicating in the first place is that we have something to say. In order to make our communication efforts relevant to our target audience, any communication strategy must start by developing the story and the central message. Oticon had a groundbreaking product. But the challenge was to develop a good story that concisely explained what made the product so special. The result was the story of *The Computer in the Ear*. It was really about developing the core story for the product brand DigiFocus.

B. Getting a seal of approval from opinion leaders

When both story and message have been developed, the company has to make sure that the story is watertight. The best way to do this is to test your story on your toughest critics. Effectively, that means throwing your message to the lions and seeing what is left once they have gobbled it up. Remember that besides your customers, your toughest critics are usually professional experts and opinion leaders in the field.

Throw your message to the lions and see what is left once they have gobbled it up.

In order to identify the right opinion leaders you need to think backwards. Find out who media go to when they are looking for information about the subject at hand. Who do the media listen to?

Your company should also test the message on opinion leaders from other worlds that have associated relevance within the story. Oticon contacted a wide spectrum of opinion leaders all the way from neurologists and brain scientists, to IT experts and chip specialists. The latter, came from a completely different world than that at Oticon, but they were still highly relevant due to their insight into the latest computer technology. This helped put the story into perspective and show the depth and possibilities of the product; something the audiologists could not have done on their own.

Your company should also test the message on opinion leaders from other worlds that have associated relevance within the story.

The final objective for the company is to ally itself with opinion leaders around the common cause, and communicate the message through and with them. If the story of the company has real substance, then opinion leaders should enjoy the benefits of seeing their own causes linked to the story. Opinion leaders also need to promote themselves on a continuous basis if they are to remain relevant. As a rule of thumb, the company should be able to get a minimum of three independent opinion leaders to give their seal of approval. Three opinion leaders provide sufficient critical mass to eliminate any suspicions of chance.

This is the ultimate test. If the chosen opinion leaders had rejected the Oticon story, there would have been no basis for the strategy as it was carried out. Their opinion determined whether or not the company had to go back and rethink the message. Alternatively, the company can choose to take the conventional way out and try to penetrate the noise of their competitors with traditional marketing tools. But it is costly to yell that loud, and not nearly as credible.

C. Coverage in opinion leading media

An opinion leader's seal of approval provides good leverage for selling the story to the media.

An opinion leader's seal of approval, among other things, provides good leverage for selling the story to the media. If the company has not done its homework the media will soon find holes in the story, but with the support of opinion leaders this risk is dramatically reduced.

The company can also benefit from selling the story to a select few, relevant media that set the agenda within the field of the company. This was a strategy that Oticon used with great success. Once the opinion leading media have picked up the story, the wider media also begin to take an interest in the story. Ultimately, media feed on good stories, and they are constantly seeking inspiration for relevant content for their publications. They also look over each other's shoulders, and use more prolific media as their guide.

D. Traditional marketing

Once you have secured your seal of approval, and your chosen media have picked up on the story, it is time to start employing more traditional forms of marketing. These include in-store activities, commercials and other forms of advertising. On the strength of your non-commercial activities, your commercial messages will appear more credible by creating synergies across media, and directing the same unified message towards the end user (step E in figure 10.3). The timing of the strategy is vital. If traditional marketing is rolled out first, the benefits to be gained from the voices of opinion leaders and media will disappear.

Once you have secured your seal of approval, and your chosen media have picked up on the story, it is time to start employing more traditional forms of marketing.

Most companies overlook this effect. They run on autopilot and roll out the traditional marketing apparatus. They go directly from step A to step D; at best they try to incorporate step C during the process. But often this is a parallel activity that takes place in the shadow of the traditional marketing effort. The true punch is only achieved when even their worst critics can see the potential in the story. This requires serious substance and a near perfect story.

Most companies run on autopilot and roll out the traditional marketing apparatus.

By now you are probably thinking; "It's all well and good to have a nice, simple strategy, but it probably cost Oticon a fortune to launch a global campaign like that". Actually, the answer is "No", especially given the effect. TV-coverage alone was achieved on more than 1,650 stations worldwide. The publicity caused the company's stock value to more than double. If your story is good enough, you can achieve amazing results with creative storytelling techniques and an intelligent strategy, even when your budgets are limited. The launch of the American cult thriller *The Blair Witch Project* is an excellent example of just what you can do, even on the most limited resources.

CASE

Bringing a Legend to Life

The combined investment for the film *The Blair Witch Project* was a meagre 34,000 Euros. But thanks to a clever campaign that ignited the mystery surrounding the movie, *The Blair Witch Project* ended up grossing more than 135 million Euros worldwide. Rumours of a horrifying "true" story were built up by systematically leaking information here and there, and building hype by word-of-mouth one year in advance of the movie premiere.

The rumour was spread that two young movie directors had found eight rolls of film in the woods surrounding the small town of Blair, in Maryland, USA. The tapes shed light on the disturbing fate of three college students, who had gone on an expedition into the woods in order to make a documentary about the mythical Blair Witch that had terrified the local community for centuries. The college students disappeared mysteriously, but thanks to the discovery of eight rolls of film, the truth about what had actually happened to them was finally out and had been made into a movie: a documentary thriller based on a true story. The campaign duped cinemagoers the world over.

In reality, the story was an ingeniously clever scam. The myth of the Blair Witch and the missing college students was the directors' idea.

In reality, the story was an ingeniously clever scam. The myth of the Blair Witch and the missing college students was the directors' idea. But through a carefully planned strategy that moved into an ethical grey area, they managed to distort the relationship between reality and fiction to such a degree that it could well have happened. First the fictive story was told in a limited forum. At selected colleges and trendy hangouts for young people in and around the town of Blair, posters of the missing college students appeared. The posters had pictures of the three under the headline "MISSING". At the same time the directors managed to have a documentary aired

on the science fiction channel "SciFi channel", where the story was depicted as an actual event.

On www.blairwitch.com the world could see statements from the people of Blair, photos and newscasts of the event. What nobody knew was that they were watching actors playing the role of police, newscasters and relatives. On the website, there also appeared a historical timeline of all the mysterious events that had occurred in the woods surrounding Blair from the sixteenth century to the present day. They included stories of abducted children, witches, murders, ghosts, legends, strange symbols and insane hermits. The hype was at full throttle and more than 200,000 visitors had logged on to www.blairwitch.com before the movie even got to cinemas.

The hype was at full throttle and more than 200,000 visitors had logged on to www.blairwitch.com before the movie even got to cinemas.

The massive interest also caught the eye of the media. Journalists across the world were quite literally goaded into solving the mystery surrounding the Blair Witch. Like everybody else they were fascinated. Aided by front covers on Time Magazine and Newsweek the myth spread to a worldwide audience. On December 2nd 1999 the Danish paper Politiken wrote, "The truth is, that no matter how you twist and turn *The Blair Witch Project*, it remains a good story, and when it comes to good stories the media has no self control. No matter whether you look at the manipulation, or the 135 million Euros - or whether you actually like the movie - *The Blair Witch Project* is a damn good story, and faced with such, the media are powerless. You think that you are writing critical journalism, but actually you end up in the big black pot, because every line you write, adds to the myth and the blockbuster success. It is the realisation of these interconnected relations and the systematic exploitation of them that remains the greatest trick of the people behind *The Blair Witch Project*."

If the Blair Witch people had launched a traditional campaign via television commercials, print advertisements and billboards, the story would never have gone so far.

If the Blair Witch people had launched a traditional campaign via television commercials, print advertisements and billboards, the story would never have gone so far. It would not have had the same credibility and punch. In what amounts to arguably one of the most creative, if deceptive, marketing campaigns in history, *The Blair Witch Project* is an extreme example, but it serves to underline why the way in which we tell our stories, is decisive in the way we perceive it.

The strategy for *The Blair Witch Project* was exemplary. First the story was found. Then the strategy was planned. And finally the story was told in a systematic manner across media that could directly engage the target audience. ■

You Decide the Ending

"Where did Nora go?" The question eats away at all who have read Henrik Ibsen's short story, *A Doll's House*, about the housewife, Nora, who breaks with the stereotypical mould of everyday life and leaves her husband and children for a new life. But what kind of life? The ending is never resolved.

So what is to become of storytelling in relation to branding? Here the ending is also open. One thing, however, is for sure: we have reached a point where companies – like Nora – have to break with the prevailing conditions and think in radically new ways. The time of the rational argument is gone. Emotions are taking over. Development and progress require new ways of thinking. The brand has to drive the company forward, and storytelling is the engine that can get the movement going.

The brand has to drive the company forward, and storytelling is the engine that can get the movement going.

Rational businessmen and women who are most at home with boxes and diagrams, are afraid of this development. Meanwhile, our visionary leaders purposefully stride towards a future full of hope. The fact is, there have never been as many exciting possibilities in terms of communication as there are today.

Those companies, who understand how to benefit from storytelling in communicating the values of their brand, are in a strong position.

In a surplus society, companies have to tell a strong story that clearly explains how they make a difference. It must be a story that we can remember and pass on, and one in which we can get involved. For this to happen, management must be prepared to tear down the walls that divide departments in categories and free the entire company to support the same unified story.

In a surplus society, companies have to tell a strong story that clearly explains how they make a difference.

Hopefully, this book has opened a door. Maybe it has planted a seed that will enable your company to start telling its own story. The opportunities abound and the landscape lies wide open. The ending is all up to you.

Bibliography

BOOKS

Branson, Richard (1998): *Losing My Viginity.* Virgin Books.
Carlzon, Jan (1987): *Moments of Truth.* Harpercollins.
Denning, Stephen (2001): *The Springboard.* KMCI Press.
Godin, Seth (1999): *Permission Marketing.* Simon & Schuster.
Jensen, Rolf (1999): *The Dream Society.*
Jyllands-Postens Erhvervsbøger.
McKee, Robert (1997): *Story.* ReganBooks.
Neuhauser, Peg C. (1993): *Corporate Legends & Lore: the power of storytelling as a management tool.*
Pearson, Carol S. & Mark, Margaret (2001):
The Hero and the Outlaw. McGraw-Hill Education.
Peters, Tom & Austin, Nancy (1985): *A Passion for Excellence.*
Random House.
Ridderstråle, Jonas & Nordström, Kjell (2000):
Funky Business. ft.com.
Saunders, Dave (1999): *C 20th Advertising.*
Carlton Books Limited.
Simmons, Annette (2001): *The Story Factor.*
Perseus Publishing.

ARTICLES

Bedbury, Scott (2002): "Nine Ways to Fix a Broken Brand". *Fast Company,* issue 55.
Cox, Beth (1998): "Calvin Klein Campaign Features E-Mail Element". *Internetnews.com.*
DeSalvo, Kathy (2001): "BMW Weaves Through The Web With Five Filmmakers". Shoot, Published weekly by BPI Communications.
Errico, Marcus (1998): "Pamela Anderson Gets Bottled" *Eonline.*
Goddard, Ken (1998): "Silver Bottle Helps Strike Gold". *VR Beverage Packaging.*

Hiles, Andrew (2002): "Enterprise Risk & Security Management". *Kingswell International.*
Holmes, Stanley (2001): "Starbucks: Keeping the Brew Hot". *Online Extra.*
Jensen, Rolf (2001): "The Dream Society II". *Instituttet for Fremtidsforskning.*
Lambert, Joe: "What is digital storytelling?". *Center For Digital Storytelling.*
Manjoo, Farhad (2002): "Dying scent of e-mail ad campaign". *Wired News.*
Martin, Michelle (1998): "A dream to the last drop". *The Guardian.*
McCarthy, Michael (2002): "BMW cars to star in online movie sequel". *USA TODAY.*
Mikkelson, Barbara (1999): "Knew Coke". *Snopes.com.*
Ransdell, Eric (2000): "The Nike Story? Just tell it". *Fast Company,* issue 31.
Rubin, Harriet (1998): "How the Best Storytellers Win". *Fast Company,* issue 15.
Shannon, Caitlin (1998): "R.L. Puffer, via e-mail, asks, 'Whatever happened to...? New Coke". *The Christian Science Monitor.*
Snowden, David J. (2000): "The Art and Science of Story". *Business Information Review,* issue 17.
Snowden, David J. (2000): "Story telling: An old skill in a new context". *Business Information Review.*
Span, Paul (1991): "Ads with instant intrigue. For tasters choice, the 45-second soap opera". *Washington Post.*
Stepanek, Marcia (2000): "Tell Me a (digital) story". *Business Week Online.*
Stewart, Thomas A. (1998): "The Cunning Plots of Leadership". *Fortune Magazine.*
Stone, Richard (1999): "How is a business like a story?". *StoryWork Institute.*

Weil, Elizabeth (1998): "Every Leader Tells a Story". *Fast Company,* issue 15.
Wentz, Laurel (1993): "New coffee romance; same old problem". *Advertising Age.*
Yan, Jack (1999): "Nicole and Papa: A 1990s retrospective". *CapOnline, Jyanet.com.*

OTHER

Chandy, Caroline & Thursby-Pelham, Douglas (1992): "Renault Clio: Adding Value During a Recession". Agency Publicis. Advertising Effectiveness Awards.
LEGO Company (2000): "Play for Life". Corporate Image Brochure.
McCann Erickson (1996): "Love over gold - the untold story of TV's greatest romance". Advertising Effectivness Awards. Institute of Practitioners of Advertising.
Starbucks presse release (2003): "Starbucks Seeking Matches Made Over Coffee".

Index

About the Authors

The authors are specialists in strategic communication, branding and storytelling at the European based communication unit SIGMA. Since it was founded in 1996, SIGMA has been dedicated to pursuing good stories for a wide variety of companies on internal and external projects, nationally as well as internationally. Several of the cases in this book are the results of SIGMA's own work. More information about SIGMA can be found at www.sigma.dk.

Klaus Fog
Klaus Fog has worked within storytelling throughout his career, starting out as Marketing Director at leading Danish newspapers, Politiken and Ekstra Bladet. He co-founded the Danish division of Saatchi & Saatchi before being appointed Scandinavian Vice President at TV3 (a Nordic television group) in 1988. Following his work here, he went on to contribute to the turn-around of the Danish national TV station, TV2, as Sales & Marketing Director. In 1996 Klaus Fog founded SIGMA, specialising in strategic communication, branding and storytelling. SIGMA has worked with a diverse number of international clients including: the LEGO Company, Oracle, Oticon, ECCO, and Grundfos. Klaus Fog is an esteemed lecturer and co-author of the book *Franchising - a business model for the future* (1985). Klaus Fog has a Masters Degree in Business Administration.

Christian Budtz
Christian Budtz has a Masters Degree in Communication. He was formerly head of the Student Organisation under the Danish Marketing Association, and freelance journalist at the leading Danish youth magazine, Chili. At SIGMA, Christian

Budtz has specialised in storytelling and strategic communication for a number of accounts, including ECCO and Oracle - and was the driving force behind a global project for the LEGO Company, in which storytelling was used for communicating the brand values internally. Christian Budtz has written several articles about storytelling for key Danish business publications such as Borsen.

Baris Yakaboylu

Baris Yakaboylu has a Master of Science (Design & Communication Management) and solid international experience in the field of storytelling. From his former base in New York, he contributed to the promotion of the Danish corporate sector with Invest in Denmark. He was later put in charge of branding Denmark within the American market as New Media Manager at the Danish Tourist Board, using digital storytelling as a key component. After his return to Denmark, Baris Yakaboylu has specialised in strategic communication and storytelling for a number of accounts such as ECCO, Coloplast and the LEGO Company.