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# CIPR Skills guide

Social storytelling

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This guide is worth 5 CPD points

You're not likely to start a tweet or a Facebook post with 'Once upon a time...'

Yet, the term 'storytelling' to most people still conjures up the images of bedtime tales.

Thanks to digital and social media, we are now working in an 3.0 24/7 age where audiences are bombarded with communications from the minute they wake up until the moment they fall asleep.

Rather than being something nice and twee, effective Storytelling, will increasingly be the difference between success and failure in communications – at both a strategic and tactical level.

People prefer brands with a story. The better you can tell your story, the more effective the power of your subsequent communications is to engage, inspire and stand out from others.

Thanks to social media, organisations can involve their audiences in their narrative like never before.

“Storytelling can help organisations stand out from the crowded Twitter feed or among the overpopulation of Facebook posts.”

## How can I tell my story in a more compelling way?

In the communications world over the past few years, the term 'storytelling' has almost lost its meaning through overuse and a lack of clarity over meaning.

The power of story to communicate an idea or a message is something that Hollywood screenwriting coach, [Robert McKee](#), is an acknowledged expert on and covers eloquently in [this talk](#) at the [Thinking Digital](#) conference.

[Jonathan Gottschall](#), author of [The Storytelling Animal](#), [says](#) science can evidence this belief in the importance of story, "we are beasts of emotion more than logic."

But what are the tried and tested techniques that can be used to tell your story?

When working to tight deadlines, it can be easy to run with the first story you think of. But will this resonate with your audience and provide the response and organisational impact you require?

It can also be a trap to think that storytelling only works for glamorous organisations. It doesn't matter if you're targeting a trade audience, b2b or consumer audience – you need to communicate with them regardless. You'll get better results if your communications resonate by using storytelling techniques the audience can relate to through their consumption of other content – be that books, TV or films.

Think of these as tools you can use to run your story through to make more compelling stories.

\*Christopher Booker: 'The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories'



Theme	How you can use	How can I use to tell my story
<b>1. Overcoming the monster:</b> defeating a threatening force: Star Wars, James Bond.	What is the monster you are overcoming?	
<b>2. The Quest:</b> in search of a goal and achieving it: Watership Down, Pilgrim's Progress.	Where is the better place we can take people?	
<b>3. Journey and Return:</b> hero goes on a journey, returns changed by the experience: Wizard of Oz, Gulliver's Travels.	What is the journey you need to go on and how will you be changed?	
<b>4. Rebirth:</b> hero is captured or oppressed but is able to start again: The Ugly Duckling.	How we can seek transformation from within.	
<b>5. Rags to Riches:</b> overcoming obstacles to make good: Cinderella.	How intervention can transform circumstances.	
<b>6. Comedy:</b> a misunderstanding comes between different parties but is resolved at the end: Bridget Jones Diary.	How can humour be used to tell your story?	
<b>7. Tragedy:</b> temptation caused by vanity or greed, becoming more desperate, (can have happy ending): Hamlet, West Side Story.	Can your story help overcome past or potential tragedy?	

## Five narrative patterns

Can use narratives for:	What the story does	When you tell your story make sure you...	Inspire responses such as...
<b>1. Spark</b> Igniting action	Describes a successful change + allows others to imagine how it would work in their situation or evoke the future you want without too much detail.	Focus on the challenge. Avoid too much detail.	'What if...' 'Just imagine.' 'When do we start.'
<b>2. Share</b> Communicating who you are, your Values	Provides audience with engaging drama and reveals some strength or vulnerability about you The story is told by the product or service itself, or by customer, or by credible third party.	Offer meaningful detail but ensure audience has time and inclination to hear your story. Use believable characters and situations to ensure story is consistent with your own actions.	'I didn't know that about her!' 'Now I see why she does what she does.' 'Why don't we do this all the time!'
<b>3. Spotlight</b> Make what you do the hero	Share your story of challenge and its experiences, focus on the problem and show it can be corrected.	Make sure reality aligns with promise.	'Must tell my friends about this...'
<b>4. Success</b> Building teamwork and collaboration	Demonstrates some aspect of a rumour to be untrue. Uses the uncertainty of the story to turn against itself.	Let people have their say to encourage different alternatives.	'Reminds me of the time we...' 'Better watch out or that...'
<b>5. Surf</b> Gossip		Avoid temptation to be negative and make sure rumour is false.	'Never thought of it like that before.'

## Telling your story everywhere

Thanks to social and digital media, you can tell the story of your organisation everywhere your audience is.

Create a central hub to act as the home of your story – whether it's a website, blog post or YouTube video – and spread different chapters of it across social. Think about how your story can work on Twitter,

Facebook, video sites, Instagram, split your story up and draw audiences back to your central narrative.

Social media can let the audience into your story, let them own the story, make them more emotionally involved and ultimately impact on your objectives.

## Do's

1. Remember what your objective is and build your story with that in mind. People loving a story is not equal to people loving a brand. Think about your audience's needs and interests.
2. Listen to your audience. Understand how they like to converse, its typical tone, its preferred channels, influencers and regularity of discussion.
3. Think about your audience and their motives at all times. Simply broadcasting your own agenda won't hold attention. Make sure your story serves a purpose for the audience and is relevant, useful or entertaining.
4. Be relevant, meaningful and useful.
5. Facilitate audience participation. If you engage people with your story enough for them to want to interact, make sure it's clear how they can do so and mechanics, such as a hashtag are in place, to collate these mentions so you can easily monitor, measure and reply.
6. Think about how you connect with your audience. Connection builds loyalty.
7. Prioritise authenticity as much as possible. People connect with people, not companies. Use names. Humanise your stories. The more relatable your story is the more connected and responsive your audience will be.
8. Create memorable content. Analyse your most positive, shareworthy content to date and look for trends to further amplify what type of stories your audience are positively engaging with and sharing the most.
9. Tell a visual story. Play with how visual tools – Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook Timeline photos – can help convey your story by.
10. Be prepared. Carry tools and equipment that will allow you to capture the story. For example, if you are running a conference, take photographs and record videos that can be shared digitally.
11. Keep it simple and human – remember the audience may not know about your industry or organisation and you could lose them if they can't relate to your content/story.
12. Remember good content is not about storytelling; it's about telling a truly connective story well.
13. Consider all eventualities. Be aware of the risks and potential downsides. Have you looked at all of the angles and considered the scenarios that could go wrong?

## Don'ts

1. Think that just because you don't have huge budgets that storytelling is beyond your grasp – a strong narrative can be woven through brand communications at any level.
2. Forget to think about where your story will be published and what assets you might need to convey in your messaging.
3. 'Just story tell' for the sake of storytelling – make it purposeful.
4. Make sure you don't overlook opportunities to generate content which will help to support your narrative, whether it's from events, testimonials, partners or other sources.
5. Forget to tie your storytelling back to an objective. Plan clearly at the beginning by asking yourself what are you trying to achieve. Start with the end in mind and ask yourself what success looks like. Is it to raise awareness, generate brand loyalty / good will, increase sales? Measure your success against these different objectives appropriately.
6. Think it's about you – it should be more about what the audience will take from the story and how they might change / take action / alter their perception of your brand or product as a result.
7. Use corporate speak. Stories on social media must be told in a way that your audience can relate to.
8. Put your story out there without doing your research into the audience and their behaviours. What works on Facebook may not transfer to Snapchat.
9. If your story involves consumer participation, try to think about potential eventualities. The internet population will often try to subvert your brand messaging if they can – think of the recent [Coca-Cola](#) example.

## Examples

- [This Girl](#) Can – Sport England
- [Like a Girl](#) – Always
- Red Bull – [Red Bull publishing house](#), sports and extreme sports sponsorship and stunts such as Felix Baumgartner space jump.
- NIKE – [Make it Count](#)

## Essential reading/watching

<https://hbr.org/2014/10/why-your-brain-loves-good-storytelling/>

<http://www.convinceandconvert.com/content-marketing/3-ted-talks-that-uncover-the-secrets-of-storytelling/>

<http://www.convinceandconvert.com/digital-marketing/the-power-of-storytelling-ann-handley/>

<http://www.briansolis.com/2015/04/brian-solis-hugh-macleod-share-art-storytelling-inspire-engagementvideo/>

[http://www.nytimes.com/times-insider/2015/05/18/snapchat-a-new-mobile-challenge-for-storytelling/?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/times-insider/2015/05/18/snapchat-a-new-mobile-challenge-for-storytelling/?_r=0)

<http://aeon.co/magazine/culture/digital-storytelling-revives-the-art-of-gossip/>

<http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/8-ways-to-become-a-better-storyteller-through-social-media/614117>

<https://econsultancy.com/blog/65397-five-brands-excelling-at-storytelling>

<http://www.dailywritingtips.com/how-to-structure-a-story-the-eight-point-arc/>

<https://hbr.org/2014/03/the-irresistible-power-of-storytelling-as-a-strategic-business-tool>





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