

CONTENT: A TALE AS OLD AS TIME

The beauty and the beast of marketing storytelling

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What does Ancient Greek and Shakespearean storytelling have to do with direct marketing today? More than you may realize. Here is a proven five-step process—as described in Gary Hennerberg’s “Reinventing Direct” blog—that has been used for centuries to hold the reader to the end of a story. Direct marketers can use this timeless framework to write compelling copy for storytelling that engages and sells.

Stories Can Feel Good

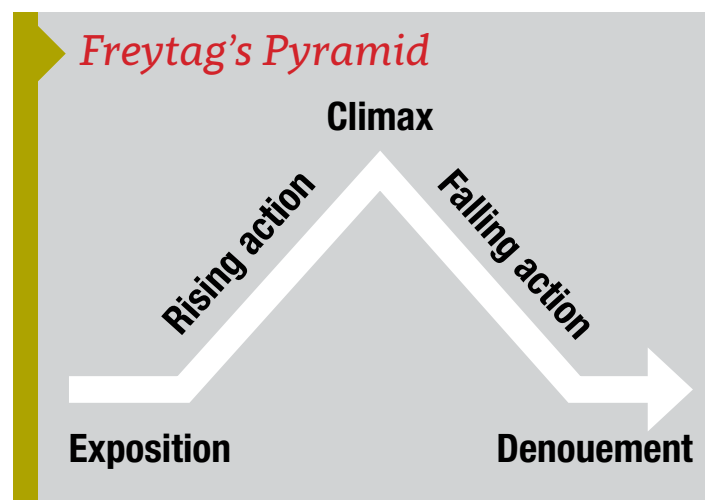
Marketers clamor to have their messages go viral. We want our customers to become advocates and evangelists for us. We want them to “like,” comment and share our messages for us. A mention on the evening news can skyrocket the number of views on a video into the tens of millions, all for a “feel good” moment. How do you reach a goal to reach the masses? Most likely through effective storytelling, since it’s not too likely your hard-hitting sales message is going to be shared or talked about.

Good storytelling makes your audience feel good, whether it comes from the media or a marketer. Effective storytelling in content marketing creates those feelings, increasing your odds of being liked, shared and talked about.

However, marketers often put the cart before the horse when it comes to content marketing. As Robert Rose, of the Content Marketing Institute, says “We’re taught to think, ‘What’s our TV campaign going to say?’ or ‘What’s our print campaign going to consist of?’ We think medium first—message second. Instead, when we think content, we need to think content first, channel second. What’s the story? Then, which channels should we tell it on?”

Getting back to basics is important to making the audience feel good. Re-focus on the story itself, because crafting a good narrative might just be the most important part of your content marketing strategy—the part that you never knew you needed.

The five-step process of Freytag’s Pyramid has been a successful storytelling framework going back centuries, and it’s a good place to start for your marketing stories.



Climbing the Pyramid

Using your imagination, you can see how the five-step process of Freytag's Pyramid applies to direct marketing copywriting and story:

1. EXPOSITION

The exposition is the portion of a story that introduces important background information to the audience; for example, information about the setting, events occurring before the main plot, characters' back stories, etc. Exposition can be conveyed through dialogue, flashbacks, character's thoughts, background details, in-universe media or the narrator telling a backstory.

2. RISING ACTION

In the rising action, a series of related incidents build toward the point of greatest interest. The rising action of a story is the series of events that begin immediately after the exposition (introduction) of the story and build up to the climax. These events are generally the most important parts of the story since the entire plot depends on them to set up the climax, and ultimately the satisfactory resolution of the story itself.

3. CLIMAX

The climax is the turning point, which changes the protagonist's fate forever. If the story is a comedy, things will have gone badly for the protagonist up to this point; now, the plot will begin to unfold in his or her favor, often requiring the protagonist to draw on hidden inner strengths. If the story is a tragedy, the opposite state of affairs will ensue, with things going from good to bad for the protagonist, often revealing the protagonist's hidden weaknesses.

4. FALLING ACTION

During the falling action, the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist unravels, with the protagonist winning or losing against the antagonist. The falling action may contain a moment of final suspense, in which the final outcome of the conflict is in doubt.

5. DÉNOUEMENT

The dénouement comprises events from the end of the falling action to the actual ending scene of the drama or narrative. Conflicts are resolved, creating normality for the characters and a sense of catharsis, or release of tension and anxiety, for the reader.

Once you have the basic outline of your story put together, using Freytag's Pyramid to guide you through the rise outline, you can take it to the next level with some fine-tuning.



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—Robert Rose, Content Marketing Institute

Stories Can Do Good

Direct marketers can use storytelling today as part of the “For Good” movement that has permeated our culture, largely fueled by social media. Your challenge is how to engage through your story, and effectively monetize these efforts better than your competitors.

Have a look at an analysis of any organization that balances “For Good” messaging with selling. “For Good” messages drive interest and traffic from videos of performance and behind-the-scenes stories. The interest builds and goes viral in the likes, comments and shares of certain types of social media messaging. It translates into more Web traffic, and more Web traffic translates into more event and product sales. The numbers won’t lie.

A few illustrations:

- An informal video—recorded on an iPad and uploaded to YouTube—where a charitable organization performs for a boy wounded in a school shooting is posted on Facebook and Twitter, yet is watched thousands of times in just a few days. Nothing was sold here—just the feel good story.
- Thousands watch a behind-the-scenes interview, and fans get something they can’t hear anywhere else. The video closes with a subtle reminder of an upcoming performance. Again, nothing is being sold here—it’s just insider information being shared.
- A static post overtly selling an upcoming event doesn’t get much traction for likes, comments or shares. That doesn’t mean it was a failure. It simply says that people don’t want to be sold. They want to choose to buy. And in this case, they choose to buy in bigger numbers when a series of stories have led up to the event.

People want to be part of a movement larger than the individual, and often when they can experience an event, they are ready and willing to buy. When there is product available for sale, demand has already been generated because the customer is ready to buy before you ask them to buy.

With that distinction in selling style, it’s vital that you don’t forget to strategically weave your “for good” messages into the storytelling as a way to monetize the effort. That doesn’t mean that you add an intrusive sales pitch in the message. It means you naturally lead your customers and prospects through a planned sequence, timed in a way that takes the individual to the ultimate goal: purchase.



10 Ways to Create Emotional Connections

Creating an emotional connection through storytelling is critically important, and a powerful way to connect with your audience on a higher level than ever before.

1. STIMULATE INTEREST/EARN TRUST

Your audience probably isn't interested in what you have to sell until you have stimulated their interest and earned their trust in your value to making their lives better.

2. GIVE THEM UNUSUAL ACCESS

They want to be let in on what's going on behind the scenes. Video can deliver this experience better than any other channel, but don't let your story be resigned to only one medium.

3. BUILD TENSION/RELEASE WITH JOY

Like any good story, add an element of tension, but don't forget to let the audience experience joy. People will remember you for how you made them feel.

4. GIVE CONTEXT IN YOUR STORY

As an insider, it is your responsibility, as a storyteller, to set the stage. Refrain from using acronyms and jargon, so the viewer can appreciate the importance of an upcoming element of the story.

5. LEVERAGE THE FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO)

Craft your story so it builds from one part to the next, so your audience, while fearing they'll miss something, is looking for your message.

The Fear of Missing Out

We're all wired to have basic fear. And without taking inappropriate advantage of your prospective customers, there are ways you can appeal to this part of the brain—the amygdala—with messaging to make your sales programs more effective. Here are three uses with FOMO in mind as you write copy and create message positioning:

- **First to Know:** If you fear missing out, you must surely want to be the first to know of an important development, new product or news. And, when you're one of the first to know, you're most eager to tell others that you were the first, and pass it along (to your benefit).
- **Inside Story:** People like to have the inside scoop, combined with effective storytelling. Mix the concepts of revealing your inside story with a unique selling proposition—or positioning—and the sum is greater than its parts.
- **Limited Time:** When there is a limited time a product is available, it intensifies the desire to acquire it now. The challenge today, however, is that it's easy for customers to check out competition and discover that limited time appeal has its limits.

These uses also create urgency in your copy. Writing copy and messaging based on this intense human primal fear will drive higher response. There can be no question that the spell of FOMO is real and a part of your customer's minds.

6. LET CHARACTERS BE STARS

If you have multiple people in the story, creatively develop a delivery vehicle so everyone can participate.

7. PUT YOUR AUDIENCE INSIDE THE STORY

Don't be detached. Invite them to come along with you.

8. ENCOURAGE COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

Your audience will tell you what they think, so invite participation.

9. THE STORY DICTATES LENGTH

Many claim videos must be short. Not necessarily true. As with any medium, they should be tightly edited and move the story along.

10. STRATEGICALLY MONETIZE

Think long-term about monetizing content marketing; it's not meant to pay off over night. All of your content is effectively a series. As the audience experiences more and more of it, their knowledge about your market expands, and they become more comfortable regarding you as an expert and potential vendor. Coming into the all-important consideration and purchase phase of the buyer's journey, your audience is pumped to work with you, which makes selling your products and services all the easier.

Feeling good is what makes storytelling effective in copywriting, and what the "for good movement" leads to. Leading people to feel good is how you can move them to respond.

Maya Angelou succinctly sums up why storytelling in copywriting is so important: ***"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."***

