

Why brands need to become master storytellers

By [Greg Viljoen](#)

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Many millions of brands, from consumer goods to charities, compete across a bewildering array of media platforms for attention. All of them hope for more... Ultimately what they want is not just to be noticed but to inspire feeling, connection and action.



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Traditional advertising across traditional media invades and shouts for that attention, and anything else it can get. But social media and modern notions such as Seth's Goldin's permission marketing have largely disrupted those advertising conventions.

I believe inbound marketing, a blend of social media, content marketing and search engine optimisation that uses 'pull' techniques to draw people into an engaged community, is where today's brands need to focus.



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Inbound marketing is a way for brands to receive people's attention as opposed to the way that old-style advertising assaults it. The most effective tactic to achieve that 'pull' is to revert to one of the most basic ways of being human – which is to tell a meaningful story.

Stories help us find kindred spirits

Both art and science have long shown that humans are hardwired to stories. Narrative is the essence of how we make sense of the world, and ourselves. When we first meet someone, it is the nature of the stories that we exchange about ourselves and our lives that determines whether we go forward into a connection with potential for a relationship or just move on.

It's the same in business or for a non-profit organisation. One of the seminal aims of storytelling is to discover whether we can connect. Stories help us find kindred spirits. They help us unearth whether we have shared values; whether our likes and dislikes are similar; whether we have potential to be friends, lovers or tribespeople.

In essence, in stories lies the power to connect. It is through stories, fables and fairy tales, that we learnt important life concepts as children. It is stories that lead us towards self-realisation, understanding and trust, receptivity and empathy. It is thanks to stories that we become champions of causes and loyal supporters – every brand's real aim.



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Today's media clutter is extreme

This is why I maintain that it is essential for businesses, brands and causes to harness the skills they need to tell their authentic, compelling stories.

Today's media clutter is extreme. Apart from the usual bombardment of traditional marketing, we also have fake news, algorithms skewing the content showing up in our feeds and click-bait shock tactics to contend with. Nothing cuts across the noise more effectively than a genuine story that touches hearts and minds. That story can be the story of a brand or a business or a charity. It just needs to be honest, and it needs to be well told.



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While causes are mostly rooted in powerful human-interest stories, not all charities tell their stories well. And the same can be said for brands and companies. Having a great story is not the be all and end all. In an overloaded space, it becomes all about how you tell your story. Are you a master storyteller?

Fables and fairy tales might seem like child's play, but many of the stories we share with our 21st century children have endured for a very long time. Why? Because they are stories that have been told well. And, there's no doubt that telling your story well has become crucial to businesses, brands and causes.

ABOUT GREG VILJOEN

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