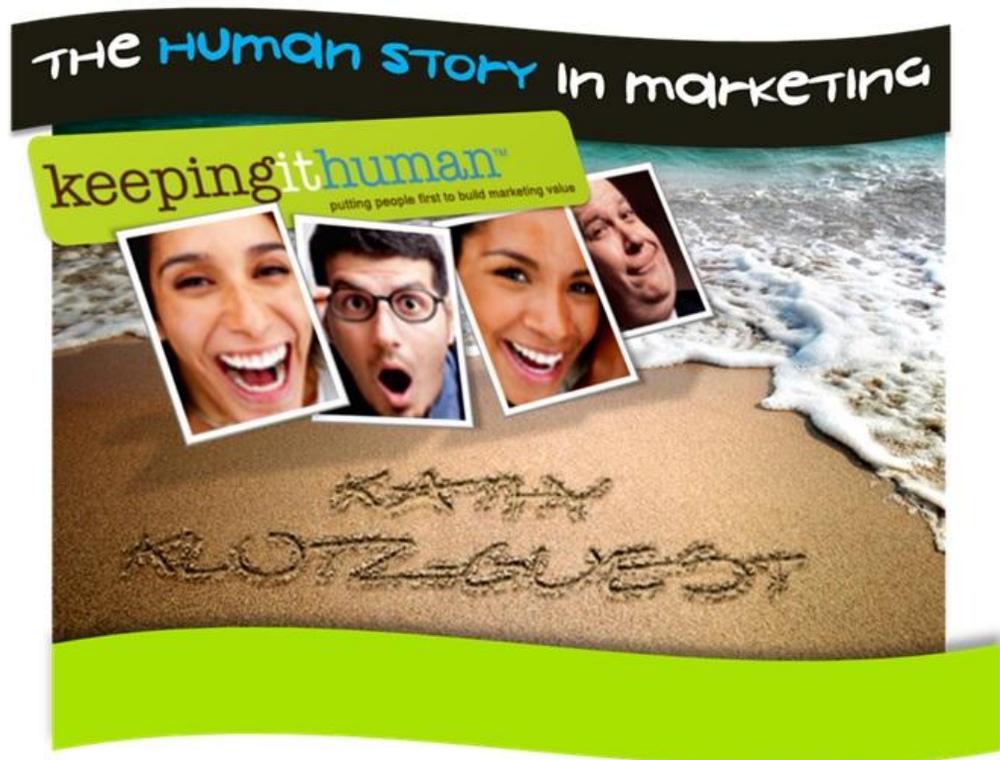


December 2013 Vol. 2: A More Human Model for Product Storytelling

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About This Book

What keeps you up at night is *your* business. All business is personal. Are you telling the right stories to prospects and customers? This eBook explains why humanizing your marketing with stories is critical to cutting through the noise and connecting with customers and prospects.

Humans are wired for stories; we're storytelling animals. The resurgence in storytelling, the original social medium, is an important and welcome evolution for many reasons. Memorable stories scale in a way that facts alone cannot. And a multiplier effect is critical in marketing. Finally, stories cut through the tremendous clutter—much of it lacking context and meaning—created by the never-ending content explosion. Here's where stories pay dividends: According to a recent [Stanford study](#), stories are remembered up to 22 times more than facts alone.

In a world of noise, the best stories win.

From Product-Centered to Story-Driven Content

The most important thing any organization can do is become [a storytelling organization](#). That means elevating your product or service discussion to one that focuses on the human needs of your audience.

It all begins with telling the right stories about real people who use your product or service and not focusing on the product itself. Your best stories are not about your products or you. Your goal is to tell a bigger story that makes your *customer* the hero.

Customers are doing their own research, and they're asking the most important question: How will your product or service make my life better? If your marketing fails to elevate the discussion to one of change for the better, you'll never rise above the din.

Getting Started

One of my favorite models for getting started with storytelling comes from improvisation—one of the most powerful ways of co-creating stories. It's also that classic and fun universal bed-time story model that you'll recognize from movies. I've used this model as an improviser on stage and as a marketer. Recently, I used this approach in several storytelling sessions I gave at [Product Camp Silicon Valley 2013](#).

What I love about this particular model, called the "seven-step story," is that you can easily adapt it. This approach covers all the key elements of a story, and it works for just about every type of story a company can have: a core purpose story, product stories, origin stories, and others.

Here's the model for product/service stories told through the lens of your customer:

Once upon a time, <customer name> was doing...

And every day, he or she did <big challenge he or she has>...

Until one day, he or she discovered <enter the solution: your product or service>...



And because of that, he or she could <benefit 1>...

And because of that, he or she could <benefit 2>...

And because of that, he or she could <benefit 3>... (You don't need three, but three is the maximum you want. Shorter stories are more powerful.)

And every day since that day, he or she uses <your product or service> because it enables him or her to <big human need>...

Show How Customers' Situations 'Change'

The most important part of a story is showing how the hero/protagonist of the story changes. What can your customer do now because of your product or service that he/she could not do before? That's story rocket fuel.

Your product or service must make your customers look good. (They are the hero; your service becomes the supportive sidekick!)

Start thinking bigger than your product by focusing on what people really want: *time, freedom, success, recognition, enhanced reputation, self-reliance, stability, belonging, safety, reduced risk, acceptance, security, credibility, and so on.* Think about Abraham Maslow's famous "Hierarchy of Needs."

No one needs your product or service. What they need is the change that your product or service allows them to make! And you don't have to be saving lives to claim real value. You must aim for credibility, however. Great stories are built on a foundation of truth. And if you are in need of inspiration, ask customers, "How did we make your life better?" And make it personal. The best product stories are.

Here's a brief example applying the model to Company X:

Once upon a time, Bob, a company owner, kept numerous files in various locations.

And every day he had to update information in many places because he did not have the data in one secure place to be able to work remotely. It was a huge pain in a number of ways.

Then, one day, a friend introduced Bob to Company X's cloud-based data services.

Because of that, Bob could securely access data anywhere, anytime wherever he was.

Because of that he was able to get more work done quickly and easily and without worrying about compromising data security.

And every day since that day, Bob's organization uses Company X because the ability to access data "anytime anywhere" securely has reduced his risk, ensured data freedom, and

freed up his time to do what does best: run his business and spend time with his family—not with his IT department.

Customers Buy Stories, Not Products

Company X delivers its service via the cloud. No one needs cloud-based services, but the cloud is how Company X delivers its value. What matters is that the product allows users to do something (bigger than the product) that they could not do before. In this case, Company X enables information freedom, simplicity, security and freed-up time.

Your product story is always about the *people* who use what you sell and how their lives are better. When you focus on products and features—on you, instead of your customers—you are playing a small game.

Elevate your marketing. Products come and go; a deep commitment to changing customers' lives for the better—something bigger than any company—must be an unwavering purpose that provides meaning. That's the change your stories must focus on if they are to resonate emotionally with your audience, be memorable, and create compelling calls to action.

That's my story. What's yours? Email: [Kathy\(at\)keepingithuman\(dot\)com](mailto:Kathy(at)keepingithuman(dot)com)

Kathy Klotz-Guest helps companies [turn marketing-speak into compelling, human stories](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



An improviser, storyteller, and marketer, Kathy Klotz-Guest is CEO of San Jose, CA-based marketing and communications firm, *Keeping it Human*. Kathy helps executive teams succeed by telling their best stories to the world in human-speak, a language that customers trust. Kathy is a Founding Director for the Society for New Communications Research (SNCR.org), a think tank for transforming the way businesses use new media. She blogs, speaks on marketing all over the country, and runs a marketing podcast. Kathy's clients have included Yahoo!, Autodesk, Cisco, United Way, and Stanford University. She has Masters Degrees from Stanford University and UC Berkeley.

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