

August 2013 Vol. 1: The "Human Case Study"

Kathy Klotz-Guest, Founder of Keeping it Human™



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. And, with a five-step approach outlined here, your team can tell better stories, connect better with prospects, and generate more and better leads.

All Marketing is Storytelling

Humans are wired for stories; we're storytelling animals. Yet, we're living in an era of 'Big Data' information overload. There is too much data chasing too little mindshare. That's because data itself doesn't create what people want most: *meaning*.

The resurgence in storytelling, the original social medium, is an important and welcome evolution for a number of reasons. Stories are memorable and they scale in a way that facts alone cannot. Stories cut through the tremendous clutter – most of it lacking meaning – created by this online content explosion. According to recent [Stanford research](#) (October 2012), stories are remembered up to 22 times more than facts alone. Stories are the most important way to connect with an audience.

Why Do Stories Matter Today?

In a world of growing noise, declining trust, and a changing buying journey, human stories differentiate, simplify and expedite connections that lead to sales.

Content Explosion: It's Raining Marketing BS!

Yes, facts matter. In isolation of a story, facts alone become noise. There's just too much out there. In 2010, then-CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt, stood up at a conference and told attendees that every two days, we are creating as much information as existed from all of human history up through 2003. Recently, IBM reported that 90% of all the 'content' that exists today has been created in the last two years. Content is growing at an exponential rate, and it's not slowing down.



Age of Advocacy and Declining Trust in Companies

At the same time, trust in companies is eroding - we don't believe what companies tell us anymore (Edelman Trust Barometer). We don't have to. We do our own searches, we talk to our networks, and we gather information before we make purchases. The buyer's journey has changed. Companies are not the primary source of information of their services. This has huge implications for why advocacy matters today. Forrester's data shows that 94% of us trust advocates (rabid customers) compared to 18% of us who trust influencers. Why? Because unpaid advocates are believed to be "people like me." I don't trust paid spokespeople and media 'influencers,' but I trust people like me.

Against this backdrop of marketing ‘Big data,’ and its corollary (‘little relevance!’), marketers are fighting to be heard. This can be a good thing – it forces companies to rethink how they are communicating. It’s time to change the marketing ‘game’ to one that is more human, relevant and purposeful.

A Changing Buying Cycle

According to Forrester (Oct 2012), [the average b2b customer is 66% – 90% along in the buying journey before he or she reaches out to the vendor](#). Customers are doing their own research and they’re asking the most important question: How will your product or service make my life better? And by “life” we don’t just mean work. People have emotional needs like security, stress reduction and reputation enhancement that have to be met as well. Ignore those at your own peril. Stories fuel a powerful B2B content marketing strategy that gives people the right content at the right time in the buying cycle. Moreover, stories simplify the decision-making process.

Stories Make an End-Run Around the Facts Filter

We know from neuroscience that humans don’t make fact-based decisions. We make decisions based on feelings and emotions (Do I trust this company? Will they be there for me? Will I get results?), and use facts to rationalize those decisions. As behavioral economist Dan Ariely points out in *Predictably Irrational*, humans irrationally believe that we act rationally most of the time. We’re anything but rational. Even in B2B. We don’t check our humanity at the door when we go to work. Surveys show that 92.3% of audiences are, in fact, made up of people!

Every Company Must Become a Storytelling Organization

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

Stories Always Focus on People

Many businesses (regardless of size) focus their messaging on their services and products. When you do this, you don’t establish a deeper connection with your audience. Overwhelming people with ‘data’ adds complexity - now they have the burden of figuring out how you can help them. Great stories, by contrast, focus on how customers are better off because of your services and products.

Stories of customer success and real change, therefore, matter more than ever. And if your marketing fails to elevate the discussion to one about how lives are improved, you’ll never rise above the noise. And, as I’ve written about before, [customer stories](#)



[and empathy](#) must [drive a human-centered product design process](#) as well as content marketing after a product is designed and launched.

Stories Differentiate and Paint What Could Be

Stories help every business differentiate. And according to venerable marketing author, Jack Trout, it's "differentiate or die."

A story has to paint a picture of what could be. How could things be better? You have to show contrast with the status quo. What is not working for your prospect and how has your product or service left the user better off? Tell a powerful story that helps customers envision what working with you will be like (example below):

Sally has a small business and had business computers stolen. She was in a panic. The computers contained sensitive customer information, and a breach would hurt her business and her customers by exposing their data. How would she protect their data, her reputation, and run her business now?

Before the theft, our firm had encrypted all customer information, so that every piece of financial information on the stolen laptops was protected. Additionally, our firm immediately wiped every laptop clean with remote technology, and restored all customer data for Sally immediately from backups. We encrypted this data, too. We even supplied Sally with temporary laptops until she could expedite the insurance claim. We had Sally's business up and running again immediately without any service disruption to her customers. Even though computers are stolen, your data doesn't have to be. Security, access, and service are our concern. We reduce your business and personal risk! And we're looking out for your customers, too, by protecting their data.

A story answers what prospects really want to know, "What happens when I really need you? How will you treat me?" Stories also help prospects understand that you've dealt with their challenges before. When prospects ask, "Have you worked with a client like us before?" what they are really asking is, 'Have you solved this problem before, and what results did you get?' *They're asking for a story.* That means facts + emotional connection in order to develop trust.

A Keeping it Human™ Framework for Case Stories That Work

I have worked with professional services firms, both B2B and B2B, and the steps to a great case study are the same. You'll notice that these elements are part of any great story. People don't check their 'human card' at the door, even in B2B. So it is important that none of the steps below is shortchanged. **My five-step framework:**

- **Step One:** Have a strong **protagonist** - humanize your case study as much as possible by giving names and specific titles. So for example, if you sell to small businesses, you might call your business owner Sally, as we did above. If you sell to CTOs, say CTO John Doe or Jane Smith – whatever it is. Always give

names if you can, versus Company XYZ. If I am a CTO buying technology, I want to know that you have dealt with real challenges at my level before. So make your protagonist a real person with the title of the audience you are targeting.

- **Step Two:** Make your listener care by describing in detail **the challenge** your protagonist had. Again, your audience is looking for some ‘feeling’ of comfort that you have dealt with their issues before. Humanize the challenge. What’s at stake for CTO John or CMO Kate personally as well as professionally if a project fails? Remember failure isn’t just failure for the company - it’s a very personal issue. Your ideal prospect needs to trust that you will leave the company better off and that you will make him or her look good in the process! In this case the professional need might be to increase productivity, while the personal, human need is for enhanced reputation from great project execution.
- **Step Three: The plot.** What was the frustration that drove the protagonist to seek a solution? One day....CMO Kate had it! The company’s projects were stalled and her reputation was on the line. Don’t exaggerate; however, it is important to build in the human factor. And a well described “today’s the day moment” will grab your audience and take them on a human journey. CMO Kate will be able to recognize her situation in your protagonist’s human drama. The point - don’t shy away from what’s personally at stake for the protagonist. What’s the personal cost if the situation if the challenge is NOT resolved? What finally happened that was so painful that it caused the customer to seek a solution?
- **Step Four: The resolution** - briefly, how was the problem solved and what were **the immediate business outcomes**? This is a key point - be brief; this is NOT about the lengthy details of your methodology. What matters is that you achieved results. ‘How’ is not important to your customer; the results are. So, for example, in this case, the immediate business results were that the project was completed on time and under budget, allowing the CTO to move the business forward.
- **Step Five: End your story on a personal, human outcome for the prospect.** How has the customer’s personal situation changed? The most important aspect of a great story is showing change. What was the human change that you enabled: more time, more security, enhanced reputation, reduced risk, increased visibility, positive positioning, growth, for example. Think about *Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*. What do people really want beyond the immediate business outcomes? So, while your project is an economic success for the company, it’s also important to tell the story of what this success enabled the CTO to do personally. If you are selling to CTOs, your prospect is thinking, “Will this company help or trash my reputation?!” So, for sake of example here, because of the project’s success, the CTO had his budget doubled. This means he had a personal reputation win! Tell *that* story, too. All business is personal.

Always ask your prospect, *what will success on this project mean for you personally?* Your prospect feels personal risk if your firm fails to deliver, not just financial risk. You need to signal that you get what's personally at stake for your prospect.

Imagine the following sterile story:

Company ABC came to us. They weren't doing well. Using our unique patented methodology and, after implementing 25 processes, we reduced costs by 15%.

Unfortunately, this is how most companies talk about their results. It's very underwhelming, and we have no frame of reference for how that made a difference to the client. What difference did it make in the life of the economic buyer?

What if, instead, I ended the story with: because of the 15% return, our customer was able to hire new service people, grow the business, and build a bigger team to tackle bigger projects. That came with increased internal visibility.

A series of disconnected economic 'facts' does not make a cogent and compelling human story. When you end on a human note, you signal to your customer that you understand that there is a personal, human investment involved. As a result of doing business with you, how are customers better off personally, not just financially?

You must tell **that** story of *change*.

A Human Story

I had a client with very complex semiconductor technology. The execs talked about the technology in great detail with prospects. It was very difficult to get traction with buyers - we're talking about complex, expensive technology, and huge buyer risk.

We then crafted a story about how their technology reduced prospects' time to market by years and saved millions in R&D (research and development). The real a-ha, however, was that because their technology cut time and R&D, cash was freed up for investment elsewhere in the company. My client alleviated financial risk for companies and CFOs! They made CTOs *and* CFOs look good! This is key because CFOs are influential in the decisions of the companies to purchase technology, just as CTOs are.

As soon as we started telling it, the company signed a deal for tens of millions of dollars.

Marketing is About People, Not Facts

What's at stake personally if prospects don't solve the problem or big challenge? In my case with the semiconductor client I mentioned, they had a high cash burn rate and they weren't getting new clients fast enough to grow. They had also gotten their last round of funding. What was at stake was a failure for the founders



because of cash flow. The real human story of success here was that a great prospect / marketing story didn't just bring in tens of millions of dollars in new business; it's that a better story gave the company (and founders) a second chance with a much-needed cash infusion.

People don't check their humanity card at the door when they go to work in their "B2B" job. If a B2B customer perceives huge risk in buying your services no matter what the facts say, you'll lose every time. Remember, neuroscience tells us is that feelings decide; facts are used to rationalize the decisions we've already made with our "gut." So, for example, that CTO you're trying to sell to? He or she is making human choices about what is not only good for the company, but also what is good for his or her personal reputation, career, and positioning in the company. If you can't answer the human element of how your products and services make him or her look good – not just the company – than you have missed a huge opportunity to beat your competition. And trust is a feeling – a human connection – not a fact.

Here's to keeping your marketing - and storytelling – more human. When you humanize your case 'story,' you connect with your prospects' head and gut. That is a competitive advantage in a world filled with fact-overload and noise.

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. A comic improviser, Kathy plays improvisational comedy on Sundays. Her favorite audience is her little dude, Evan.

Contact: [f Facebook](#) [t Twitter](#) [in LinkedIn](#) P/F: 408.578.8040

Website: www.keepingithuman.com Email: kathy@keepingithuman.com

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Podcast: <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/kathyklotzguest>