



## **The power of a good brand story.**

Call it cavalier but my first question to any client, large multinational or start-up entrepreneur, is ‘what’s your story?’

What strikes me is not how different or how similar, the answers are but how hard it is for nearly everyone to answer the question in the first place. Before reading any further, and before casting any stones, pause for a moment and ask yourself the question. It’s not so easy, is it? Well into the age of the soundbite, we’re still hard-pressed to summon the elusive 60 second description of who we are, what it is we do and why it matters.

And, this of course, is only the tip of the iceberg. Our fixation with the ‘elevator speech’ (or martini-monologue) derives from the need to sum it all up for audiences with notoriously short attention spans. But, before we can sum it all up, we need to have thought it all through. Like the concert pianist who makes Chopin seem easy, there’s a whole lot of unseen effort that goes into the public performance.

So when I ask people “what’s your story,” and see their eyes glaze over and their fingers start to fidget and their throats sprout frogs, I know that someone has not been practicing. Someone has not learnt to read the music, to hit the right notes, to make the instrument of communication sing. I know too that, no matter whatever the immediate, there’s a deeper need, a more significant bit of work to be done.

One of the primary ways we make sense of our world and our place in it is through stories. The same is true of brands. They’re the stories that unite us all in a common purpose within an enterprise, and connect us with the people we serve on the outside. These brand stories give meaning to who we are and what we do. They build on themselves chapter by chapter, over time, evolving as they respond to changing customers and markets.

Brand stories are what propel awareness, consideration, trial and buying. They are also what ensure the repetition of this process – the cycle that produces growth and profitability. This is what makes brand stories so important. Far from being window dressing, they are key business drivers. The more coherent and compelling your brand story, the more it will power the success of your enterprise.

So, how do you go about crafting a strong brand story, one that drives key business decisions as well as marketing communications? The watchwords of a strong brand story are clarity, consistency and character.

Clarity - First, make sure you know what you wish to say. This is the content of your brand; who you are, what you do, who you do it for, why it matters to them, and how it’s different from anyone else in the marketplace.

Consistency – Make sure that your brand shines through at every customer touchpoint – everything you say or send out. – to create a brand presence in the marketplace.

Character - Give it a bit of oomph, panache, flair. This is where your personality shines through. It’s what brings you to life and what makes people want to connect with you. It’s what turns necessity into desire.

To a large degree, crafting a good brand story is about applying the lessons we’ve always known. Remember the tales we used to love as children? At the end, a parent or teacher would ask, “what’s the moral of the story?” The same applies to business. Your brand story works in a similar way; it defines and expresses who you are and what you stand for, the reasons for your decisions and the heart of all your messages.

Ultimately, it’s your brand story that helps you answer that most fundamental of all questions: “Why?” Why do you decide to make one decision and not another? Why do your customers need you? Why is it that you’re better able to meet their needs than anyone else? And why should someone use your services or products over those of anyone else?

Once you have answered these questions, you can go on to create important communications tools – the key messages that keep your people on point, the speeches and corporate communications that rally investors, the copy and design that accurately and powerfully convey your identity to consumers. But, until you’ve defined your brand story, no matter how fancy your communications program, you’ve got nothing to say.

So, what’s your story?