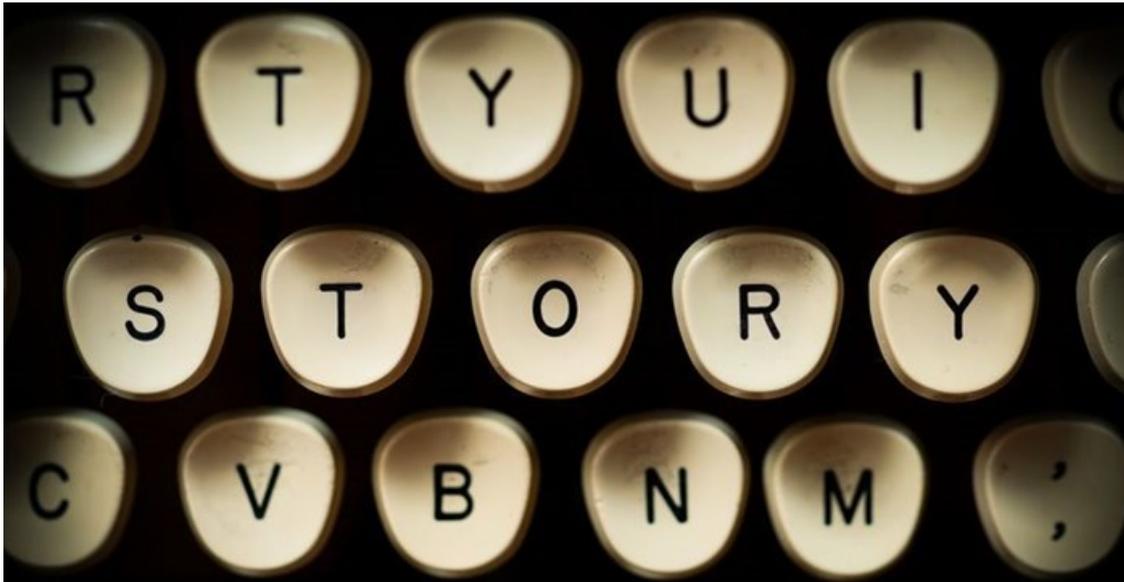


Telling the right STORY

 By Jacques du Bruyn

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In the early years of your business journey, you're going to read book after book, receive more advice than you'll know what to do with and stress over which direction to take on various decisions. With so many areas to focus on—HR, Finance, Sales, Process, Management, etc.—it's often difficult to pay enough attention to communication; that's a problem. I'm of the opinion that communication is a fundamental pillar for the success of any business. Getting it wrong may set you up for failure from the very beginning.



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I think Maslow forgot to add communication to his hierarchy of needs. How is anyone (from any walk of life) supposed to progress without being able to communicate? How do you get a raise if you can't negotiate or motivate? How does a child get fed without communicating that it's hungry?

Be an effective communicator

In his latest book, *Atomic Habits*, James Clear reveals a study that suggests all successful CEOs have one thing in common – they're effective communicators. I'm almost willing to state outright that the more effective you are at communicating, the more successful a career you'll have. It goes without saying that to sell yourself, motivate a team or send an important email, it all comes down to how you say something as much as what you say.

Now, let's talk about your business. It's one thing to be a personally astute communicator, but to effectively communicate your business through owned, earned and paid media is where you can lose your audience. Let's consider how communication works; a message is encoded, sent and, finally, decoded by an end-user.

Where things often fall off the rails is not in the sending or decoding but the encoding. Perform a quick Google search for some of your competitors or some public businesses. Go to their 'about' section and read them. I'm willing to bet 99% of it sounds like jargon put through a blender and spewed onto a page. Most of what we read on websites, emails and other paraphernalia leaves us saying: "who cares?"

I've recently thought about how businesses can improve how they talk about themselves. To that end, I've come up with a lens that can provide a sense check. It's called STORY, and before you pass it off as another 'fluffy' term without value, hear me out. Humans respond to stories. Our prehistoric selves told stories; narratives on cave walls are a perfect example of that. Today, we tell jokes, read novels, watch shows and put on plays; we love stories.

Let's breakdown STORY:

S- is for simple

Simple in thought, language and delivery. If you feel you're saying too much, you probably are. Steve Jobs said that success lies not in what you include but in what you exclude. So, remove, remove, remove; keep it simple.

T- is for translatable

The most successful ideas, narratives and even jokes are successful because they're easily understood by all. Think about how the most effective political ideologies spread? They're often simple and easily understood, so to must your communication be translatable irrespective of your audience.

O- is for original

When I was in university, one of my prescribed reading books was just 100 pages long – Purple Cow by Seth Godin. I love that book, and I still read it now and then to refresh. The premise is that if you want to stand out, you have to be remarkable, you have to be original. Ask yourself if what you're saying is cliché?

R- is for relatable

You're not writing for yourself, you're writing for an audience. Don't know your audience? Good luck with your business venture. Every piece of communication has to bring your audience into your story and help them to relate. That's where context matters. Understand your audience, and write them a love letter.

Y- is for you

Lastly, your communication should make your values, your business' DNA, evident. What is it that makes your business different – what defines it? What is your culture? Bring that to life through your communication.

STORY is a litmus test for any piece of business communication. Start with something easy. Visit your homepage and ask yourself: is it simple, is it translatable, is it original, is it relatable and does it effectively communicate us?

ABOUT JACQUES DU BRUYN

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