

7 • Telling Stories

Stories are the most basic tool for connecting us to one another. . . . People attend, remember, and are transformed by stories, which are meaning-filled units of ideas, the verbal equivalent of mother's milk.

—MARY PIPHER, clinical psychologist

The human brain is hard-wired to turn information into narrative: heroes, villains, victims, plots, solutions.

—CARL POPE, executive director of the Sierra Club

As an advertising writer, you will often be called a brand's storyteller, and for good reason. People need narratives to make sense of their lives, to shape experience so that it means something instead of nothing. Because stories testify to what people believe, they like to hear them over and over. And brand stories matter as much as any others; in a consumer culture they may matter even more.

Uncover the story

Once you think of yourself as a brand's storyteller, then all your product research is less to find stray factoids than to dig into that brand's history and reason for being, the narrative that accompanies it. Starting out, you may not know what that story is. Or it may have gotten buried, chopped up, skewed, or lost over the years. But in your research you'll discover a story worth telling. And what you learn will give you more than enough details to fill that story in and carry it forward.

What's a story?

Let's unpack *story*, a term that gets tossed around without much agreement on what it means. A story is a narrative, a series of events that happen over time to someone or to a number of someones; it is character(s) in action. A story is not just a product differential or marketplace position or brand *raison d'être*. It may use these to create stories, stories may be hidden inside these things, but "The only pain reliever with Xylocaine" is not itself a story. It's a differentiating

product spec. BMW's "The ultimate driving machine" isn't a story either; just a slogan, a positioning statement. It's a claim that stories might prove, though, and stories have done just that. One of the renowned early forms of branded entertainment was *The Hire*, a series of short movies starring Clive Owen as The Driver. Each movie put a BMW through a lot of hard driving inside a mysterious, fast-moving tale. The movies turned the slogan from just a claim into action that proved the claim. (See [fig. 7.1](#) for another selling argument transformed into a story.)

What are a story's elements?

As you remember from fiction or film classes, *stories*—novels, short stories, movies—have parts: plot, characters, setting, theme, symbols, style, and point of view. Each can play a role in the meaning of your brand; each can prove instrumental in how your brand enters consumers' minds and stays there. Let's examine them one at a time.

PLOT

More than just a story, what you're really looking for is the *plot* of the story. Here's a famous distinction between the two:

"The king died and then the queen died" is a story.
"The king died and then the queen died of grief" is a plot.

—E. M. FORSTER, *Aspects of the Novel*¹

Plot is a story's engine: it drives events by transforming chronology into drama. And *conflict* drives plot: someone wants something, and another person or force stands in the way. The protagonist has an antagonist. Conflict is how any story moves forward.

What conflict is inherent in your brand? From what struggle did it emerge? Or from what struggle does it rescue people? In short, what's its plot? (See fig. 7.2.)

How many plots are there?

Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, thought there was only one: the quest, in which "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."² (See fig. 7.3.)

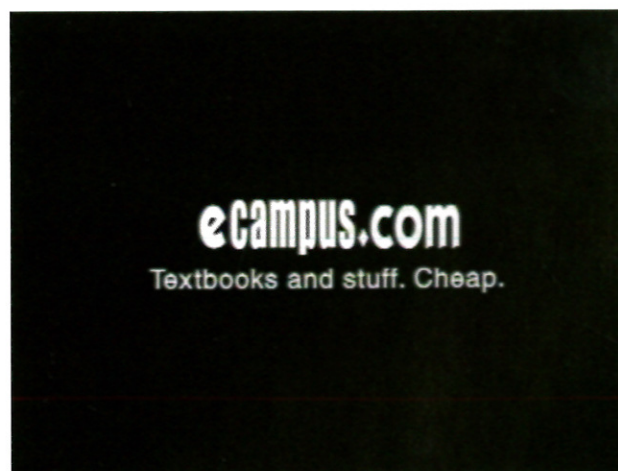
Robert McKee, screenwriting teacher, agrees:

In essence we have told one another the same tale, one way or another, since the dawn of humanity, and that story could be usefully called *the Quest*. All stories take the form of a Quest. For better or worse, an event throws a character's life out of balance, arousing in him the conscious and/or unconscious desire for that which he feels will restore balance, launching him on a Quest for his Object of Desire against forces of antagonism (inner, personal, extra-personal). He may or may not achieve it. This is story in a nutshell.³

Six durable plotlines

If one story seems too few, here are basic plots you may also remember from literature classes (notice how each, in its way, is a quest). One of them might already be or could become the driver of your client's brand. (Please forgive the sexism of "man" in what follows. "People" won't work, nor will flip-flopping "man" and "woman." I'm stuck with "man," I'm afraid. Apologies all around.)

1. Man against nature. People need help just to survive. Lots of help. Insurance companies defend people from life's ill winds: hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, and floods. All outdoor gear (The North Face, Patagonia, Timberland, Coleman, Nike ACG) helps people prevail against the wilderness; the enemy is mountain terrain or river ice or some other obstacle out there, even rain (headline on a Rockport hiking



7.1. eCampus.com claims that it sells "Textbooks and stuff. Cheap," a solid selling argument. How can it become a story instead of just a claim? By finding someone who hasn't heard of the company but needs it, then playing out the consequences. Here a college student, desperate for money, goes to the usual source: his parents. But the twist is that . . . well, you'll see.

 Watch the TV spot at [fig. W-7.1](#).



1



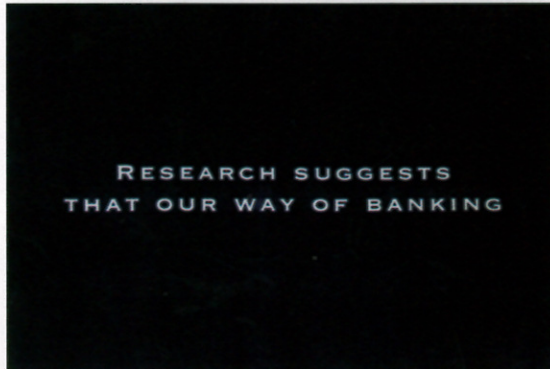
2



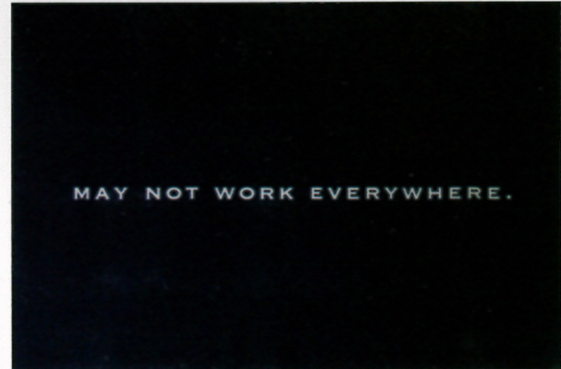
3



4



5



6




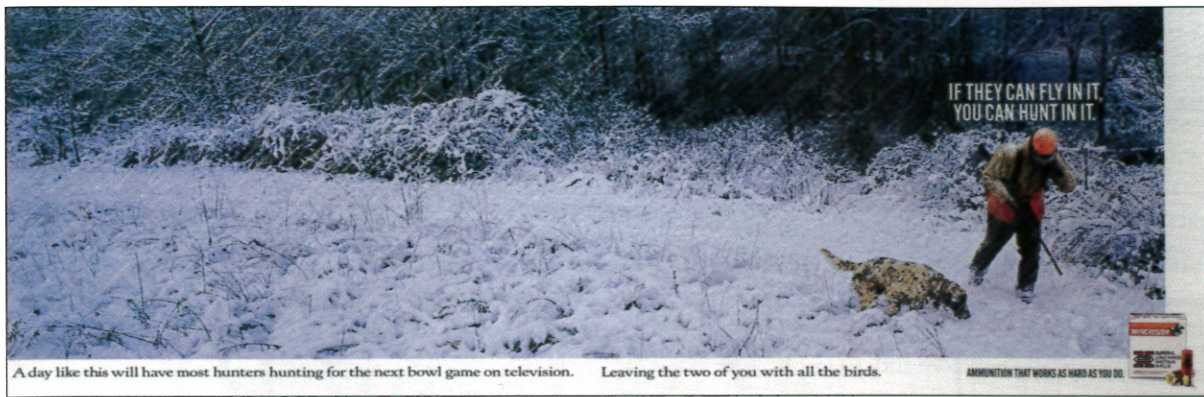
7



8

7.2. Every plot needs a villain. Here the villain is New York City itself. The bank's friendly representative faces indifference, impatience, even hostility as he tries simply to engage people in conversation. What better way to dramatize the down-home qualities of Frost Bank, and, by implication, Texas's values against those of the urban East, than with this fellow, shunned for being friendly?

 Watch the TV spot at fig. W-7.2.



7.3. My father raised bird dogs and hunted pheasants. Had he seen this ad, he would have recognized himself in it—a perfect moment in a small, but true, variant of the quest of the hero.

boot ad: “We could make them less expensive. God could make rain less wet”). Land Rover’s story has always been man, elegantly equipped, against nature (fig. 7.4). Three prints ads demonstrate the brand’s argument:

Remember the \$34,000 you were saving for a rainy day? (Range Rover in the rain)

Who says you can’t buy your way out of trouble? (Range Rover climbing a rocky hill)

It gives new meaning to the term upward mobility. (Range Rover going up a 45-degree incline)

But beyond outdoor challenges, think of basic needs like food, shelter, clothing, and protection against disease and infirmities of all sorts. People live inside an all-too-permeable—and vulnerable—skin.

Does your brand save people from an otherwise harsh, short life? Tell that story.

2. Man against society. Things didn’t get easier once people came in out of the rain. Society creates its own kind of rain. Has your brand helped people triumph over communal and cultural difficulties? Has it gone up against misguided societal assumptions? Dove’s Real Beauty campaign, for example, fought against this culture’s rigid, unrealistic stereotypes of what women should look like. Even as in-



7.4. Another Range Rover ad with a similar visual says, “We brake for fish.”

7.5. A marketing writer tells his man-against-society backstory—or, in this case, child against elementary school. Conflict leads to sweet revenge.



On one fateful spring day, the landscape of the American farm was quite literally changed forever. In fact, the 3-wheeled tractor commissioned on that day by the John Deere Company would soon reduce plowing time in half. Much to the relief of tired farmers. Not to mention their exhausted oxen.

ON MARCH 5TH, 1912, FIELD OXEN EVERYWHERE BREATHED A COLLECTIVE SIGH OF RELIEF.

Of course, the first gas-powered tractor is just the beginning. The rest, as they say, is history. A history that's preserved at the new John Deere Pavilion. A place where you can trace the progression of the family farm to the future of agribusiness with interactive, hands-on displays. See everything from the first horse-powered plows to the latest 215-horsepower combine. Or learn more about planting and harvesting. Not to mention what John Deere is doing to help feed the world.

Then again, if car racing is more your speed, feel the thrill of the checkered flag in our own John Deere race car or watch races on the surrounding wall of televisions. There's even a John Deere Store with seasonal gifts and merchandise as well as a library and special children's area. So you can take home a piece of the legend.

There's something for every taste. Literally. In fact, even our restaurant lets you sample regional cuisine from throughout America. It's all part of the John Deere experience. And it's all here. At the new John Deere Pavilion in Moline, Illinois.

For directions or information, call (309) 765-1000 today.

JOHN DEERE PAVILION
 WHERE THE LEGEND LIVES ON

FREE ADMISSION • OPEN DAILY ON THE COMMONS IN MOLINE, ILLINOIS • 309-765-1000

7.6. The John Deere Company has, well, John Deere behind it, an innovative fellow with interesting stories to tell. This one's about the commissioning of the first three-wheel tractor.

nocuous a brand as Tupperware countered society's notion of how and where to sell things, introducing home parties as stores—a pioneering use of social networking—and women as income-earning business people—an early moment in the story of women's liberation. (For another example, see fig. 7.5.)

Many brand stories use a subset of man-against-society: **the man or woman who saw (or the brand that saw) things differently.** Tell the founding myth about the person who created the brand in order to eliminate a societal blind spot or improve upon "it's always been done this way" thinking. King Camp Gillette, who in 1901 founded—what else?—The Gillette Safety Razor Company, fought against the assumption that shaving blades had to be permanent, which meant that, when dull, they had to be taken to a sharpener. Considering this a waste of time, he invented the world's first disposable blade. Ever since, Gillette's story has been how their research-and-development wizards keep gaining the edge over people's recalcitrant beards, body hair, and bad ideas, one shaver after another, many named futuristically: Atra, Trac II, Sensor, Fusion, Mach 3.⁴ (See fig. 7.6 for the tale of another man who saw things differently.)

3. Man against man. The duel, the conflict between the hero (protagonist) and his enemy (antagonist), drives many stories. Pepsi was created to counter Coca-Cola's market stranglehold and has been locked in combat with it ever since. Apple computers go head to head with PCs; recent advertising personified the competition as two fellows—the cool

Apple guy one-upping the bumbling, pretentious (but envious) PC guy. Insurance companies like to talk about fighting against double-dealing competitors, the red-tape guys (the headline on a Liberty Mutual ad showing a storm-damaged house: "In the history of repairs, red tape has yet to fix anything."). Lawyers tell similar stories. Can you make, has the brand made, the struggle against a villain its story?

This category also has a subset, one that could be called **The Little Engine That Could** or **David and Goliath**. You know these plots. There are lots of little-engines-that-could whose stories need telling (VW Beetle and Avis famously developed two such storylines). More recently, MINI and Smart Car have seen themselves as David to most other cars' Goliath. Microbreweries happily bring slingshot and stone to the fight against beer behemoths. If your brand is the "little guy," tell its story. People are in your corner already.

4. Man against himself. Isn't much of life a war within? People wrestle with their own inner demons: sloth, ignorance, gluttony, anger, insecurity, any of a multitude of *bêtes noires*. They fight to lose weight or gain peace or quit yelling or get smarter or learn to love or . . .

Crispin Porter + Bogusky created advertising for Domino's Pizza that grappled with a difficult truth: Domino's made a lousy pizza. The campaign showed the chefs and everybody else going to war (against their former selves and ways) to build a better pizza. Ads featured disaffected consumers being surprised at their doors by pizza-bearing delivery guys who wanted them to try Domino's again. The Domino's attack on itself is a bold stroke, and not a common one, but there is a story waiting to be told every time a brand utters the phrase "new and improved."

Think of the things created and sold to save people from themselves. Perhaps your client's brand intends to do that or already does. If so, tell the stories of people's inner weaknesses or demons and the deliverance the brand offers. (See fig. 7.7 for whimsical takes on one of man's wars with himself.)

5. Man against machine. Apple was "the computer for the rest of us." Prior to Apple, computers were either huge, incomprehensible things whirring away inside business empires or else smaller but no more friendly beasts. Apple shrank the big ones, demystified the rest, gave them a human touch ("hello," the first Mac screen said in cursive script), and ushered computers into people's homes and lives. Initially, Apple was the protagonist against IBM and other corporate

monoliths. Now, as Apple has broadened into many consumer electronics, it's Apple against technological difficulty, Apple against the status quo.

OXO designs kitchen and household tools that are easier to use ("Tools you hold on to"). That's a product differential, not a story, but there are stories inside it. People's battles with kitchen tools and themselves are endless: hands too little or too big, left-handedness in a right-handed world, peelers that don't, graters that won't. The brand's plot is partly man versus himself (his inadequate reach), but mostly it's man against machine. OXO asks the basic questions: why should our tools hurt our hands, and why don't they work better? Fittingly, OXO began when its originator, Sam Farber, watched his wife, Betsey, who had arthritis, struggle with kitchen tools. The brand was born in pain.

What damnable machine or technological mess is making life more difficult than it should be, and is your client's brand the solution? Tell that story.

6. Man against fate. Are people destined to spend their years in penury and despair? No, they are not. Self-help organizations, lawyers, financial services, government, religion, and education all promise to help people change destiny's big picture. State lotteries offer people a long-shot chance to defy fate. Lots of branded things have gone to war against the ravages of time and chance. Can people beat cosmic forces? They can try. Maybe your client's brand can help.

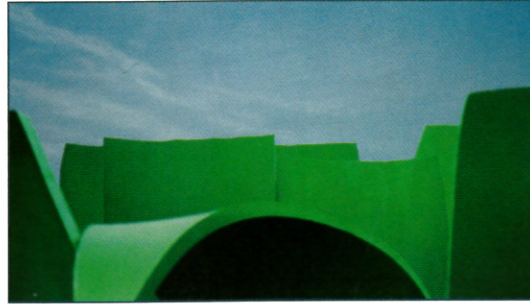
How many plots are there, really?

Although the six plot lines just discussed cover a lot of ground, how many plots there are is anyone's guess. Many durable stories come from myth and folklore and include Killing the Beast, the Ugly Duckling, and the dark stories gathered by the Brothers Grimm, including Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel, Rapunzel, Snow White, and Little Red Riding Hood. All such tales tap into deep human impulses and needs, which is why they've been told and retold over time.

Your job is to find new particulars in old stories. David Fowler, executive creative director at Ogilvy & Mather, New York, advises, "Instead of just writing ads, stop and think about the story you want to tell. Consider how others have told it before you. Then tell it once more, new."⁵

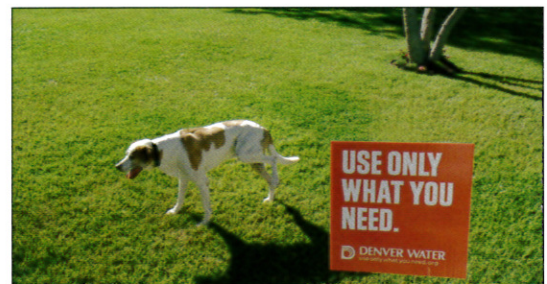
CHARACTER

Many brands have CEOs, founding mothers and fathers, a family or group who created the thing. Many of these characters, long dead, live on through brand



7.7. Conserving water is something people know they should do but often don't—conscience losing to habit. How to convince people to win this inner battle? Deliver the argument lightly, as do these short stories—quick little sketches with characters, setting, and plot. They say serious things unseriously, a smart way to get people to listen to difficult truths. In the first two spots, grass proves how dumb it is by failing to recognize a distinctive sound and by failing to recognize an unusual water source. In the second two ads, flowers show what happens when they've had a little too much water.

© To watch the four TV spots, go to [fig. W-7.7](#).



names: Schick, Sears, Ben & Jerry's, Schlitz, Heinz, Bausch and Lomb.

Ma Boyle, the president of Columbia sportswear, has been turned into a character: Perdue chicken for decades used the cranky old chicken farmer himself, Frank Perdue ("It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken"), to personify the rigor of that brand's approach to raising chickens.

If the people behind a brand are quirky or significant, let them help tell its story. Two brands of ice cream in my town differentiate themselves by means of the people behind them. Graeter's ice cream has been hand made by the Graeter family since they emigrated to Cincinnati from Bavaria in the mid-1800s. The brand's website and posters on the walls of their stores tell me all about the French pot process, the hand churning, and the original market at the foot of Sycamore Hill. Another brand of ice cream, Jeni's, has Jeni Britton Bauer behind it, a young woman whose art school background has found expression in her designer ice creams (Vanilla Cedar Wood, Goat Cheese with Cognac Figs, and Sweet Corn & Black Raspberries, among other unusual flavors). Here is a bit of Jeni's voice and mission from the brand's website, Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams:


We create ice creams we fall madly in love with, that we want to bathe in, that make us see million-year-old stars. We devour it out of Mason jars, coffee mugs—whatever we can get our hands on. Handmade American ice cream = Bliss with a big B. Every single thing we put in our ice cream is legit. Generic chemist-built ice cream bases and powdered astronaut-friendly gelato mixes? No, ma'am. We build every recipe from the ground up with luscious, Snowville milk and cream from cows that eat grass. With that exquisite base, we explore pure flavor in whatever direction moves us at any moment, every day, all year.

See figure 7.8 for the Web page itself.

Both brands interest consumers in who is behind them. People think of these founders when they think of their ice cream. And since the founders have become characters, their stories give the brands life. Are there characters who, in telling your brand's story, can become part of it (see fig. 7.9)?


SETTING

Setting is a powerful force in many novels and films;


Shop: FLAVORS COLLECTIONS GOODS | OUR STORY FIND US BLOG

WHO WE ARE

our story — who we are




"We explore pure flavor in whatever direction moves us at any moment, every day, all year."

Every day I'm surrounded by an ice cream-making crew of artists, writers, photographers, bakers, big-brain mathletes, travelers with omnivorous cultural appetites, and world-class experience gatherers.

We create ice creams we fall madly in love with, that we want to bathe in, that make us see million-year-old stars. We devour it out of Mason jars, coffee mugs—whatever we can get our hands on. Handmade American ice cream = Bliss with a big B. Every single thing we put in our ice cream is legit. Generic chemist-built ice cream bases and powdered astronaut-friendly gelato mixes? No, ma'am. We build every recipe from the ground up with luscious, Snowville milk and cream from cows that eat grass. With that exquisite base, we explore pure flavor in whatever direction moves us at any moment, every day, all year.

To more pleasures,



7.8. Jeni tells about her ice cream—how it's made, who makes it, and what binds her crew together. Quirky details and a singular voice combine to differentiate the brand.

think of Joseph Conrad's jungle in *Heart of Darkness*, the moors in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the apocalyptic landscape in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (both his book and the movie). Place can exert the force of character.

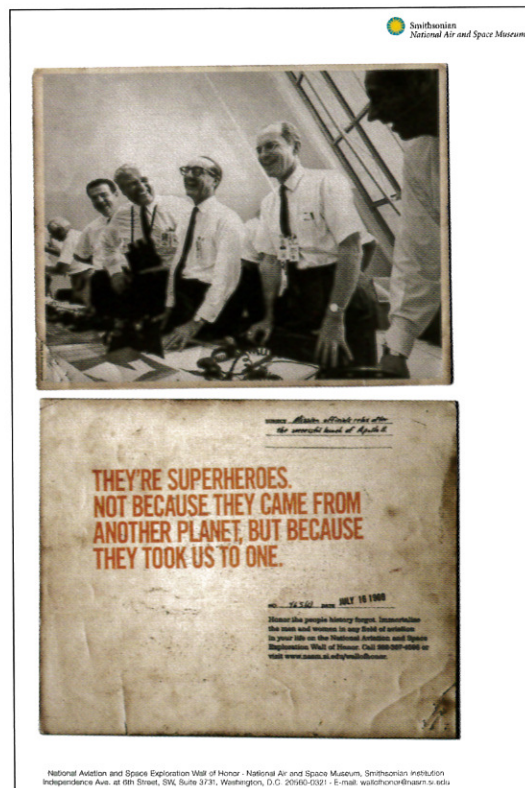
Is the "where" of your brand important to its story? It is to Hewlett-Packard. The garage in which HP was founded is a legend told and retold by HP itself. It is to Pepperidge Farm, which started in Margaret Rudkin's kitchen on her family property in Fairfield, Connecticut. Decades of advertising have created of it a mythical place, a pre-mass-merchandised Eden in which white, horse-drawn wagons and old-timey trucks drive the bread to market. Corny? Yes. Comforting? Also yes. Would you want a hip, "edgy" bread? (See figs. 7.10 and 7.11 for two more brands whose stories involve place.)

STYLE

Style is the brand's voice. Every powerful brand comes wrapped in a distinctive one. (See chapter 9 for how to develop voice.)



National Aviation and Space Exploration Wall of Honor - National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution
Independence Ave. at 6th Street, SW, Suite 3735, Washington, D.C. 20560-0321 • E-mail: wallofhonor@si.edu



National Aviation and Space Exploration Wall of Honor - National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution
Independence Ave. at 6th Street, SW, Suite 3735, Washington, D.C. 20560-0321 • E-mail: wallofhonor@si.edu

7.9. The U.S. space program has been a hero's quest if ever there was one. How to tell the story? Find the characters who shape its themes, then use paradox to draw readers in.

SYMBOLISM

A *symbol* is a central image or thing in which is condensed much of a story's meaning (symbols in literature, we remember, include such items as Ahab's whale, Hester's "A," T. J. Eckleburg's billboard eyes in *The Great Gatsby*, and the lighthouse in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*). Symbols in brands include things as various as Prudential's Rock of Gibraltar, the red umbrella of Travelers insurance, Nike's swoosh, the little bluebird of Twitter, and Dos Equis beer's "The Most Interesting Man in the World"—each of which carries much of the brand's meaning in compressed form. So, too, do a brand's color palette, typography, and every other aspect of its graphic presentation.

As a writer, you'll watch those graphic decisions being made by the visual thinkers you're working with more than you'll make them yourself. But you'll be expected to be a good critic and occasionally a direct contributor. You'll certainly be expected to put language up against visual ideas.

Find one central image around which to wrap the story

Brand strategist Tom Himpe gives this advice (he's talking about stunts, but his advice applies to story-telling):

Another crucial element in making sure the media picks up a story is imagery. . . . Images condense all dramatic elements around a theme into one striking visual that invites the viewer to read about it. In terms of PR, imagery is the easy way into a story, making even the least accessible and most difficult stories attractive to a wide group of people. . . . The more complex and unattractive the story, the more important it is to try and speak the visual language that everyone understands.⁶

Greenpeace is good at doing this, Himpe says, creating dramatic and memorable visuals by placing their little rubber boats up against much larger tankers and Navy vessels. It's the story of David and Goliath.

What condensed image might contain your client's brand story? (Watch a sign become a symbol in [fig. 7.12.](#)) An image containing elements in tension—for example, Greenpeace's big versus little—is probably strongest because it expresses a conflict.

POINT OF VIEW

Point of view in film and literature means the literal point of view (first, second, third, limited, omniscient) from which the story is told. You can apply the term in similar ways to brand stories. What is the authorial point of view toward the product, its benefits, its audience? Most advertising uses first person (“we,” “our”) and second person (“you,” “your”) to keep things personal, the essential relationship being expressed in this sentence structure: “We, the brand, speak warmly with you, the consumer, about your needs and how we can fulfill them.” But speakers for brands are increasingly consumers themselves. Their points of view help shape the brand’s point of view. That’s one reason many brand voices sound identical to the voices of their core consumers.⁷ (See fig. 7.13 for an ironic use of the consumer’s point of view.)

THEME

Theme is the brand’s core argument for itself, its position or differential (BMW’s “The ultimate driving machine”). The stories inside that theme, which is often lodged in the slogan, are what advertisers need to tell and encourage consumers to tell. A brand without a theme isn’t long for this world.

When you’re developing a brand’s theme (should that assignment come your way), you need to put the argument on the head of a pin. Study the subtitles of books of narrative nonfiction, which at their best demonstrate the art of a theme concisely and energetically expressed. Here are a few nonfiction titles, followed after the colon by their subtitles:

Always On: How the iPhone Unlocked the Anything-Anytime-Anywhere Future and Locked Us In

The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America

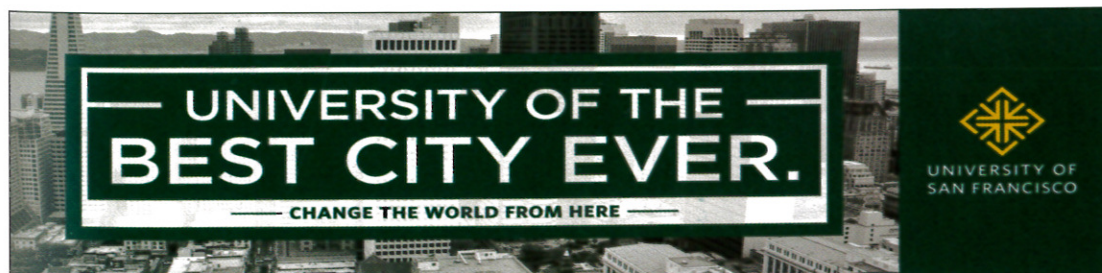
Brain Bugs: How the Brain’s Flaws Shape Our Lives



7.10. This is where Evian’s bottled water comes from and how it’s created—a dramatic setting and a differentiating story, especially since many competitors simply filter or distill city water.

Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations

Your job, when you work on a brand’s theme, is similar to that of book marketers: boil its meaning down into one core proposition—an argument or idea that’s different, succinct, and compelling. Given these challenges, why not take a cup of coffee and a notebook to a bookstore?



7.11. The University of San Francisco has much to offer, part of it right there in the name.



1



2



3



4



5



6

7.12. Frost Bank's claim of Texan friendliness is condensed into one simple gesture.



To see the TV spot, go to [fig. W-7.12.](#)

Invite your audience to help tell the story

"Instead of trying to manage your company's relationship with its customers and their culture, think instead about being their voice inside the walls of your company."

—ALEX BOGUSKY and JOHN WINSOR

With interactive advertising, your client's brand can create a shape that consumers fill and a storyline that

they carry along. Subaru, for example, invites brand loyalists to recount true-life stories about the durability (the brand differential) of Subaru. "Dear Subaru" campaign ads were essentially testimonials in which loyalists shared affectionate, often quirky stories of life with their Subaru. One owner recounted how her car outlasted its key; another owner found the family Subaru surrounded by ten curious goats on a trip through Utah, snapped a picture of the encounter,

and thereby created one of the many testimonials in the “Dear Subaru” campaign, whose theme line, appropriately, was “Love. It’s what makes a Subaru, a Subaru.”

How short can a story be?

Stunningly short, according to this anecdote about Hemingway. When asked to write the shortest story ever, he supposedly jotted on a napkin, “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.” Though the anecdote is probably apocryphal, Hemingway did value economy—what he left out of his stories often mattered more than what he put in, and some of his stories say a lot in only a few pages.

Here’s another writer who thinks that a story can be stunningly brief:

We used to tell a story at J. Walter Thompson that illustrates the power of stories. It goes like this: The Amish have an excellent reputation for making top quality products. It so happened that a family in a town close to an Amish community had to find homes for a litter of kittens. They put out a sign that said “FREE KITTENS.” For an entire week no one stopped. Then they changed the sign to “FREE AMISH KITTENS.” The litter was gone in a day.

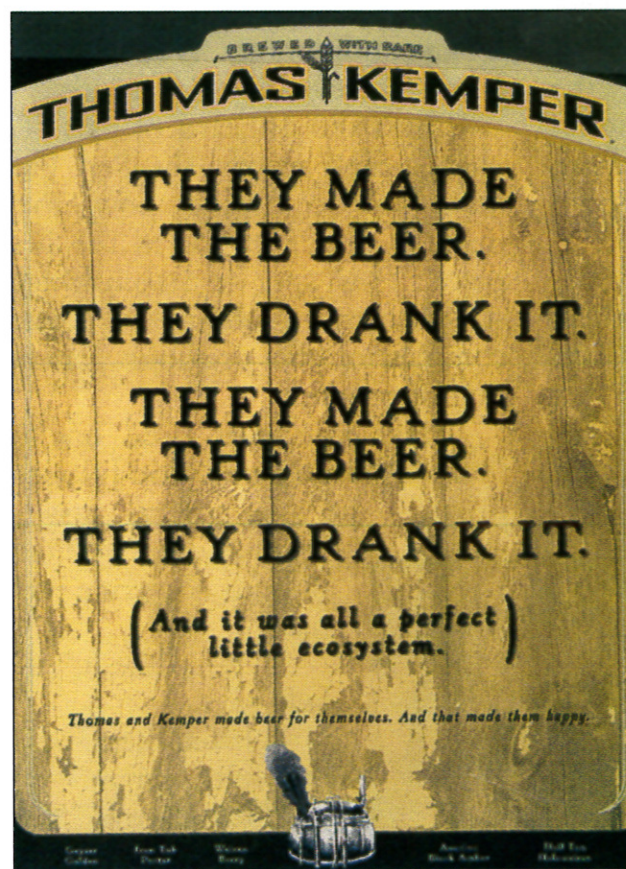
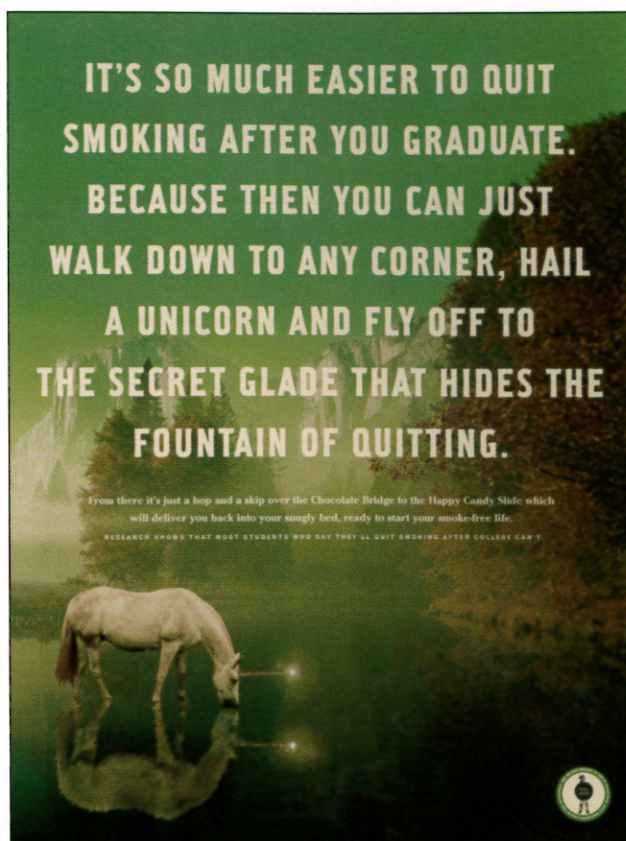
—JAMES PATTERSON, novelist, former chairman,
J. Walter Thompson, North America⁸

Right top

7.13. This ad satirizes the kinds of stories people, especially college students, tell themselves when they’re trying to quit smoking. After the headline, the ad continues, “From there it’s just a hop and a skip over the Chocolate Bridge to the Happy Candy Slide which will deliver you back into your snuggly bed, ready to start your smoke-free life,” followed by a voice that clears the air: “Research shows that most students who say they’ll quit smoking after college can’t.”

Right

7.14. Repetition announces and enacts this brand’s story. By positing two fellows almost reluctant to sell their beer, the ad creates a micro-microbrewery story, neatly summarized at the end: “Thomas and Kemper made beer for themselves. And that made them happy.” To buy the beer is to break up this “perfect little ecosystem,” of course, so the final argument—and the brand story’s subtext—is one’s ability to obtain that which is unobtainable. The narrative, smartly conceived and succinctly expressed, creates a strong position in a market filled with microbreweries.



**FOR 100 YEARS, OUR NATION
HAS STOOD ON THE SHOULDERS
OF GIANTS.**

TINY, NECKERCHIEFED GIANTS.

Celebrating 100 years of Scouting.



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA.



scoutinggoodforlife.org

7.15. This headline is a very short story. Or to put it another way, it's like a zipped file: over a century of stories is compressed in it. All a copywriter needs to do is double-click the file.

One word can't quite be a story, but it can suggest one, don't you agree? Reading the word "Amish," people can almost see the life these kittens were born into and the values that surrounded them. Rationally, a kitten's a kitten, but "Amish" carries a lot of freight, implies a lot of backstory. To pick one of those kittens is to take that story home, too. (See figs. 7.14 and 7.15 for other short short stories.)

The power of brand storytelling

I said earlier that brand stories often matter more than other stories in our culture. Natalia Ilyin, designer and writer, explains the role of designers (and copywriters, since they do the same thing with words) in creating these stories:

As designers, we create ideal mental worlds, inhabitable worlds of imagination, and we make them seem real to everyday people. . . . If we are not actively involved in laying the cozy woolen throw upon the wicker chair [she'd been reading an L.L.Bean catalog, with its myth of the North Woods], we are passively involved. We design the identifiers of the product that lies upon the chair; we design the chair. We are part of the great storytelling machine of our culture. We are not nihilists. We are believers. We push Heaven.⁹

The power of storytelling is immense. Your ability to spot a story, and to tell it, will enrich your work as a copywriter perhaps more than any other skill. Journalist Bill Moyers cast the value of storytelling into long relief: "Once in East Africa, on the shores of an ancient lake, I sat alone and suddenly it struck me what community is. It is gathering around a fire and listening to someone tell us a story."¹⁰

Find the human story in your brand, tell it, and watch people gather around the fire.