

[Promo Power]



Why are you in business? How did you get here?

Those are the first questions I ask in a strategic planning session. It's amazing how many businesses have lost sight of where they came from and why they're in business to begin with.

Most entrepreneurs start their business because they love what they do. They have what we call "passion" for their business. Soon after they open their doors, they find that passion alone isn't enough. It's good. It's even important. But, it's not enough. You need other things, too...

You need customers. You need to know exactly what type of customer your product or service will most appeal to. How old are they? What kind of lifestyle do they live? What are their hobbies and interests? What kind of jobs do they hold (if any)?

You need a brand promise. You have to translate your passion into benefits to the prospective buyer. Why should they buy what you're selling? How will it make their life better? After they buy, will they be more profitable, healthier, more attractive, less stressed? No matter how passionate you are about your products or services, nobody is going to buy them until they see what they will do to make their life better.

You need marketing. You have to get that translation of your passion to benefits in front of those target customers. And, you have to present it in language and media they can relate to. Some people are avid readers of newspapers and magazines (including this one). Some get absolutely

STRATEGIC PLANNING

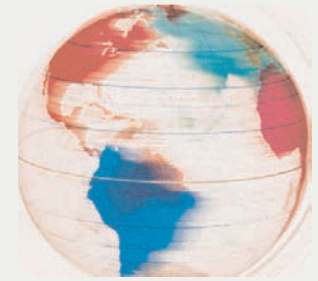
everything from their smart phone. Some are TV viewers, and others listen to the radio day and night. It's important to know where to put your message so your prospects will see it without spending a lot of money talking to people who aren't prospects.

A lot of money is wasted on advertising that was placed in front of the wrong audience. Know who your prime targets are and you'll easily see which medias make sense and which are a waste.

You need a "story." Stories engage people. When I speak to audiences, I see ears perk up immediately when I start to tell a story. If you just deliver information, people get bored. You can't bore people into buying. You must have their interest, and nothing grabs it like a good story. Your story may depict your mission to make your customers' lives better. Or, it may be the story of a customer's journey from poverty to prosperity, or from chronic illness to vibrant health using your product.

No matter how good your product or service is, if you don't have a specific type of customer in mind, can't explain to them why they've just got to have it, and don't get that message somewhere that they're sure to see it, you're going to have a lot of time to yourself.

Work on telling your brand's story as if you were telling a tale around the campfire. People stop and listen when someone starts telling a story. In a world where your prospects have thousands of brands competing for their attention, wouldn't it be nice to get them to drop everything and tune into you? That's what a good story can do. ■



YOUR BRAND'S STORY

People have used the art of story telling to impart wisdom, teach lessons, share ideas, and hand down heritage since time began. We naturally pay attention when someone starts telling a story. In a world where just getting your prospects' attention is a major challenge, a tool that will help you grab it without turning up the volume is a godsend.

A good story has five basic elements: character, setting, plot, conflict, and theme.

The **character** may be you, your company, or a customer. Your audience needs a central character to follow and relate to throughout the story.

They have to know where and under what conditions the story took place. Your **setting** may include the geographic location, when it happened, the state of the industry at the time.

There has to be a **plot**, a story line. There are elements to a plot, but it's basically a series of events.

To keep a story interesting, there must be a **conflict**. There is some struggle between the main character and another entity. The conflict can be against a person, nature, a competitor, market conditions... maybe just the character's own inner demons and emotions.

The story culminates in a **theme**. There's one impression you want the audience to remember when it's all over. This is the "moral" of the story.

Try writing your organization's history in short story form. You may find a story that defines your brand in a way that is easy to convey to your public and leaves a memorable impression. What more could you want from your brand?

Larry Mersereau works with business owners, marketers, and sales professionals who want to bring in more business, so they can take home more money. More at www.PromoPower.com.