

The Story Of You[®]

by Kathy Ellis, The Business Lab Marketing Coach

The average American is exposed to 254 different commercial messages in a day.* Combine this with the millions of Web sites, the hundreds of E-mails, the thousands of magazines and newspapers and the daily armful of mail and you might say there is “clutter” all around us. Most people intuitively sense this clutter but somehow convince themselves their information is immune. They fall back on the things that are most familiar, which is why you can pick up just about any company brochure (sell sheet, Web site, etc) and read facts about the company, the products, and the services. The majority of all business-to-business collateral speaks to the rational side of our brain. But, if you stop and think about it, very few of us “buy” with the rational side of our brain. Typically, we buy on emotion and justify with facts.

Many times it's up to the design of the collateral to convey the emotion. A challenge we here at The Business Lab delight in each day! But if this is all that is done, then we've only addressed one part of the communication—the context. There are two other very important parts of communication that can play a major role in cutting through the clutter: the messenger and your story. In this month's article we discuss your story and offer strategies to influence your audience more effectively.

Your Story: In one way or another, your prospects and clients will know/believe/tell a story about you and your company. The very knowledge of this story allows them to do business with you because it is the first step in building trust. Your prospects must be comfortable with who you are and why you are here (your story) before they will proceed any further in the relationship. So, who are you and why are you here?

Your story could be one of facts and accomplishments. You could choose to appeal to the rational side of your prospect's mind. As we stated above, this is exactly what most businesses do when developing their collateral. This would be the most common and most familiar thing to do. But stop and think about the way you are influenced; about how and why you believe something/someone. Chances are you felt connected in some way to the person or company.

Tip From The Business Lab: The goal is to get to that connection as quickly as possible. The easiest way to get connected is to let people see who you are by helping them feel like they know you and your company personally. There are several ways to do this: personal stories, historical stories, stories from a friend, parables, etc.

The following two examples will help demonstrate the difference between the rational story and an emotional story; the difference between stating facts and sharing who you are.

Example—The Rational Story: At D, X, Y & B Accounting Firm, our partners are former executives of the Big 6 firms. Our firm brings over a decade of experience in personal and business accounting to work for our clients. We aggressively specialize in resolving IRS issues. The firm believes in the value of relationships. We view every client relationship like a partnership, and truly believe that our success is a result of your success. And so on...

Example—The Emotional Story: We are the Accounting Firm, D, X, Y & B. When we came together to form our team we had each gained tremendous experience at Big 6 firms and we thought we knew it all. Then we met Mary. Mary was our first client. What we learned from Mary was that clients weren't only looking for the right numbers on their accounting statements, they were also looking for partnerships and friends; for solutions and commitment; for growth and peace of mind. An so on...

Which of the two do you feel more connected to?

Tip From The Business Lab: The story of “you/your company” can be a powerful addition to your marketing plan. With your team, you can create your company story and help each of your “messengers” with their stories. Your stories must be congruent and they must be true and from the heart in order to be effective. We all can spot a fake a mile away (after all, we get over 254 chances a day). If you have great stories but have difficulties getting them into context, work with a professional story-teller/copywriter and designer.

* Media Dynamics, Inc.—New York

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