THE POWER OF PR STORYTELLING

Uniting ideas with emotion

Human beings are natural-born storytellers. We’ve been telling stories as a way to connect, entertain and pass on information since the beginning of time. And stories are still at the centre of all that we do and say today. From the anecdotes we share with our friends, to the bedtime tales we tell our children, stories help us forge connections and build meaningful relationships.

But stories aren’t just for bedtime. They have a firm place in business too. This is where PR storytelling comes in.

WHAT IS PR STORYTELLING?

Every business has a story to tell, whether it’s the unique way the business was launched, the way a revolutionary product was invented, or the exemplary way in which a business serves the local community.

PR storytelling is about attracting the attention of the media by telling that story in an engaging and thought-provoking way.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD STORYTELLING IN PR

PR storytelling is a powerful tool for marketers to communicate information, influence opinions and build trust. Here are three reasons why.

PR STORYTELLING LIGHTS UP THE BRAIN

If you think facts and sales figures are the way to win over the media, think again. As science has proven otherwise.

When we consume uninteresting information, like a presentation packed with charts and graphs, a certain part of our brain called the Wernicke’s area is activated to translate the information into meaning. But when we hear a story, lots of areas of the brain light up, including the parts we would use if we were experiencing the events of a story ourselves. It can cause us to develop thoughts, opinions, and ideas that align with the person telling the story.

This makes PR storytelling an incredibly powerful tool for marketers.

PR STORYTELLING HUMANISES A BRAND

It’s a well-known fact that people buy into people, not products. By sharing stories about your business and the people behind the scenes, it gives your brand personality, making it easier for people to know who you are, and to understand your values and trust you.

Unfortunately, a lot of brands focus on selling product features rather than brand stories and miss out on the opportunity to make authentic connections with customers and the media.

PR STORYTELLING GIVES YOU A COMPETITIVE EDGE

Brands that excel at PR storytelling stand out from the competition. Take Apple and John Lewis for example. There are plenty of tech brands and department stores out there. But these two brands have cornered the market in their respective niches. Why? Because they have invested in PR storytelling to differentiate themselves.
As a result, every time Apple launches a new product, or John Lewis launches one of their highly anticipated Christmas ads, they send the public and media into a frenzy.

FIVE EXAMPLES OF STORYTELLING PR CAMPAIGNS

These are just three of the many benefits of harnessing the power of storytelling in PR. Now let’s take a look at five brands that excel at it:

SKYPE

Skype is a popular video chat application, used around the world. Despite the product’s many technical capabilities and features, the PR team know better than to simply list them in their marketing campaigns. Instead, they use PR storytelling to market the product as a tool that brings people together. Each of their campaigns shows how the platform enables families, friends, and colleagues to connect.

Here’s an example from their 2014 ‘Stay Together’ campaign, about a Ugandan man who kept in touch with a family left behind when war caused him to escape the country and start a new life in America.

The emotive campaign, which features a series of emotionally charged videos in a similar vein, did not involve paid media, but earned them a load of free coverage and empathetic new fans.

BURT’S BEES

Burt’s Bees is a skin and body care brand that sells a range of natural products made of beeswax. Masters of PR storytelling, they market themselves as a environmentally conscious brand that promotes living simply, naturally, and responsibly.

A large component of their storytelling focuses on company founder, Burt Shavitz, and how his philosophies on life and his nomadic lifestyle influence the products they make.

Through a series of quirky videos, we get to know the man behind the brand. For example, this feature length documentary sees Burt talk about his simple, holistic lifestyle, his passion for beekeeping, and how he turned his passion into a thriving business.

The brand has also created a series of videos titled ‘Burtisms’, which feature fun musings and pearls of wisdom from the former beekeeper.

This is clever PR storytelling, as putting a name and face to a brand creates familiarity and trust. At a time when transparency means everything, the honest and open way in which the brand tells its stories helps it create a genuine connection with the people who buy its products.

AIRBNB

Since launching in 2008, PR storytelling has been at the heart of Airbnb’s marketing efforts. The brand, an online marketplace where people can rent out rooms to holidaymakers, uses powerful PR storytelling to tap into people’s wanderlust.

For New Year’s 2015, the company told one of its stories with a striking animated video, full of interesting facts. The brand said that one million travellers had spent New Year’s Eve in one of their rental homes, in one of 17,500 cities in 150 countries around the world.

The advert went on to promote the best destinations to visit for couples, the elderly and families.
New York topped the list of the most popular place for Airbnb guests to ring in the New Year, with 47,000 travellers.

This is a great example of how a brand can use data to tell engaging stories. And it raises an interesting point: stories trump stats. According to content in Forbes’ article ‘A Good Presentation is about Data and Story’, American psychologist Jerome Bruner suggests that stories are up to 22 times more memorable than facts alone. That’s a significant amount.

The lesson is, if you have some impressive numbers to share, great. But be sure to do as Airbnb did, and package them up in a compelling story, for maximum effect.

**DISNEY**

Entertainment brand Disney is no stranger to PR storytelling, and this adorable advert for Disneyland Paris is a perfect example.

The heart-warming story centres around a cute duckling, who finds a Donald Duck comic book and becomes obsessed with the iconic fluffy character. However, bad weather sets in, and the duckling and his family have to flee, leaving his beloved comic book behind.

The next morning, the sun reappears, and the duck family arrive at Disneyland Paris, where the duckling is greeted by the real Donald Duck. The moment when the duckling comes beak-to-beak with his idol is magical.

Through this moving display of anthropomorphism, Disney captures the magic and excitement that children feel for Disneyland.

**APPLE**

Technology brand Apple has storytelling down to a fine art. The late co-founder, Steve jobs was arguably the world’s greatest business storyteller. He transformed every product launch and keynote speech into a theatrical production, complete with sets, props, and music. His stories worked people into a frenzy, to the point where fans would camp overnight to get their hands on the latest product, and journalists would work through the night to be the first to publish a review.

As well as their awesome product launches, Apple uses PR storytelling to great effect in their marketing campaigns. Take ‘Détour’ for example. The charming, 11-minute film by Oscar-winning director Michel Gondry, follows the adventures of a child’s tricycle that becomes separated from its young owner.

The campaign stands out for two reasons: the heart-warming story is beautifully crafted and engaging to watch. It also perfectly demonstrates the many features of the iPhone, such as underwater filming, time-lapse and slow motion, as it was shot entirely on the iPhone 7 Plus.

If you can tell a brilliant story while showing off the unique benefits of your product or service, you’re on to a winner.

**SIX HANDY PR STORYTELLING TIPS**

These brands stand out because of their brilliant PR storytelling. Here are six top PR storytelling tips to help you do the same.
MAKE EM’ LAUGH (OR CRY)

American writer Maya Angelou once said, ‘people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.’

Therein lies the power of storytelling. It evokes emotion. A prime example of a brand that excels at this is John Lewis. Renowned for its heart-wrenching Christmas PR campaigns, the brand tells its stories through music and emotion. In fact, the ads are so powerful that numerous blogs, articles and newspapers dedicate pages to speculating what the next year’s ad will bring.

Make your audience laugh or cry and you’ll create PR storytelling gold.

BE AUTHENTIC

PR storytelling tip number 2 is be authentic. Today’s consumers can spot brands that are inauthentic a mile off. And it turns them off. Instead use stories about real people that have actually used your product or service, or stories about the humble origins of your brand. When a brand story is honest, it’s more believable and easier to connect with.

Take baby food brand Ella’s Kitchen. The founder, Paul Lindley, crafted the entire brand on the authentic story around his personal experience of trying to get his daughter to eat healthily. He had a vision to create a world for kids filled with fun and experimentation. It works as it’s an inspiring story, based on his personal experience. And it taps into the emotions of parents across the world.

BRING YOUR STORY TO LIFE

Live experiences can take your story to the next level. So, if you’re telling a story about being adventurous, you should be engaging with customers and the media in a way that shows them you are. Think about Red Bull. The brand image is one of adventure, extreme sports, and freedom. And its PR and marketing campaigns encourage people to live the Red Bull brand lifestyle. From its World of Red Bull commercial series to Felix Baumgartner’s 128,100-foot space jump, the brand involves the audience in the experience, which drives emotional connections and reinforces the message.

DON’T JUST SAY IT, PROVE IT

It’s one thing to say you have a great company, product, idea or cause, but it’s another to demonstrate why that’s true. When crafting your story, be sure to have data to back it up. Use statistics, research findings, surveys, testimonials, or other data to provide depth to your story, verify your claims and demonstrate how your product fills a need. Cold hard facts can often be the key to getting people interested. Just remember to package them up in your story.

DON’T FORGET THE NEWS

For the most part, your story will only be of interest to a journalist if you can tie it to news that’s relevant to readers. Be sure to work current events into your story to make it more newsworthy.

USE A VARIETY OF PLATFORMS

For the most effective storytelling, you’ll want to utilise a variety of platforms, and present the content in multiple ways. You can promote your stories across social media, your website, blogs and more. Using a mixture of video, audio, images and text will provide the most dynamic user experience and encourage interactivity from your audience.
THE BOTTOM LINE

Everyone loves a good story, because our brains are programmed to. If you tell yours effectively, it’ll pay dividends. So, it’s time to put pen to paper. Great PR storytelling can create brand fans, generate media coverage and ultimately, improve your bottom line.

THE FOUNDATION OF STORYTELLING:

Understanding the audience is the first and most important element of good storytelling in public relations. A fascinating story appeals to the target audience's needs, interests, and emotions, as well as their values and objectives. To create an engaging narrative, public relations professionals must first understand their target audience, their preferences, and their motives.

This entails completing extensive research, creating buyer profiles, and learning about the audience's demographics, psychographics, and habits. Understanding the audience allows public relations professionals to adjust the narrative to their needs and interests, ensuring that is relevant and appealing. For instance, if the target audience is young millennials, the story may need to be more visually appealing, socially conscious, and aligned with their values of social responsibility and sustainability.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE STORY:

Once the audience is understood, the next step in crafting the story is identifying the key messages. These are the building blocks of the story and serve as the foundation upon which the narrative is constructed. They are the core ideas or concepts that we want to communicate and reinforce through the story.

They should be clear, concise, and aligned with the overall PR objectives and brand positioning. They should convey the intended meaning and evoke the desired emotions. It is important to ensure that the key messages are consistent with the brand's values, identity, and image. Inconsistency in messaging can dilute the impact of the story and create confusion among the audience.

BRINGING THE NARRATIVE TO LIFE:

Once the key messages are identified, we select the appropriate storytelling format to bring the narrative to life. Various formats of storytelling can be used in PR, including written content, visual elements, multimedia, and experiential events. The choice of format depends on the target audience, the story conveyed, and the overall PR strategy.

- **Written Content:** Written content, such as press releases, articles, blogs, and social media postings, is a traditional type of storytelling that may be utilised in public relations. Written content enables us to build a narrative using words, resulting in a fascinating story that stimulates the audience's imagination and emotions. Well-crafted written content may successfully express the brand's messages, attracting the audience's attention and keeping them interested.

- **Visual components:** Visual components like photographs, videos, infographics, and animations may give depth and richness to the storytelling experience. Visuals are highly engaging and may deliver complicated concepts in a visually appealing and readily consumable style. They may elicit emotions, leave a lasting impression, and forcefully reinforce the brand's messages.

- **Multimedia:** Multimedia storytelling combines different forms of media, such as text, images, videos, and audio, to create videos with embedded text or podcasts that incorporate
storytelling techniques. Multimedia storytelling enables public relations professionals to use the capabilities of several media types to create a dynamic and engaging narrative experience for their audiences. It allows you to engage the audience on numerous levels by appealing to their visual, aural, and emotional senses, making the tale more compelling.

- Experiential Events: Experiential events, such as product launches, brand activations, and immersive encounters, may be effective storytelling tools. These events create an opportunity for the audience to interact with the brand and experience the story directly. We may leave a lasting impression on the audience and transmit the brand's messaging memorably and effectively by creating engaging and memorable experiences.

The Art of Crafting Compelling Narratives:

Crafting compelling narratives requires us to use storytelling techniques that captivate the audience's attention and evoke their emotions. Here are some key storytelling techniques that can be incorporated into PR campaigns:

Character Development: Characters are at the heart of any story. We come up with characters that people can relate to and remember, who show the values of the brand and connect with the audience. These characters can be real people or fictional personas who represent the brand's story and personality. We increase the story's level of interest and stickiness by creating characters that the audience can identify with.

Conflict and Resolution: Conflict and resolution are essential elements of storytelling that create tension and drama in the narrative. We incorporate conflict and resolution in their stories by highlighting challenges or obstacles that the brand has overcome, or by showcasing how the brand has resolved an issue or met a need. This creates a compelling story arc that keeps the audience hooked and interested in the outcome.

Emotionally Charged Storytelling: Emotions play a critical role in storytelling. We use emotionally charged storytelling to create a deep emotional connection with the audience. This can be achieved by sharing personal anecdotes, testimonials, or real-life stories that evoke emotions such as joy, sadness, fear, or hope. Emotionally charged storytelling makes the story more relatable and memorable, leaving a lasting impact on the audience.

Authenticity and Transparency: Authenticity and transparency are crucial in building trust and credibility in storytelling. We strive to be genuine and transparent in their storytelling, avoiding exaggeration or fabrication. Authentic storytelling involves being honest about the brand's strengths and weaknesses, acknowledging challenges, and sharing genuine stories that reflect the brand's values and purpose.

Visual Storytelling: Visuals are powerful storytelling tools that can enhance the impact of the narrative. Visuals, such as images, videos, and infographics are used to create a visual story that complements the written or verbal narrative. Visuals can convey emotions, provide context, and make the story more engaging and memorable.

Successful Brand Storytelling in PR Campaigns:

Several brands have successfully used storytelling in their PR campaigns to create compelling brand messaging. Let's look at some real-world examples:

Nike's "Dream Crazy" Campaign: Nike's "Dream Crazy" campaign is a prime example of powerful storytelling in PR. The campaign featured NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, known for his
controversial protests during the national anthem. The campaign used Kaepernick's personal story of 
overcoming challenges and standing up for his beliefs to inspire and motivate others to dream big 
and pursue their passions. The campaign received widespread attention, generating millions of views 
and sparking a conversation about social issues, while also reinforcing Nike's brand messaging of 
empowerment and perseverance.

**Dove's "Real Beauty" Campaign:** Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign is another notable example of 
impactful storytelling in PR. The campaign challenged traditional beauty standards and celebrated 
real women of all shapes, sizes, and ages, encouraging them to embrace their unique beauty. The 
campaign used personal stories of real women and their struggles with self-esteem and body image 
to create an emotional connection with the audience. By promoting authenticity and inclusivity, 
Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign resonated with millions of women around the world, generating 
widespread media coverage and earning praise for its empowering and positive messaging.

**Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" Campaign:** Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign is a successful example 
of experiential storytelling in PR. The campaign involved replacing the Coca-Cola logo on its bottles 
with popular names, encouraging people to share a Coke with friends or loved ones. The campaign 
created a personalized and emotional connection with the audience, sparking conversations and 
social media buzz around finding and sharing Coke bottles with their names or the names of their 
loved ones. The campaign used a simple yet powerful storytelling technique of personalization to 
engage the audience and strengthen the emotional bond with the brand.

**Airbnb's "We Accept" Campaign:** Airbnb's "We Accept" campaign is a powerful example of using 
storytelling to address a social issue. The campaign tackled the issue of discrimination in the sharing 
economy by sharing personal stories of Airbnb hosts and guests who had experienced discrimination 
based on their race, gender, or sexual orientation. The campaign used emotionally charged 
storytelling to highlight the brand’s commitment to inclusivity and diversity, and to encourage 
acceptance and tolerance among its community. The campaign received widespread media coverage 
and earned praise for its impactful and socially relevant messaging.