

## Storytelling for Sales Success

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In today's always-on society, people are bombarded with information, which shortens their attention span and makes it harder for companies to get messages to stick. The [Edelman 2009 Trust Barometer](#) found that people need to hear a message three to five times to believe it. To get the attention of their audience and hold it that many times, companies need to make sure that their communications are designed for maximum impact, no matter the delivery channel.

Regardless of the channel, storytelling is the most influential form of communication, dating back at least to the days of cave dwellers. Psychologists believe that people think, fear, dream and hope in stories. As consumers, we are influenced by the stories we hear, whether from the media or our peers.

How effective is storytelling? The London School of Business found that people retain 65 to 70 percent of information shared via a story versus only 5 to 10 percent of information conveyed through statistics. Relatively speaking, it's like comparing a press release to an article – and we all know which of those is more powerful.

In business, storytelling can help to influence a prospect's or customer's behavior, build and reinforce relationships, convey complex ideas easily and persuasively, and enhance success in sales. Without an interesting story to grab a customer's attention, salespeople can't count on establishing long-term relationships or making a sale.

So how can you build a story that will pique the interest of an audience and make a connection? Active listening is critical. Get to know your customers by finding out what motivates them at the emotional level. Ninety percent of the time, people buy based on emotion and justify the purchase through intellectual proof. Most sales organizations promote benefits, completely ignoring the emotional importance of their target.

Using storytelling principles can help salespeople make that personal, emotional connection. For example, if they are referring to a corporate service such as a 24-hour help desk, they can talk about a particular person who works there and tell a story that makes the case for personal service rather than touting the benefits of having that help line. Instead of picturing a generic entity, they can now envision Jason from the help desk spending time helping another customer.

Storytelling is also useful when making sales calls to prospects or customers. It can help focus on the goal of the call, prepare an opening statement and also plan and prepare relevant questions. Storytelling is also helpful for customer up-sell by illustrating possibilities, such as discussing how other customers are forging ahead on the road of success.

And of course salespeople can use storytelling in social media. By listening and joining online conversations, they can encourage dialogue by posing questions and commenting on others' comments. Social media can help them add value to the conversation by referencing external content, adding a new insight or thought on a topic. Social media is all about karma. Anyone who is providing information that is valuable will find followers.

When it comes to sharing stories, it's about the connection. Sales and marketing rely on each other for success, and storytelling helps bridge the gap. Salespeople rely on marketing to give them coverage, and marketing people rely on salespeople to bring them stories. A salesforce is on the front line with customers, and by working together with marketing, that team can help manage and distribute stories effectively.

For more information, please contact [Terri Nopp](#).