

Developing An Effective Story for Your Business

By Stephen A. Saenz, 2003

To Make A Long Story Short...

Stories have been around since men and women were living in caves, maybe earlier. They have been told and retold countless times over the millenniums. You might say that stories are the DNA of human history. Nothing captivates the heart and mind like a good story. Think about your own life experience. You probably remember some very special people in your life who entertained, taught or even put you to sleep by telling you stories when you were young. Maybe you are the storyteller now. People love good stories and they love people who tell good stories. That is a subtle point about human beings that should be of great interest to you as the “director of marketing” for your business!

The Story Builder Process

This guide describes a process that will help you develop a clear and compelling story for your business. The process has seven steps, six of which will form the copy (verbiage) for your marketing brochure. The last step will give you some guidance in designing your brochure.

Steps in the Story Builder Process

1. Define Your Core Values
2. Define Your Philosophy
3. Identify Your Points Of Distinction
4. Draft Your Mission Statement
5. Define Your Process
6. Develop Your Biographies
7. Turning Your Story Into A Marketing Brochure

The Integrity of Storytelling

An effective story communicates who you are, what you do and why people should do business with you. Stories like that do not come to you in the middle of the night. You have to dig deep for them. You have to do some soul searching to figure out what you really have that is unique and valuable. This is a discovery process.

Many advisors take the easy way out and “borrow” other people’s stories (otherwise known as plagiarism or copyright infringement). The logic goes something like this: “Why should I reinvent the wheel when someone else has already written a great story?” You should always resist the temptation to do this. Even if you find one you really like, it would be someone else’s story. It would clearly explain why people should do business with *that person*, not you. When you use someone else’s story, you lose your integrity. In fact, you are communicating in no uncertain terms why people should NOT do business with you. If you want to have a clear and compelling story, you have to develop your own. Do not rush the process. In the end, your story is nothing less than a reflection of your own integrity.

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Tips for Developing a Great Story

- ❑ Experience has shown that you will end up with a stronger story if you follow the *Paragon Story Builder Process* exactly as it is outlined above. You should start with Step 1 and work sequentially through the process, rather than skipping around.
- ❑ Do not let conventional wisdom take the punch out of your story. Over the years, you have probably heard things like: “Sell the sizzle, not the steak” and “Tell them what time it is, don’t tell them how to build a clock.”
- ❑ While well intentioned, these pearls of wisdom were developed by product-driven sales managers for product-driven sales people. These are the same people who live from transaction to transaction. Their motto is still “you’re only as good as your last ticket.” If you consider yourself to be a true advisor you should NOT subscribe to this outdated way of thinking. It will only hurt your business.
- ❑ Your clients and prospects are well educated today. They also have high expectations. They can smell a sales person coming from a mile away. They will cut you off at your knees if they sense that you are just trying to sell them something. Consider for a minute that, on a good day, cold callers get 3 out of 100 people to *listen* to them. That should tell you something. Cold calling has never worked well and it never will.
- ❑ Your marketing brochure should reflect this new reality. Do not cut corners! Your story does not have to fit on a 3-panel brochure. It does not have to be a novel, but it needs to have enough *substance* to let your clients and prospects know that you are a person (practice) of substance.
- ❑ People WILL read a well-written and well-designed brochure. This is especially true if they have or just came into serious money. Think about that for a minute. Do you honestly think that someone who just inherited or sold their business for \$3 million is going to select their financial advisor based on a 3-panel brochure? Not likely.
- ❑ There are three keys to developing a great marketing brochure:
 1. It must be well-written (substance and grammar)
 2. It must be professionally designed (layout, fonts, images)
 3. It must convey an image that is consistent with the caliber of people you want to have as clients (paper, cover, photography)
- ❑ That last point is critical. When it comes to marketing your business, *everything* you do should be on par with the caliber of people you want as clients. If you are a full-service advisor who expects to be paid full-service fees, you should utilize full-service resources to create your marketing brochure. Anything less would make you a hypocrite.

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Using Outside Resources

It is important to reiterate that in order to have a clear and compelling story, it also needs to be well written. Unfortunately, not everyone can write well. You can and should hire an experienced marketing coach to help you with your story, **BUT THEY SHOULD NOT WRITE IT FOR YOU**. The key to using a coach is to find one who can *pull* your story out of you. The idea here is for you to come up with the “raw materials” for your story. Your marketing coach should serve as your editor and sounding board.

Once developed, you will be communicating your story in two ways — verbally and in writing. The verbal version will come in handy when you are meeting face to face with clients and prospects. The written version will “speak” for you when you are not there to speak for yourself. In this guide, the term “story” refers to the copy (verbiage) for your marketing brochure. Step 7 explains the process of turning your story into a brochure.

At the end of this guide, you will find a section called *Effective Writing Techniques*. This section contains some helpful tips on how to write more effectively. You should read this section before you begin working on the exercises and refer back to it while you are working on the *Story Builder Process*.