

OPINION >

Why do agencies find it so difficult to develop and tell their own stories?

By **Darren Woolley** - 15 November 2019 04:19am

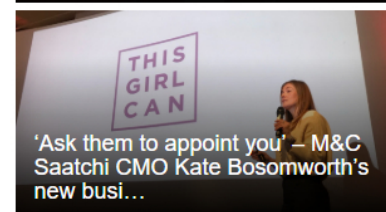
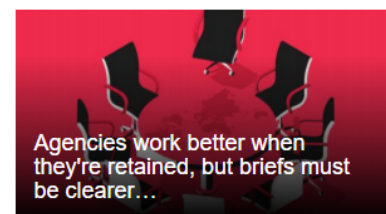


Have agencies forgotten how to tell their own stories?

Over the past two decades, I have seen more than a thousand agency credentials presentations, either in reviewing an agency or as part of the pitch process. I am often asked to help agencies refine and sharpen their agency **stories**. You would think that advising a company that is tasked with developing their client's brand story would be redundant. But for some reason, very few advertising agencies appear to know how to tell their story.

Because of the prevalence of storytelling as a business skill, many agencies will declare they are going to share their agency stories. But what follows is far from a story, let alone a powerful and compelling one. Instead, it's lists features such as the people, clients, capabilities and case studies. These lists are almost never distinctly unique to the agency, filled with the hallmarks of agency good agency and therefore not particularly distinctive

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or memorable.

The question is why? Agencies are filled with smart, talented people who are professional storytellers. So why do agencies find it so difficult to develop and tell their own stories? The issue is the way most agencies think about their credentials and the associated story about their agency.

When you talk about a credentials presentation, many agencies immediately frame this as a commencement step in the maligned pitch process. This is quite a narrow view of the role of a credentials presentation. You may need to present your agency credentials in many situations, other than as part of a pitch. It could be to introduce the agency to a new chief marketing officer of an existing client. It could be an introduction to a marketer wanting to know more about the agency. Or any number of other opportunities to pitch the agency and what it can do.

To understand what makes a great credentials presentation, you need to have a laser-like focus on the purpose. For me, there is only one purpose and that is to get the next meeting that will lead to being awarded more business. This is where the agency story is essential. Unlike a list of facts and features, a great agency story captures the single-minded thought you want the audience to remember and associate with your agency. It is memorable, based on the truth of the agency and creates a desire in the audience to know more.

For independent agencies have the opportunity to create their own stories. While for network agencies it is important to take the network story and customise it to your market situation and reflect your local positioning. You can achieve this through the inclusion of the relevant proof points.

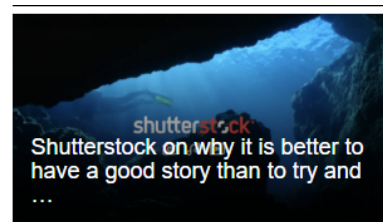
The proof points for the agency, previously a list of features, are delivered as benefits that support an agency's story. Each proof point builds on the credibility and the power of the agency story. It requires discipline to only include the proof points that support the story and to leave out anything that is irrelevant and confusing.

When you have developed your agency story the first people you should share it with are your staff. They will tell you if it rings true, and possibly motivate them to greatness. Then share your story with your existing clients. Too often agencies put all their effort into winning clients and forget to update them on how the agency is evolving. Who knows, you could even win extra business by sharing the proof points they may not know. Even if they don't, your clients are the best ambassadors for talking about you to their friends and colleagues in marketing.

The other thing about a truly great agency story is you can make the telling as long or as short as time allows, by adding the proof-point details to support the story or leave them out. If you have an hour-long meeting, plan and practice telling the story in less than 30 minutes, leaving time for the client prospect to share their story. If you have 30 minutes, tell the story in under 15 minutes. And if you have 2 minutes in an elevator, tell it in 60 seconds. (It's why it is sometimes called the elevator pitch).

Imagine meeting a marketing prospect socially and when they ask what you do, rather than tell them just the name of the agency and the type of agency, you give them a taste of the story in a sentence that makes them want to know more?

There have been some great one lines that capture the agency story, the promise of a benefit that makes the agency distinctive and memorable in



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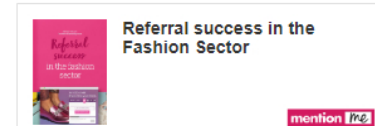
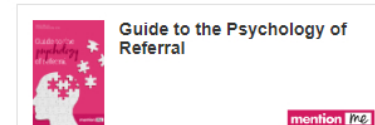
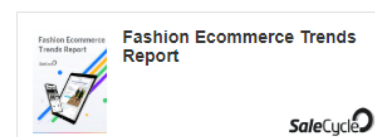


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the mind of the advertiser and the industry. I am sure you would be able to name these agencies just on the lines from their agency stories such as 'Nothing is Impossible', 'Brutal Simplicity', 'The Disruption Company', 'Truth well told' and more. But the agency story is not these lines, the story, like all great stories, is in the telling.

Darren Woolley is founder and global chief executive of TrinityP3

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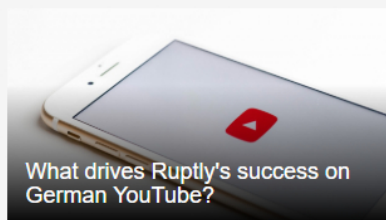
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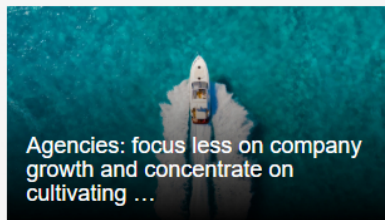
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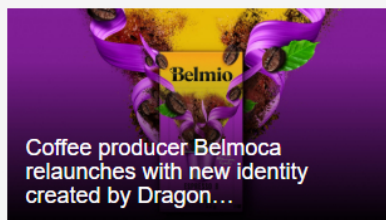
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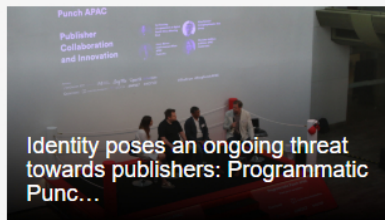
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