

# Building A Solid Business Foundation Begins With Story — What's Yours?

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Lynne Golodner Forbes Councils  
Member

Forbes Agency Council

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*Host of the Make Meaning  
Podcast, Owner at Your People  
LLC PR/Marketing company,  
Founder of the Make Meaning  
Movement, Author of 8 Books.*



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To succeed in marketing and public relations, an organization must know its story and the best words to share it.

My tried-and-true formula for marketing success is Storytelling + Relationships + Higher Purpose = Brand Success And Growth. Everything starts with your story, which should include details about your founding, evolution and growth in compelling, interesting, and memorable words and ideas.

Your stakeholders must know who you are, why you do what you do and why it's important for them. All marketing and public relations begins with the development of a solid and comprehensive foundational narrative.

A good brand story begins with personal and professional interweaving. There is a human component underlying all professional stories because people do business with people. Origin stories set a foundation for the compelling brand story you want to share widely, including details of how you came to be.

Simply put, what inspired you to create the company? What pivotal moments or experiences got you started? Was there an individual or a team of individuals who, together, brought a dream to life?

I believe the foundational narrative must include the following:

- Mission.
- Vision.
- Tagline.
- Five to 10 paragraphs of an anchor story.
- A boilerplate for use in brochures and press releases.
- Organizational values.

So, you can see there's a lot to create, but it should all focus on the same phrases, ideas or concepts, giving you a solid foundation of content for your marketing channels.

Once developed, foundational messaging should guide all communications and marketing efforts. This is the source you turn to for all messaging — the key concepts and values that should drive your social media content, the focus of your email newsletters, blogging efforts and website content. It should appear in marketing materials and press releases. It is the language of your world, the compelling story about what sets you apart from the competition.

Think of how your organization sells an experience or builds a lifestyle. Think of the ways customers and communities are better off after interacting with your brand. Think of the possibilities you offer to people's lives, to communities, to make them better.

These are the stories you want to tell.

A good story is original. It is creative. It pulls at emotional and personal connections, creating a relationship between writer and reader. A good story asks the recipient to do something — to take action, to go on a journey with the brand. And a good story has mutual benefit. This is super important because it can't be a good story if only one side benefits from interacting with it.

When done well, compelling storytelling can increase revenues — as long as you are consistent and authoritative and you have integrity.

Good brand stories come from the heart, evoke human connection and convey higher purpose. A good story can inspire word-of-mouth referrals because of its emotional connection.

When we work with a client to develop foundational messaging, we might take a few months to research, conduct interviews, brainstorm and go through several revisions before we arrive at concise, compelling copy that aptly represents the brand. You can go through this process on your own, and it might not take quite as long. Here's how.

Begin by asking the typical who, what, where, when, why and how questions. Then dig deeper.

Speak with company founders, leaders and people who've engaged with your brand.

Ask why they do this work. How do they want to impact the community? What inspired the creation of the company? What led to the products or services you offer today?

Look for success stories — turn to satisfied customers, longtime employees or others positively impacted by the brand. Look for words or phrases that come up again and again. Those are clues to what your company's true value is for its constituents.

Who is your audience? What transformation do they experience by engaging with your brand?

Gather anecdotes and stories of change or impact. You don't have to quote people by name; just share their insights and experiences in the storytelling.

Think about your industry — how do you depart from the norm? Do you live outside the box? How so? These are important clues to your value.

Investigate prevailing notions about your industry. What is expected? How are you different? Is this why people come to you?

Some stories are aspirational. When a company isn't quite where it wants to be, storytelling can be its North Star. It's the old fake-it-till-you-make-it approach. Put the words out in the world so you can step into them, live up to the ideal.

Finally, look for inspiration from great corporate stories. What brands inspired you to get into this work? How are they changing the world? And how do they communicate their value?

Do your research to find stories that spark engagement. Create yours in the image of all the great company stories that have gone before.

Once you develop solid foundational messaging, you can use your keywords and concepts consistently and widely across all marketing channels. That way, your audience sees you show up again and again with the same enthusiasm, excitement and expertise — and *that* builds trust.

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Lynne Golodner

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