Getting your story straight

Building a great product and business on the strength of a simple story
You can’t *tell* a good story…

If you don’t *have* a good story to tell
What makes a great story? (Start with a BIG problem)
Behind every great product is a great story
Why do stories work?

Until recently we've only been able to speculate about story's persuasive effects. But over the last several decades psychology has begun a serious study of how story affects the human mind. Results repeatedly show that our attitudes, fears, hopes, and values are strongly influenced by story. In fact, fiction seems to be more effective at changing beliefs than writing that is specifically designed to persuade through argument and evidence.

What is going on here? Why are we putty in a storyteller's hands? The psychologists Melanie Green and Tim Brock argue that entering fictional worlds “radically alters the way information is processed.” Green and Brock’s studies show that the more absorbed readers are in a story, the more the story changes them.

And, in this, there is an important lesson about the molding power of story. When we read dry, factual arguments, we read with our dukes up. We are critical and skeptical. But when we are absorbed in a story we drop our intellectual guard. We are moved emotionally and this seems to leave us defenseless.
Why does story matter?

*You* need to know your story so you can lead.

Kevin Plank, Under Armour
Why does story matter?

Your team needs to live it every day.

About Dropbox

Dropbox is a free service that lets you bring your photos, docs, and videos anywhere and share them easily. Dropbox was founded in 2007 by Drew Houston and Arash Ferdowsi, two MIT students tired of emailing files to themselves to work from more than one computer.
Why does story matter?

Your customers need to get it (really quickly).
Why does story matter?

Your investors need to believe in it.
Oh, and BTW, it’s hard!
Exercise: let’s all tell a story

What brought you here tonight?
Story structure

- Characters
- Motivation
- Plot
- Symbols
- Customers
- Insights
- Problem/solution
- Logos/icons
The pieces of a product narrative

**Story**
- Protagonist
- Motivation
- Conflict
- Plot imperative
- Plot narrative
- Setting
- Tone, Voice

**Product Narrative**
- Customer
- Customer insights
- Problem definition
- Value proposition
- Product delivery (reasons to believe)
- Positioning
- Attributes and personality
Pick a **target** – who is the *main* character in your story?
Pick a First target customer First
Later, find and serve your 2nd target customer
Always start with a focus
If you don’t have a target, look for one
Who’s the target (main character) in this story?
Dig for a compelling insight – what is their motivation?
Insights = inspiration

Kent felt vulnerable riding his commuter bike at night.

As Kent was riding home one night, he wondered why his bike's headlight, meant to illuminate the road ahead of him, was mounted on the handlebars. Why couldn't the light be closer to the ground? He put his engineering mind to work, and RevoLights were born.
Insights: know thyself (and thy friends)
Can you have an insight about a business?
Go deep to understand the character in your story

Zimplistic, Intel-Berkeley Technology Entrepreneur Challenge, 2009 finalist
Problem definition – set up the conflict in your plot
Define the problem

Zimplistic

Roti (chapati or phulka) is the staple diet of 800 million Indians who eat 2.4 billion rotis every day.

Roti making is such a skillful, tedious and time-consuming task that people are resorting to unhealthy means such as frozen rotis, bread, or they are eating more rice.

There is NO COMPLETELY AUTOMATIC KITCHEN APPLIANCE like a Rice cooker to make rotis with just a click of a button in the market today!
So you can solve it

Zimplistic

pain killer

Revolutionary kitchen appliance
Compact as a mini microwave oven
Enables anyone to make rotis!

'Rotimatic prints readymade cooked rotis, literally!'
Problem definition often comes from an observed insight

Why do ordinary kitchen tools have to hurt your hands?

Why can’t there be wonderfully comfortable tools that are easy to use?
Two-sided problem

Problem (for publishers): how can I insure a site visit is from a human?

Problem (for advertisers): how can I improve recall for my ad?
Google romances the problem
What’s the problem?
Identify the value proposition (how is the product useful?)

Where does the character in your story want to go?
Technology vs. utility

About Twitter

Why do so many people seem to like Twitter?

Simplicity has played an important role in Twitter’s success. People are eager to connect with other people and Twitter makes that simple. Twitter asks one question, “What are you doing?” Answers must be under 140 characters in length and can be sent via mobile texting, instant message, or the web.

Twitter’s core technology is a device agnostic message routing system with rudimentary social networking features. By accepting messages from sms, web, mobile web, instant message, or from third party API projects, Twitter makes it easy for folks to stay connected.

A global community of friends and strangers answering one simple question: What are you doing? Answer on your phone, IM, or right here on the web!
Find out what makes your technology useful!
Make it clear. Really clear.

Start accepting credit cards today.

Sign up and we'll mail you a free Mobile Card Reader.

Email address
Password Confirm password
Get Free Card Reader

2.75% per swipe, no additional fees, and next day deposits

VISA Discover Works with iOS and Android devices.
Simplify the value proposition

Gaitu (2011 IBTEC winner):
Customer:  “dress up photos in any style”
Artist:     “find customers who fit your style”
Bring it to life

Hydrate from anywhere
What’s the value prop?

Receive your household mail online instead of on paper!

- Your household mail is delivered online in a secure, private, verified mailbox.
- It is electronically organized, filed and stored for you, forever, for free.
- You can view mail, pay a bill or print an exact copy any time you want.

Sign Up - It’s Free!

Secure
Zumbox offers bank-level security and is compliant with strict security standards, keeping all your mail and sensitive information completely safe and secure. More »

Private
You are the only person who can read your mail. There is a Zumbox for every street address, and you can even create one for each person in the household. More »

Central
Manage all your mail in one place. Whether you receive it digitally or on paper, you can store it all in your Zumbox and access it anytime from anywhere. More »

Verified
We verify your street address by sending you a security code via the USPS which only residents can receive. All senders are also verified, so no scams, ever! More »
What was the value prop of Google Wave?
Product Delivery – complete the narrative
Make the “promise” tangible

Zappos Family Core Value #1: Deliver WOW Through Service

Customer Service Isn't Just A Department!

We've been asked by a lot of people how we've grown so quickly, and the answer is actually really simple... We've aligned the entire organization around one mission: to provide the best customer service possible. Internally, we call this our WOW philosophy.

- Instant check out
- Call for support and pick up immediately
- Free overnight delivery (largely)
- 365 day money back guarantee
Make sure the product delivers

We help students prepare for tests.

We give you everything you need to start studying

- Hear It Explained
  Video and text explanations after every problem

- Keep Track of Your Answers
  Flag difficult questions and review all past answers

- Detailed Results Summary
  Compare your pace and accuracy with other users

- Customize Your Practice
  Review difficult subjects or simulate an actual exam

- Access Anywhere, Anytime
  Take our online products anywhere you go

- We’re Here to Help
  Our team answers your emails at record speeds
If it’s complicated, break it down

Get organized
Manage inventory, reservations, customers and payments from anywhere.
Showcase inventory and real-time product availability to your customers.

Faster
Improve speed of service with mobile checkouts.
Save time with automated reservations and real-time product availability.

Smarter
Make better informed decisions through real-time analytics.
Keep your store open twenty-four-seven with online reservations.

Better
Manage your business from anywhere in the cloud.
Enjoy increased visibility and revenues from our product rental marketplace.
Simplify your proof points (3 is good)
Do you have your MVP (minimum viable product)?
Positioning – give your story context
Find a unique place for your story

Fans voice

National

Local

Yahoo! Sports

ESPN

Bleacher Report

ESPN Boston

Boston.com

Pundit's voice
Don’t make differentiation hard to find!
Give your product a frame of reference

The OS that makes your computer work like an appliance...

- By comparison:
  - **The Microsoft Windows OS** is clunky and gets worse over time
  - **Google Chrome OS** isn’t available on your device yet
  - You can get it on YOUR computer (you don’t need to lots of $ for an **Apple device**
“Originally, we weren't exactly sure how to market the Touch. Was it an iPhone without the phone? Was it a pocket computer? What happened was, what customers told us was, they started to see it as a game machine. We started to market it that way, and it just took off.” (Steve Jobs, 09/09/09)
How is stay.com positioned?

Get your free personal travel guide
Download, print and share your guide for free

Where do you want to go?
GO

Maybe: London, Paris or New York?

Make Your Own Travel Guide
Forget about your already outdated travel books. We have updated information on thousands of places to visit for your next vacation or business trip.
Attributes and personality – add texture to your story
Southwest attributes: fun, on-time, inexpensive

We Weren’t Just Airborne Yesterday

Time flies when you’re having fun!

More than 38 years ago, Rollin King and Herb Kelleher got together and decided to start a different kind of airline. They began with one simple notion: if you get your passengers to their destinations when they want to get there, on time, at the lowest possible fares, and make darn sure they have a good time doing it, people will fly your airline. And you know what? They were right.

What began as a small Texas airline has grown to become one of the largest airlines in America. Today, Southwest Airlines flies over 100 million passengers a year to 66 great cities all across the country, and we do it more than 3,200 times a day.
Virgin America personality: sexy!
Don’t be afraid to have an attitude

Our condolences to mahogany conference tables everywhere.

share your screen

join someone’s screen

Buy pro
Free team trial
Take a tour

works for Windows, Mac & mobile
Your story becomes your promise, which becomes your brand

THE FORMULA THAT CHANGED THE GAME

From the lab to the playing field, Gatorade is the most tested sports drink on the planet. Its unique blend of fluid, electrolytes and carbohydrates has shown time and again to be the optimal hydrator, keeping athletes at the top of their game. Gatorade is scientifically formulated as a 6% carbohydrate solution (14 grams per 8 oz), found to be the optimal percentage for rapid fluid and energy delivery into the body so you can keep going strong.

Gatorade can be found on the sidelines of athletic competitions around the world. For athletes who always want to perform at their best.
Be brief: distill down to the essence of your story

“I would have written you a short letter, but I didn’t have the time.”

Mark Twain (or maybe Pascal)
Putting it all together

The easiest way to organize your apartment hunt

Sign Up Now!
All stories all the time...
When you have a great story... anyone can tell it.

davidariemer@yahoo.com
Office hours: alt. Tuesdays 12-2
The art of story telling
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simplicity</th>
<th>Concreteness</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
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<td>Unexpectedness</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Stories</td>
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Let your customers tell the story

Some of you are probably like me and come from one of those families where you are the only one who knows how to turn on the computer, change the height of your mom’s office chair, or tie your shoes. So every time one of the aforementioned tasks has to be completed, they’re yelling for (at?) you. Ever since I got accepted to MIT, though, it’s gotten significantly worse. Why didn’t my mom’s favorite reality show tape last night? “ASK HER, SHE’S THE MIT STUDENT.” Photo printer is doing nothing but eating paper? “GET THE MIT STUDENT. SAVE THE TREES.” 14 x 22? “YO, MIT GIRL.”

My name is Jess K. ’10, and I am indeed an MIT student. I’ve lived in California all my life, where it’s okay that I wear t-shirts and flip flops in December. When it gets below 60 degrees here, we cry. So not only do I have to wrap my head around this whole thing of going to college, capital C, I have to wrap my body in something other than breathable cotton.

My name is Keri Garel, and I’m a member of the class of 2010. (Yeah, I’m new here. Let’s hear it for built-in excuses for not knowing what’s going on.) I was born in Jamaica, but I moved to the Miami/Fort Lauderdale area in Florida at age seven. (Kolaa’!) From England, who lives a floor above me, says this makes me half an international student. I don’t agree. Yet.) Notice the aforementioned locations. Jamaica, Florida - and the very tip of it at that. I’m still struggling to understand this concept of it being cold (whaaaaaaaat?!) I’ve never even seen snow, so it’s a sure bet that I’ll be the girl running around in the courtyard screaming at the first sign of flakes. Yes, I’ll do it even if there are only maybe three and a half of them and they melt before they even reach the ground. It’s the principle of the thing.

I live in Senior Halls, which is awesome. We host Steer Roast every year. We have a fire swing, enough said.

Thoughts on Removing the Long Essay From the Freshman Application

October 23, 2009 | So long, extraneous passages of florid prose.
Posted in The Freshman Application | 38 Responses

In which brains are awesome

October 02, 2009 | Neanderthal congress.
Posted in coursework | 9 Responses
Jobsian storytelling

- A headline
- A villain
- A simple slide
- A demo
- A holy smokes moment
So...

What’s your story?