

## Storytelling: Creating a Narrative That Matters

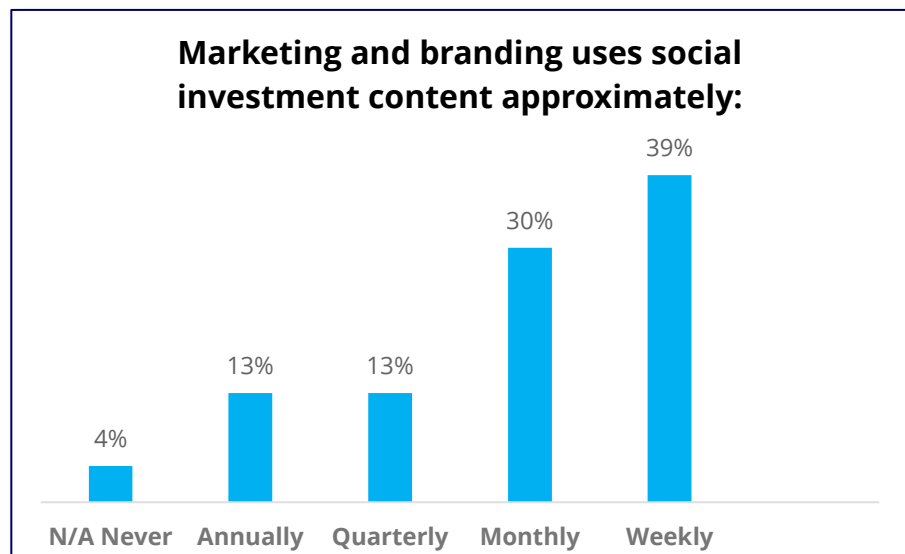
August 2020

**CECP Overview:** An important job function of Corporate Social Responsibility professionals is to develop, embody, and share their business' story and how it coincides with being a force for good. This is storytelling, or how we weave together facts and emotions into a cohesive narrative. Most people are more receptive to stories than facts or data because stories help us relate, empathize, and remember. It allows for individuals to build connections among people, brands, and businesses.

Below you will find insights that reflect how companies have effectively used storytelling to deliver on—and stay true to—their core purpose. If you have a resource or example to add for CECP's website and resources, please contact [info@cecp.co](mailto:info@cecp.co)

### CECP INSIGHTS

- 2020 CECP Summit  
Audience Poll Question:  
How important is your  
corporate social investment  
strategy to the overall  
marketing and branding  
practice of your company?  
(N=46)



### SUPPORTING DATA

- According to **Quantified Communications**, research shows that messages delivered as stories can be up to 22 times more memorable than just facts.<sup>1</sup>
- In a report called *Corporate Culture & Performance* by James Kotter and James Heskett, it was demonstrated that companies who convey purpose and value can outperform their counterparts in

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.quantifiedcommunications.com/blog/storytelling-22-times-more-memorable>

stock price by a factor of 12 and have a profit performance ratio 750x higher than companies without shared values.<sup>2</sup>

- Stories can create a sense of purpose and drive action. For example, in a 2007 report from **the Wharton School of Business**, participants were asked to collect donations from a call center. Those who were told the money would improve the lives of others earned more than double than the group of participants who told that the money would improve their own lives.<sup>3</sup>
- How can a brand build trust? Get involved in at least one social issue that does not directly impact its business. Consumers expect brands to keep their promises by taking action that makes a real difference. Only 1 in 4 young people could think of a business that had a purpose bigger than their product (BBMG).
  - **The Edelman Trust Barometer** reported that 76% of consumers only listen to a company's advertising if they are trusted.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, only 1 in 4 young people in the study could think a business that had a bigger purpose bigger than their product (BBMG).

## KEY LEARNINGS<sup>5</sup>

- A clear purpose is foundational to storytelling.
  - Purpose is often activated and reinforced through storytelling. A clear purpose, coupled with storytelling, creates a strong corporate culture where individuals can align their drive to their organization's purpose and articulate their stories to others.<sup>6</sup>
- Authenticity is critical within storytelling.
  - Storytelling does not begin with a narrative; it begins with an action. Narrative supported by concrete actions is credible.
    - Key questions to ask: What is the story we aim to tell, who do we aim to reach, to whom is the story relevant, what is issue we want to solve?
    - Do not jump to tactics right away: ad buys, events, social media channels. Start with actions within the company (right now). Where do we have unique capabilities to invest in solving challenges?
  - Authentic actions must underpin narrative, while the longevity of the journey builds credibility to drive the narrative forward.
  - To remain relevant, brands should start with a human truth that shines through in every business decision, product design, and marketing program.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/celinnedacosta/2017/12/19/why-every-business-needs-powerful-storytelling-to-grow/#74fb57ae43bo>

<sup>3</sup> <https://virtuallspeech.com/blog/importance-storytelling-business>

<sup>4</sup> [2019 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report on Brands](#)

<sup>5</sup> 2020 CECP Summit, Brand Building Through Storytelling session

<sup>6</sup> Harvard Business Review. 2020. Use Storytelling To Explain Your Company's Purpose. [online] Available at: <https://hbr.org/2015/11/use-storytelling-to-explain-your-companys-purpose> [Accessed 10 July 2020]

- **Heineken's ad, "Worlds Apart":** Recognizing the deep ideological divides in our politics and culture, Heineken challenged conventions with a campaign based on the human truth that beneath the surface we are more alike than we are different.
- Companies should be careful when making statements during times of social upheaval. Ensure your own house is in order before making statements that could be questioned.
- Stakeholders engage with brands they want to be around for the long term. Do they feel you are part of their story?
- Brands that incorporate storytelling into their company's strategy can be a profound vehicle for societal change.
  - It is important to embrace a human-centric approach when building trust amongst consumers.
  - Among younger generations, there is a higher expectation for businesses to use their resources and capital for societal change.
- Storytelling and Leadership
  - The motivation for storytelling should not be self-aggrandizement, but rather to create a brand vision that others can share. Purpose is what builds real passion, motivation, and buy-in for the stakeholders of any organization.
  - Leaders have the power to reimagine the mentality of a company and its outward-facing brand as not selling but serving its significant stakeholders. Leaders can focus on building an enduring, relevant brand, that is resilient for future.

## COMPANY EXAMPLES

- **Visa**
  - While primarily business-to-business (B2B), the company is ubiquitous, but invisible. The challenge for Visa was how do they tell stories that resonate with consumers and society?
  - The company does not start by thinking about how to sell products/services but rather how can the company solve a problem or fill the gaps in the global economy and financial services market. Visa addresses their strategy through the asking 1) what do people want, 2) what does the world need, and 3) what can Visa uniquely offer?
  - Visa's key to storytelling is finding stories that demonstrate how Visa's products and services fill a critical need in the world.
- **Nike**
  - Nike is a brand known for connecting consumers to their products through storytelling. The central message of their storytelling approach is to use of power of sports to unite and inspire people to act within their communities.
  - For example, in 2017, Nike launched their EQUALITY campaign. Nike used storytelling to encourage people to take the fairness and respect practiced in sports and translate them off the fields. This set Nike apart from other competing companies because it offered something more to today's athletes than just a pair of sneakers and branded workout clothing and equipment. Storytelling connected Nike with its audience and invited them to become a part of a collective

movement by wearing Nike products or engaging with their inspiring activism posts on social media.<sup>7,8</sup>

- **Microsoft Corporation**

- Microsoft's storytelling strategy is based on the four P's—people, places, process, and products. In each campaign, they aim to incorporate at least two of them.
- For example, when the Microsoft Kinect—a game control system—released in 2010, Microsoft featured the man who designed the hardware and took the audience into the shop where the Kinect was created and tested. This was deemed an effective use of storytelling because it gave consumers an in-depth look into creation of the Kinect and introduce them to the people who put their passion into their jobs, which formed a genuine connection between the product and consumer.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://marketinginsidergroup.com/content-marketing/6-examples-genius-brand-storytelling-see/#:~:text=Nike%20%E2%80%93%20Equality%20Campaign&text=This%20is%20an%20example%20of,the%20brand's%20always%20inspiring%20videos.>

<sup>8</sup> <https://news.nike.com/news/equality>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.t6oproductions.com/how-the-fortune-500-uses-corporate-storytelling/>