



1

The Simple Magic Of Storytelling

Heathrow, Terminal 5

In February 2019, I was sitting in Heathrow Airport, drinking a latte and feeling a little tearful. I had chosen an adventure that led to me getting ready to board a plane to Nashville, Tennessee, USA. Flying over 4,000 miles away on my own, I would be leaving my husband, two daughters and two dogs behind for a week.

As I sat watching the world go by, I posted on LinkedIn. No image. No video. Just a short post that started, 'Sitting in Heathrow Terminal 5, feeling a little tearful. It's a mix of emotions...'

By the time I got back a week later, that post had had over 17,000 views, ninety-four comments and several private messages. My invitations to connect on

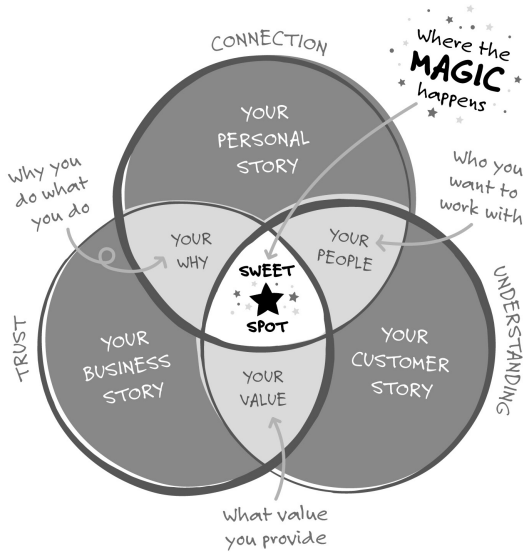
THE BUSINESS OF STORIES

LinkedIn had shot up, visits to my website had spiked and a flurry of people had downloaded my free guide (even though I hadn't mentioned it in my post). Several people had booked a call via my online scheduler to talk about working with me on my return.

What was the post that instigated all of that activity? I had shared how brave my little girl had been when I dropped her at school that morning, knowing she wouldn't see me for a week, and how I was feeling quite tearful from the mix of emotions – both nervous and super excited, all at the same time. It was short, but real and honest. I hadn't written it to win business, but I got clients from that one post.

Never underestimate the power of a story.

THE SIMPLE MAGIC OF STORYTELLING



All the stories

When I talk about storytelling, I'm not just referring to the 'one story'. You know, the one you've put on your 'About' page or tell at the beginning of every talk you do. I'm talking about *all* the stories.

Everything about your business is potentially a story: the way you do what you do; the project you're working on right now; the clients you're working with and the results they've had. All stories. You might not tell them all; some you might tell often, some you might only tell to certain audiences or in certain situations, and some you might tell once, but you have a million stories to choose from and you're creating new ones

every day. Please put aside the idea that you don't have stories, or that you're no good at telling them, or that no one is interested in them. That is simply not true.

Your stories are living breathing things. They're not static pieces of copy; they come in all shapes and sizes and can be conveyed in many ways. You get to choose which ones you want to share; the purpose of this book is to help you be more intentional, mindful and skilful at unpacking your stories, exploring the gold that lives within them, and deciding how and where you're going to share them so that they connect with your ideal client.

My own storytelling journey has been an exciting adventure. Everything I'm doing today – the business I now have, the clients I get to work with, the ambitious goals I've achieved, including writing these words and publishing this book – started with me taking a deep breath and telling my own story. A story that has had the inevitable ups and downs, successes and failures, happy times and hard times. But that's life, isn't it? We all experience highs and lows.

Back in 2015, when I first started sharing my story, my 'highs' included a beautiful daughter, who gave me a compelling reason to get up every morning and make every day count, and an exciting job in media. I worked in the press office at TV-am (anyone remember Anne

and Nick?) and later at Capital Radio, a station that was 'Number one in London by miles and miles' – or so the jingle went. I also worked with Chris Tarrant for many years, organised fundraising balls, dinners and other events in and around London, and attended premieres, opening nights and exclusive events, often with VIP and backstage passes.

But the 'lows' were an important part of my story too, including the guilt I felt at leaving my daughter with someone else while I commuted into central London to work. I gave my childminder a little book to write notes in each day, so I would know what they'd done, the funny things my daughter had said, what she'd eaten. But looking through that little book each night made me sad. I was reading about her life instead of being there, living it with her.

I became a single mum on my daughter's sixth birthday and then, for many years, suffered from chronic fatigue. One of my lowest moments was standing at the bottom of a flight of stairs in a cinema in Epsom, Surrey, crying because I didn't have the energy to walk up them to watch a film with my then ten-year-old.

Another was steadily building up a property portfolio to ensure I could provide the life I wanted for my daughter, only to find myself hundreds of thousands of pounds in debt when the property market crashed in 2007.

Being heard

There's a really important point I want to make before we move on. The impact telling my story has had on my business was not down to its content. I didn't have some humdinger of a tale that was fit for a Hollywood blockbuster. Far from it. It was just a story that, in some part, many of the 1,500-plus business owners I told it to back in 2015 related to.

Some were also single parents working hard to provide for their family. Some were business owners who'd burnt the midnight oil and, as a result, burnt out – like I had. Some were would-be entrepreneurs who'd invested in a business venture, only to find themselves heavily in debt or bankrupt.

Many simply related to the fact that we all accumulate bumps and bruises along the way. At times, life feels good and in flow, and at other times, it's bloody tough and stormy. Just as these people related to something in my story, others will relate to something in yours.

The difference my story made was down to what happened when I told it. I went from struggling to cut through the noise to being heard. I went from not knowing how to attract the people I wanted to work with to having ideal clients reach out to me. I went from being just another moderator of a group to being a real human with a story that connected with other humans, because something in it was meaningful to them.

One comment

It was 7pm on Thursday 26 May 2016 when I heard the comment that would completely change the trajectory of my business. I was at a monthly peer-to-peer mentoring session at my local university, and someone was saying they had been invited to do a talk – and they weren't sure what to talk about.

As usual, I was recounting what had happened to me when I told my story and commented that their own story would be a great subject for their talk. The business start-up manager, who was facilitating the session, agreed.

'Storytelling is so important,' he said. 'I've been thinking I'd like to add a new module to our business start-up course on that very topic.'

'Oh wow, that's brilliant,' I enthused. 'I'd love to hear that. Any chance I could come and sit at the back of the room for that one?'

He looked at me. 'Hmmm, well,' he said, 'I was kinda hoping you'd be at the front of the room – delivering it.' He laughed and carried on talking, but I never heard another word. To say a lightbulb had gone on in my head was an understatement. This was one of those jaw-dropping, stop-me-in-my-tracks, 'oh-my-God-did-he-just-say-what-I-think-he-said, could-this-actually-be-a-thing?' 'aha' moments.

I drove home from that meeting with a smile from ear to ear. How had I not seen this before? It was so obvious. This was it. I had finally found my thing. My

love of storytelling had started at a young age but, in that moment, it dawned on me that I could turn that love into a living.

From then on, everything fell into place ridiculously quickly. In the following *eight days*, a series of events played out so brilliantly, I managed to create a website, a brochure, a process and a talk, which I (nervously) delivered to forty entrepreneurs in London just over one week later.

From that first talk, I got six paying clients and The Business of Stories was born.

The perfect mix

As I write this book, several years later, the journey that unfolded from that day has brought me back full circle. For the first couple of years, my storytelling work focused on helping business owners tell their story; how their life experiences have shaped who they are today; the journey they've been on and the defining moments along the way.

Then in 2018, I came across a book called *Building a StoryBrand* by Donald Miller.¹ In it, he outlines a marketing framework that helps businesses focus their messaging on their customer story. I loved the

1 D Miller, *Building a StoryBrand: Clarify your message so customers will listen* (HarperCollins Leadership, 2017)

framework and immediately implemented it into the work I was already doing with my clients. In February 2019, I took a step further when I flew out to the USA and trained to be a StoryBrand Certified Guide.

As I worked with clients over the next few years, helping them to implement the StoryBrand framework into their business, I saw that there was another layer of storytelling that I could bring from my earlier work to help business owners see how and where their own story fits into their customer's story. Your customer story is super important and definitely one to tell, but there is a special place for your story too – as long as it's told in the right way, at the right time, to the right people. In fact, having the perfect mix of personal, business and customer story is an extremely powerful way to create a meaningful connection with your audience.

But let's not jump ahead of ourselves. First things first.

The storyteller's hat

Set yourself up for success by coming to this process with a sense of wonder and adventure. I love the idea Todd Herman talks about in *The Alter Ego Effect* of putting on the 'hat' and persona of the person you need to be to get a task done.²

2 T Herman, *The Alter Ego Effect: The power of secret identities to transform your life* (HarperBus, 2019)

Think about the qualities you need to tap into to become a great storyteller:

- **Curiosity.** Bring a sense of wonder with you. Be intrigued about what might come up. Don't dismiss anything too quickly, be judgemental or expect stories to arrive perfectly tied up in a bow, ready to be shared. Just be open to exploring them for gold.
- **Intuition.** Tune into which stories you feel compelled to share. Notice which ones speak to you and pop into your head or even your dreams. Follow your gut and intuition. Notice the stories that make you feel something. If they make *you* feel something, there's a good chance they'll make your audience feel something too.
- **Creativity.** Engage your creative brain. Even if you don't consider yourself a creative person, when it comes to storytelling, you are. You already tell stories all day long; I'm simply going to show you how to uncover the stories in your unique Circles of Storytelling Magic and get intentional about the ones you share in your marketing.
- **Enthusiasm.** Enjoy the journey. Bring your most positive energy. Going through this process shouldn't feel like a chore or a tick-box exercise; it's an adventure. This process is about reflecting on your journey and seeing how your stories align and connect with the people you want to engage with and do business with.

You already have all of these qualities in abundance. If you're up for bringing them to this work, I'll provide the 'how-to' steps and together we'll craft stories that will attract your ideal clients so that they show up, ready to buy from you.



Even the hardest of stories can be told in a way that inspires others.

I'm excited that you're here. We're about to embark on a wonderful journey together.



Storytelling magic

- You have a ton of stories and you are creating new ones every day. Everything you do is a story. I'm going to help you choose the right ones to share.
- Storytelling can help you cut through the noise and be heard above the crowd in a way that feels aligned and true to who you are and what you stand for.
- Approach this process with a sense of wonder and adventure. Be curious. If it helps, imagine putting on the 'hat' of a storyteller to help you fully engage and enjoy it.
- The perfect mix of personal, business and customer story is an extremely powerful way to create a meaningful connection with your audience.
- Storytelling is not just essential in business; it's a superpower.