

# The Write Word

## Copywriting and Editing Services



### **Skyword *Content Standard* Articles**

*Below are some articles I wrote for Skyword's flagship publication in 2017. They are offline now. These were original submissions, so they had some minor edits, but are very close to what was published.*

#### **How to Choose a Content Marketing Provider (Hint: You Can't Just Order Off a Menu)**

Jubilation! Your engineering team has made profound advances: the software that controls a communications chipset they've been working on for over a year will soon be ready for its debut. Desolation! You're the product marketing manager that can talk geek with the best of them, but you can't say a thing to your content marketing team—because you don't have one. You've got enough engineers to code a new parting of the Red Sea, but anyone to put winning sales words in place and the use the latest marketing technology to wing them out there? Not a soul.

Worse yet, and this one really stings: you hear that your biggest rival, Kinda Good Software, has just signed a bust-the-bank deal to sell their chipset software—software that pales next to yours—to a major phone manufacturer, and all the big business media are making major noise about it. So, when your phone lights up, you know it's the boss on the line. And when she says the company needs to hire one of those newfangled content marketing agencies, the ones who can supply your company with the words, the means and the metrics to get your tech in front of the right buying eyes, you're Googling before you hang up the phone.

Ahh, Google. Sometimes an embarrassment of riches is overwhelming, not clarifying. Your search for a content marketing provider gets you spilling cupboards of enterprise marketing agencies, marketing technology companies, boutique agencies and freelancers. Yikes! Maybe you should begin at the beginning, and clearly outline what your company needs in an agency before you fall into the arms of one who you won't love—and who won't love you in return.

### **Research, RFPs and the Sweet Smell of Success**

A recent Forbes report on agency choice declares that one of your initial interests has to be how much the company will familiarize themselves with your brand. [Forbes 2] After all, it's not just a one-and-done piece of software you're peddling here—these days, it's also your company's mission, perspective, and the whole of the customer conversation. As suggested, your new agency should have the chops to do some targeted market and competitive research too.

We're not suggesting you should be the neighborhood gossip, but it's a solid thought to research any agencies on your radar by contacting other clients of theirs to get the skinny on how they fattened their other clients' coffers. Check out the agency's case studies [CMI link] to see what strategic capabilities the provider has, and if they mesh with yours.

Once you winnow through your initial list, and have some top-level sense of what the company could offer, it's time to write up an RFP to send to your prospects to see if they have the right stuff. That RFP should include the usual suspects: your company's business model, customer targets/audience, content topics and goals (like leads or revenue or both), existing company content uses and placements, social media channels you socialize on, active marketing channels and the like.

While you're waiting for every one of those agencies to say they can deliver 200% on all of your needs (and send brownies at holiday time too), there are some other salient considerations for what agency might suit you best; one of them is *what counts as success?* [Forbes 3] That earlier Forbes piece goes into detail on you needing to know the goals of engaging with an agency. How will you calculate ROI, how will the data be supplied, and what will you do if the results aren't as promised? (Though we understand how good it feels, pouting isn't a solution.)

## **Putting a Ring on It**

Numbers are nifty, as suggested above, but don't forget the human side of the equation. There's no success if you grit your teeth every time you call an agency rep, or read one of their emails. No need that they become your BFFs, but behind many business successes are many cordial relationships. People who like to work with you go the extra mile and vice versa. Speaking of teamwork, take confidence in knowing that your chosen agency has a content team[[Digital agency network link](#)]. You don't want a single copywriter who doubles as the editor and also manages the marketing technology on his lunch break. The costs can be considerable for engaging an agency, and you want to be assured that your dough is going toward the work of a united squad of highly competent professionals with the moxie to move your assignments.

Speaking of that human side, some analysts have suggested that engaging a content marketing provider is like—gasp!—getting married. This association can be a long-term partnership[[Report Garden](#)] where understanding and cooperation is key to getting the best results. Your partner has to know your needs and expectation, and you theirs. So, a winning smile is only worth so much, if their marketing technology is based on Windows XP. (Oh, the “starter” marriage concept isn't advised here—don't test the waters with a mediocre candidate.) The Report Garden post is worth a long look, because it covers with admirable depth many concerns on digital marketing agency choice—be sure to read to the end before you sign the agency agreement.

And if the Report Garden piece is too lush of a garden to read, circle back to the Forbes piece for its bullet-list summary of simple questions[[Forbes 4](#)] to ask yourself before you engage a provider. Sure, there are plenty of details here that insist you think before you ink, but want to make sure your content marketing investment is going to bring in enough profit[[Skyword link](#)] so you can stock the company kitchen with enough Monster drinks so your engineers will code into eternity.

## **How Proper Talent Management Prevents CIOs and CMOs from Butting Heads**

In this corner, weighing in at 210 servers, with a wicked left jab of memory capacity and data dependencies, our CIO! In the other corner, weighing 190 analytics programs, with a crushing right hook of lead-generating earned media, our CMO! Which one of these worthy bruisers will win the attention (and the pursestrings) of their CEO, as our CMO tries to justify a bust-out budget to replenish a depleted marketing department? OK, maybe this sounds a tad dramatic (though perhaps you haven't been in enough boardroom brawls), but when you're working at the enterprise level, talent management is a rumble for skills and the dollars to pay for them.

That doesn't mean that if one department wins, another loses, but it sometimes happens.

The heads of tech and the heads of marketing have been known to butt those heads now and then, but it's clear from mom and pop shops up to the enterprise, creating a better customer experience—and more customers—is a mutual goal. Their approaches, of one providing customer value by ensuring all technologies and the user experience work together, and the other providing an appealing, outward-facing—and personal and empathetic—customer experience, aren't mutually exclusive. But today, they've become more deeply intertwined.

Indeed, A 2016 Forrester report suggested that tech management can be too slow to embrace change, and that they often remain too “inside-out” focused. From the report, IT departments need to become as customer-obsessed as the marketing department and “build the systems, processes, and technology that help your company win, serve, and retain customers. CIOs must let go of their tech-savvy mindset and focus on customer outcomes ... CMOs have to go beyond the customer experience.”

So, how do they play nice together? According to Forrester, by establishing new skills spanning both marketing and tech management. A few high-level suggestions from the report:

- **Focus tech investments on value creation throughout the customer life cycle**

- **Build strong analytics and machine-learning capabilities**
- **Establish a shared vision**
- **Focus dynamic, cross-role teams on customer outcomes**
- **Explore what each department can bring to the table.**

## **Marketing and Tech Dance a Delightful Duet**

We're getting the sense that forward-thinking CMOs and CIOs won't be throwing punches, but perhaps toasting each other with [spiked] punch. If our hero CMO has buy-in from both the CEO and the CIO on filling out needed marketing hires in ways that complement both the technology and customer-centric angles of company needs, how can he or she use talent management as a content strategy? What attributes should marketing personnel, spread across roles, have for modern digital marketing success?

Let's begin with the knowledge that numbers have more meaning than ever, for both marketers and tech-heads. And the software systems to extract that meaning are becoming more sophisticated and highly tuned. Thus, a fair percentage of your new-age marketers have to have analytics savvy. According to [Hubspot](#), there's going to be a shortage of 1.5 million data-savvy managers by 2018. Hire 'em if you got 'em in your sights. And that graphic tells it loud: new marketing hires will require technical skills.

[Quicksprout is quick to tell us](#): SEO is still a thing, and the way it is continually evolving, your new hire needs to have the tech chops to be on top of its changing algorithms and the best practices in the SEO trade. (Oh, it looks like it's good to have a PPC specialist in the mix too.)

And this might sound like another order off the specials menu, but [Mashable is persuading us](#) that new digital hires with social media advertising skills can boost a marketing department's bang. Whether it's Facebook or some similar media heavyweight, hires that can handle ad creation, testing and analytics in those platforms will put companies high up on those platform heels.

## **Going Soft Isn't a Bad Thing Either**

Yes, the evidence is compelling that tying tech into marketing makes bigger marketing muscles, but when you are looking to strengthen your marketing team, you've got to be holistic too: "soft" skills count. Numbers are nothing unless you have your human beings cooperatively and collectively discussing them—and implementing their impacts in approachable and accessible customer-facing programs. Talent management on the "approachable" side encompasses [the so-called soft skills](#) of communication, empathy, patience and adaptability. Data doesn't tell stories: people do.

Speaking of storytelling, your marketing engine will stall out altogether if you don't have skillful storytellers on your staff. Storytelling is such an obvious content strategy these days that declaring it seems like a big "duh," but we must: no less a titan than Forbes [listed content marketing](#) at the top of list of must-have marketing skills for 2016 and beyond. And you can't have content marketing without content copywriters telling your stories.

[This TOPO post](#) emphasizes the sway of storytelling as well, and puts in a big vote for marketers who can create remarkable customer experiences on every corner (and in every cranny) of the channel. As Star Trek's Captain Picard use to say: "Engage!"

### **Seek Marketing Moxie**

As great as it is to have a laser-focused specialist, like someone who can run personalization programs like Hera on Mount Olympus, it's a dandy trick as well to seek hires that have multipurpose marketing moxie: there are people who have great communications skills melded with strong analytic abilities—dip deeply with your dowsing wands to find them. (As an aside, there don't need to be too many chiefs: as [this MarketingProfs piece](#) spells it out, you don't need a Chief Content Officer, just good content marketing.)

And let's underscore what we began with here: Cooperation among the C-People. Forrester saw in their surveys that "CMOs and CIOs still don't come to the table with an open mind to build a joint strategy. To close the gap, IT must ramp up its marketing chops to understand marketing. In return, marketing must clearly outline its priorities, link them to business results, and then communicate those needs to IT." It's spelled out succinctly here in another Forrester report title: *The CMO And CIO Must Accelerate On Their Path To Better Collaboration*.

And then we will have peace in the valley, better sunsets, and happier customers.

## How to Properly Diagnose a Failed Email Campaign

As Mark Twain said after his latest marketing promotion: “The reports of the death of the email campaign are greatly exaggerated.” As any marketing maven knows, email lives with a vengeance, and remains one of the biggest hammers in any marketer’s toolbox.

But bad email campaigns are death warmed over: email done wrong does your promos and your products a lethal turn. However, with a few thoughtful tweaks, your email promos can rocket your marketing to satellite heights. Let’s look at the good and bad of email marketing.

Consider this scenario: You’re the VP of marketing for an SMB company that sells some kind of luxury good online. The company is doing OK, and you’ve been trying for a while to ramp up sales, but the cash registers are silent as the tomb. You’ve tried a number of email angles: FOMO on moving on up, funny videos with cats wearing your fancy togs, positioning the products as the ultimate lifestyle enhancers, lots of shots and videos of gleeful people living large with your stuff.

Nada.

But what if it’s not the products that are flat-lining, but the way you use email? Because there are some clear ways NOT to do an email campaign—at least, clear ways to do one wrong. First up: Lists

### **Making a List (But Not Checking It Twice)**

If you have a customer list that you’ve grown over time, filled with active subscribers, and relevant to your target market, excellent! If you have a list that you purchased or rented, a “one size fits none” bulk address dump, filled with zombie AOL names from 1996, and mostly people who are coupon-clippers mouth-breathing for store sales (not that there’s anything wrong with that), you are hosed.

Whether you are using a purchased list to supplement an existing list, or you are buying it whole cloth from which to weave your marketing magic, you will suck the air out of your email campaigns quicker than a flash fire. Purchased lists are [random, irrelevant to your market, often filled with dead addresses](#), and can bring down the anti-spam cops on your precious head.



You can do better. Build your list organically, with appealing opt-in forms, product giveaways that require sign-up, landing pages that promote fun newsletters with signing up—there are lots of approaches. Buying a list is buying stale food: no sales nutrition there.

### **Segment and Conquer**

But let's say you have a decent list. The best way to win the war is to shoot all of your cannons in every direction, right. No! If twenty percent of your customers only buy those mink socks, they shouldn't get the email blast pushing \$4,000 coffeemakers. You know how a bulls-eye target is, right? There is that center sweet spot and then all of those outside, wide circles. Your content strategy has to target your lists to their bulls-eye, and to do that, you must segment.

Your sock customers want to get notices about socks, and perhaps for high-end footwear. And your male sock wearers (probably) don't want ads for pearl-laden pantyhose, and your 75-year-old sock wearers (probably) don't want promos for fishnets. Segmentation takes care of that, [serving up content that people—individuals—care about](#). Group your customer addresses by their purchase histories and your emails will have more zing.

You can segment with a conversion vengeance by using some A/B testing so you can offer unique, focused content to targeted segments. [<https://www.skyword.com/contentstandard/marketing/6-tips-to-increase-your-email-marketing-roi/>] Customers will appreciate that you seem to precisely anticipate what they are looking for next—and you can bask in your sales genius. (By the way, the opposite of genius is when the software tools you use to collect, sort and categorize your address list sends out emails addressed to “Andrea” when the customer's name is “Adam.” You and your tools need to know the Adams from the Andreas.)

Speaking of Adams, Adam Vavrek, Director of Marketing Operations at Skyword said that one of the most successful email campaigns of the year involved getting more readers for the highly nutritious content of this very Content Standard. The reason for the success? Personalized content recommendations in the mailings <https://www.skyword.com/content-marketing-software/personalized-content>, A/B tested against a control without them. A 5X increased-subscriber victory!

## **Subjecting Customers to Bad Subject Lines**

Your email's subject line can swing a welcoming door wide, or slam it in your prospect's face. There are myriad ways you can botch a subject line: you can be vague, deceptive, [<http://www.iko-system.com/blog/cold-calling-2/do-you-take-part-in-the-7-worst-practices-in-cold-email/>] even insulting. Many times content marketers love the sound of their own voices (guilty here), and make their subject lines from puns, or literary metaphors, or pull some of the latest lingo from the Urban Dictionary to make the subject scene sound hip, man. This can often backfire.

Clarity is good in so many things: so it is in subject lines as well. Of course you can still give the line some character, some verve, some life—you do want your customers to jump on the mail. But don't get too cute. Or perhaps even worse, send out mailings with a draft subject line or some random code. [<https://www.act-on.com/blog/7-classic-email-marketing-mistakes-and-how-to-avoid-them/>] Yikes.

## **Let's Take This Specimen to the Lab for Analysis**

Perhaps you breathe a sigh of relief after you've sent out all campaign mails—to an active, segmented list, with great subject lines—and think it's time for lunch. No, it's time for more coffee! You want to find which messages bounced, which were delivered, who opened them (and when), what links were clicked, what content downloaded, what sites visited (and when), who put goods in the cart, who purchased what. And those are just some of the highlights.

You won't know how well your mailings have performed without digging into the data. Data digging is a distinct content strategy, and dig results should shape email campaigns to come. The last few years have brought shiny new marketing technology to the forefront, and a good analytics program should be part of your arsenal. Here at Skyword, we use a Marketo marketing automation tool [<http://www.skyword.com/skyword-launches-marketo-integration-part-latest-skyword-marketing-automation-solution/>] to dissect leads and also put content into our email editor.

## **Content Can't Be Cotton Candy**

Speaking of content, we won't waltz around a significant email content strategy: the content has to be good! If your sales pitches are boring [

frighteningly-common-email-marketing-blunders-to-avoid-like-tainted-halloween-candy/], confusing, misleading or just plain lame, no matter how spiffy your cashmere, no one's going to spend any cash on it.

This is the era of great storytelling. Cook the meat of your emails so your clients can smell the spices, lust for the sauce. (And if they are vegetarians, segment to match.) Stories are indeed the food of modern marketing[<https://www.skyword.com/contentstandard/marketing/at-visionary-companies-storytelling-runs-deep/>][—](https://www.skyword.com/contentstandard/marketing/at-visionary-companies-storytelling-runs-deep/)feed your customers and prospects the good stuff and they will hunger for more.

Making the most of your email marketing can be tricky, but great galloping gallimaufries, when it's done well, everybody wins.

And now you can have lunch.

## Does Native Advertising Work?

“Look, you’re going to love this piece! No more smashing your customers in the face with ad hammers. Instead, I write an inspirational article about the cutting-edge value of contemporary widgets, and throw in some stuff about hipsters using them now too. We put your logo and a subtle ‘sponsored by’ message in the corner, and I send it out to Forbes, Atlantic, BuzzFeed—hey, this native advertising thing is the real deal!”

If you’re the CMO of Willy Wonka Widgets, and you’ve never ventured into the brave newish world of native advertising, you might take a big swing at that pitch. After all, the dentist’s drill of interruption advertising is a pain of diminishing returns. Native advertising is one of content marketing’s cousins: it carries the sense that you win over a customer these days by reaching out—gently—with wise counsel, objective information, and the invitation to an ongoing conversation.

What better way to chat than to tell a story, and then softly nudge potential clients in the storyteller’s direction—that is, toward your product?

In a time when important demographics (whisper: *millennials*) are using ad blockers and regularly zoom to YouTube to see what their favorite influencers are wearing, drinking or riding, traditional ads aren’t considered a content strategy. Native ads, usually placed in publications that are highly regarded (or at least highly visited) don’t head-butt consumers with BUY ME! battering. Instead, they can [explore ideas, engage emotions and win over defenses](#).

## Going Native

Maybe it is time to dip your toes (or even a leg) into the native pond. If you’ve already got an agency on retainer, you could consider them for copywriting and placement. Or maybe you’ve got sparkly copywriters in-house, and a marketing team with some savvy. Probably the most critical thing is not to go native willy-nilly—[you need to have a plan](#).

At the very least, you have to do your homework in targeting an audience, allocating enough budget and time to try some variations in how you sponsor content, and of course, make that content interesting, helpful and credible. They don’t call this a content strategy without some *strategy*.

As this Business.com article points out, [a good native ad is an ad, but it doesn’t read like one](#). A juicy one is both suitable to your audience and expressive of your company’s perspective, whether the topic is widgets or whales. But an

infomercial does not a native ad make. Many firms will use social media, such as Facebook and Twitter feeds, to slip in their sponsored content. Going further, because mobile goes everywhere, Facebook provides guidelines and development tools for [inserting native ads in mobile apps](#).

## **Nothing Up My Sleeve**

One of the loudest consumer (and analyst) cries when native advertising first started appearing a few years ago was that it was deceptive. Here were companies smuggling in Trojan Horse content: what looked like an objective article turned out to be a paid promotion. Many of the earlier polls on native ads suggested that once consumers realized that a post or an article had an understated sales slant, they didn't trust it. And didn't trust the company behind it.

Tweakage occurred. Much—[though not all](#)—native material is more clearly transparent to the reader as to its origins, and more publications issued guidelines on how native ads are served up and labeled. It's up to you to make it clear your relevant content doesn't come with a mask. When your widget wizards give us a clear look at who's behind the screen, the serious pressure is on you to make what's on the screen worth looking at.

And *are* people looking? Some industry analysts say that native advertising, [particularly on mobile](#), is a clear winner for eyeballs and sustained attention. But as that Content Insights article also suggests, the one-to-one connection between eyeballs and conversions is sketchy. "Just looking" isn't a helpful response for widget vendors hoping to keep the lights on. Your native ad tracking should be sophisticated enough to see if the cash registers are ringing.

## **When In Rome ...**

Good native ads are of a piece with the place where they're positioned. When [Netflix ran an ad](#) in the *New York Times* for "Orange Is the New Black," it was a news-oriented piece that examined women's prison issues that complemented the show's content. Translation: You have to properly dress your ad for its surroundings. No fake news! Rather, a piece of content strategy. One that's predicted to be worth [\\$8.8 billion](#) in 2018.

So, you can see that native advertising is a bit of a mixed bag. But it could be a bag that you want to include in your shopping. When your content is strong, relevant to your product, the ad placement is in the content family of the

publication, and you have some decent analytics in place to see if the conversion dance is happening, you're golden.

### **Native: Just One Step of Many**

Native ads are clearly a step up from old school, in-your-face hard-sell. They do incorporate the [storytelling component](#) of modern marketing, and if your widget tales can be woven into a persuasive piece of promotional poetry, you should add native to your marketing toolbox.

But it's unlikely you're going to make total bank on your native ads. They could be a sound addition to your overall content strategy, but the strongest marketing measures use a multitude of tactics—serve up your widgets with a variety of sales sauces, and there will be more partaking at the table.

## Movies in Your Customer's Minds: Video Marketing Trends, Take 10

I won't do it. I won't look at the kitten-riding-a-tricycle video. Nope, not gonna. OK, just a peek. Wow, look at that! That's hilarious! OK, I'm a sucker for kitty viddies, but there are [millions of open eyeballs](#) now blinking for good content—content that sells product or promotes a brand in immersive, engaging ways. As marketing trends go, video marketing is, in the word of a famous tweeter, YUUUGE!

If you're a marketing exec at any enterprise-level firm, you probably already know that video marketing is a scorching marketing trend. If you're that same exec that's only dabbled in video for your firm, you'll know that your lost sales are the thing that's getting torched.

Now that video—even live video—is on [phones, tablets, in cars and planes](#) (and yes, the implants will come), it's hard to escape. And most people don't want to. Just to bolster your C-suite pitch that your company needs to dial up the dollars for video, let's visit 10 compelling reasons why investing in video marketing is a strong bet for 2017 margins. And this is hard data peddling that tricycle, not some flying furball.

### 1: Video, by a Landslide!

Some pundits predict that within just a couple of years, [80 percent of online content](#) will be video. As all proof necessitates pudding, let's serve up some video that talks about the conversion power of all that video:

```
<iframe width='640' height='480' frameborder='0' allowfullscreen
src='//player.ooyala.com/static/v4/stable/4.10.6/skin-
plugin/iframe.html?ec=5rMzJkNDE6wmC2uVBt8erPaYGrWQWDOH&pbid=66
6a390a01504fe788e591c9f3b38f40&pcode=doaGYyOgPxs9v2vPKkXMppUT
psU'></iframe>
```

And just to get chatty, Snapchat has a mere [10 billion daily video views](#). If video isn't a marketing trend, I'm a tricycle-riding kitten. And let's not say that Instagram stole Snapchat's idea, let's just say that their [Instagram Stories](#) are a homage.

### 2: Video Consumers Clean Their Plates

In a 2016 Hubspot survey, users said their overall content consumption was up. But the [content they consumed most thoroughly](#): video. We all want to see

the end of the movie. Forbes asserted that [65% of video viewers visited a vendor's website](#) after watching a video. As far as marketing trends go, that's a mother.

### **3: Once They Land, Capture Them!**

We all know that people, like fruit flies, can be a bit fickle regarding their attention spans. Savvy marketers are now pinning them to their seats right when they arrive. [Landing page videos](#) are proving a captivating way to hold tight to a potential customer right at the site door.

### **4: YouTube: The Walter Cronkite of Video**

Yeah, maybe you have no clue who Walter Cronkite was. Way before the advent of fake news, Walter, from his post at CBS News, was known as the "most trusted man in America." Apparently YouTube has assumed that position among today's youth: 4 in 10 millennials said [they only trust YouTube](#) for causes they care about.

### **5: Better Start Filming Your Company's Blog, and Make It Live**

Your brand might be pulled up by its britches by this one: [80% would rather watch live video from a brand than read a blog](#), and 82% prefer live video from a brand to social posts, according to Livestream.

### **6: Get It Said in 3 Seconds. Or Maybe 30 Minutes**

There's some evidence that getting your message (or at least a brand experience) across is necessary in the [first three seconds of the video](#). That may make you think of the voiceover in medication commercials that at commercial end lists every wicked side effect in a maniacally fast voice that's amped out of its lungs. But perhaps images work more smoothly in the mind.

Luckily for those videos just getting their throats cleared in three seconds, there's [some countervailing evidence](#) that long-form videos have a 95% completion rate (and that live video pumps high numbers too). We do hope that there's no evidence that the long-form videos are actually putting people to sleep and they are no longer conscious behind the keyboard while their IP address sings merrily along.

### **7: Put Your Money on Social**



Facebook is the mack daddy of [social ad spending](#), and for good reason: those gazillions of eyeballs like to share what they are eyeballing, and what better way to share than on a social network? Twitter's playing in this playground as well, and with live video streaming a thing, more and more networks are going to host brand-built movies.

### **8: Where Did Pokémon Go?**

Audiences, oh fickle beasts, can jump on something. And then wander off. There are still plenty of people playing Pokémon Go, but the initial excitement has dampened. So when you place your videos, you want that place to have staying power. Or growing power. Just [one year into Periscope live broadcasts](#), the format had 200 million videos and 110 years of video watched *every day* on iOS and Android.

That's a growth pattern that parallels how the Macarena zoomed through social circles. What's the Macarena? Oh, never mind.

### **9: Spreading the Love**

People do like to share, and not only about their Tinder swiping—sending videos amongst the peers is definitely hot among marketing trends. Some 2016 Twitter statistics bear this out: [Videos are 6X more likely to be retweeted](#) than photos and 3X more likely than GIFs. This is video marketing moving on its earned-media momentum, rather than having a huffing and puffing marketer moving it along.

### **10: Millennials at the Movies**

Not to make it all about the millennials, but they are a desirable demographic. And what do *they* desire? Well, among many things, movies, apparently. What's in it for video marketing teams? [80 percent of millennials consider video content when researching a purchase decision](#). Who's paying for the popcorn?

And if you want a headstart on video production basics, [we've got you covered](#).

Sorry, gotta go: I hear there's a new cat-driving-a-Tesla video. Can't miss it.

## **Not Your Dad's Content Marketing Trends—But Maybe Your Great (x5000) Granddad's**

Nailing down marketing trends is targeting something that's ever-moving. One day's list might be topped with a push for big (and bigger yet) data, the next insisting that more personalization is the thing, while another declares that inbound, top-of-funnel crusades pave the road to conversion nirvana. Whatever the content du jour, narrowband hit-and-run tactics aren't definitive enough for C-level execs that often need to map out blue-sky content strategies—ones with staying power.

That's why we're looking here to survey the kind of marketing trends for 2017 that have operational components—things that industry leaders are drafting into their master plans. And just to make you wonder whether we're going to say Windows 95 is back as well, let's start out with one of the granddaddies: email.

### **This Isn't Your Dad's Email**

Email—it will not die! With all the whiz-bang connectivity apps (and their advertising) burning consumers' smartphone batteries these days, it seems ludicrous to claim that email is still one of the kings of content strategy. Yet, the inbox remains a sacred space—it's the Rip Van Winkle of marketing trends.

The table-busting wealth of internet distractions finds consumers clicking then vaporizing in a nanosecond; in comparison, their inboxes are calm confines of sweet repose, where your message—if sticky enough—might make its way to top of mind. Joe Pulizzi of the Content Marketing Institute cites an [email renaissance](#) swelling subscription numbers at places like BuzzFeed and the Washington Post.

He specifically cites targeted email newsletters as an audience-growing trend. Both Sumo [Stories](#) and MailChimp's [What's In Store](#) newsletter are good examples of companies expressing the basics of their brand—often using video and good graphics—with good humor and worthy information.

### **Ooh, Look—Pretty Pictures!**

Video, video and more video moved in the minds (and came out of the mouths) of industry pundits as one of the huge marketing trends of 2016—

and it ain't going away. Creatively composed imagery, as any moviegoer knows, has a way of slipping behind your rational mind and grabbing your gut. And these days, you don't need a hushed audience and a darkened auditorium to reach your clients with video—as Facebook Live has shown, the right movie messages on their phones can equally tingle their spines.

The impact of video [on conversion and engagement](#) suggests that it's a tool with persuasive power, and that millennial viewers are particularly hungry audiences. But soul-grabbing video content isn't usually the result of a tossed-off iPhone capture. Producing solid and inviting video messages takes [considerable skill and resource allocation](#)—with more companies investing time in recording and production, the bar has been upped. [Many companies](#) have YouTube channels with sophisticated video products, but with its [Planet of the Apps](#) show, Apple is even getting into original programming to expand its brand offerings.

And if you want to see companies dancing on the film edge (but sticking, because of their comic charm) check out this [First Moon Party](#) video for the “Period Starter Kit” from HelloFlo or perhaps the *50 Shades of Grey*-inspired [Burger King Valentine](#). These aren't your dad's videos either.

### **Peddling Influence**

Instead of scrambling with scattered promotions, ads, deep campaigns or other measures to gain the attention of rapt followers, why not just piggyback on some company or person who already has a fervent following? Influencer marketing is a burgeoning content strategy with considerable sales charge, [as these stats indicate](#).

As this [Inc. article](#) suggests, “... the potential customers you're looking to attract would prefer to hear *about* you, not from you.” Markets are often better served by some glittery outsider singing your product praises rather than you—even if it's clear you're paying a pretty penny for that praise. As another Inc. piece states: [you're paying for trust](#).

However, when that trust is lost, the influence can go bust, and with it your shiny association. Witness the recent debacle with the wildly popular YouTube star, PewDiePie, whose YouTube Premium channel [was just shut down](#) because of Pew's anti-semitic content. When the reporting of the vile content became news, Disney's Maker Network ended its association with the

channel. Bigoted content is poor optics for Disney, or for most other companies.

### **Tell Me a Story**

Hmm, this “what’s old is new” thing might be a theme (or better yet, a marketing trend). Going back a [mere 40,000 years or so](#), someone stenciled some images of human hands on a wall. Someone was telling a story, trying to connect. The group probably worked it up around the campfire as well. Lots of evidence suggests that we are hardwired for stories: tales of courage, lust, conflict, loss, good and evil—we gobble them up. And many companies are [turning to storytelling](#) as a key 2017 content strategy.

A well-told story is a beguiling thing—and if you can integrate your company’s story into a creative, richly told tale, one with emotional resonance, audiences will lean in. Procter and Gamble’s [Thank You Mom](#) campaign hit the right notes. Dos Equis’ Most Interesting Man in the World promotions continued to amuse (and reinforce the brand), even when the original concept became a near cliché.

If you [invite people into the story](#), rather than hammer them over the head with it, you lull defenses and cultivate receptivity to a product or a message. Storytelling has a good shot at being a [content strategy](#) for the next 40,000 years, so start sprucing up your cave paintings.

### **I Like My Reality on the Virtual Side**

Virtual reality has been talked about in bug-eyed tones as “the next biggest thing” for what seems to be as long as the use of 3D glasses in the movies. Wasn’t that during Eisenhower’s term? Facebook’s purchase—not without some fiscal hitches—of Oculus Rift a couple of years back seemed to ensure the legitimacy of the experiential technology, but its true adoption has only been seen in fits and starts. But 2017 should nail it one of the true marketing trends. Maybe.

Not that some analysts don’t see big bucks—[\\$22 billion, anyone?](#)—in the near future. Google’s release of its Daydream headset is pushing what seemed like a stalled momentum, and some brands, like [Jaguar, Volvo, and the New York Times](#) have made forays into VR programming where the user can, for instance, take a test drive using their phones as the base display for the VR headset.

One issue is that the hardware (like the Oculus and the HTC Vive) that supplies the truly immersive experiences [is expensive](#). I ran through a number of the supplied programs on a Samsung Gear headset this past Christmas and though the experience was interesting, the video quality was just fair, though the illusion of depth and spatial experience did give some thrills. But I soon tired of the headset feel, even though it was only modestly bulky. However, this Inc. piece suggests that 2017 will be the year that the [VR experience is normalized](#).

Trends come and go, but some examples, like those cave paintings are forever, or nearly so. The tools to tell your stories might change, but the fundamentals apply: the stories have to be good. Aim high.

## **Marketing Music to Millennials Takes Social Media Savvy**

There's danger in trying to categorize and market to a group, but to an entire generation? Beware. People's personalities don't fit between the lines in spreadsheets. That's why effective millennial marketing is tricky, especially considering this generation tends to distrust advertising. But millennials make up [25 percent of the U.S. population](#), so the savvy ticket seller needs to be in the game. For effective millennial marketing, the game centers around live music.

### **Out With the Old, in With the New**

Even in a period of limited discretionary income, ticket sales for big music events like Coachella or Outside Lands are impressive, as well as for individual artists like Jay-Z and Lorde. But you can't rely on blaring billboards and ads in dying newspapers to put concert consciousness in front of millennials. For effective millennial marketing, you have to live where they live: in social media.

But that doesn't mean setting up a static Facebook page with a banner-based front end. For the generation for whom texting is like breathing, putting a brand front and center is asking to be ignored. Millennials are a two-way communication crowd, and sharing with friends is in their blood. What do ticket sellers have to share to be shared alike?

### **Doing Good for Good Returns**

One way is to partner with or partially sponsor environmentally or socially conscious organizations and entities. You need to be cautious about controversial political alignments, but if your own values are in tune with those of progressive organizations that are backers of the artists or events, being part of their focused social media campaigns can position you favorably.

Maybe there's a local recycling organization with a large booth at the venue, perhaps a local craft beer, maybe a raffle for a Prius—with millennials, there's favor in having your brand positioned with brands demonstrating social good. If you have onsite ticket sales, your promotional materials should link you to these partnerships/sponsorships. But of course, they can't be a cynical ploy—these have to be causes that your organization legitimately associates itself with.

Speaking about local, what about a trying a partnership with new transportation companies like Lyft and Uber before major music events? Perhaps where you display a thoughtful ticket-buy promo in the most-trafficked vehicles? Lyft and Uber are popular in the young urban crowd, less interested in auto ownership in big cities—tie-ins there are promising. Don't forget that some music apps and gaming apps accept advertising.

### **There's a Human Being in Your Twitter Stream**

Of course you need some direct social media voice, since [huge percentages of millennials participate on social networks](#), but your Twitter stream can't just be "Buy tickets for (band) on (date)." Search the most popular hashtags for artists and events, see which Twitter accounts get high volumes of retweets from those tags, and retweet those tweets that are relevant to your sales to start conversations. Link to the Twitter accounts of performers, tweet about their upcoming concerts where you have a stake. Send out Instagram or Snapchat images of their prior performances, without making a direct sales pitch, just messaging about upcoming events.

Of course, on your own Facebook page or Twitter feed, you have to be a human being. Make all fees clear up front, respond promptly to complaints, show a sense of humor—be real. Being real is essential for effective millennial marketing.

YouTube is a mecca for music fans, and the world's second largest search engine. Because good "raw" videos get as much traffic as polished ones, you could make some humorous films about the ticket-buying experience, without huge overhead. Link from your site to the films, and from Twitter and Facebook to them, with sharing buttons enabled for all the major networks.

### **Doing the Right Thing, for Connections *and* Sales**

Contests, bundles, and/or giveaways that connect with young people on an emotional level are promising. Perhaps one ticketholder wins the chance to take a selfie of him or herself backstage? Or the ticket buyer who submits a YouTube video of the most interesting way they obtained the money to pay for the tickets wins tickets for their friends? Those kinds of contests have a chance to go viral for popular events.

Don't forget the tickets themselves. Do you use a percentage of recyclable

materials? Spell that out on the ticket. Do you have an option for print-at-home tickets? Printed mentions of any of those socially conscious concert-day tie-ins should be spelled out, too.

Keep in mind that millennials are good with things that are expressive of their values, that are intimate, high energy, that connect emotionally. They are happy to share information that doesn't seem fake, overblown or ethically suspect. Do the right thing with social media—which can take some time to fine-tune—and you should see results.



## **Made in America: Brand Boon or Brand Burden?**

Made in America: A rallying cry, a blunt instrument, a razor that might cut both ways. Our new president stoked the flames of the faithful with his “Make America Great Again” mantra, promising to return American manufacturing to heights unseen in two generations and to stock shelves with products that shine with their red, white, and blue provenance.

But there’s the noise of a simple slogan, and then there’s the reality of the marketplace. Today’s supply chains girdle the globe, complicating most mainstream manufacturers’ ability to say that their goods have 100 percent American DNA. And for those companies that do all their work within U.S. boundaries, would they want any association with an administration that seems to be floundering, if not toxic? You can’t ride on coattails that are tearing.

More directly: Do the bulk of consumers even *care* if something is made in the U.S.? If you’re a CMO of a company that makes goods here (or, as in the complication above, use some imported goods as part of your process), is it patriotic shine or bottom line that makes the difference? Where does country merge with content strategy?

### **Throw Some Shade on Where It’s Made**

First, let’s consider that “Made in America” can be a slippery concept. American car companies do have manufacturing plants here, but they source parts from all over the world. For example, Mexico is a major supplier of auto parts, which sometimes cross the border more than once, in different forms, before they are bolted into your dad’s Buick.

One challenge for big companies is that the U.S. doesn’t have a thriving matrix of large factories that are readily available overseas: they simply can’t fulfill orders in the thousands—or hundreds of thousands—of pieces. And interestingly, as this [AOL Finance article](#) points out, the majority of workers in many American factories are immigrants, which has a touch of the ironic about it. However, this [New York Times](#) piece makes clear that for some manufacturers of narrow-market luxury goods, making merchandise at home, while challenging, can have profitable (and even psychological upsides)—politics aside.

That bespoke American goods cachet also has another home-grown component: technology. Most economists are pessimistic that American factories will even remotely resemble the scale of yesterday, but today's tech is enabling a host of manufacturing startups. This [Fast Company piece details](#) the thriving garment manufacturing hub in Los Angeles making use of data analytics to sell goods through real-time demand and reduced inventory. Also, check out the article's info on vertically integrated supply chains that control "everything from the factory to the distribution." Efficiency is always a content strategy.

The profiles of luxury eyeglass and watch manufacturers in the same article reinforce "new manufacturing" on domestic shores: leaner, smaller scale and customized. None of the several business leaders in the piece are avowedly Trumpish in their made in the USA pride; to the contrary, they expressed alarm over the proposed border tax, and over the potentials for their employees to have immigration issues because of new laws.

### **Patriotism vs Profits—a False Dichotomy?**

There's a [Made in America Movement](#) online that claims 440,000 members and has a page with links to goods and services provided by vetted companies claiming to make their products solely in America. However, investigating some of the categories reveals thin company: clicking on "Automotive" reveals a single company in the category, specializing in truck bedliners.

A [Brand Keys survey](#) of iconic (and patriotic) American brands has Jeep, Coca-Cola and Levi Strauss among the top, as they all were 15 years ago. Yet all of those companies have investments and production and distribution facilities overseas, so patriotism and profits, on examination, might be an uneasy mix.

Some brands like Under Armour are [experimenting on a small scale](#) with an America-made play, testing their processes and their pricing to see if the appeal has legs. Legs the colors of dollars, that is. Conversely, other fashion brands are [getting some pushback](#) from consumers because of associations with Trump's USA thrust, no matter how uninterested the companies are in politics. Again, a made in the USA content strategy might cut both ways.

Pricing seems to interest consumers more than patriotism, as several surveys suggest. [This CNN piece](#) (fake news!) explores how consumers are on the

lookout for a deal rather than Old Glory when they shop. The same conclusion was reached in an [Associated Press poll](#) detailed in this *Chicago Tribune* piece.

### **Made in the USA: “It’s Complicated”**

Even venerable stars-and-stripes flying brands like Harley-Davidson might be accused of some taint, because although every bike is assembled on these shores, they contract out for parts made all over the world. Another American institution, L.L. Bean, indeed still makes a variety of goods out of their Maine factory, but they now contract with overseas vendors as well. They have a “Made in America” section on their site, which subtly informs that some goods aren’t.

If you’re way out West, you might not be aware that America’s biggest—and oldest—craft brewer is Yuengling (1829), and their water, hops and yeast do come from the Old Sod on this side of the pond, though some big boys like Budweiser, who sport Americana themes coast to coast, are owned by foreign conglomerates (in this case, the Belgian company InBev). Even a hallowed American brand like Jim Beam (1795) sails some of its ships far from these shores, being owned by a subsidiary of Japan’s Suntory.

So, there’s the American image, there are manufacturing and supply chain facts, there are consumer inclinations that tilt one way and then another—and there’s a vast gray area of what it means to be American made—and if it really matters all that much anyway. In the meantime, while legislative bodies in Congress rant and posture, there are some small newish American companies like Shinola <https://www.shinola.com> out of Detroit, making highly regarded watches and bikes, and having a positive impact in their communities. They have made a declared commitment to American manufacturing and hiring. Yet, they source some of their parts from overseas. That’s not un-American, is it?

## **Wired for Story: Empathy and the New Brand Storytelling with Tom Gerace**

Stories are food. You can make a reasonable argument that stories are a human nutritional requirement, of an emotional/developmental type: food for the brain. We share collective stories in our social structures and in personal ones within our consciousness: all influence our motivations, actions and reflections. In the business world, brand storytelling is now close to a movement, rooted in customer empathy and connection.

Tom Gerace, Skyword's founder and CEO, is going to speak at Forward 2017 <http://www.skyword.com/forward/> on empathy and brand storytelling. He's going to co-teach workshops for marketers on Storynomics, along with Robert McKee, legendary teacher, seminar host and author. Gerace took some time away from his seminar prep to share his thoughts on the power of storytelling.

Q: Setting aside business aspects for the moment, can you think of when you were first struck in your own life by the power of storytelling?

Tom Gerace: "I think that we all experience it all of our lives. We are in fact wired for story. Story is the form in which we experience and record the world, and it's the form in which we forecast the world and make decisions. So, the brain is really a storytelling and story consuming machine. I think that story has been with me since birth, as it has been for all of us."

Gerace experienced one of his first direct "aha" moments about storytelling not long after he'd turned 30. He'd co-written a screenplay and proudly sent it to a friend, one of the producers of the movie Airplane. The producer told him to take one of Robert McKee's story seminars, and only then did Gerace understand that he wasn't exactly being encouraged about the power of his screenplay.

"After I saw McKee, I thought the producer's suggestion was the gentlest and yet most severe rejection I've ever received. Because McKee's seminar really did two things for me: It helped me understand the power of the craft of storytelling when it is done well, and at the same time, helped me understand just how poorly at the time I was doing it or we were doing it. That stuck with me and really played a role in my business life ever since, and in my personal life, no doubt."

Q: How did those McKee workshops influence you and your work at Skyword, and in turn, influence other people you work with at Skyword?

Gerace: “Advertising has entered a rapid phase of decline, and that tees up a huge problem for marketers. That is, how they connect with their customers in a world in which those customers reject interruption and can block it, opt out of it, subscribe to a service that’s ad free—people are doing that by the millions every month.

The brand marketer has to find a way to hook attention of an audience, hold that attention, reward that attention, and then move somebody to act. And in a world in which we are constantly bombarded with opportunities to read, view, and listen to something new, the marketer has got to get really good at doing those things.

So, that drove the company to focus on storytelling and moving brands from content creation to storytelling, and we believe will move the industry from content marketing to brand storytelling, which is a subset of content marketing, is the fact that storytelling is simply far more effective at doing those things. Hooking, holding, rewarding audience attention and moving people to act.”

The Storynomics seminars teach aspects of story form designed to hook, hold and reward attention. If well applied in a business mode, story can compel someone to try or buy a product. “The problem most marketers have when it comes to hooking and holding attention is not that audiences aren’t willing to give them their attention. They are if the experience is worthwhile. The problem is that marketers are creating crap content,” says Gerace. “The short way to say it is, craft content that is worthy of their customers’ time.”

Q. A lot of companies and industry analysts are now talking about storytelling in brands, and Skyword is at the forefront. What kinds of trends are you observing in those areas among marketing professionals?

Gerace: “Because of the trends we’ve just talked about, brands are shifting from ad-centric to story-centric marketing. As a result, the role of the marketer is shifting from an optimization role to a role as change agent. Over decades, ads have had the same basic model: Find the stories your customers

love, interrupt them with the ad, and spend enough until you get brand affinity, brand awareness and then brand affinity.

Marketers as their core roles were just optimizing on that theme. They were testing new places to put their ads. They were testing new ways to create ads. But it was the same basic approach and all they were doing is measuring the math to figure out which purpose would be the best. Now, most marketers will learn to become, if they're doing this well, good showrunners. And they will, when they are creating content in a sustaining way, work with professional creatives.

They're going to come up with the capital and the plan. They're going to come up with and hire or retain the talent to create the thing. They're going to manage the project as the showrunner, but they're going to rely on experts at every creative task to actually tell extraordinary stories for them. Because I don't think you're going to find Meryl Streep takes a job with P&G any day soon."

Gerace says that even small to medium businesses will need to tell brilliant stories, but at a lower budget. "Anybody with a camera can create a story. So, if you're an entrepreneur and you can tell a powerful story, you can connect with your audience. You don't really need a massive production budget to do it. And you can't try to mask a bad story with a big production budget," he says.

Q: What is the power of empathy as it relates to stories?

Gerace: Empathy is the central organizing principle for my keynote talk. Story has the unique ability to help us experience life as somebody else. In fact, experience it as somebody who comes from a different background, growing up in a different part of the world with different resources or different life experiences and different culture than our own. I think because storytelling can do that, a well told story is unique in its ability to help us step outside our own naturally self-centered view of the world and think more broadly.

I don't know of any ways that are as effective as story in building empathy between people. You can think about how stories have transported you into different worlds and find a good example of that. I mean, I didn't grow up in the 50s. I didn't grow up as an African American. I didn't grow up as a woman.

But man, did I connect with the characters in Hidden Figures when I watched that film.

Stories help you to understand life and the complexities and nuances of life better. It's good for the world because it helps us all be better citizens of the world. And if you're a business leader, it's certainly good for your business. Because if you can't build a connection with your customers, and that connection requires empathy, then in a post-advertising world, you're going to struggle to get them to try or buy the things you want them to."

Register today for the Storynomics seminar coming this June 16 in Boston.  
<http://storynomics.com/storynomics-boston-registration/>

## **Storytelling: Using the Moth to Turn to the Light**

The words are magical. “Once upon a time ...” and you are seven again, and there might be castles, dragons, spaceships. Your brain, that thing that fixates on the overdue electric bill, the anxiety-inducing headline, the murky future—that brain vaults away from those and embraces the story. Storytelling seems one of the most ancient of human arts, but tellingly, a good story told today has the same irresistible invitation.

As Rachel Gillett said in this Fast Company piece <https://www.fastcompany.com/3031419/why-our-brains-crave-storytelling-in-marketing> on storytelling, “When we read a story, not only do the language parts of our brains light up, but any other part of the brain that we would use if we were actually experiencing what we’re reading about becomes activated as well.”

Stories get in your skull and walk around.

But let’s look at your own story. You’re the marketing director at a brand badly in need of a facelift—at the cellular level. You and your team have developed an energized go-to-market strategy that’s going to put the shiny new face of your company under the spotlight, and every camera angle will be showing your good side. The heart of the branding strategy: storytelling.

### **We All Tell Stories (But We Can Tell Them Better)**

One minor hitch in the grand plan: you’re the storytelling creative lead. And though you get it, *really get it* that telling stories gets your customers’ brains to light up—and you really tingle to a good story yourself—creative thinking has never been your thing. You’ve never had the knack of telling tales. Building characters, plotting a narrative, letting the imagination fly—not on your résumé.

The accumulating weight of the adult world might have made you forget about the spark of intuition, hearing the small voice of song in a loud room, knowing that the urge to play shouldn’t stop when you turned twenty-two. But there’s compelling evidence, that we are all creative.

<http://www.roamandgolightly.com/blog/we-are-all-creative> And one wall of that creative frame is that we are story-making machines.



But listening to a few podcasts at The Moth <https://themoth.org> gets you thinking that even if storytelling is an art, it's an art that's a result of craft, of structure—like a great branding campaign. The Moth, which has hosted more than 25,000 people telling their live audio tales, and has held more than 3500 live events, is based on the simple premise that ordinary people have extraordinary stories to tell. A tiny window opens to a place where you sense that it's not that you have to have a creative thinking gene to be a storyteller. More that stories are common to us all, and connect us all.

But how best to tell them?

### **Do This, But Not That**

Taking some bites from The Moth's Storytelling Tips and Tricks advice, here's a condensing of tale-telling wisdom, slanted toward persuasive marketing:

#### **Have Some Stakes**

The storyteller has to be all in—skin in the game. You have to have something to win or lose. Your branding campaign has to take some risks, expose some of that skin. Today's customers want to know more than just features and benefits—they want to know the company has a pulse, and how to locate its heart.

#### **Have a Great First Line**

You have to move the audience toward you from the first breath. So, your post headlines, your email subject lines, the first thing your clients see in the two-minute video—it has to be pumped, alive.

#### **Know Your Story Well Enough to Have Fun**

Don't choke, double-back, or say what's already been said when you deliver your message. Don't use ten metaphors when one hits home. Be a pro—but relax.

And a few don'ts that will keep you from bombing:

**Steer clear of meandering endings** - Keep your closings crisp

**No standup routines** - Humor is helpful, but machine-gunning jokes isn't

**No rants** - Anger often brings defenses, rather than engagement

**No essays** - A well-constructed essay has its place, but not when you are building market share. Be quick.

## **Stories Connect**

Thinking of how stories connect, you know that revealing the new face of your brand for media-savvy customers today won't succeed unless your stories resonate, unless they bridge gaps. As Jonathan Gottschall, author of *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, wrote: "Stories powerfully hook and hold human attention because, at a brain level, whatever is happening in a story is happening to us and not just them."

You don't want an "us vs them" for your brand; you want what Moth founder George Dawes Green in this Newsweek article <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/07/10/moth-storytelling-turns-eighteen-348443.html> describes, "I just loved the idea of a community of people that would be able to gather and tell stories. Life for everybody in that group was richer." A community with you and your customers has so much more exchange than seeing them as fields on a spreadsheet.

So, in some ways, it looks like less is more when it comes to mastering the art of storytelling: <http://www.metro.us/lifestyle/three-tips-for-nailing-any-kind-of-presentation-from-the-moth/zsJoln---u505Njz76tTt2> be authentic, expose some of yourself, and make sure that last sentence in every post brings down the curtains to strong applause.

## **Stories Are Everywhere**

Once you absorb that sense that stories are everywhere, and that you only have to willingly wink at creative thinking to open the storytelling gates, let your brain explain. You might come up with all kinds of quirky but vibrant branding ideas:

Have the company founders tell a succinct video story of how the company came together. Maybe couch it in "creation myth" terms.

Show the product at work with the backdrops being American institutions—Half Dome in Yosemite, Mt. Rushmore, Times Square—to frame your brand as something of significance and sweep.

Set up a songwriting contest about the product among the company directors. The winner gets to sing the song on a public video. (Note: sometimes even the cringeworthy has some viral value.)

Start a podcast of customer interviews of how they use the product in their work. Or maybe a podcast set up as a game show, where all the correct answers describe your product's value to customers.

Use your analytics to find the customer who is at the most distant geographic point from company headquarters. Fly out with an interview team to videotape her on how she still feels connected to the company.

Once you start seeking out stories, you'll find them. And with an open mindset, you'll tell them.

However you do it, clear your throat, and start with a story. We'll listen.

### **Addendum: Brands That Bring It**

Now that we're clear that telling tales can not only thrill, but convert too, let's look at a couple of brands that have sold their stories so well that their customers step into those brand stories and write new chapters. YETI Coolers <http://yeti.com> has to be one of the coolest (sorry) examples.

Before we even get into their creation story, know this: one of their coolers, the Tundra 350, retails for \$1,300. No, you don't get fries with that. Before YETI began making coolers that cost hundreds of dollars, there wasn't even a category—nor market—for premium coolers. They created it, and it thrives.

YETI is the brainchild of brothers Roy and Ryan Seiders, avid outdoorsmen who grew frustrated with the poor quality and durability of standard coolers. They started making prototypes of coolers you could jump on, that could fall out of a car or off a cliff and remain strong and usable. As this Inc. profile <https://www.inc.com/magazine/201602/bill-saporito/yeti-coolers-founders-roy-ryan-seiders.html> of the brothers puts it, "... they have built their community, their operating philosophy, around their passionate commitment to the outdoors."

As the Inc. piece details, they visited fishing-tackle shops and outdoor equipment retailers to show what a premium cooler could do, working small accounts and trade shows and then hiring influential guides and fishermen as brand ambassadors, and then move to natural market tangents of the outdoor set. Word of mouth—and customer raves—followed.

Now on the YETI site you can read the stories of these ambassadors: famous figures in the outdoor world, hunters, fishers, competitive ropers and more, actively depicted in beautiful environments. A section of their site identifies the Wild Ones, photos of customers tagged by sporting interest and location. Their Twitter feed is active with customer engagement and goodwill. YETI is branching out into new products, but carefully, to ensure they keep the spirit of their brand.

### **Dannijo Has Hearts That Glitter**

YETI brothers, step aside for a sisters story: sisters Danielle and Jodie Snyder founded their jewelry brand Dannijo almost 10 years ago. In that time they've gathered 145,000 lively Instagram followers by letting their customers peek into (and comment on) the sisters' lives, and by showing sharp pics of celebrities and non-celebrities wearing their glittery goods.

As this article explains <http://sujanpatel.com/marketing/7-companies-killing-brand-driven-storytelling/>, the company is making the most of video while using the sisters' story-selling chops; videos often have one of the sisters interviewing influential figures, or showing people behind the production of their products. Their World of Dannijo blog has sections on Health, Motherhood, Style and Interviews, many with arresting photo galleries of their topic subjects wearing Dannijo gems. Or the sisters themselves wearing them.

Customers have responded positively to the smiling presence of the sisters in most of their marketing; of course, having customers like Beyoncé and Natalie Portman doesn't hurt. Their mission statement "... to create artisanal, timeless pieces that can be worn as little daily reminders of Love and Beauty" also includes their commitment to sustainability and working with women in underdeveloped areas of the world. The Snyder sisters have come a long way from making jewelry for all their friends as teenagers, but the center has held: their full, active lives are integrated into their lifestyle brand. And people dig it.