



Storytelling and Branding

How Businesses Connect with Tribes— With Stories That Resonate and Stick

What do losing 256 pounds, branding major corporate products, and writing have in common?

From Storytelling . . .

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A journey.

Consider, first, the journey of Peter Arnell to lose 256 pounds.

In the opening pages of *Shift* (Crown, 2010), we learn of Arnell's peculiar habit of eating oranges by the bushel. In a given day, Arnell often eats 50 oranges and drinks eight 32-ounce bottles of water. As he travels the world, he seeks out stores with the best oranges, in and out of season. Peeling the oranges gives his fingers a tint that starts conversations with strangers.

Eating oranges helped Arnell go from 406 pounds to 150 pounds. He loves the taste and the orange ritual keeps his fingers and mouth busy. The orange works as Arnell's McGuffin, Alfred Hitchcock's term for the object that drives the story. In *The Maltese Falcon*, the McGuffin is the statue; in *Casablanca*, it's the papers of transit.

Of course, Arnell did more than eat oranges and drink designer water to get skinny. He started by deciding, as he watched his kids frolic in the back yard, that he wanted to avoid an early death. Then he shifted his whole diet, eating salads and vegetables instead of pastrami. He got friends to rally round his cause. He mobilized waiters in his favorite restaurants. He set a big hairy audacious goal rather than settling for a more doable goal like 230 pounds. He tracked his progress by taking in his tentlike pants until they could be taken in no more.

So there's the journey in a nutshell, from fatman to skinny dude. Now it gets interesting.

Peter Arnell, for the non-marketing folks out there, is one of the masters of branding. He has overseen major branding efforts for Pepsi, McDonald's, SoBe, Donna Karan, Rockport, Banana Republic, Con Ed, and Samsung. When he decided he wanted to lose weight, he took on the challenge as a rebranding effort.

Branding, Arnell says, distills everything that matters about a product into one all-powerful essence. A good brand is authentic, open, inviting, strong, consistent. If Arnell was to succeed in his own rebranding, he needed to hold fast to the values that he developed over the years as a New Yorker, an architect, an ad man, a family man, a friend, and even a foodie. But he needed to redirect those values to serve a new project.

But he could not just carry forward the old values. He had to clear out the crud, so the values worth keeping had a chance to shine. The crud, in Arnett's case and our own as well, is self-deception.

"We all get stuck in roles that really aren't us," he says. "We're desperate to break away, to break loose, but something keeps us toiling away even if it feels all wrong."

That something, of course, is fear — not just fear of failure but also fear of success. We fear leaving behind an old comfortable self, even if it's dysfunctional. And so we dress up that dysfunctional self, we valorize it, and succumb to all the temptations that prevent us from moving forward. We live a myth and allow others to reinforce that myth.

For Arnell, the myth was of his crazy, artistic persona. He was loud and sweaty. He carried on in meetings like a mad genius. He wore a stretchy pair of khakis and a loose, untucked shirt. No corporate getup for *this* crazy corporate creative!

To move forward, Arnell consciously rebranded himself. As soon as his tailors told him *no mas* on taking in the stretchy pants, he started wearing sharp corporate suits. His the new threats suited the changing body, and both suited the changing image, "in which people would see my intense approach to work balanced by an extreme sense of calm and ease with myself."

The new Peter Arnell brand was true to the best of the old — friendly, creative, fun-loving — but adapted for new virtues. And here's the key. The different pieces of the new brand were, mostly, congruent with each other. The old brand, remember, was based on the crud of fear and self-deception as well as energy and vision and creativity. That crud undermined Arnell's sense of self. Now he has a chance to be truer to himself.

And so we now move to the writing part of this account.

Arnell says he treated himself like a brand that needed to be updated. But I see him as the hero in a story. The story is about his effort to heed Nietzsche's challenge: "Become who you are."

Maybe branding and storytelling are one and the same. But I'd like to consider them separately.

At the end of the day, the brand is an image or idea about a thing. Arnell rebranded Banana Republic from an outdoors adventurer's store to an urban sophisticate's store. He rebranded McDonald's from a quick and reliable fast food joint to a place with pizzazz (think of Justin Timberlake singing "I'm Lovin' It." He rebranded Con Ed from a stodgy utility to a community-based organization of people serving people.

Granted, even the most established brands change with every passing day. But the point of a branding process is to end somewhere specific and concrete: *Here's what you get when you buy this product. Interested?*

Stories are ongoing. The complexity and contradictions can be great virtues. Conflict is essential. Fallibility and striving are central. A whole

discordant cast of characters are needed. And the character, even when he succeeds, might lose his bearings and fail again.

Maybe you could say the same things about branding. But here's something else. Branding is all about selling stuff. Yes, I know, it's not just selling commodities but also about selling experiences and identities. But you're still trying to get someone to fork over some form of money in exchange for the good or service.

A story is deeper than that, removed from the means-ends nexus. Peter Arnell tells his story — still incomplete — well. And in the process he offers a useful lesson not only in “reinventing” businesses and careers and personal brands, but also in the essential skills of engaging the audience in a good, old-fashioned *story*.

. . . To Stickiness

Remember the old Steve Martin routine about getting small? It's a great bit spoofing the way druggies giggle and cackle about getting high.

I like to get small. It's very dangerous for kids, because they get reallly small. I know I shouldn't get small when I'm driving, but I was drivin' around the other day and a cop pulls me over ... says, 'Hey, are you small?' I say, 'No, I'm tall.' He says, 'I'm gonna have to measure you.' They give you a little test with a balloon. If you can get inside it, they know you're small ... and they can't put you in a regular cell either, because you walk right out.

In the media world these days — in advertising, the Internet, marketing, promotion, publishing, you name it — people are carrying on about getting “sticky.” Stickiness is the quality that products have when readers or consumers feel the need to linger a while. Rather than surfing to a new site, readers “stick” to a site that offers something intriguing and engaging.

Chip Heath and Dan Heath, a brotherly duo of biz-school professor and entrepreneur, have written the ultimate manual for getting sticky. *Made to Stick* outlines six qualities needed to make anything — idea or image, web site or ad jingle, catch-phrase or product design — stick.

The Six Requirements of Stickiness

1. Simplicity

If you argue ten points, nobody will remember even one. People easily remember two things (which set up a yin-and-yang kind of contrast) or three (which set up a triangle in which each corner affects the other two). And if you give them a mnemonic device, they can remember a string of ideas.

But to get people to remember, you have to work hard at simplifying your message. The Dale Carnegie Training offers a simple formula for giving memorable talks. It's called the Action/Benefit speech. Talk about an incident, describing a specific action and the benefit it produced. Done well, these talks impart memorable wisdom. And advertisers love the format. Think of all the slogans that take this form: “Get Met. It Pays.”

2. Unexpectedness

As Aristotle noted 2,500 years ago, the reversal produces a powerful impact on the audience. When you're expecting one thing, and something dramatic and different happens, you remember. In *Story*, his masterful guide for screenwriting, Robert McKee talks about opening and closing "gaps" throughout the picture. Give a character something he has to reach for—and then, just as he's about to reach it, pull it away. And when you make the hero's job harder, do it by surprising him with some demon or challenge that he had no idea was waiting for him.

3. Concreteness

Don't use adjectives and adverbs. Ever have a friend who recommended a book or movie that was "interesting"? That word means nothing. Think of some memorable moments of popular culture. We remember the horse head in the film mogul's bed in "The Godfather." We remember Jake Gittes slapping Mrs. Mulwray in "Chinatown." We remember Carlton Fisk waving his home run fair in the 1975 World Series and Bill Buckner coming up empty in 1986. We remember Kennedy and Reagan at the Berlin Wall, the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team surrounded by American flags, the screaming girls at Beatles concerts.

We know what a freshly mown lawn smells like. We know how good a beer tastes on a blazing summer day. Political and business people often don't even know what concreteness is. They use vague general slogans, thinking they're speaking to the most immediate concerns of their constituents.

When I worked as a planner for the City of Boston, I thought terms like "transit-oriented development" and "Emerald Necklace" were specific and concrete to the ordinary folks. I was puzzled when people complained how abstract the conversations could be. They're great terms — for planners — but ultimately plannerspeak. Words go only so far. Our most successful discussions of planning used maps and images of the streets, houses, business districts, parks, etc. The more concrete, the more people responded to our planning efforts. To be concrete, think of the senses — sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.

4. Credibility

People want to believe, but you have to tell them why they should believe. Everyone has a different tool. Academics love footnotes and statistical analysis. Sports fans also love stats, the more exotic the better. Lawyers like expert witnesses. Marketers pull a reversal and put the expertise in the hands of the consumer with guarantees and trials: "We know you'll like it, but YOU decide." Politicians often try to do the same thing, as when Ronald Reagan asked, "Are you better off now than you were four years ago."

Demonstrations can also increase credibility. Beyond War, a peace activist group, uses the image of a bucket of bee-bees to demonstrate just how we have overarmed ourselves with nukes. Each bee-bee represents a nuclear warhead with the firepower of the bombs that demolished Hiroshima. Which raises another point about credibility. The more visual and specific you can be, the stickier your credibility claim. Celebrities often strengthen a

campaign's credibility. Now, celebs are often the least credible spokespeople for a complex issue. But celebrities who have established a strong emotional connection with audiences have also established trust, which is another word for credibility.

And so we listen to Richard Gere on Tibet, Meryl Streep on environmental health, Sting on global warming, and Mia Farrow on Darfur. Credibility can be manipulated as much as anything. Professionals use technical-sounding language to take the upper hand in debates. Lawyers, doctors, researchers, professors, even web-designers take refuge in gobbledygook language to bewilder their audience. When people cannot explain things in simple terms, you should be suspicious of their knowledge or motives.

5. Emotions

Make people feel something. People remember fear best of all. They also remember hope, when it's connected to their fondest childhood hopes and dreams. Least of all, they remember the elements of a logical and systematic argument.

Think of how powerful emotions have been in American politics. Lyndon Johnson conjured the image of nuclear war in his mushroom cloud ads against Barry Goldwater. George Bush conjured a world of menacing rapists like Willie Horton carousing the streets if Michael Dukakis were elected president. Barack Obama warned about Republicans throwing granny off a cliff if anyone dared to reform Social Security. When people fear losing something, and a demon is connected to that fear, that's what they remember before all else.

6. Story: More than anything else besides physical needs, humans need to tell and listen to stories. Stories provide meaning to everything from the most mundane to the most unknowable aspects of life. Stories give order to things that would otherwise feel chaotic and meaningless. Stories create a sense of wholeness. Stories also stretch the imagination, spurring people to think of achieving something beyond themselves.

Stories have, essentially, three plots: Challenge (David and Goliath conflicts, underdogs rising up, rags-to-riches tales, and triumph of will dramas), Connection (Good Samaritan, relationship that bridges a gap), and Creativity (Ingersoll Rand testing of materials, Shackleton's dealing with rebellious guys).

The Stickiness of *Made to Stick*

The Heath brothers, true to their message, make sure that their stickiness message is also sticky. Look over these six attributes of stickiness. They're listed in an easy-to-remember mnemonic. The first letter of the six terms spells out the word "success"—almost, anyway. Let's review (another critical tool to make an idea sticky):

- S—Simple
- U—Unexpected
- C—Concrete
- C—Credible

E—Emotional
S—Story

Got it? Good.

Now what?

So what are you going to do?

Do you want to bring your writing to a new level? Do you have a book you want to write? Do you want to give your blog—or your professional writing—more clarity and pizzazz?

Or maybe you're part of an organization—a business, a nonprofit, a public agency, or a school—that seeks a total transformation through more efficient and creative communication.

If you're interested in one-on-one coaching with Charles Euchner, the creator of The Elements of Writing, it's time to act.

Or if you are a leader of an organization—a director of learning, a teacher, an advisor, an editor—organize a one- or two-day seminar to get everyone in the organization writing better, faster, right away.

You probably need a sampler before you make such a decision.

If you're in the New York City area, let's organize a one-hour "Lunch and Learn" session. At that session, you will learn the one core skill that makes all writing better, right away—which no one else teaches.

If you're outside the New York area, we can arrange a one-hour webinar—again, our treat.

How? Easy.

Email Charlie@TheElementsofWriting.com or call (203) 645-6112.

Over the last decade, Charlie has created The Elements of Writing System to improve his own writing—and to show others how to improve theirs. At the center of this system are two related insights:

People are storytelling creatures. Nobody doesn't love hearing and telling great stories. Every levels of writing take the basic structure of a story—every sentence, paragraph, section, and whole piece.

If you show people simple tricks and hacks—how to apply the basic storytelling structure to every level of writing—they will get good at it.

The Elements of Writing is a *system*. It offers the three qualities that all good systems offer. The Elements of Writing is:

1. **Simple:** Anyone can understand it and apply it. We have distilled all of the challenges of writing to an essence. Once you understand a handful of simple ideas, all the other pieces come together. Rather than overwhelming you with abstract *thou shalt* and *thou shalt not*s, we connect all challenges to our simple core writing ideas.
2. **Comprehensive:** This is a complete approach, which leaves no gaps. For every writing challenge, there is a specific action. Other writing programs use vague and abstract language to avoid problems. They use pretend solutions. Not us. Note well: For every single writing challenge, we have a simple, intuitive, effective strategy.
3. **Applicable:** Whatever you do, wherever you do it, The Elements of Writing can help you. The specifics of your writing challenges differ—whether you're writing a report, an RFP, a proposal, emails, or web copy. So we show you specific skills to apply the core skills to these challenges.

The Elements of Writing Seminars

To teach you this system, we offer interactive one- and two-day seminars, which show you *simple tricks that you can use right away* to write better.

When you understand this approach, everything gets easier. Editing gets easier. Grammar gets easier. Explaining a process gets easier. Explaining complex concepts gets easier.



Other “soft skills” programs fail because they come to town, speak at a series of vanilla slides, and then leave you in the lurch.

The Elements of Writing shows you how to make your skills *stick*. The program is interactive. It involves writing, videos, group work, even movement. Every skill we teach, we also give you a way to apply it as soon as you return to your computer.

We work in three stages:

1. Prepping to Learn: We work with clients ahead of time to get the most out of the seminars.

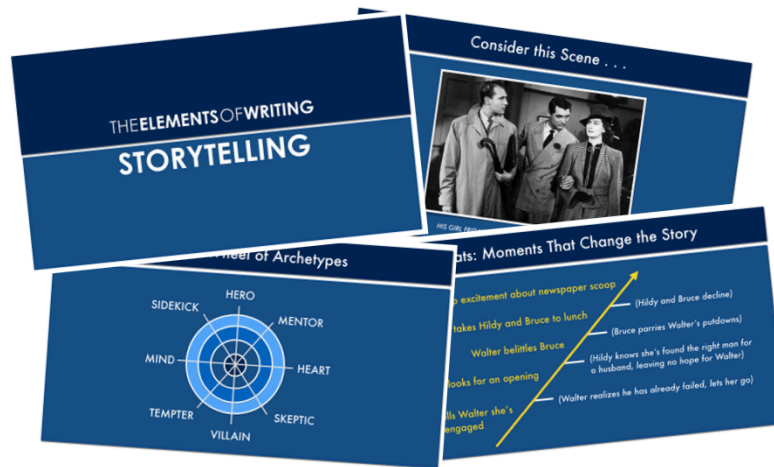
We start with an assessment. What are your “pain points”? What are your greatest frustration? What do you write? Who writes? Who reads what you write? What would your ideal results look like?

If you’re interested, we offer a pre-work assignment. That assignment could be a brief fragment of writing (100 to 250 words) or even just a list or picture or map. Ideally, the pre-work relates to both the mission and content of your work. It need not take more than 15 or 20 minutes.

2. The Event: Every moment of The Elements of Writing seminar is dynamic, interactive, and focused. Skill by skill, students create their own expertise—and a common way of writing, editing, and working together. We work together, as a large group and in small groups too. Our slides and workbooks offer useful pictures and graphics—and exercises that help everyone apply the skills right away. We also use videos to engage people in dissecting important concepts.

Together, we break down every writing challenge. We master concepts and skills together. We are all on the same page—literally and figuratively.

Because everything revolves around the Golden Rule of Writing—a simple insight about the basic way that people express themselves and understand what they see and hear—every new skill reinforces all the others.



3. Following Up: “We are what we repeatedly do,” Aristotle said. “Greatness then, is not an act, but a habit.”

To make sure the skills take hold, then, we work with you to develop a simple followup plan. This plan need not—in fact, *should not*—be complex. But everyone needs to be on the same page. In our followup plan for managers, we show you how to make sure everyone applies our simple, effective techniques.

But wait—there’s more. We don’t just give you a plan and say, “Good luck.” We are available for questions and trouble-shooting, by phone and Skype—and, in New York City, in person. Rather than letting kinks disrupt the whole process, we show you how to deal with every challenge as it arises.

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Raves for The Elements of Writing and Charlie Euchner

This was truly the most successful education program I've run. On a scale of 1 to 10, I think we scored at least a 12. ... As a professional writer and corporate trainer, I was very impressed with Charlie's passion, refreshing approach, and interesting strategies. We have already seen a marked improvement in reports and email correspondence. If you are looking for someone to deliver an amazingly effective business writing class to your staff, Charlie Euchner is the person to do just that.

—Alan Z. Fromm, director of training, Amneal Pharmaceuticals

Excellent presentation, well delivered, lots of useful info. ... This presentation was engaging and informative. I enjoyed learning about writing and the parameters of good writing. ... Needed more time. Excellent session. ... Terrific presentation with enough detail to pique one's interest. Good engaging speaker. Nice PowerPoint covered lots in short time. Great presentation. Very passionate. ... Very valuable writing techniques discussed/demonstrated. Very effective presenter. Didn't feel rushed like some others. Managed time well. ... This is wonderful. The content is relevant in a number of areas. ... Passionate, engaging speaker. Interesting speaker and topic. Good mechanics about classic storytelling.

— Assessments of Fortune 500 executives at Richmond Events

I personally recommend Charles Euchner. He delivered a keynote presentation that was absolutely fascinating. If you once loved writing, hearing Charlie will move you to once again reengage in that art. If you write marketing material for your business, you will learn some great tips how to draw readers in and leave them wanting more. Take advantage of the opportunity to hear Charlie—it is a good investment of your time and money.

— Ann Marie Sidman, Vice President, Learning and Development, Gen Re, a Berkshire Hathaway Company

Charlie's two-day seminar gave my daughter the practical tools, enthusiasm and confidence that she needed to write a compelling college essay; she enters Columbia University this fall. In this super-competitive environment where most applicants have stellar grades and scores, Charlie shows the kids how to write an essay that allows them to stand apart. His passion for writing, friendly style and on-site writing and review propel the kids toward their goal of completing a draft essay before school starts in the fall. More than that, The Elements of Writing seminar gave our daughter a fresh outlook toward writing that has made subsequent writing assignments less of a chore and more of a positive challenge!

— Mary Beth Pendley Ray, mother, National Cathedral School senior, Washington, D.C.



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ELEMENTS OF WRITING

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