

How to Create the Most Valuable Asset Your Business Will Ever Own

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Yep. You read that headline right. So, take a deep breath. Down some strong coffee. And then tell your admin to hold all your calls, emails and Snapchats. Because this just might be the most important article you will ever read.

Now, I know that might sound like a bunch of click-bait, “99%-off-for-the-next-15-seconds!” type of hype. But believe me, it’s anything but. For this article is going to reveal how your firm can capitalize on the most powerful weapon you have at your disposal.

Your brand story.



That's right, your humble brand story. It's the glue that bonds you with your chosen tribe. The one possession your competitors can't ever steal – but that you can use for free forever. And the rocket you can ride to unicorn levels of profitability IF you develop it the right way.

So, what are we waiting for?



How to Create Your Brand Story

Long story short, a brand story is defined as *“a cohesive narrative that encompasses the facts and feelings that are created by your business – and inspires an emotional reaction.”* And if you want to see a great one in action, check out that little trillion-dollar concern known as Apple, Inc.

Apple's cohesive narrative is that it sells cool, uncompromising products that are incredibly easy to use. Their story draws from the cool, uncompromising personality of their founder Steve Jobs, who famously refused to release ANYTHING unless it was “insanely great.”

Ergo, millions of consumers believe Apple's products are the best because they must have already passed Apple's standard for insane greatness. That story helped make the iPhone the #1 seller in the absurdly competitive smart phone market - and Apple the most valuable company in the world.

Make no mistake, developing a brand story will require a lot of work. But it will absolutely be worth it. And if you want to end up with the kind of industry-disruptin' story you seek, then I highly recommend you follow a step-by-step, cradle-to-grave creative development process.

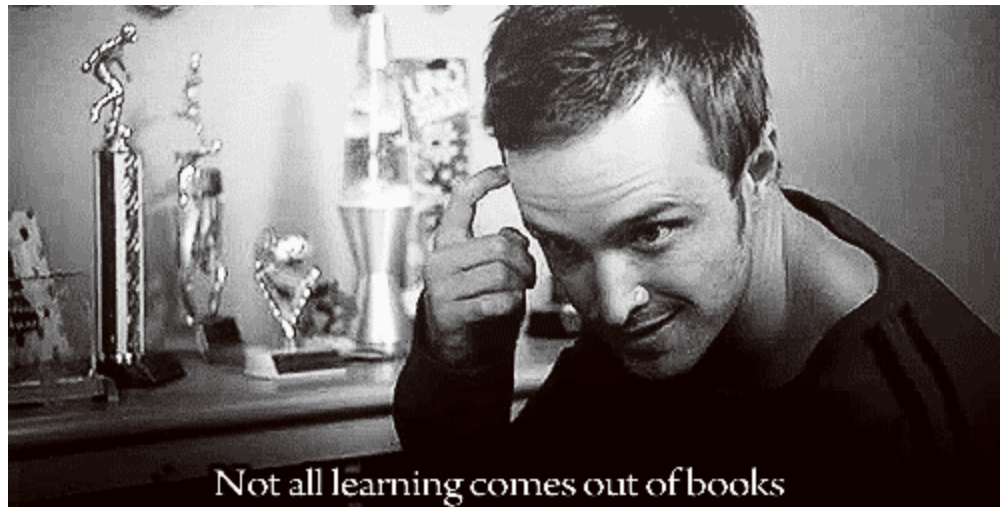
And what would those steps be? Why, they would be these:

Step #1: Determine how your firm is perceived in the minds of the outside world. You know, all those people walking around outside the four walls of your offices. This includes your customers, your prospects – and anyone else who has ever heard of your company. Because when it comes to your brand story, what they believe is what matters most of all.

This means you can't just guess, throw darts or take a poll in your next marcom meeting. To learn what outside humans believe, you must get as close to the source as possible. Query the following:

- **Your sales staff** – they talk to prospects all day – every day. They know who they are, what makes them tick - and what makes them click the buy button. Your sales team also knows your competition – and their brand stories, too.

Good sales dogs have a firm grasp on what potential buyers believe to be true about your brand story, as opposed to what they consider to be just buzz-wordy marketing fluff. They hold PhDs in prospect psychology – and are your best internal source.



- **Prospects who did NOT convert** – Yep, the very same people who went through your sales process – but then decided NOT to buy. I know it sounds crazy, but stick with me here. Because it is critically important to understand what they think.

Discovering what they believe is actually a great way to gauge how effectively you're telling your story in public. If there is a disconnect between what they think – and what you believe, then you should review your ads, sales pitches and other messaging.

The best way to obtain such information is to contact these non-converters almost immediately after they opt out. Your response rates might be low – but what you might get could be gold.

Follow up via checklists that require only a minimum of effort. Then push it further by asking what they believe to be true about your firm. Yep, you guessed it, this is where you stealthily slip in your brand story. Then close by asking what your firm should do to win their business in the future.

This extra effort will show that you are willing to listen, learn and improve. And, in some circumstances, it might even cause the

customer to change their mind. It gives you a chance to make one final sales pitch before that prospect disappears forever.



- **But most of all – talk to those crazy prospects who DID convert – otherwise known as “your existing customers”** – And research has shown that one of the cleverest ways to determine what they think about your firm is to, well; ask them.

Reaching out to customers on a regular basis is a great idea period. Customers LOVE when you seek their advice, opinions or ways you can improve your service. It shows that they matter to you – and it makes them feel like part of your mission.

And today’s uber-connected world offers dozens of ways to reach them. These include emailed surveys, questionnaires posted to your social properties – even requests for feedback in their monthly statements.

In addition, you can get some great info about your customers’ perceptions by monitoring the chatter on your social channels and online reviews. For even more communications options, read this <http://bit.ly/2EQhPvU>.

Of course, instead of using formal methodologies, you could always opt for a radical new approach known as “actually listening to what your customers are telling you every day.”



Okay, so that’s hardly radical or new. But it is something many businesses overlook. Your approach could include everything from simply writing down what your customers are saying – to creating a formal Customer Advisory Board.

A great example of a firm who DID listen is the online shoe vendor Zappos. Zappos is legendary for their phenomenal customer service.

It is the essence of who they are. But here's the funny part. When they first started, Zappos had no idea this was their brand story.

Indeed, they initially believed customers loved them because they offered the widest selection of shoes on the web. But then they decided to employ that cray-cray "actually listen to what your customers are telling you" strategy.

It began when their CEO, Tony Hsieh, received a personal email from a customer. But instead of complaining, the customer raved about how well she was always treated by every one of Zappos' employees. Hsieh checked around – and found dozens of other stories just like hers. It was an epiphany.

The incident helped Zappos realize their true story was their fanatical dedication to providing an incredible customer experience. Hsieh quickly made such "WOW service" central to the company's mission. And it is now what the company is known for worldwide.

Step #2: Review all of the insights you've gathered – and start making decisions. Yep, this is where it gets tougher. Where you have to gird your loins and start writing a brand story you want to stick with.



This can be a bit nerve-wracking, as you have a lot riding on the line. Your brand story will form the backbone of your messaging for years. It will become the song book from which your entire organization sings. The theme into which you will pour millions of dollars' worth of marketing and advertising. So yeah, um, you sorta want to get it right.

It might seem that all of the info you've collected would make it clear how to write your company story. But oftentimes, that Tsunami of data can make you feel overwhelmed. Which is why you need rules to guide you. Here are a few that can help you determine if the story you're considering is the correct one for you.

- **Your story must be clear** – the simpler the better. Your story must distill the essence of who you are down to the most basic of levels. It helps to think of the EMOTIONAL response your story will elicit in your audience. Like “WOW Service.”
- **Your story must be perceived as true by your audience** - You believe a lot of awesome things about your company. But if your customers don't share these beliefs, then, like Zappos, you may not really know your own brand story.

Resist the temptation to dismiss external opinions with which you disagree - or overrule them with your own perspective. Because, in the end, you don't tell your audience what your brand story is. They tell you.

- **Your story must be concise as hell** - Why? Because today's consumers are carpet-bombed by 5,000+ brand impressions on the daily. And now you've got to somehow squeeze your unique brand story into their already red-lining little brains.

Ergo, your brand story must spark a prospect's interest from the get-go. Before the next bright shiny brand story object arrives to pull that consumer's attention away.

- **Your story must be compelling in the eyes of your audience -** Repeat this phrase: “What’s in it for me?” And then keep repeating it over and over. Because that’s what your prospects are asking any time they hear your brand story.

Now, the perceived benefit from your customer’s perspective could be financial, tribal – or even purely emotional. But the brand story that best addresses it will likely be the best option for your firm.

Great brand stories check all of these boxes!



An example of a great brand story is that of the ultra-discount retailer Wal-Mart. You’ll find them at the opposite end of the luxury spectrum from Apple. But they embrace their positioning – and powerful brand story – wholeheartedly.

Their motto is “*Always the low-priced leader. Always.*” A brilliant tagline that neatly conveys the essence of their story. It is certainly **clear** in the financial and emotional benefits they offer, **true** in the eyes of their audience, **concise** in that it can be boiled down to 6 words – and **compelling as hell** to millions of cost-conscious consumers worldwide.

Yes, Wal-Mart is fully aware that they are considered to be something of a trailer park joke to certain consumers. But they don't care about what those people think. They only care about the opinions of those in their niche.

The Wal-Mart brand story obviously focuses on a simple concept of "The Lowest Price." But successful brand stories can be based on concepts that range all across the board. Some examples include:

The "Fantastic Founder Personality" Story – When Your Brand Story Is Built Around YOU



They have thousands of employees. Offer dozens of product lines. And compete in a multitude of industries. But if you mention Tesla, Microsoft or Virgin Airlines, you think of one person – and one person alone.

And when you do, you usually ascribe the traits of their personalities to the firms they founded. Whether it is their bold, seemingly crazy vision (Elon Musk - <https://foundr.com/entrepreneurs-solve-problems/>), their will to dominate all life (Bill Gates) or their propensity to kitesurf with naked supermodels (Richard Branson) – the more outsized aspects of each founder's personality will always be tied to the companies they created.

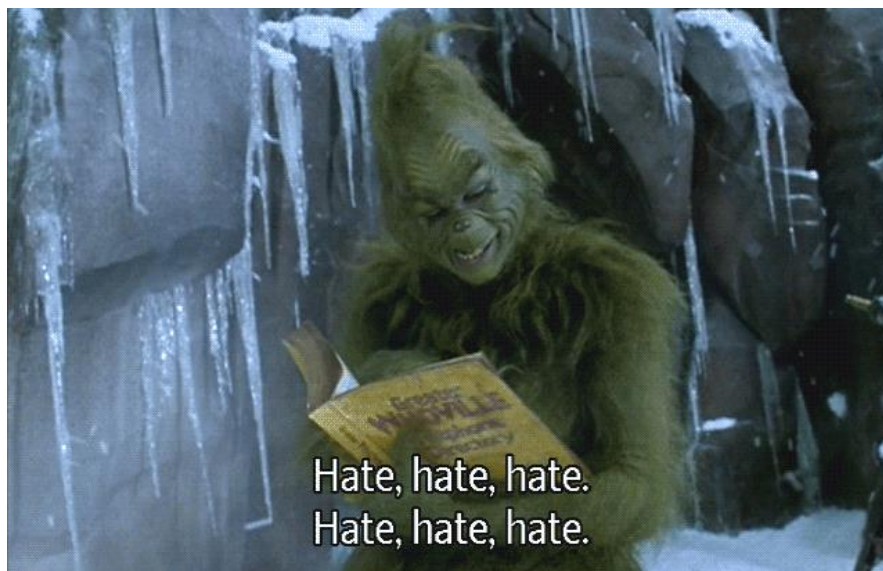
Of course, this strategy could never work for your small biz, seeing as the last time you checked, your founders were not exactly international celebrities, right? Don't be too sure.

Remember, the founders mentioned were all virtual unknowns when they launched their firms. Their personalities came first. The fame came later. What's important is that their personalities resonated with their audience.

THE TAKEAWAY FOR YOUR BIZ? Consider your founders. They're usually quite unique by their very nature. When it comes time to write your brand story, consider their most compelling personality traits. Could any of these be embraced by your target audience?

Now, it could turn out that none of your founders possess any weird, obtuse or oddly endearing borderline personality disorders. That's okay. There are other ways to go. These include:

The Personal Experience Brand Story – When your brand story revolves around a pain point to which YOU AND YOUR CUSTOMERS can relate.



People react to bad experiences in different ways. Some might decide to call customer service. Whereas others might decide to disrupt entire global industries. And when they do, they can solve the problems of thousands of people experiencing the same problems they did.

I have a client named 3PL Central (www.3plcentral.com) who offers a SaaS WMS for 3PLs. Not sure what all those letters and numbers mean? Well, you're not alone. In fact, they only make sense to a small – but highly lucrative – niche market. But that's all my client needed.

You see, those wacky acronyms stand for a software my clients developed for warehouse owners. And why did they ever build such a beast? Because they were warehouse owners themselves. And in 2006, they desperately needed a software designed for their requirements. They looked everywhere – but couldn't find anything.

So, they created the perfect solution on their own.

Their product became a huge hit - in large part because of their real-world knowledge of their customers' pain points. This might not seem like a big deal to you or me. But to a warehouse owner, it was HUGE. Finally, here was a software provider who GOT them.

THE TAKEAWAY FOR YOUR BIZ? Your founders' personal frustrations are more universal than you realize. And people just love to hear how you vanquished your problem – especially when it is their problem, too. Start by writing down WHY you started your business. Next, share your pain and show your fix. Then stand back and watch people sign up in droves.

The Customer-Obsessed Brand Story – When Your Brand Story is totally focused on – you guessed it – YOUR CUSTOMERS

Some of the most powerful brand stories have little to do with a company itself – and everything to do with their customers. For one of the best ways to get customers to fall in love with you is to show that you are in love with them. <https://foundr.com/brand-strategy/>



This is more of a winning strategy than ever before. Empowered by mobile phones, unlimited shopping choices and intense competition for their business, today's consumers have incredible power.

As a result, companies realize that they must either provide a superior experience at every touchpoint – or start working on plans to file bankruptcy. It doesn't matter how big or entrenched you are. Need proof? Google "Sears."

This is why many successful brands follow the maxim "the customer is always right" to the extreme. This includes that 800-ton eCommerce gorilla known as Amazon.

Yes, they are known for their low prices, free deliveries and ability to sell you everything on Planet Earth. But Amazon's real secret to success? Their total focus on customer convenience.

And you can see it in everything they do. One-click checkout. Stored addresses. Same-day delivery. Even the ability to re-route your order – even if it is already on the truck headed to your house.

The idea is to create truly frictionless commerce that eliminates every barrier to making a purchase. From initial impulse - to the front of your porch - with a single click of your mouse.

Final Takeaway for Your Business – Developing a brand story is never easy. But if customers truly love your biz for its undying devotion to their specific needs, then there is no better time in history to leverage that love for all its worth.

Write down every way your company makes life easier for your customers. And if you can actually tell a legit brand story about your customer obsession – then you could get a leg up on your competition for life.

Step #3: TEST YOUR IDEAS! Again, one cannot simply assume that your new brand story idea will work. You must test its viability on actual living, breathing human subjects. This would include:

- **Focus Groups** – ideally these would consist of people who know little about your company – and care less. In other words, like how most prospects will feel when they first encounter your brand.
- **Your Customer Advisory Board** – They will quickly give you the thumbs up – or down. Along with that all-important insight as to who you really are from their POV.
- **Stealth Ads in Google** – The response rates you receive should let you know that to which the online world will respond – and fast. This tactic was famously employed by author Tim Ferriss when he was developing the title for his book “The Four-Hour Work Week.”
- **Return to Your Original Subjects** – In other words, run your new brand story idea past the audience you began with, i.e., your sales staff, customers and prospects. Do they find your new story clearer, more compelling – and most of all – the tale of who you truly are?

In short, does your pitch play in Peoria? And if it indeed does, well then...

Congratulations!

You have now created your own bouncing baby brand story!



Your story could grow up to be beautiful, wonderful and amazingly impactful. Or it could turn out to be utterly useless - **IF** you don't leverage it properly. Like every other aspect of your company, it will all come down to your ability to execute.

So here's how to execute yours.

How to Ride Your Brand Story to Unprecedented Glory



Repeat after me: brand execution is all about repetition. You've got your great story. Now you, your co-workers and all your partners - must begin repeating that tale relentlessly to anyone who so much as makes eye contact with your company. It can take different forms. But it must always be the same message.

It's a big job – that only gets bigger as you add new products, customers and employees. But it can be done. Here are the steps you need to follow if you want to maximize your brand story's power:

Step #1 - Ensure your brand story is a priority for your senior management. This can be a tough sell, depending on the backgrounds of your top dogs – and their acceptance of, you know, that touchy-feely marketing crap. But you must bring them along no matter how much they resist.



Without their support, you'll never have the clout you need to execute throughout your organization.

Step #2 - Ensure every employee knows your brand story – and what it means to your customers. And I do mean EVERY employee. Your brand story should be their bible. Every employee should not only know it – but understand its true meaning – and believe in it wholeheartedly. Here's a great way to do that - <https://foundr.com/onboarding-best-practices/>

Step #3 - Ensure everyone in your firm delivers on your brand promise every day. A great brand is more than just a cool marketing slogan. It is the fundamental truth of your business. Ergo, if you are known for uncompromising quality, then everyone in your org must deliver that – from the CEO down to the janitor.

Step #4 - Ensure your brand story is reflected in all of your external communications. Your partners must become obnoxious evangelists, as well. These outside groups are often the direct conduit to your target audience. Which means they ARE your firm in the eyes of those prospects.

Step #5 - Monitor, Monitor – and Then Monitor Some More. - You may have heard that we live in the digital age. Which means we now have the

ability to track, scrutinize – and improve – EVERYTHING we do. And when it comes to your brand story, there are a ton of ways to do that. These include:

- **Analyzing your content marketing metrics** - Which aspects of your story resonate best with your target audience? Break down by components, e.g., headlines, images and subject matters. Test multiple approaches to ensure maximum brand reinforcement.
- **Continuing to survey customers** to ensure your story is always being communicated properly. As your company grows and introduces new products, it runs the risk of brand dilution.
- **Keeping abreast of social media chatter**– You once monitored this to discover your brand story. Now you have to make sure you're living it. Social media is utterly unfiltered. Most people have zero problem letting you know exactly what they think about your company. You must know what they are saying.

Step #6 - And Above All, Never Let Your Brand Image Rest on Its Laurels



Remember, your brand story is a living thing. Hence, it must be restated, replenished and revitalized on a daily basis. This has always been true. But it has become even more so as you battle to overcome the millions of distractions it must now outshine every day.

In fact, this may well be the single-most compelling reason why brand stories today are so uber-important. And precisely why I humbly submit that your company's brand story is the most valuable asset that it'll ever own.



Agree? Disagree? Feel that something else is more valuable? Then don't be shy – step right up and let me know. I'd love to hear your thoughts.