

COLUMNS

StoryBranding: Creating stand-out brands through the power of story

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By **Jim Signorelli**

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Stories have been, and still are, the most persuasive tools in the arsenal of human communications. Why?

Well, there are a lot of reasons that serve as the foundation of a process we now call StoryBranding, and the best among them is that stories clothe truths by not getting in the way of truth.

Stories get around our natural resistance to being sold by not pushing beliefs. Rather, they stimulate and resonate by inviting us to acknowledge beliefs that are already in place. They do this by fascinating us with identifiable characters and by inviting us to empathize with their experiences.

Certainly all stories intend to sell us something. Whether it is to demonstrate the importance of love, courage or freedom, some human value always underlies the reason stories are told. But stories reveal truth – they do not preach it.

Brands have intentions, too. But often that intention is too raw, too blatant and too often dismissed because the profit motive is transparent.

If we look beyond the need for immediate sales, we start to see something that is far more

appealing than the brand's facts or opinions about why it is the best, strongest, most durable, cheapest, etc.

We start to see a belief, philosophy, or cause that defines who the brand is, not just what the brand is for. And much as we form an emotional bond with story characters, we start to relate to a brand in the same way.

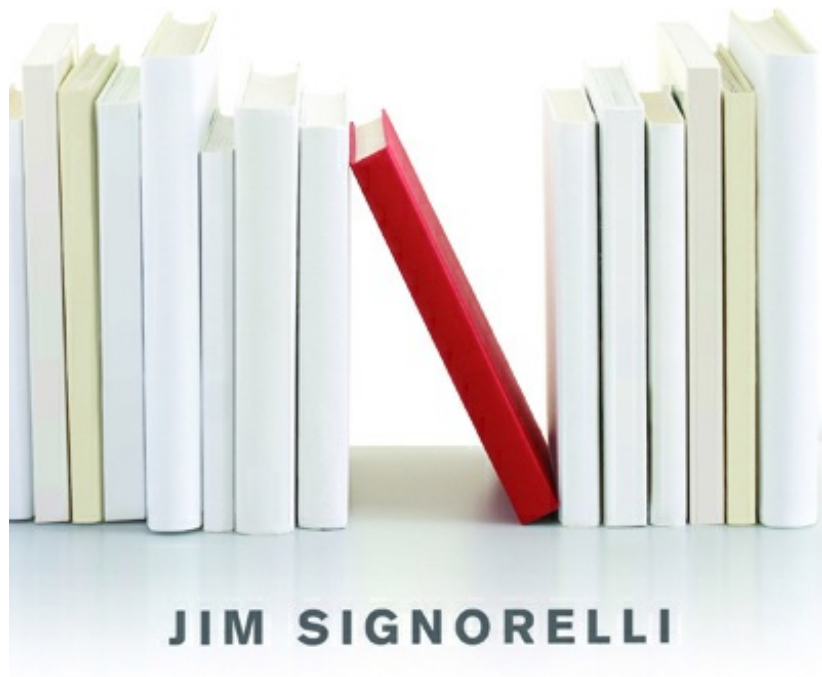
The brand's importance goes beyond any functional advantage. When we buy a brand, in a sense we join its tribe. In turn, we invite it into our lives to reinforce who we are while telling those around us what we believe is important.

Admittedly, that is a hard concept to get when we have been trained to believe that brands should boast benefits.

Certainly, benefits are important. But we are humans first, consumers second.

StoryBranding™

CREATING **STAND-OUT BRANDS**
THROUGH THE POWER OF STORY



Storybranding

Certainly, we want things that help us to do more, and/or to do it better, faster, or for less money.

But above all, we are constantly striving for meaning. Brands perceived as stories to be told have a better chance of helping us find meaning than they do as products to be marketed.

But to tell a brand's story authentically, we have to know it first. We have to see, hear and feel its reality because it is there, not just because consumers tell us they want it there.

What is real has to reveal itself not in what is promised, but in what is proven across every point of contact.

StoryBranding is a process designed to help us know brands the way stories help us know characters. It is a process that also helps us know a brand's prospects in ways that will foster lasting relationships, immune from any competitive claim or coupon.

There is no magic trick to the StoryBranding method. There are no four-syllable words to learn, no ivory-tower theories to embrace. It is intuitive and easily digested. It has been proven countless times to help solve marketing communications problems with solutions that more powerfully resonate shared meaning with audiences.

It is easily understood because, without being fully aware, we already use it in our everyday communications.

As its name implies, StoryBranding is rooted in the logic of stories, something psychologists have shown is part of our hardwiring.

With awareness, we just rely on it more effectively. We learned about this process from principles that storytellers have been using since the beginning of language to reveal fundamental truths. And upon further investigation, we found ourselves borrowing techniques from successful brands that have, maybe unknowingly, relied upon its principles.

Some may find what follows blasphemous, as it takes on a few age-old marketing myths many of us have been saddled with since the so called disciplines of marketing were invented. But that is OK. We did not discover the Truth. Just ours.

Jim Signorelli is CEO of [ESW Partners](#), Chicago. He is also the author of StoryBranding: Creating stand-out brands through the power of story. This article is an excerpt from that book. Reach him at jims@eswpartners.com.