

Once Upon a Time... The Best Brand Stories Ever – taken from Volusion blog, 9/4/12

Every brand has a story. Whether it's a story of empowerment, everlasting love or wisdom, your brand story should have a "theme" that shapes it from beginning to end. Just like in fiction, a brand story needs literary components like theme, plot, character, setting and style to make an impact.

A powerful brand story creates a memorable and authentic representation of your brand, and can establish an emotional connection with your future customers, employees and partners. To help you write your own brand story, I've identified several brands that tell irresistibly compelling tales that have inspired people worldwide to believe in their brand truth. As you study these examples, think about the following questions and how they pertain to the development of your own brand story:

- Who are your brand's characters? Who's the protagonist (the hero)? Who's the antagonist (the villain)?
- Where does your story take place, and how does that change over time?
- What type of conflict(s) does your brand story experience?
- What's the turning point (the climax) in your brand story? What other defining moments shape your story?
- How should someone feel after you tell him or her your story?
- How can you work your story into everything you do?



Nike

Story Theme: Power, Perseverance, Achievement

Watch one Nike commercial and you can sense the brand story instantly. Every commercial is framed around challenging oneself to strive for the maximum point of physical achievement. The company was founded in 1950 with a handshake between two visionary Oregonians – coach Bill Bowerman and his University of Oregon runner, Phil Knight. The duo, along with the team they hired to run Nike's future operations, were dedicated to bringing innovation and inspiration to every athlete in the world. To this day, Nike empowers athletes everywhere to be driven to do the impossible and take action on life's most difficult challenges.

What can we learn from Nike?

Though Nike continually evolved its advertising tactics, marketing strategies and product lines, the compelling story of endless human potential in sports remained consistent throughout all of Nike's brand elements. Whether it was an in-store display or a Super Bowl commercial, Nike purposefully challenged its customers to greatness through connecting with their brand. From day one, Nike was not in the shoe-selling business; instead, the brand focused around selling the feeling of achievement. The organization developed the tagline, "Just Do It," which resonated more as a movement than a brand element. Think about the core reason you went into business, and ask yourself if it resonates in all of your communications. Every element builds into the greater brand story, and demonstrating consistency across the board will do wonders for your brand.



Tiffany & Co.

Story Theme: Finding True Love

There's undeniable power in color, and no brand has captured this better than Tiffany & Co. Since 1853, Tiffany & Co. has been reaching the hearts of women (and their admirers) with the allure of the "little blue box" and the timeless gems inside. Charles Lewis Tiffany founded the brand in 1837 when he opened a store in downtown Manhattan. Today, there are over 230 stores worldwide, employing more than 9,000 people. From the publishing of the first mail order catalog, known as the "Blue Book" in 1845, Tiffany & Co. maintained a consistent message across all of its communication to this day. Every touch point is centered on the brand's bestselling story: realizing true love.

What can we learn from Tiffany & Co?

Take a look at the advertisement below, and notice how Tiffany & Co. doesn't use a single word to convey the emotion and mystery behind the message. Sometimes, visually conveying emotion is much stronger than using words to describe it. Think about how your online store's homepage or landing pages can invite shoppers in by creating the emotion that you want them to experience when shopping with your brand. Even if you don't have as recognized of a brand symbol as the little blue box, you can leverage strong visuals that speak to shoppers' hearts.



Whole Foods Market

Story Theme: The Power of Community

Whole Foods, a leading natural foods grocer, was founded in 1978 by 25-year-old college dropout John Mackey and 21-year-old Rene Lawson Hardy. The pair borrowed \$45,000 from family and friends to open a small natural foods shop (SaferWay), and would store some of their food products at their apartment. When their apartment complex booted them for storing food there, they decided to live at the store, even bathing in the dishwasher (it had an attached water hose). Two years later, John and Rene partnered with Craig Weller and Mark Skiles to merge Safer Way with Clarksville Natural Grocery, which marked the opening of the original Whole Foods Market on September 20, 1980.

Less than a year later, a massive flood devastated the city of Austin, wiping out the store's inventory and ruining most of its equipment. As a result, Whole Foods Market experienced \$400,000 in losses. Local customers and neighbors volunteered to join the staff to clean up the damage, and creditors and investors all provided the opportunity for the store to get back on its feet. Whole Foods reopened 28 days after the flood, and today plans for future growth to over 1,000 stores.

What can we learn from Whole Foods?

The most important element in any business is the people. Through Whole Foods' story, we learn how a couple of health-conscious businessmen took the natural foods industry by storm and gained unwavering support from its community. Without the support and help of thousands, Whole Foods would have never reached the point of success they're experiencing today. Whole Foods proudly lists their core values on website, in materials and in stores, and the unifying element of each of these is – you guessed it – **people**:



Whole Foods Market's Core Values

- *Selling the highest quality natural and organic products available*
- *Satisfying and delighting our customers*
- *Supporting team member excellence and happiness*
- *Creating wealth through profits and growth*
- *Caring about our communities and our environment*
- *Creating ongoing win-win partnerships with our suppliers*
- *Promoting the health of our stakeholders through healthy eating education*

Think about how you're involved with your community and how you can share that message on your site. Consider listing your brand's values, or expanding on the company's history, to show how the brand's 'characters' have shaped the history and future of your brand.

That wraps up our post on great brand stories, and how you can capitalize on yours. We'd love to hear your brand story and how your business got started! Tell us how you maintain a single storyline throughout communications, and where you've seen success.

Happy selling!

- Olga Kazakova, [Volusion](#)