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Brand Storyteller+

Frequently Asked Questions

+What is 'brand storytelling'?

Brand storytelling is the articulation and communication of a place, product or organization's authentic brand story, one that illustrates the company's unique market space and informs all future strategic and creative decisions.

+Why do we need a brand story?

An authentic story, especially when communicated in rich, textured and evocative language, allows a brand to define and occupy its own distinct market space, which minimizes or eliminates competition with other brands.

+What do you mean by 'story'?

'Story' is shorthand for **'strategic brand story'**, defined **as a brand's experiential aspiration and destination, an integrated approach to strategy driven by a company's core values and differentiators.**

+What's your process?

I work with each client to determine their needs through preliminary high-level strategic research and individual interviews. From that information, I design a series of evocative questions and engaging exercises that build on each other and ultimately reveal a brand's core and aspirational identity. I then lead participants through a creative, inspirational and thought-provoking Envisioning session, out of which the threads of a brand's authentic story emerge. After the session, I look at the major emergent themes and ideas. Depending on the scope of an individual contract, I may write these up in skeletal form for the client's feedback (Discoveries), or I may go directly to writing the Brand Storyline.

+What's an Envisioning session?

Envisioning brings together leaders of an organization, destination or project in a stimulating, inspiring and highly creative (usually offsite) session. Each session is unique, filled with surprising ideas and engaging creative exercises designed specifically to address a group's particular strengths and challenges. Each one helps to elicit a different thread of the client's authentic brand story or brand experience. The questions within Envisioning sessions are designed to take the clients out of their traditional comfort zone, to stretch their thinking and begin a journey towards a new, more strategic, creative and fulfilling comfort zone.

Envisioning encourages clients to embrace challenges, transform fears into solutions and proactively address cynicism and doubt. More often than not, participants leave a session feeling personally transformed as well.

+Is this the same as strategic planning?

Of a sort. Envisioning articulates a brand's values in a way that can be used to form, inform and drive strategic and creative decisions across all departments, from development to marketing to sales and operations. It encourages businesses to transform the way they think about strategy. Rather than constructing a 'story' based on numbers-driven strategy, it digs deep to find the elements of the brand story, then provides clients with a more defined identity as well as the specific tools to make strategic (and number-crunching) decisions.

+What's the difference between a Brand Storyline and a business plan?

Although one client referred to the end product as "...a business plan that reads like a novel", a Storyline is emphatically not a business plan. The Storyline includes vivid and evocative language, and at two levels, "Snapshots" of how the story will be experienced when it is fully realized. It keeps things real, and in a culture of mandatory transparency, authenticity means success.

+Can't you just talk to a few of us individually?

Individuals, no matter how well-meaning, bring their own biases and agendas to an interview. The process of collective envisioning allows the group's ideas to rise above that of any one individual, resulting in a story that best benefits the brand. As well, showing up both demonstrates and furthers a commitment to an idea or ideal.

In addition, the synergistic creativity of a group is far greater than that of any one or two people. Though it is possible to write an abridged storyline by interviewing a handful of executives, this approach tends to result in a biased, rather than authentic, story. Having a mix of participants from all stages and departments ensures that the story is comprehensive, representative and inclusive.

+Why does it matter whether the session is on- or off-site?

In some cases, especially destination development in rural areas, it's useful to be on site for a number of reasons. However, the ideal environment for an Envisioning session is one that is neutral and inspiring, and often any space associated with work is neither.

By taking participants away from the work environment, structure and hierarchy, each individual can more easily engage in the process. We encourage participants to bring their full selves to the session. One man may be there as a company's CFO, but we urge him to draw upon all aspects of his life – as a father, neighbor, grandson, volunteer, frequent flier, homeowner, spouse and consummate air-guitar player – during a session, rather than limiting himself to the viewpoint prescribed by his role.

+Who participates in an Envisioning?

It's a bit like casting a movie. First, an Envisioning requires the presence of C-level leaders and senior management (who have the authority to approve or veto change-making decisions). Without their commitment, the exercise is fun but futile. Higher-ups don't always know what's happening on the front lines, which means that middle management needs to be represented as well, or the story will be distorted through a C-level single-focus lens.

One of the keys to successful Envisioning is the involvement of both the business's most trusted advisors as well as outside 'catalysts' – handpicked thought-leaders and provocateurs who bring a fresh perspective and unbounded creativity to the process. Catalysts allow inside participants to see their business – strengths, opportunities and identity – through fresh eyes.

It's a good idea to include your stick-in-the-muds, contrarians who have a vested interest in the company but are vehemently opposed to any kind of change. Addressing objections directly, in a creative environment, allows a company to proactively address the issues underlying resistance.

In the best of all worlds, an Envisioning has 21 participants. This is a large enough group to generate a breadth of ideas, yet a small enough group that everyone gets to know each other and has the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution. Whatever the size of the group, the ideal ratio of client team to advisors to catalysts is 1:1:1. Keeping the balance allows us to divide the larger group into three teams that have a variety of thinking styles, work disciplines, (corporate) political and cultural viewpoints.

+ Why bring in people we've never met?

We all have blind spots, and organizations tend to have collective ones, whether ignoring an obvious selling point or staying in denial about challenges. Catalysts are selected based on their creativity, generosity and relevance to the client's challenges. Those whose only stake is to help the business become the best it can be are able to ask the tough questions, challenge the obvious and champion what others cannot see.

+ What time commitment is required?

The chart on the next page provides a general range of offerings, however each client's needs are unique. The scope of each contract is tailored to the client's priorities, stage of development and budget. Though my full engagement, from Letter of Agreement (LOA) to delivery of the Brand Storyline, runs approximately 4-6 weeks, Envisioning sessions can be as brief as four hours or as long as two days. The latter is optimal for even the smallest company, because it allows for one day of information dissemination and team explorations, and a second day dedicated to idea generation. Two-day sessions also include a Team Dinner, where experience has shown that many great ideas germinate..

+ What happens after the session?

Depending on the scope of the engagement, a draft of either Discoveries or the Storyline will be delivered within 10 working days after the session. After up to two rounds of feedback and edits, the final draft is delivered.

After the initial scope is completed, many clients choose to leverage their investment with "Living the Story" options, including 'on-story' brochure, book or web copy; promotional audio or video script (full production is also available); story-driven guidelines for strategic implementation; ideation for further promotions/communications platforms; naming; additional sessions designed to elicit feedback and create buy-in from a larger number of stakeholders... and numerous other offerings. For every need, there is at least one solution.

+ Sounds great! What next?

Contact me, and let's discuss your company's needs. If I think I can help your company realize its full potential, we'll talk about what scope would be appropriate. If not, I'll do my best to point you towards a consultant who can.

+ What's the price range?

Scope	Deliverable(s)	Cost ¹	Description
Cliff Notes	Abridged Story (5-8pp)	\$3000	Low-budget option for very small companies, organizations, startups and nonprofits ² . Interviews with key team members take the place of an Envisioning session.
Short Story	Storyline (8-10pp)	\$4000	Built around a half-day Envisioning session, best-suited to small businesses that aren't ready for a full-day session. Companies with more than 100 employees will find a one- or two-day option more cost-effective
Novella	Longer, more comprehensive Storyline	\$5000	One-day session, ideal for single-focus companies and destinations (hotels, restaurants, museums, sports arenas, theatres), as well as established small companies
Bestseller	Discoveries (5-10pp) Full Brand Story (20-25pp)	\$7500	In a perfect branding world, all companies would do the two-day 'full meal deal' is Municipalities, multi-focus companies, mixed-use communities, airlines, banks, chains
Epic	Epic + Living Guidelines	\$9,500	Includes one-day follow-up session to discuss specifics of implementing and communicating brand story "Living the Story" across all departments

¹ Additional expenses may include venue rental, travel and accommodations, collateral printing, research expenses and catering.

² Registered Canadian and American nonprofits receive a 20% discount on all offerings.