



Storyforce

Prospects Prefer Storytelling

Treating stories as assets is an underrealized idea right now. Stories serve as glue to unify communities. Stories spread from employee to employee, from consumer to consumer, and, in some cases, from employee to consumer, or consumer to employee. Stories are much more memorable than statistics or simple anecdotes and are a mechanism that allows communities to grow. Strong stories can be told and retold. They become infectious. – Jennifer Aaker, Stanford Business School

Throughout our recorded history, humans have preferred storytelling because it helps us navigate complicated decisions. When we tell a story, we are reaching deep into the needs of the mind we are engaging. The top-read books of all time are dominated by stories that educate, entertain and inspire us.



MBA programs from the finest schools in the world rely on case studies and stories to accelerate learning. Publishers of business books often require actual customer stories in order to publish a book, because they know that books with customer stories get read.

Stories are a requirement in today's selling environment. Prospects move through at least 66% of their buying process before initiating a conversation with a provider.¹ They need stories to start envisioning themselves as customers.

Later on, when prospective customers talk with colleagues about you, they'll need stories to persuade. Finally, when they are prepared to make a decision, they will need stories to be confident with their investment.

When making complicated decisions in the business world, few people want to be the pioneer in choosing a new product or service. In any given marketplace, most buyers do not fit the risk-taking profile of early adopters; the majority would rather benefit from what earlier customers have learned. They must have proof points or they will not move forward.

Without stories, providers cannot connect with their potential customers. Stories help bridge the credibility gap between benefits promised and benefits realized.

¹Forrester, Lisa Wizdo, Principal Analyst, October 4, 2012

Customer Stories are the Most Powerful Force in Marketing

When we compare earned media and paid media, we see a significant difference in trust, impact and cost.

Customers telling success stories through “earned” social media can give a brand reach and credibility. Compare the financial windfall a company can gain as a result of infectious storytelling by happy customers, with the dollars wasted on paid media promoting promises that could not be kept.

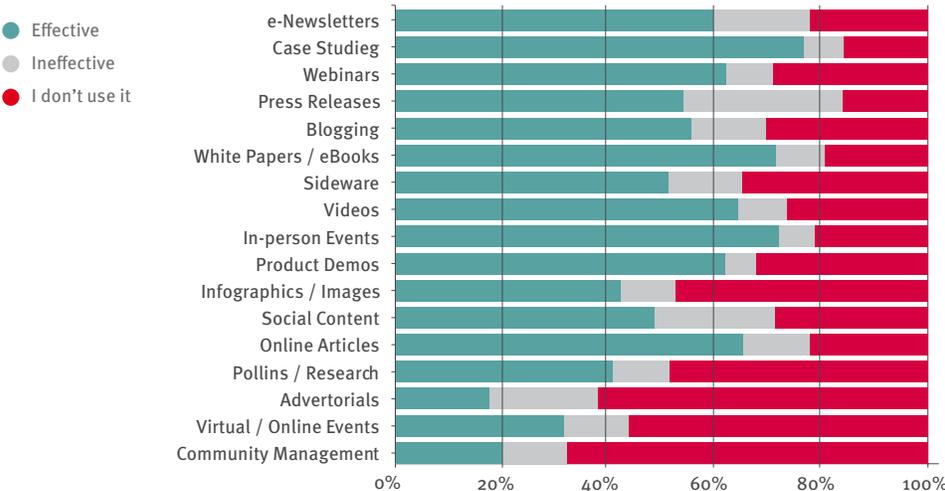
Brand discussions are happening in social media with increased frequency as buyers team up for the first time in history to jettison brands that lack credibility. Business buyers use more sources to consider purchases, spend more time considering purchases, and involve more team members than they have in the past.²



In this modern era of marketing, we have too many channels, too many voices and not enough time. The reason storytelling works efficiently for prospects is that it combines some important elements: a) it can travel in any form, from actual word of mouth to digital word of mouth b) it is earned credibility c) it impacts every step in the buying process.

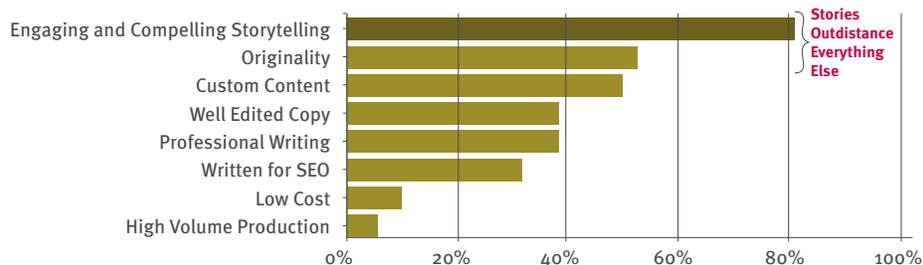
Without good stories, how can you hope to be a priority in a time-crushed world? What others say about you trumps anything you could say about yourself.

How Effective are the Following Formats?



²The 2012 B2B Buyer Landscape, DemandGen Research

What do you consider the three most important elements of effective content?

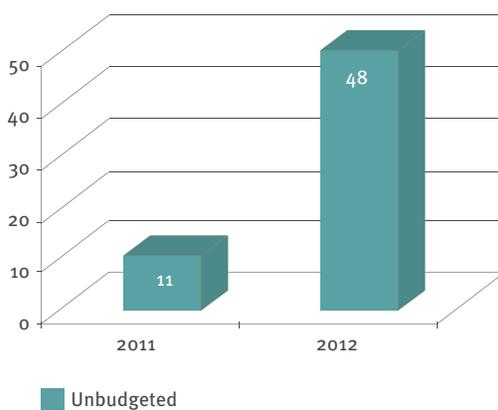


Source: IDG: B2B Content Marketing Trends Survey, 2012

Stories Drive Unplanned Purchases and Then Validate Them



The number of U.S. B2B buyers making unbudgeted purchases showed a dramatic increase in 2012, according to a report from DemandGen, a global consulting firm specializing in client relationship management. In 2012, 48% of buyers reported unbudgeted purchases, up from 11% in 2011. As the economy improved, it became imperative for proactive sellers to quickly adapt their offerings to meet the unplanned demand. When looking at the outcomes enjoyed by customers, it became imperative to take unplanned action in an improving economy.³



³The 2012 B2B Buyer Landscape, DemandGen Research

Improvement is not always in the budgeted plan, but it can quickly move from a nice-to-have to a must-have through the power of story. What happens when a competitor is taking market share or using technology that is more responsive to its customers? Just because your response isn't budgeted doesn't relieve you of the responsibility of taking action.

Stories help prospects take action to solve an emerging problem, address a competitive threat or jump on an opportunity. A provider can say things that make logical sense, but your logic won't have the same power as a customer story that prods your prospect to act.

But Yet, Stories are Hard to Find

Customer stories are like products on the shelf that prospects choose based on their specific needs. Just like food in a can, a story offers understood value: That understood value addresses the buyer's need for assurance. Unfortunately, today's buyer often finds out that most of the shelves are often unorganized, bare or lacking quality.

US GDP is comprised of 68% services.⁴ How challenging is it to show service excellence without customers to speak on your behalf?



Storytelling is Hard to Get Done at a High Level

Time is a Bottleneck

Even if you believe storytelling is going to help your company influence more prospects, that doesn't solve the problem of finding the time to get stories done.

This is a pervasive problem in companies. People are just too busy servicing current customers on the outside or supporting internal operations. Companies struggle to find the time to tell their customer's stories.

Getting Customers to Talk/Interviewing Skills

Can you get a customer to relax, share their enthusiasm, and deliver the facts that keep a reader engaged? Can you bring forth the human element of the customer's story?

When interviewing customers, it takes the curiosity of a journalist, organizational skills of a market researcher and the people skills of a diplomat. Having great questions, letting the customer tell his story, probing for more insight and keeping him on track is necessary to gather the most compelling information. Once this step is done, it's up to a master storyteller to make the story come to life and resonate for readers.

Lack of Writing Expertise

*Did your first sentence grab the reader?
How about the second? No? Then the prospect
is gone.*



Writing is easy. Writing well is a different matter. Good writing takes experience, style, confidence, goal clarity, enjoyment and the ability to rewrite. According to The Content Marketing Institute, one of the two biggest challenges in the last two years has been content quality. Prospects want a story to hold their attention and get to the essence of the matter, since valuable time is being invested.

There are also quality expectations from the customer side. If a customer is willing to tell her story, she has an expectation that the quality of the writing must match the importance of the relationship. A customer's professional reputation is on the line, which is no time for amateurs.

Storyforce is a Game Changing Solution

Vibrant customer stories are a strategic asset that improves all of our marketing and sales. In other words, customer stories are a revenue game changer.

Fastlane's customer story solution is called Storyforce. Storyforce is a strategy that accelerates all discussions about your company. Storyforce becomes the premise that your company can be trusted.

Storyforce Gives You Unique Leverage

A unique characteristic about customer stories is that they can contribute to just about every type of marketing communication, venue or sales call. Stories can deliver gravitas or proof points to product literature, press efforts, or a shareholder meeting.

The majority of prospects need you to get serious about creating customer stories or they will struggle to take you seriously. By embedding those stories into other marketing efforts, you are creatively repeating the stories that make you memorable.

What makes Storyforce a unique marketing asset is its ability to add impact to other efforts as a proof point. For example, it would be a challenge to find an example where an executive's speech improved a product sheet. - but Storyforce does.

Storyforce Creates Stories with Impact

Even if everything has gone digital, you need great writing. In fact, because everything has gone digital, you need exceptional writing. The ability to get someone's attention has never been more difficult. You need professional writers who have made their living knowing how to plan, interview, grab the reader's attention, and rewrite for improvement.

Storyforce's writers will sync their efforts to your revenue needs. As an example, we will want to write stories that bridge lucrative prospects to relevant customer stories. With this approach, there is a positive impact to the entire buying process, and no one is happier than the sales team.

The sales team seems to always been under a prospect's scrutiny for what they have to say. Without an effort like Storyforce, you leave them to fend for themselves with what can seem to be arcane concepts, jargon and unsubstantiated promises. Salespeople are natural storytellers. Why not give them a useful instrument that plays to their strengths? Storyforce closes the credibility loop for them and helps them sell with focused confidence.

Confident salespeople sell more. It's that simple.

Storyforce Makes Your Stories Easy to Find

Storyforce helps you package and organize your customer stories so a prospect can bridge his POV (Point of View) to your credibility quickly.

POV is more than someone's opinion. person's preconceived notions based on his role or persona in the organization. POV can also be a problem he urgently needs to solve. In some cases, POV is dominated by the person's preferred product category or vertical industry perspective.

Even if you don't always know the reasons prospects are interested in your company, you know the most popular ones. It could be a strategic reason; or, simply event-driven which relates back to the unbudgeted purchases. However, most prospects will come to you from their POV. A prospect will use his POV in order to bridge himself to your content.



A good way to test your own POV bridges is to look at your website. Has it been designed to help your prospects use any of these POVs to find relevant customer stories? If you look at a sample of websites, you will see that most providers have not designed their websites to help prospects find stories that would bring them comfort. This is why marketing can be so frustrating. We may be very active in marketing, but if we are not communicating a clear premise for trust and we have not delivered a clear path to trust, we have failed.

Customer stories are essential to our revenue growth and must be easy to locate. In many companies, great stories are buried under a misguided marketing effort. If the prospect cannot find the stories that resonate, we are stuck with the proverbial tree falling in the woods. Storyforce helps make those stories easy to find so prospects can move forward.

The Secret Sauce of Storyforce

There is another component to Storyforce we only share with our clients. It helps bring even more comfort to prospects.



Storyforce Makes Storytelling Easy

If writing flows and is easy to understand, that is the result of great effort and professional rewriting. That's where the confusion lies. Anyone can write, but very few people can write at an engaging level that makes it easy for you to deliver customer stories.

“So, what’s your story?” We’re all familiar with this question. It’s just another way of saying, “so why are you here?” “Why you?” Or, “So what?” These are the questions that are on our prospect’s mind, but as stated previously, it’s hard to get stories done. Storyforce makes creating a customer story strategy easy. Like any strategic effort, you need expertise, process and maintenance capabilities so stories impact your revenue efforts.

Expertise

Fastlane’s writers are hard-to-find professionals who are journalists, business writers and science-technology writers. Our writers average over 15 years of experience and have written for some of the greatest publications in the world. We know the storytelling craft.

When someone is a journalist, they do their homework prior to the interview, increasing the velocity and accuracy of the conversation. Journalists understand deadlines and relationships. They have the ability to connect with the interviewee and they bring out the essence of the story. They know without the human element, it just won't resonate.

Business writers know that people do business with people. Revenue can only follow where trust has blazed a path. Many companies fall in love with "inside my world" jargon that loses the reader. Fastlane writers do not write clutter or try to nourish our vanity. Their job is to connect with the prospect quickly from their POV and walk them through a story that builds trust.

When writing about science and technology, facts and logic are critical. Our writers are always building on the last fact or premise of the argument. By having the science and technology premises support the benefit argument, the writer validates the argument, giving confidence to the prospect. The real magic comes taking complex information that was complicated and creating a story any prospect can understand.

Our writers value your customer relationships. As well as being masters of the storytelling craft, you will find our writers to be thoughtful and flexible. In combining the aforementioned writing expertise with your singular style and the customer's voice, the reader recognizes your storytelling style, values the customer and stays engaged.



Process

You will enjoy the consultative approach our writers use to understand your company, markets, competition and goals. A specific and realistic Storyforce plan will be put together that is to be executed in an achievable timeframe.

Details to be discussed early on include writing style, your involvement, checkpoints, prospects' POVs, web site design, story distribution points and business goals. Together, we can target customer stories by collaborating with the sales or executive team.

In addition to writing the story, we can consider creating presentation slides or a video. It's classic project management from there. We stay focused on meeting the story requirements, budget management and deadlines. Another way of putting it, is that we now have an editorial calendar.



Build a Well-Rounded Brand That Excites All the Senses

Smart brands deliver lasting impact and value. The right brand strategy provides endless energy to power your marketing, sales and communications efforts. We build “brands that move” – your customers, partners, prospects, media and other influencers.

- Map your brand story, core competencies and messaging to your brand identity
- Be unique and take a stand for something BIG
- Strike a chord that is relevant, stirs emotions and is timeless



Purposefire Lights a Path to Better Financial Results

Purposefire is a unique and transformational strategic program that combines internal communication, external marketing and a disciplined approach to social media.

Give your audiences the elements they need to share your purpose and all supporting messages with their trusted networks.

- Higher revenues – 4X revenue growth
- More jobs – 7X job creation
- A higher stock price – 12X stock price



Media & Beyond

At Fastlane, we define the convergence of Public Relations and Social Media as SocialPR. Today’s news and brand messages have the potential to travel at lightning speed, through traditional news organizations as well as through networks of influencers active on social media.

A SocialPR program involves building powerful messaging, sharing compelling content, and engaging the influencers who will tell your story the way you want it to be told – across the spectrum of print, broadcast, digital and social media.

- Tell your story by leveraging our unique Storyforce capabilities
- Build trusted relationships with key media influencers and market analysts
- Get quoted as a thought leader in your targeted markets



Content Marketing Fuels Your Outreach Efforts

Companies now have more ways than ever to tell their brand stories, share thought leadership and differentiate their products. At the same time, competition for mindshare is intense.

If you’re going to stand out, your content needs to be fresh, engaging and impactful. Fastlane specializes in content strategy development, execution and outreach that will:

- Fire up your SocialPR with real ideas that will get influencers talking
- Generate leads by sharing success metrics, using our unique Storyforce capabilities
- Raise your brand profile by positioning yourself as a leader in the marketplace



Creating That “Wow” Factor

Event marketing is all about the experience and the memories. It’s what separates good events from truly exceptional ones.

We develop well-rounded, experiential event strategies that are designed to break through and excite all the senses. Our Marketplace Makers practice even develops virtual events to complement a physical tradeshow or as a stand-alone online event. Working with Fastlane helps you:

- Develop integrated and full, social-enabled event plans
- Engage customers and generate leads
- Gain brand momentum and raise your brand’s profile
- Make the most of your trade show and event budget



Your Customers Have Moved to Mobile. Have You?

Mobile is fast becoming the primary place where prospects learn about your brand and make buying decisions. Shipments of mobile devices are already far outpacing computers at historic levels – yet many companies still don’t have an effective marketing solution for mobile.

Fastlane’s Mobile Marketing practice works with companies to develop a comprehensive mobile strategy to fully engage customers when, and how, they want to be engaged.

- Align with the 68% of consumers who bought from their smartphone in 2012
- Help 85% of B2B buyers who researched services on their smartphone in 2012
- Prepare for the projection that 78% of Internet traffic comes from mobile in 2017

For more information contact:

Christopher Faust • 855 677 5263 e 104 • chris@fastlane.co • 855 677 5263 • fastlane.co • copyright ©Fastlane



Over the past few years, Fastlane has helped Collabera (Formerly known as Global Consultants, Inc.) grow considerably on a global scale. We initially started with public relations, but have since worked with Fastlane on brand development, marketing communications and event marketing.
Cynthia Moricz de Tecso – Marketing and Supplier Diversity Manager Collabera

Fastlane gets it – their ideas are innovative, writing is full of impact, PR is business building, and the team members are consummate professionals.
David Glassman – Vice President of Marketing Onstream Media

Fastlane has been responsive to our needs and helped elevate our company's brand profile through well-designed, attention-getting advertisements, compelling tradeshow graphics, and sophisticated marketing campaigns.
Bill Gilbert – Vice President of Marketing Advantedge Healthcare Solutions

The Fastlane team brings its significant experience and forward-looking communications expertise to our venerable brand. As a result, Fastlane will enhance the already-strong relationships we have with the CEO community.
Marshall Cooper – CEO Chief Executive Group

We've worked with Fastlane for several years now and they continue to treat us as if we are their only client. Their passion, creativity and professional pride is contagious too. The entire team is a real joy to work with.
Jeff Neale – Director of Marketing Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America

Fastlane captured the essence of my business and developed our ShinyPaw branding and image from scratch, everything from the logo and product packaging to our eCommerce-enabled web presence and business stationary. I couldn't be happier and would recommend them highly to anyone.
Roger Koman – Founder Therapeutic Pet Solutions