

PERSUADE WITH A DIGITAL CONTENT STORY!



How Smart
Business Leaders
Gain a Marketing
Competitive
Edge

LISA APOLINSKI & HENRY DEVRIES

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[CONTENTS]

Lesson 1	Your Digital Content Sucks— Here's Why	1
Lesson 2	The Six-Step Digital Content Story Formula	13
Lesson 3	Three Must-Have Characters ..	31
Lesson 4	Eight Great Stories	43
Lesson 5	Monster Stories.....	57
Lesson 6	Underdog Stories	67
Lesson 7	Comedy Stories	77
Lesson 8	Tragedy Stories	85
Lesson 9	Mystery Stories	93
Lesson 10	Quest Stories	99

Lesson 11	Rebirth Stories.....	107
Lesson 12	Escape Stories	115
Lesson 13	Threading The Digital Needle.....	123
Lesson 14	The Importance Of CEO Digital Storytelling.....	131
Lesson 15	What Is Coming On The Digital Horizon?	137
Appendix	143
Acknowledgments	143
About The Authors	145
End Notes	149

[LESSON 1]

YOUR DIGITAL CONTENT SUCKS— HERE'S WHY

Ready for some tough news? Your digital content sucks, and you have some statistics stacked against you. Data indicates more than 70 million blog posts are produced each month on WordPress.¹ Since WordPress powers only 35 percent of the internet,² a ton of digital content is being created every single day.

If that is not totally disheartening, consider the fifteen-second rule³: visitors to your online content will stay, on average, only fifteen seconds. Think about your digital behavior today. How quickly did you close out of a blog or link? People abandon swiftly and often

because the digital content is not persuasive and there is plenty more available. With so much digital information being added every day, getting content to rise to the digital top is the Holy Grail.

There has never been a better time for sharing your digital story, and humans are hardwired for stories.

Despite all of the tough news, consumers are hungry for good digital content. Digital trend reports show while our digital consumption has dropped by three minutes a day as compared to last year, people spend nearly 40 percent of their day online.⁴ That translates to spending more than one hundred days a year engaging with digital content.

There has never been a better time for sharing your digital story, and humans are hardwired for stories. Storytelling can persuade potential clients to connect with your brand on a human level, trust your brand promise, and become

a repeat customer, even during uncertain economic times. That means happier clients and consistent revenue streams for organizations.

Nothing is as persuasive as storytelling with a purpose. This little book holds the keys to proven techniques for telling the great client success stories employed by Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and Wall Street.

In addition to humorous ways to remember the eight great metastories, this book reveals how to include must-have characters into each client success story, including the hero, nemesis, and mentor (spoiler: smart executives should avoid the rookie mistake of making themselves the heroes of their own client success stories).

THE SCIENCE AND ART OF STORYTELLING

In August 2008, *Scientific American Mind* published an article by Jeremy Hsu titled, “The Secrets of Storytelling: Why We Love A Good Yarn.” The entire article is worth the read, but

here is a concise summary.

According to Hsu, storytelling, or narrative, is a human universal. Familiar themes appear in tales throughout history and are global norms. The greatest stories—those retold through the generations and translated into other languages—do more than simply present a believable picture. These tales captivate their audiences, whose emotions can be inextricably tied to those of the characters in the stories. They connect to audiences on a human level.

By studying the narrative's power to influence beliefs, researchers are discovering how we analyze information and accept new ideas. A 2007 study by marketing researcher Jennifer Edson Escalas of Vanderbilt University found that a test audience responded more positively to advertisements in narrative form compared with straightforward ads that encouraged viewers to think logically about arguments for a product.⁵ Similarly, Melanie Green of the University of North Carolina coauthored a 2006 study showing that labeling information

as “fact” increased critical analysis, whereas labeling information as “fiction” had the opposite effect.⁶

Research studies in 2017 about digital storytelling in research,⁷ in 2014 about the effectiveness of digital storytelling in the classroom,⁸ in 2013 about six facets of storytelling,⁹ and in 2011 about storytelling in education research,¹⁰ and in 2010 about brand-consumer storytelling psychology¹¹ confirm the persuasive power of digital content.

People accept ideas more readily when their minds are in story mode versus when they are in an analytical mindset. By moving an audience into story mode with the right stories in the right way, organizations can dramatically increase a potential client’s conversion rate.

EVERY BUSINESS HAS A STORY

“I will never forget the day Sonja called me. That call changed the course of my digital marketing agency. I discovered the power of storytelling to cut through the digital noise.”

This is the mess-to-success story of Lisa Apolinski (co-author of this book). In July 2014, she had been in business for just over two years and had moderate success with her consulting agency. She quickly discovered a good way to engage with potential new clients was to lecture at conferences. Her goal was to book four speaking engagements per year. In addition, because her agency was young, she was highly committed to demonstrating her digital expertise and knowledge.

The challenge was twofold: she was breaking into a landscape that already had thousands of self-identified speakers, and she needed to create digital content that legitimized her position as a digital growth expert. She knew creating strong digital content would provide her with the expert position she sought, allow her to reach more potential clients on a regular basis, and increase her chances of being selected for speaking engagements within a competitive field.

She wanted her agency's journey to begin with a solid digital brand and strong website. With the creation of those, she took herself through the proprietary digital discovery exercise she had developed for clients. She was struggling with the question, "What do you want to be known for?" when her best friend Sonja called.

“Sonja asked me how the branding exercise was going. I was stuck on that question. What did I want to be known for? She positioned the question differently and asked when clients talk about their experiences with my agency, how did I want that conversation to go? My immediate thought was I want companies to be smarter users of digital engagement. Being my best friend, she pushed back hard and asked what would being ‘smarter users’ do for businesses? What exactly was in it for them?”

And that question prompted a moment of clarity on the power of storytelling. She then relayed this tale to her best friend:

When Lisa was working for a Fortune 500 company, she engaged with a digital marketing agency for a project. The agency charged a hefty sum, yet unbeknownst to her, she was doing most

of the heavy lifting for the project. When she started running her own agency, she became aware of what had transpired.

*In today's world, digital knowledge
can be a matter of life and death for a
business*

“I felt completely taken advantage of, and I never want my clients to feel that way. I realized then what my agency stood for: empowering businesses with digital knowledge. There are many speakers and agencies that share why digital strategy is important. With my agency, I wanted clients to learn how to create digital strategies that work, which is the other critical piece of the digital puzzle.”

Sonja, a scientist, wanted to know Lisa's measurement for success. Lisa knew her story would resonate regardless of

where the business was located. Since she wanted to reach clients on a global scale, her goal would be to speak at one international conference by the end of 2014. Her best friend commented it was an audacious goal and would not be easy.

Sonja was right—the goal was not easy to achieve, and there were several fits and starts along the way. But Lisa was confident because she had a story to tell (several, in fact). She knew this was not a silver-bullet strategy. She needed to share the *how* behind the digital strategies and how they would work for her audience.

“I realized that because I was once in the same spot as they are today, I am them. I relate to what they are going through because I have gone through it myself. When I write articles, speak on podcasts, or lecture at conferences

and universities, I always tie back to a real case to show that strategy in action—how that client got results. In a fast-paced environment, ethereal discussions do not do the audience any service. In today’s world, digital knowledge can be a matter of life and death for a business.”

She focused on her digital storytelling. Within two months, Lisa had her first global speaking engagement. In the five years since, Lisa has been invited to speak about digital content strategies on four continents. She has spoken to hundreds of thousands of executives on getting the most bang from their digital buck. And while peering into her crystal ball, she uses the power of storytelling to share the knowledge of what’s ahead for the digital future.

The moral of the story: Clients are hardwired for stories, and this differentiator can be crucial to growing a business in the digital age.