

BrainEpics™

Storytelling in Marketing

by Claudia Antoni and Michael Wittenberg



Stories are simple. Stories are personal. Stories move us. They express causality – without the need to explain why. Linking WHO, WHAT, WHERE, HOW, with WHOM and WHEREFORE. Creating emotionality: creating meaning.

Stories make no distinction between emotion and reason; significance is purely subjective. But at the heart of every story is something of value, something emotionally meaningful to the subject, something desirable. All stories, both fiction and non-fiction, have a closed form which relates the essence of experience in a sensory-specific manner. Telling or writing a story is the condensation of human experience into a recognized and widely understandable form. The reasoning and emotional schemas held in the episodic memory are translat-

ed into a story – in short detailing the exact motives which are responsible for decision-making behaviour.

Every person in every culture can narrate. It simply happens; we've all learned this from an early age - regardless of whether through internal debates, or listening at story time. The best-selling author Henning Mankell refers to mankind as "Homo narrans." Even though the idea of storytelling is not new in itself, it has recently experienced a particular boost through findings in neuroscience. BrainEpics™

links classic storytelling with the latest findings in brain research, harnessing this symbiosis for marketing.

Neuroscience tells us that the invention of stories is an anthropological constant. As humans our brains are physiologically and psychologically constructed to create meaning in this way, and to use this to develop a sense of individual identity. Or as formulated by a renowned brain researcher: "Man is a narrative being. Narration, our stories, and our

history are expressions of our identity. Our biography is a narrative that we tell ourselves and that we believe above all.“

This means that BrainEpics™ is based on something quite essential. It literally builds on the fundamental need of human existence: “The permanent design of identity through the invention of stories.” And at this we are true masters.

BrainEpics™ furthermore links storytelling with human empathetic capital, the ability necessary to mentally and emotionally transport oneself into the worlds and thoughts of others. The art of mirroring, i.e. living vicariously through fantasy/fictional stories, not only releases us from our image of self and increases our own creativity, but above all also enriches the reserve of stories that we use within the branding context.

BrainEpics™ Brands Tell Us Something
It’s long been a truism in marketing: successful brands tell an (archetypal) story, which touches upon our deepest inner longings and awakes basic instincts that we believed to be trapped.

The nucleus of this story is generally based on a master plot (a classic story type: adventure, rescue narrative, etc.) - whose dramatic composition temporarily beguiles us, perhaps only for the brief but decisive moment needed to make a purchase decision - and whose protagonists we recognize and mirror as ourselves.

The draw of this prototypical story must, of course, be continually recharged. In other words, the story must be retold in a manner that matches the respective feeling of the time, and never cease to fascinate. It is in this way alone that a specific epic charisma or sustainability, in the original sense of the word, develops.

This epic charisma is priceless in a world where functional advantages are quickly copied, and where the image decides the emotional draw of a brand; whether we pay more without questioning the “why” or disregard the functionally equal copy.

Storytelling makes the linking of products and brands genuine and

open to be experienced in the world of the consumer. In the process it is less a matter of the identification of absolute and definitive product or brand truths - which there will never be anyway - and much more a matter of the clear (and as such also good for outsiders), easy-to-sense designation of what is subjectively relevant. For marketing this often results in surprising insights and new priorities.

BrainEpics™ helps brands strengthen their stories, but also helps the successfully-established brand narrative to evolve. That is to say, it delivers important clues as to where the brand is at present, initially to retain the status quo of the narrative quality and then to construct further possible plots that carry the brand narrative further.

BrainEpics™ – The Core Methods

The methodical core of BrainEpics™ is based on Joseph Campbell’s so-called storytelling model. This model creates a progression of tension through various stages, which then in turn allows those involved to play parts in the story. Each station in the consumer or brand journey can thus be made able to be experienced.

With the storytelling model, the internal and external motivations that lead to a brand, product, or purchase journey become recognizable in a playful way. Also recognizable are the thresholds and obstacles that

must be overcome and the strategies that must be developed, as which individual resources can be capitalized on, what the treasure should look like at the end of the journey and what this will cost.

This model is particularly appropriate for siphoning off “wisdom from the crowd” for certain objectives, regardless of whether it is to be tapped from internal staff (marketing, market research, product designer, brand manager) or from the intelligence in the outer circle (the actual customer, consumers, buyers).

Every narrative has heroes, or at least actors. The 12 archetypes are a form of basic line-up for consumer or brand casting here. They are supplemented however with additional (stereo-) types depending on the study background - this can be the eternal child in us all, or the moody diva.

A further element within the narrative portfolio is the 20 master plots: depending on their application they lend the stories being told distinctiveness, define the focus of a narrative, or shift suspense and the focal point.

These archetypes and master plots allow stories to be told and created - retold and changed.

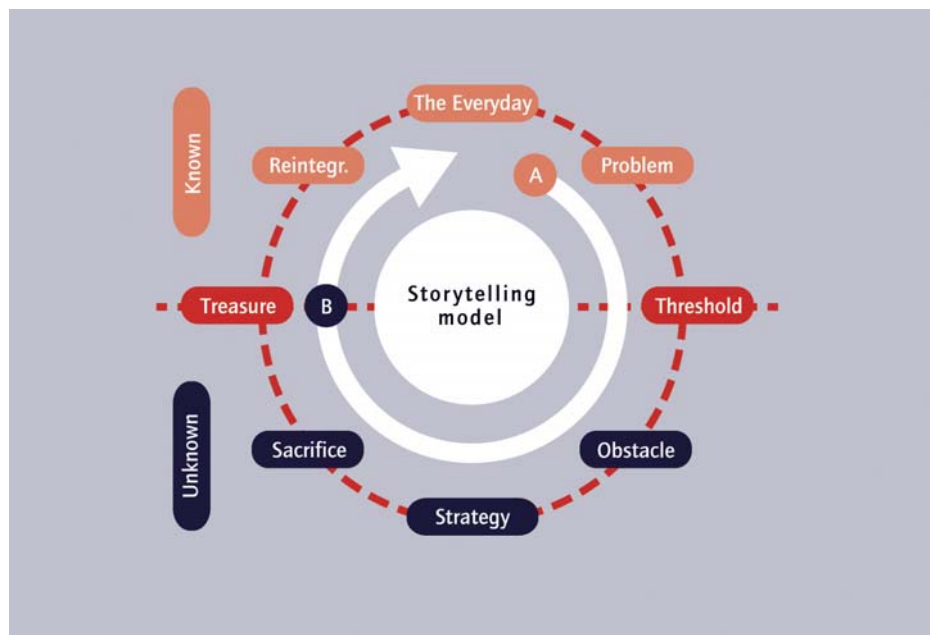
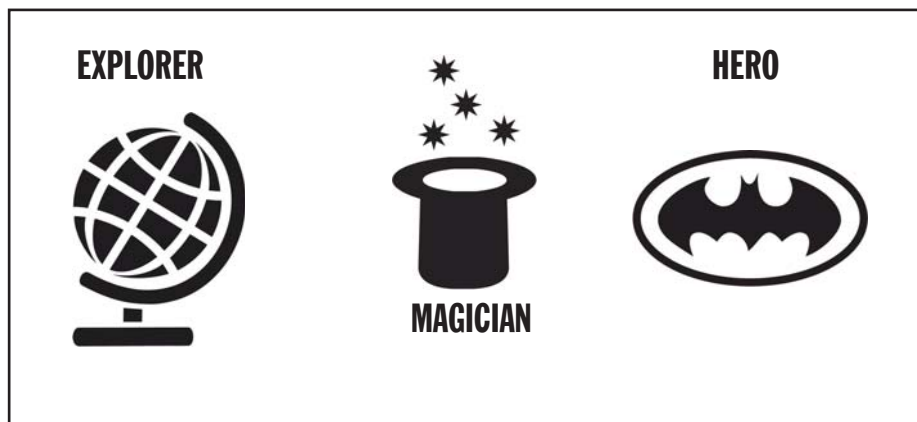


Image: H.T.P. Concept

And finally, within the framework of storytelling the following are utilized in order to meet the immediate and the changeability of stories:

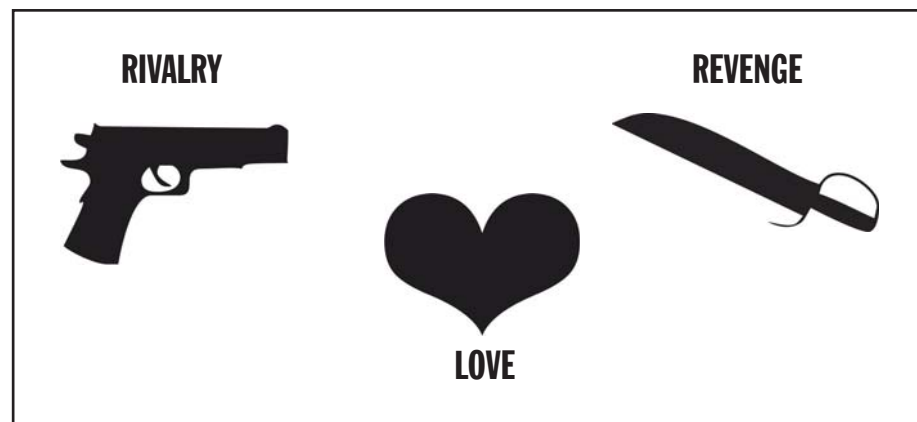
- Association and disassociation techniques
- Role-play and improvisation techniques
- Story-playing and story-changing techniques



BrainEpics™ – Storytelling in Marketing and Case Studies

Within the framework of brand analysis and brand development we see both the “storytelling model” as well as “storytelling via a change of perspective” as particularly applicable. We often have a brand’s stories told or played out from several perspectives in order to understand a brand’s core or character as a whole and its context-specific connections: from the perspective of the passionate fan (user), the jealous enemy (competitive user), the interested-but-uninvolved neighbour (low involvement user), the dropout (lapsed user), and the choreographers (ad agency, marketing department). In this way we are able to capture the perceptions of all those who participate in the construction of a brand.

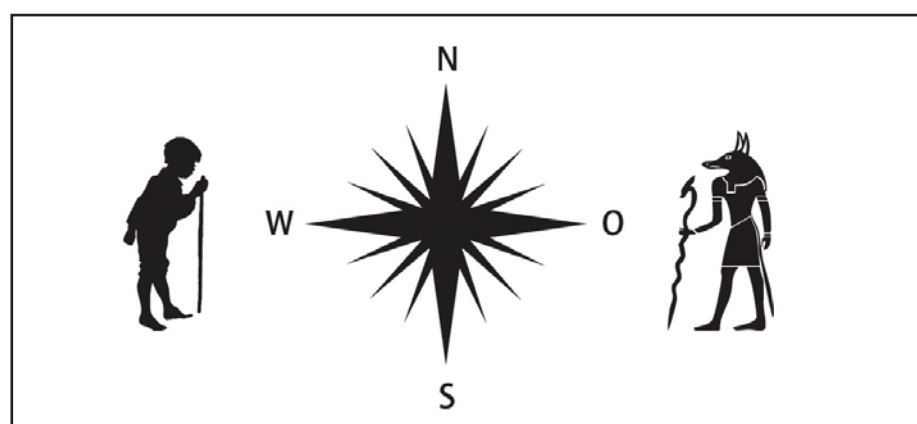
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In so doing, the storytelling model serves as a narrative form, as the framework for telling the story. Like every good story, a consumer brand story has a beginning, middle, and an end. It has an everyday context, in which it occurs or plays out - and repeats. This form contains at its core a problem or challenge for which brands become solutions, strategies, or resources.

Image: H.T.P. Concept

in order to meet the immediate experience and the changeability of stories. In this way, product and brand stories can be told from the most different of perspectives: from internal or external perspectives, from customer and consumer perspectives, from the perspective of the problem, or of the adversary, or in a more relaxed way from a bird’s eye view.



Furthermore, the diverse stations on the journey from problem to goal - whether dermatologist, beautician, friends, parents, pharmacist, psychologist, or the jungle of products seem to weaken the protagonists rather than strengthen them. These are findings that call for strong guidance, medical expertise, and that culminate in corresponding POS activities.

Just as real-life consumer stories can be transmitted through a narrative form, brand biographies can also

Image: H.T.P. Concept

be transformed through narrative or roleplay. To this end we collect a brand's key scenes in coordination with the clients, for example the brand launch, the emergence of private labels, the development of line extensions, the economic crisis, etc. These are then translated into acted scenes: birth (= launch), first vacation in a foreign land (new market entry), birthday party with friends and enemies (unveiling the brand in a competitive environment) - which are then played out with clients or consumers.

Narrated or performed brand analyses immediately bring to life where the brand comes from, where it is now, and where it hopes to go. They playfully demonstrate which deficits and resources a brand contains, who the protagonists and antagonists are, and finally enables the development of future brand scenarios through free, creative, and projective narration.

A final example from the online-world: As in real life and as in *One Thousand and One Nights*, the phenomenon of storytelling defines the world of social media. Who, where, when, with whom, and to what end...these are the endless "bits and pieces" that are told and linked on Facebook, Twitter, StudiVZ, and all other online networks. We also use this human passion for narration as a guideline for our blog platform first@thepool. We carry out market research with this consumer blog tool primarily through invitations to openly share (stories). We use these online storytelling scripts as the basis for the development of trend scenarios, communication strategies, and new products.

Bottom Line:

A narrative reflects on the dramatic scenes and high points of a story, subjectively experienced emotionality, and on the succession of each event in the story - the "genuine" causality. And in the process it comes completely full-circle to the "why" question, which often creates constructed answers rather than mirroring subjective experiences and episodic memories. This means that the evocation of brand experiences through the form of storytel-

ling (or acting) allows an immediate experience, leads to an associated state of re-experience and not to a state of post-rationalized reflection.

*BrainEpics*TM is a tool that can be deployed for traditional offline approaches like focus groups, workshops, ethnographic experientials or face-to-face interviews; just as it can for newer online-based methods including consumer blogs or innovative platforms like first@thepool.

It is useful, both standing on its own and in combination with traditional market research methods, for generating insights and market analyses as well as for the development of new concepts. And the best part:

"Storytelling is primarily a technique of discovery, not of inquiry. Storytelling always offers the opportunity to find something valuable that you weren't even searching for."



Photo: H,T,P, Concept

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Since finishing her studies in Linguistics and German and Romance Language Studies in 1991 at the University of London, Claudia Antoni has been responsible for customers like Beiersdorf and Coca-Cola at H,T,P, Concept. She primarily supervises strategic insight-, brand-, and product development processes. Additional tasks include the continuous improvement of H,T,P, Concept's methods portfolio.

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Photo: H,T,P, Concept

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Michael Wittenberg has worked for H,T,P, Concept since 1999—following his studies in sociology (focusing on the sociology of lifestyles) at the Universität Konstanz. During this time, he has been responsible for very different company clients—from food to pharmaceuticals and for entirely different projects—from the development of ideas and concepts through to their evaluation. His special interest lies in the further refinement of imagery techniques within the H,T,P, Concept methods portfolio.

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