

Book  
01



# Telling Your Brand Story

**A  
Zoho  
Academy  
Workbook**

- Establish your story's hero, antagonist, and guide
- Determine the narrative arc of your story
- Clarify your who/what/where/why/how
- Let your customers help you write your story
- Use questions to help spark your creativity

# Stories...

We're hard-wired to tell them and hard-wired to seek them out. They're how we make sense of the world and our place in it. They're how we explore possibilities, imagine the future, learn, and communicate with each other. They're how we reinforce and preserve our values, cultures, and histories. They allow us both to escape the world and to position ourselves more fully in it.

Because stories engage people, evoke strong emotional responses, stimulate sympathy, and create trust, your brand's story will be among the most powerful tools you have at your disposal.

*Without* a brand story, you're just a company that makes another commodity: undifferentiated, and ultimately replaceable.



But when you *have a brand story*? You'll have an ethos that appeals to your prospects' and customers' sense of self. Our core values are intricately wound into our identities, after all; we're drawn to what resonates for us, and we're willing to protect what we hold dear. When your brand's story aligns with your audience's core values, they won't just want to be a *part* of your story; they'll also defend that story to the end.

## And *that's* powerful.

Your brand's story is much more than your "company bio." It's everything from the colors on your website, to your packaging materials, to the way your employees answer the phone and banter with your customers on social media. It includes your origins, your goals, your inspiration, your challenges, your target audience and their experiences with your company. It's even the stuff you *don't* have control over, including how your prospects and customers *perceive* what you do and *interpret* what you say. In short, it's the sum total of *who* you are, *all* you do, and *everything* people believe about you based on the signals you send.

# Establishing Your Main Characters

Every brand story contains three crucial characters: the hero, the antagonist, and the guide. In this sense, it's like so many stories you're familiar with (think *Star Wars*, *Back to the Future*, *The Wizard of Oz*, or *The Lord of the Rings*).

**The hero is your ideal customer.** This is important: *Your brand story's hero is not your business.* The story will only be compelling to your audience—and they'll only connect with it—if it's ultimately about *them*. Set the stage for their heroism, and they'll want to take up that role in your story.

**The antagonist is your ideal customer's obstacle or pain point.** It's the thing they're contending against that *you* can help them with. It's what keeps them awake at night or takes up too much of their mental energy during the day. It's the thing that—were it removed—would make your ideal customer feel a little more “heroic” in their daily lives.

**The guide is your business.** You are the *supporting* character: Yoda to Luke Skywalker, Doc Brown to Marty McFly, Glinda the Good Witch to Dorothy. You give the hero the plan (or power) that allows them to navigate their challenge and arrive at the life they long for. Just remember: While there's a sense that the hero couldn't do it without you, *they're* still the hero in the end.

## Exercise: Fleshing out Your Hero

Your brand is never going to be all things to all people. The more you can clarify your target audience, the easier it'll be to tell the story they want to be a part of: They'll feel spoken to, after all. Persona research and market demographics are great starting places, but there's more to this process than statistics. Make your hero human:

**My hero is (female/male/nonbinary), \_\_\_\_\_ years old,  
(single/married), lives in \_\_\_\_\_ and does  
\_\_\_\_\_ for work**

**A typical day in my hero's life looks like \_\_\_\_\_**

**My hero's superpowers are \_\_\_\_\_**

**Things that keep them up at night include \_\_\_\_\_**

**My hero is happiest when \_\_\_\_\_**

**My hero's strongest core values and beliefs are \_\_\_\_\_**

**If I had to describe my hero in five adjectives, they would be \_\_\_\_\_**

# Exercise: Fleshing Out Your Antagonist

Remember that conflict makes a great story—so don't minimize it in your brand narrative. Conflict thrives on contrast... and it's precisely through contrast that your brand can differentiate itself:

**My hero is struggling with** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**The ways this struggle is negatively impacting their life include** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**The challenges that stand in their way to solving their problem are** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**If their antagonist was a movie villain or an animal, it would be** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Their antagonist's weakness is** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## Exercise: Fleshing Out Your Guide

Now it's time to personify your business. The reason this is such a useful exercise is that consumers ultimately want to do business with humans, not with non-human entities. What's more, prospects will be better able to identify with your company if you offer them personality traits (characteristics, beliefs, etc) that resonate with their own. Here are some prompts:

**If my business was a human guide, they would be (male/female/nonbinary) and \_\_\_\_\_ years old. When they weren't at work, they'd be spending their time \_\_\_\_\_**

**If I had to describe my guide's personality in five adjectives, they would be \_\_\_\_\_**

**My guide's core values and beliefs are \_\_\_\_\_**

**The action word that BEST describes what my guide does for my hero is (educating/empowering/preparing/supporting/other \_\_\_\_\_ )**

**The value my hero gets when they engage with my guide is \_\_\_\_\_**

**If my guide didn't exist, what would ultimately be at stake for my hero is \_\_\_\_\_**

# Determining the Narrative Arc of Your Brand Story

If you reduce every movie you've ever seen down to a fundamental narrative structure, you'd find we humans have been telling the same story over and over again. It'll be no different with your brand story. You'll have a few narrative structures to choose from:

- Problem > Solution > Success
- Rising action > Conflict > Climax > Resolution
- Rags > Riches
- Good versus evil
- Self versus society
- Survival in an unfamiliar environment
- The hero's journey (Departure > Initiation > Return)
- The quest story
- The creation/origin story
- The love story







# Exercise: Plotting Your Brand Story

Choose the formula that most resonates and try plotting your story. If your brand were a novel or a movie, what course would the action take? Think broadly about these possibilities: A “love story” might look like Starbucks’ mission to “create a culture of warmth and belonging, where everyone is welcome,” or like Amazon’s promise of unparalleled customer service. Maybe your quest story involves “killing the dragon” that’s the huge misperception in your industry. And so on.

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# The Non-Linear Aspects of the Brand Story: The 4 Ws and 1 H

We've been talking stories and storylines thus far; but a brand narrative isn't entirely (or always) linear. It's the historical and present sum of all your parts; and it's hardly confined to the written word. So while it's true that every blog post you publish won't cover all of these questions, the sum total of your brand narrative should answer them:

**WHO:** Who is the “guide” of your brand's story? Who is your audience? Who are the “heroes” you're in business for? Who are your employees?

**WHAT:** What, exactly, is the product or service you provide? What are its features and benefits? What are your mission, vision, and values? What inspired or motivated you to start your business? What does your company culture look like?

**WHERE:** Where did you come from? Where are you based now? Where are your products made, and where are their materials from? Where are your employees from, and based? Where are you going? Where do you hope to be in ten years?

**WHY:** Why *this* product or service, at *this* moment in time, for *this* customer? Why is what you have to offer so important? Why is this particular industry your passion? Why should your prospects choose you over your competitors?

**HOW:** How are your products produced? How long does it take? How does your product or service benefit your customers? How do you contribute to the world? How do you intend to change your customers' lives? How are you evolving?

# Discovering the Plot

Your heroes are already writing their own epic stories about your business. Remember that your brand is made up as much of what prospects and customers believe about you as it is of what you say about yourself. It's a story collaboratively authored... by hundreds or more.



What are people saying about you on Facebook? On Twitter? On Google+? On their own blogs, or in the comments they leave on yours? What are they saying when they call your customer service team? What language is in their emails? What expressions have they used when you've interviewed them for case studies? How do your closest friends see your business? How would they describe it in just a few words?

The answers to all these questions are valuable, because collectively, they give you a sense of how your brand is viewed. And the patterns you spot in these answers will be especially useful to you...because they're customer-generated keywords relevant to your brand.

## Exercise: Letting Your Customers Help Write Your Story

Search the areas we mentioned on the previous page. Make a list of common “keywords” and choose the ones that feel most relevant to your brand. Using that shortlist, assemble those relevant keywords into sentences that characterize your brand.

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# Questions to Spark Creativity around Your Brand Narrative

What was happening in the world when your company was founded? What call, or what need, was your founder responding to?

Who was your company's very first customer? What did they say about your product?

Why did your employees initially decide to come work for you? What are the things that motivate them to come to work today?

When your team members have "aha! moments," what are they about? How do they share them with the rest of the team?

Who or what inspires your employees?

What was your business's proudest moment? What are your employees' proudest moments?

What does "a typical day in the office" look like?

Do your team members have nicknames for each other? If so, where did they come from? If not, what would they be?

What have your business's biggest struggles been? How have you failed? How did these things help you evolve?

How do your individual team members describe your company's core values?

If your brand was an animal, what animal would it be (and why?)  
What famous person would it be? What musical instrument?

What's so special about where you're located? About the value your product gives? About how it's produced? About how your mission statement came into existence?

What have your employees said about their experience working for you just before they've retired?

What are three interesting facts about your company that most people don't know?

Write the "true story" of your business's future in 3-5 sentences.

Complete this thought in one sentence: "My business exists because \_\_\_\_\_."

Complete this thought in one sentence: "I am qualified to sell this product/service because \_\_\_\_\_."

# Telling Your Brand Story Consistently

You've got your characters, your story formula, and you've generated your brand story out of the questions we've offered on earlier pages. Now what? Well, if you want your prospects and customers to believe it, you'll have to tell it consistently—both across time and across platforms. This doesn't mean that what your business does or offers can't change or evolve! It just means there are elements of your messaging that must stay consistent across channels—whether in your social media posts, ads, email campaigns, the landing pages on your website, your processes for onboarding new employees, or the ways your support team speaks to incoming callers. The elements that must stay consistent include:

- your brand's voice, tone, and spirit**
- your logo and color palette**
- your fonts and typography**
- your photography and graphics**
- your mission statement, vision, and values**
- your value proposition and differentiators**
- your slogan, jingle, or catchphrase**

A consistent brand message—which is a cohesive identity—demonstrates professionalism and establishes authenticity. These things, in turn, evoke prospect and customer trust. It also provides clarity for everyone involved—yourself included. And it functions as an internal compass that will guide you in all future decisions you make about your business.

# Found this useful?

There's more where that came from.

## Get Your Business Game On

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