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## What Marketing Can Learn from Reporters

### It's Time for Marketing to be schooled by Reporter's

Regardless of what you feel about journalists, when they hit a home run with a piece they get us to tune in, stop, listen and devour their story. That's a lot more than can be said for most company marketing. When is the last time you couldn't stop reading a company brochure or press release?

The inability of companies to tell a good story is a big problem today. With the multitude of marketing-media channels available, too many companies are bungling good story-telling opportunities at every turn. A press release, website, video, brochure, blog and venues like Twitter and Facebook are all occasions to engage your audience with an interesting story that sets your company apart.

As a CEO, if you sense that your company's story is getting muddled and coming off as bland or un-engaging, perhaps its time to take a note from the reporter's story-telling playbook. What matters most is not why your business story is failing, but whether or not as CEO you are brave enough to put a stop to the corporate "blah, blah, blah" and demand that your company tell a real story.

As you review and sign-off on this year's marketing and PR efforts, ask yourself these five questions any good reporter would ask to test whether their story will engage readers:

#### Who's the center of the story?

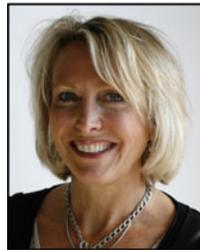
Although any corporate marketing/PR is ultimately about the company, your reader (target audience) should always be the star. Take time to really know your audience, what they care about and how they might relate to your story. This will help bring your reader into the story. Start with what's in it for them. Your marketing should build a story around

how you can make their life better, easier or happier by engaging with your sales brochure, website, press release, video or Tweet. Examples and scenarios that your reader can relate to are a great approach.

#### Are you being authentic?

With the Internet and social sites, buyers have more access to knowledge than ever before. It's time to stop pretending that your prospects don't know the truth about your company and products. Reviews, research and comments are a

#### Executive Insights



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The trick to being an authentic marketer is to proactively address buying issues and concerns instead of pretending they don't exist. This makes your marketing more believable, builds buyer trust, and gives your business an opportunity to control the whole message. It also arms your sales team with a smart, authentic way to talk about the business.

#### Is your story memorable?

Every good story is memorable. Too often technical companies are guilty of putting out mounds of information without providing anything memorable. This is easily cured by taking time to present the data and facts through a story or analogy that your reader can relate to. Another approach is to appeal to your reader's emotion. Find out why someone would care about the details and wrap that emotion into your story. Stats

presented with contextual meaning will help readers relate.

Lastly, it's hard to tell a memorable story without a well-thought out value proposition. If your company has truly defined its unique differentiating value in a way that matters to your buyers, it can be subtly woven into your stories to make them more compelling.

#### Are you trying to intrigue or kill?

Nothing kills a good story like one that never ends. If you struggle to get through your material how can you possibly agree to inflict it on the innocent? Resist the temptation to dump everything that you imagine someone could possibly want to know about your company or product on them. It's not only boring, it's exhausting. People prefer to be teased a little. They want to be lured into your story with a little intrigue. Provoke them with some interesting, compelling details and then stop. Leave your reader salivating for a little more and show them how to get it with your call to action.

#### Is your story sleep-inducing?

Boring writing is too common. Nothing ignites boredom faster than corporate-speak and jargon. Try lightening things up with visual words that spark your reader's imagination and bring your story to life. Also, try segmenting your story with alluring headlines and subheads. We're all guilty of quickly skimming material to decide whether it's worthwhile. Recognize this and make sure that your headlines and subheads work double time by telling the top level story. If your subheads entice, your reader will be drawn in to learn more.

A great story is a wonderful gift. Done well, company marketing and PR should tell a story that your readers engage with. If your company stories are lacking, look to the proven, great story tellers for inspiration. Hollywood movies, great

novels and intriguing news stories all provide a great roadmap.

This column is written by Cheryl Isen, founder of Isen & Company, a strategic marketing and public relations firm that helps companies increase visibility and brand awareness. Contact Cheryl at (425) 222-0779, Cheryl@IsenandCo.com. Visit IsenandCo.com to learn more.