



Why is story-driven
content marketing
so powerful?



Table of Contents

Face to Face with Reality: Three problems B2B content marketers shouldn't ignore	03
Stories Crown Kings: Story-driven content marketing explained	05
Back to Beginnings: Wait, what even is a story?	06
The Art of Remembering: Why stories have all the power	07
Delivery in Disguise: The Trojan Horse Principle	08
The Root of all Evil: Every story needs a villain. Who's yours?	09
Serial for Breakfast: Serialised content and the Netflix analogy	10
Tip of the Iceberg: What story-driven content really looks like	11

Face to Face with Reality

That one problem B2B content marketers shouldn't ignore



Content Shock

It's coming. We're heading straight for content shock, where our ability to absorb information can no longer keep pace with the rate of content being produced. B2B brands entering this already-noisy marketplace are finding it increasingly challenging to cut through the crap and get their messages heard.

According to a 2016 Becon research study, only 5% of branded content gets 90% of customer engagement. So, it's official. People are tuning out. They can't hear you anymore.

Think about it. At a basic level, anyone can make noise either by banging a drum or shout-singing along on a country road, but you wouldn't call it music. Certainly not good music. Content works in a similar way. You can write some words, format it averagely, hit publish and you have a blog. Or do you?

No. Because who's it calling out to? Who's it attracting? Who's following it? Good, powerful and hard-working content should move people the same way songs do. And branded content should go one step further by developing its own unique sound and stories. Like U2. Love them or hate them, you know who they are the second a song pops on the radio. It's their identity. It's their brand. It's their story.

So, you want to make music, not noise? Here's what to do:

- ✓ **Make like a minimalist, produce less.** Yes, we really did advise you to reduce how much you put out there in favour of producing quality over quantity. It works.
- ✓ **Realise that behind the stats are real people.** There's too much content pollution out there and businesses are too quick to pour out facts without a single thought for the poor human sitting at the other end. They like to brag a lot too, where's the emotional connection in all this?
- ✓ **Hold fire on your informative text.** It's not enough that it's useful. It also needs an X-factor: a narrative, a tone, a purpose and a vision.
- ✓ **Change the way you communicate with storytelling.** Organic search is dead. Facebook posts now only reach 1% of their audience when 5 years ago this would've been closer to 25%. But do you know what does capture attention? Stories. People still like them. Harness that.

According to a 2016 Beckon research study, only 5% of branded content gets 90% of customer engagement. So, it's official. People are tuning out. They can't hear you anymore.

Why your B2B brand needs to hear this

Well, let's face it. Your buyers are having a hard time. They're becoming more and more time pressured and overloaded with options. They need a bit of help.

Tell them what they need to know and do it in a way that's commanding, masterful and yes, maybe even whimsical because they want to pick you really. If they pick you, they can move on to the next task. By avoiding content shock and heeding this advice, your customers will stick with you through thick and thin – you might even increase your market share in the process. Might as well give it a go, huh?



Here's the big secret: They really want you to make their lives easy for them. In fact, they insist on it.

Stories Crown Kings

Story-driven content marketing explained

Let stories be the making of you

Remember all those times you formed a genuine bond with a perfect stranger? Or how, on the playground, there was always that one kid who seemed to have everyone bow down to them?

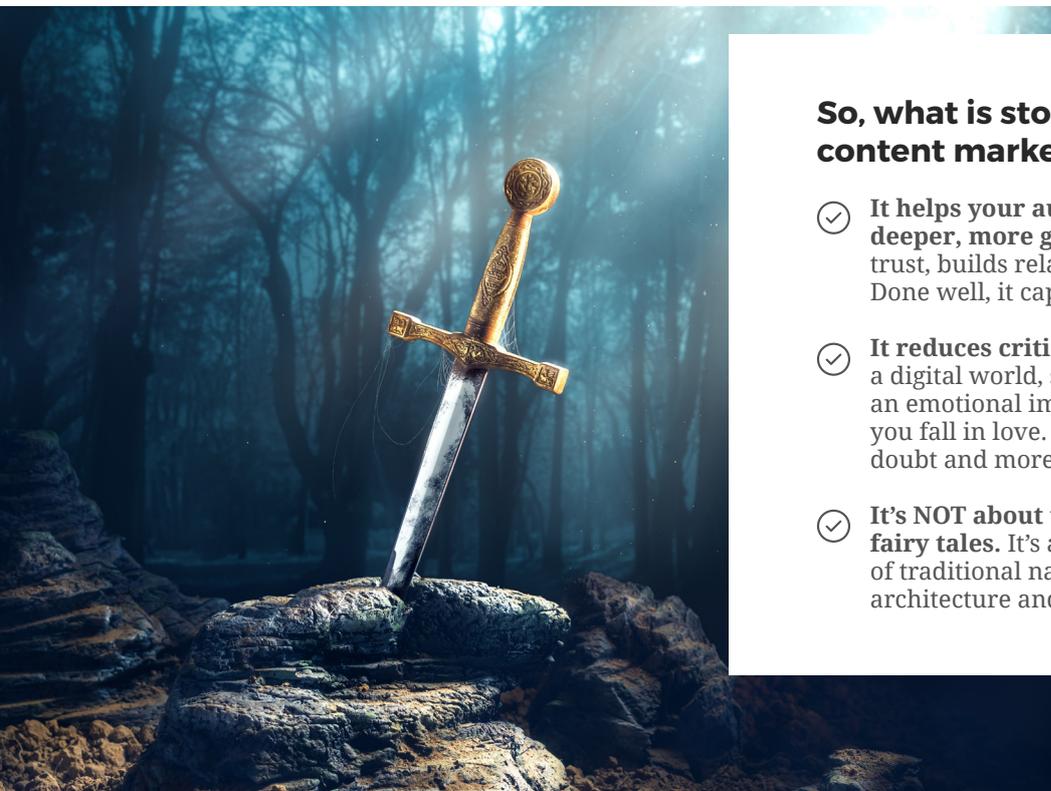
There's a correlation. Storytelling was at large.

Hundreds of stories about rebels who conquered have been told over the centuries, battles have been fought to save Kings, and we know too well not to mess with the underdog. Leaders lead, but the question is, how do they do it? How have Kings past and present been able to inspire such loyalty, motivation and devotion that people would risk their own lives to keep just one man sitting on a throne?

Well, they use a narrative of sorts, and it's called... The Speech.

It's the same even now. We've all watched movies where one brave soul stands before a crowd of anxious faces, trying desperately to bring them together, to support a common cause – enter The Speech. Now, the words may vary, and the story may change, but the narrative stays the same. The purpose stays the same. The impact stays the same.

The Speech aims to empower, but most importantly of all, it does not deceive. It comes from the heart. This has a powerful effect on the listener. While the brave figurative King talks, the people are busy forming an emotional connection towards him, by the end, they've made up their minds. They want to join him.



So, what is story-driven content marketing?

- ✓ **It helps your audience relate to you on a much deeper, more genuine level.** One that incites trust, builds relationships and informs decisions. Done well, it captures both hearts and minds.
- ✓ **It reduces critical judgement and cynicism.** In a digital world, story-driven content can create an emotional impact like the one you get when you fall in love. One that makes you less likely to doubt and more likely to act on impulse.
- ✓ **It's NOT about telling tall stories or creating fairy tales.** It's about dissecting elements of traditional narrative structures or story architecture and using them in context.

Why your B2B brand needs to hear this

How often do you talk AT your reader? Overload them with data, features and benefits? When was the last time you had a real, heart-to-heart with your customer? Thought so. For us, that's evidence enough that you should try adding some story-driven content into the mix... What do you have to lose?

Back to Beginnings

Wait, what even is a story?

It's kind of like a mountain

Since the beginning of time stories have been used as tools to communicate teachings, morals, empathy and love. The narrator may change, the language may shift but the format of a story remains the same - each has characters, settings, themes and plots that unfold as you follow the protagonist on their journey. But what makes a compelling story, compelling? Well, that all circles back to the magic Story Mountain formula:

Challenge + Struggle + Resolution = Feel Good Factor

Captivated audiences like to follow the path of endurance and fulfilment. Like climbing mountains, it's the twists, turns, poor decision-making and lessons learned that makes the story worthwhile. Why? Because nobody wants to feel like they're alone. As humans we have a need to relate to other people, to form connections. By tapping into your audience's sense of self, you can help them project themselves in your story – and once you've done that you've mastered the craft (and cemented the bond).

So, what would a Story Mountain look like for you?

- ✓ First, grab your audience's attention with a surprising challenge or question.
- ✓ Next, inspire your listeners with an emotional experience by narrating the struggle and showing them how you overcame that challenge, or how you found the answer to the opening question.
- ✓ Finally, extract a positive response with a resolution that calls them to action.

Why your B2B brand needs to hear this

Storytelling isn't new to marketing. It's been around since the industry started, but it is still new to the realm of B2B. We may know how to market technology, but the B2B space still fails to master the art of storytelling. So businesses fail time and again to truly land the hottest leads, build the longest relationships and tackle dominant market share – all because they don't know how to form bonds and tell good, honest stories.



The Art of Remembering

Why stories have all the power

Stories are memory magnets

Over 100,000 years ago language was formed, and from this moment onwards stories were used as the overriding communication tool, transferring language through generations. That's why, today, our brains are wired for story – because we live, breathe and dream in them constantly.

As you're reading this you've probably already looked sleepily into the distance, deep in thought, playing out a scenario in your mind or listened to your co-workers telling tales of their evening's antics. We can't help ourselves. Stories are part of our being – they're our own personal sense-making device. Let's get all scientific for a minute...

Why are stories so powerful?

- ✓ 70% of our conversation is a story. Because we all understand stories, they've become a universal language. Whether you sketch or use hand signals, communicating in stories means you don't need to speak several languages to relate.
- ✓ Stories release a bunch of neurochemicals that increase focus and empathy. That's a pretty big deal, because without focus or empathy, we humans would achieve very little in life. We wouldn't love our neighbours or reach our dreams.
- ✓ Stories are memorable and shareable. Think of stories as snackable information we all know how to digest. If someone passes information on in story format, you're more likely to be able to recount it to someone else than if they merely offload.

Why your B2B brand needs to hear this

Okay, we've already established that people are overloaded with content today, so the challenge we have is getting them to remember you. If they remember you, you're halfway there because memory helps to fuel all the decisions we make. So, if you want to influence your customers' buying decisions, you'll want to stay in their memory long enough to make a real difference and influence the outcome. We like to call this 'top-of-mind' status.

But there's another problem. People only remember 10% (at best) of what they see and hear. For content marketers, that's an entirely different headache. But here's what you do. You ask yourselves which 10% you want prospects to remember and, since we already know stories are memory magnets, we frame that 10% in story architecture. For example, if that 10% is data related, then we need to emotionalise it and create strong visual association to help that information stick. Seems simple enough, right?



Delivery in Disguise

The Trojan Horse Principle

Not what it seems

We all know the myth – an army disguised as a gift, the Trojan Horse was a delivery vehicle in camouflage, and so too are purposeful stories. Look a little closer and you'll see that stories cleverly convey information, ideas, emotional prompts and teachings but are packaged up with a blend of magical construction and narrative appeal, capturing the attention of the listener without them even realising they're receiving hidden messages. It's only after the story ends that their minds linger over the call to action and all the pieces of the puzzle fall into place.

One of the ways the Trojan Horse Principle works so well in story-driven content marketing, is because it enables you to transport your readers to another world. For example, whenever we hear the words, 'Once upon a time' we automatically surrender ourselves to the powerful force of imagination. It's what makes that phrase so influential. It reassures us that we're merely bystanders of someone else's journey. We have nothing to lose by following, so we feel secure enough to go explore. But why are we so eager to go with them? Well, don't we all need a little bit of escapism from our daily lives?

It's a matter of inception

- ✓ The Trojan Horse Principle leverages that sense of comfort we all crave to enhance trust and incite curiosity.
- ✓ It draws us into another world of fascination all the while embedding your messages into your customers' subconsciousness. Inception style.

Why your B2B brand needs to hear this

Unhappy with your current marketing ROI? Then this is a need-to-know. B2B brands are vulnerable to the curse of 'drullness' (dry/dull content), making it all too easy to alienate and repel prospective customers. Overloading websites, blogs, newsletters and brochures with features, benefits, facts and figures is just plain overwhelming (especially when you're in research mode). So, go on, be different in your delivery. Be Trojan.



The Root of all Evil

Every story needs a villain. Who's yours?

Characterise pain

Stories are often perceived as truer than facts because of how we identify with the characters. When you invest in a plot, you're usually investing in a person and the troubles or conflict they encounter along the way. To make your audience care about the story, you have to make them care about the people in that story.

One of the most effective ways of doing this when you're selling a product or service is to ask, "What pain points are my customers facing?" Once you know, the next step is to portray those issues as characters, or more specifically, as villains. By positioning pain points as villains and your customers as heroes, you automatically present your audience with a scenario they can relate to and emotionalise.

Why? Because villains help to create a sense of urgency, drama and tension, making the stakes just that bit higher for the hero. When the stakes are high, you root for the hero just that bit harder all because of a little thing we like to call contrast. Contrast is compelling – you just have to think about every movie you've ever loved to see that. Star Wars, anyone?

Pain is real

- 1 Find a 'root source'. Don't turn feelings (such as exhaustion or frustration) into villains. The villain must be tangible e.g. Slow internet speed, high taxes, out of date software.
- 2 Make them relatable. Your audience needs to be able to instantly recognise the villain as something they despise without cause for explanation.
- 3 Never use more than one. Don't overcomplicate. Zoom in on one pain point and make that the focus, otherwise you run the risk of lack of clarity.
- 4 Don't scaremonger. The villain should be real, never incite or invent fear when there are plenty of actual, real-life pain points out there. Let's not be fakers.



Why your B2B brand needs to hear this

B2B companies fall into the trap of generating one dimensional content. Or worse, they end up pitching themselves as the hero and claiming that their product is perfect. But flaws are intriguing and there's more than one way to skin a cat. Instead, try putting your customer at the heart of the story and focusing on their journey. Also, your product isn't perfect. Shock. Maybe even admit that once in a while... It's what makes us human after all.

Our advice? Be real, use contrast and encourage your audience to identify their headaches as villains, villains they WILL defeat (with a bit of help from you...).

Serial for Breakfast

Serialised content and the Netflix analogy

Keep them wanting more

J. K. Rowling did it. Marvel's completely addicted to it. And Netflix? Well, they do it too... a lot. Serialised content is no longer just a buzzword, it comes with some real weight behind it, especially in the world of marketing. But what is its appeal? Don't people ever get sick of it?

No. Not if it's done well. And not if you're giving your audience EXACTLY what they want!

On the surface it just looks like you're dragging out an idea for as long as possible but what you're really offering people is the chance to dig deeper. To delve into characters, places and knowledge in bite-sized amounts, with an underlying invisible thread that links them all together: The Hook – or, more accurately, the highly anticipated answer to the question they've been asking from the get-go such as, 'Will they get together?' or 'How do I lose 10kg in a month?'

Remember, if it wasn't effective, it wouldn't be done. But for it to pay off in a big way you'll need to turn to Netflix and do it intelligently. It's no secret that they use their vast amounts of user-data to determine what their audience segments want and then repurpose this information, turning it into a Netflix Original Series. Can you blame them?

So, do 18-25-year-old females like thrillers? If it has Leonardo DiCaprio in it, are they likely to watch anything? What if it's set in the 1950s? And so on... By looking at your own data, you'll soon spot common themes and be able to build your own picture. Why guess when you can know for sure?



Make serialised content work for you by:

- ✓ Remembering you only need one idea. But make it a juicy one.
- ✓ Using it in blogs, infographics & eDMs, for easy reading and digestibility.
- ✓ Being consistent. Like publishing on the same day each week.
- ✓ Not watering it down. Don't skim, or be vague. And always answer the question!

Why your B2B brand needs to hear this

B2B services aren't always easy to explain – and certainly not in one sitting. Use serialised content to educate and provide in-depth value to your customers. In turn you'll prove to them that you're an expert in your niche, which will go a long way in building long-held trust. Oh, and you'll also generate loyal followers and frequently increase engagement levels. That can only be a good thing!

Tip of the Iceberg

What story-driven content really looks like

Seeing is believing

Okay, so now you want to give story-driven content marketing a try, but you're struggling to really visualise the end result? You've arrived at the right chapter. Let's explore some basic storytelling techniques that will be easy and quick to implement.

The Story Writer's Toolkit

- ✓ Sensory language. Making your audience see, hear, touch, taste and smell is all part of the story experience. When you conjure up images in their mind, you want to also draw associations with feelings and experiences. Evocative language will be your best friend here.
- ✓ Metaphors & analogies. These are the shortest, most concise stories you'll ever write, helping your audience connect an abstract idea to something concrete – and all within a line or two. Simple.
- ✓ Get off to a gripping start. Go on, set the scene. Think about your favourite murder mystery show or gripping fantasy book. Add tension and suspense, be a bit whimsical – but only if it's contextually worth it. Don't be lame, please.
- ✓ Be humanly human. Ah, the copywriter's favourite tip. Be friendly, approachable and real in your tone of voice. Please don't use long obnoxious words.

Curtain Call

And so, the end is here. We do hope we've compelled you to give story-driven content marketing a good try. But maybe you still have some questions or perhaps your B2B business is too complex for you to even attempt to try this alone?

Welcome to Story IQ. That's what we do best. We unravel even the most complex products and build hard-working story-based content around them.

If you would like to begin your Story IQ journey email us today!

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