



EVENT

STORYTELLING

P L A Y B O O K

EVENT^{MB}
NOW PART OF **Skift**

&



COPYRIGHT

© 2019 Skift Inc. All Rights Reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means whatsoever (including presentations, short summaries, blog posts, printed magazines, use of images in social media posts) without express written permission from the author, except in the case of brief quotations (50 words maximum and for a maximum of 2 quotations) embodied in critical articles and reviews, and with clear reference to the original source, including a link to the original source at www.eventmanagerblog.com/event-storytelling. Please refer all pertinent questions to the publisher.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4	A BUSINESS CASE FOR STORYTELLING	24
WHAT ARE STORIES AND WHY DO THEY WORK?	5	6-point Plan for Resonating With an Audience	25
The Story Blueprint	6	Applying a Story to an Event: The Attendee Journey	32
Stories and the Human Mind	9	LESSONS IN STORYTELLING FROM HOLLYWOOD AND MADISON AVENUE	34
WHY DOES STORYTELLING MATTER?	11	Good Stories Are Universal	35
HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY	13	The Flawed Hero is an Endearing and Relatable One	37
Building your own stories	14	The Struggle is Real	38
4 Tips to Make Sure Your Story Resonates	15	Make Your Attendees Care	39
Test Your Storytelling Efficacy	19	Conferring a Concept, Mood or Reputation onto a Place or Event	41
Case Study: Date with Destiny	23	Transport Them Elsewhere	42
		IN CONCLUSION	43
		CMP CREDITS & DISCLAIMER	46



INTRO

EVENT STORYTELLING PLAYBOOK

Storytelling is a popular topic that has increasingly become essential for marketing success, but how does it apply to the live event experience for attendees? To the exhibitor and their visitors? The conference and their delegates?

You may have heard that storytelling is a great way to bring your event marketing and experience-making to the next level, but knowing what that means for your brand and how to apply it is a different story.

Storytelling is, above all, about conveying information by crafting a human experience. It's all about the audience, and an engaged audience means a successful experience.

This report will take a deep dive into the power of storytelling as a content marketing asset, a learning tool for attendees, and a way to channel the attendee experience.

Whether you're an event planner, exhibitor or general marketer, this report will guide you through the steps necessary to get more business by leveraging the power of stories.



//

WHAT ARE STORIES AND WHY DO THEY WORK?

The story is your content, and a story-based event is an experience. It starts with an idea and ends with an audience.

A story-based experience is immersive and persuasive; it's a filter that helps us to think, make sense, and connect with what's happening around us. It's an invitation to join in, and when we do, it feels good.

So why stories? What about them makes such a great vehicle for information and learning?

- **Stories are universal: we are used to them, we grew up with them, we understand them and we explain our daily lives to others with them.**
- **Stories are everywhere in every human language, from myths and lore to movies and books, to Facebook and Instagram.**
- **Stories package something complex in a simple, relatable, and engaging way.**



WHAT ARE STORIES AND WHY DO THEY WORK?



The Story Blueprint

Stories have familiar blueprints, which you can follow as you apply them to your event and marketing needs. These narrative elements are common to most stories, and so the elements help us connect with the story more intuitively:

- ★ Plot
- ★ Characters
- ★ Familiarity and relatability
- ★ Voice

Try to account for all of these basic components when you're figuring out how to tell your own branded story. How do these elements translate to live experiences?

WHAT ARE STORIES AND WHY DO THEY WORK?



PLOT

The content. The programme. The performance. These should constitute a purpose and a path for the attendee, becoming the attendee journey. It is an event, so your audience needs a planned structure and an agenda, but plan it as a path through your event or exhibit and curate what attendees see. Control the content delivery experience along their journey to reinforce your narrative.

CHARACTERS

You. Your audience. Your event speakers. Your exhibitors. We are all characters in the story. Position your customer as the hero of the story. How does your audience relate to them? How do they interact, and what does that interaction need to be memorable?

WHAT ARE STORIES AND WHY DO THEY WORK?



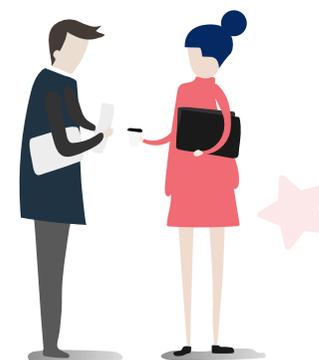
FAMILIARITY

Build some familiarity into your event to break the ice and empower the audience with confidence. Use familiar story structures to guide your audience through the typical journey: a beginning, a climax, and an end.

Unexpected changes of direction can provide opportunities for serendipitous connections with other attendees. But, while a twist can be a great way to hook an audience, keep it simple in the professional environment. When people engage in familiar moments, they bond over their shared experiences.



These storytelling elements help your event narrative make sense to your audience, but if you're not a natural storyteller, it might still be a challenge for you to get your story across.



VOICE

The tone and style are an extension of the event personality. The language used for both the content and the environment should be a good fit for the audience and, in turn, set the tone for the whole event narrative.

Use this understanding of your audience and your content delivery to pick the right venue – one that matches that voice and is a suitable space to deliver your story. Your story blueprint can inform your event structure and choices: the right conference or exhibition space, the right technology, the right style of furniture – even catering. All elements speaking one language, delivering one story.

WHAT ARE STORIES AND WHY DO THEY WORK?



Stories and the Human Mind

Telling stories is human nature. Even when the body goes to sleep, our minds stay up all night telling stories. And everyone has a story to tell.

There is a scientific explanation for our devotion to stories. Our brains are hardwired to be receptive to them: large volumes of information become more digestible in a recognizable, relatable narrative.

A ***Princeton University neuroscientific research facility*** tested a well-delivered seminar and found that the same areas of the brain simultaneously lit up on an MRI of both the speaker and listener. In fact, when we experience something like a story that resonates positively, our brains release a feel-good hormone called oxytocin. In turn, the increased level of oxytocin boosts our feelings like trust, compassion and empathy.

This is what makes storytelling so well suited to marketing and education delivery. Embracing it makes for better audience experiences.

Whether you are an organiser, a planner, or an exhibitor, your goal is to find out how to build empathy and construct powerful stories that connect to your attendees on a deeper level.

WHAT ARE
STORIES AND
WHY DO THEY
WORK?

THINK

Can you connect attendees to your event or exhibit using empathy?



IDEAS

➔ Use your exhibit or event to tell the story of how and why your company was founded.

➔ Illustrate how successful customers overcame challenges using empathetic stories.

➔ Re-think your event schedule into a story attendees live through. Rename sessions to reflect a story arch.

//

WHY DOES STORYTELLING MATTER?

Storytelling is content marketing applied to your attendee experience.

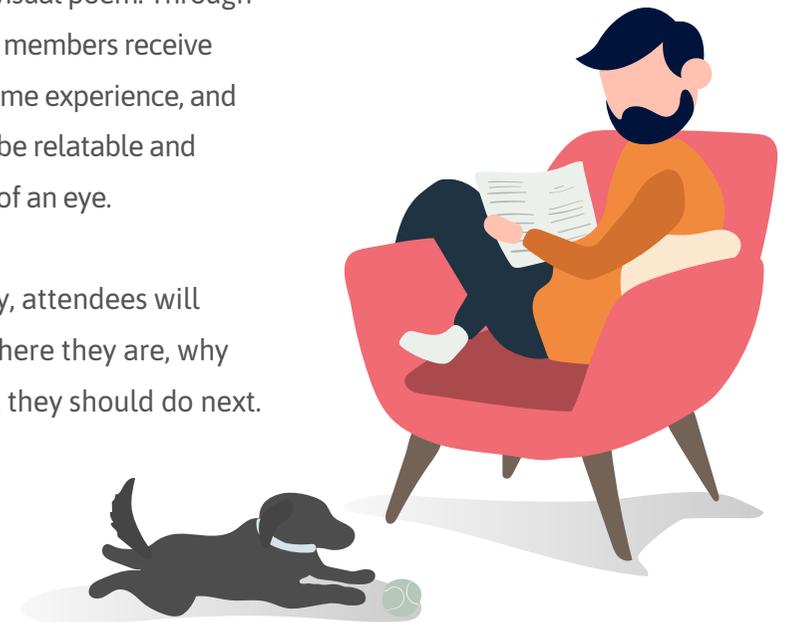
An event story provides context for the sensory experience happening around your audience, which, in turn, means a higher level of engagement. Creating a story for your event objectives can give your event deeper human engagement.

In **"The Story Factor"**, Annette Simmons discusses how, when we listen to stories, we often arrive at the same conclusion as the narrator. This process makes us wonder how the story will end, or what will happen next. It makes us feel like we're part of the process.

Being part of the process – being co-creators – has been consistently linked to better satisfaction. Storytelling is the secret weapon to having more engaged attendees and eventually more successful experiences and activations.

The reward for telling your brand story consistently across all entry points to your event is an incredibly personal visual poem. Through any interaction, audience members receive the same message, the same experience, and the same vibe, and it will be relatable and recognisable in the blink of an eye.

As characters in the story, attendees will intuitively understand where they are, why they are there, and what they should do next.



WHY DOES
STORYTELLING
MATTER?

THINK

What event storytelling elements can you use to set the right expectations?



IDEAS

➤ Use themes and archetypes in your gala dinner to help attendees connect with your story: a prom night, talent show, dinner with a murder game, ‘night at the opera’, or circus night. These are all themes you can immediately relate to, and attendees can guess how they will take place. You can be as sophisticated or laid back as your brand requires.

➤ Use familiar imagery, *evocative music*, and common concepts to do the work for you. Want to create an exhibit booth that gives your event tech a ‘space age’ narrative? Use chrome paint to give the booth the illusion of being in a ship. Create a countertop that looks like a “Star Trek” helm, but replace the buttons with charging docs. Attendees will get it right away, putting less of an onus on you to draw the story you’re telling explicitly.

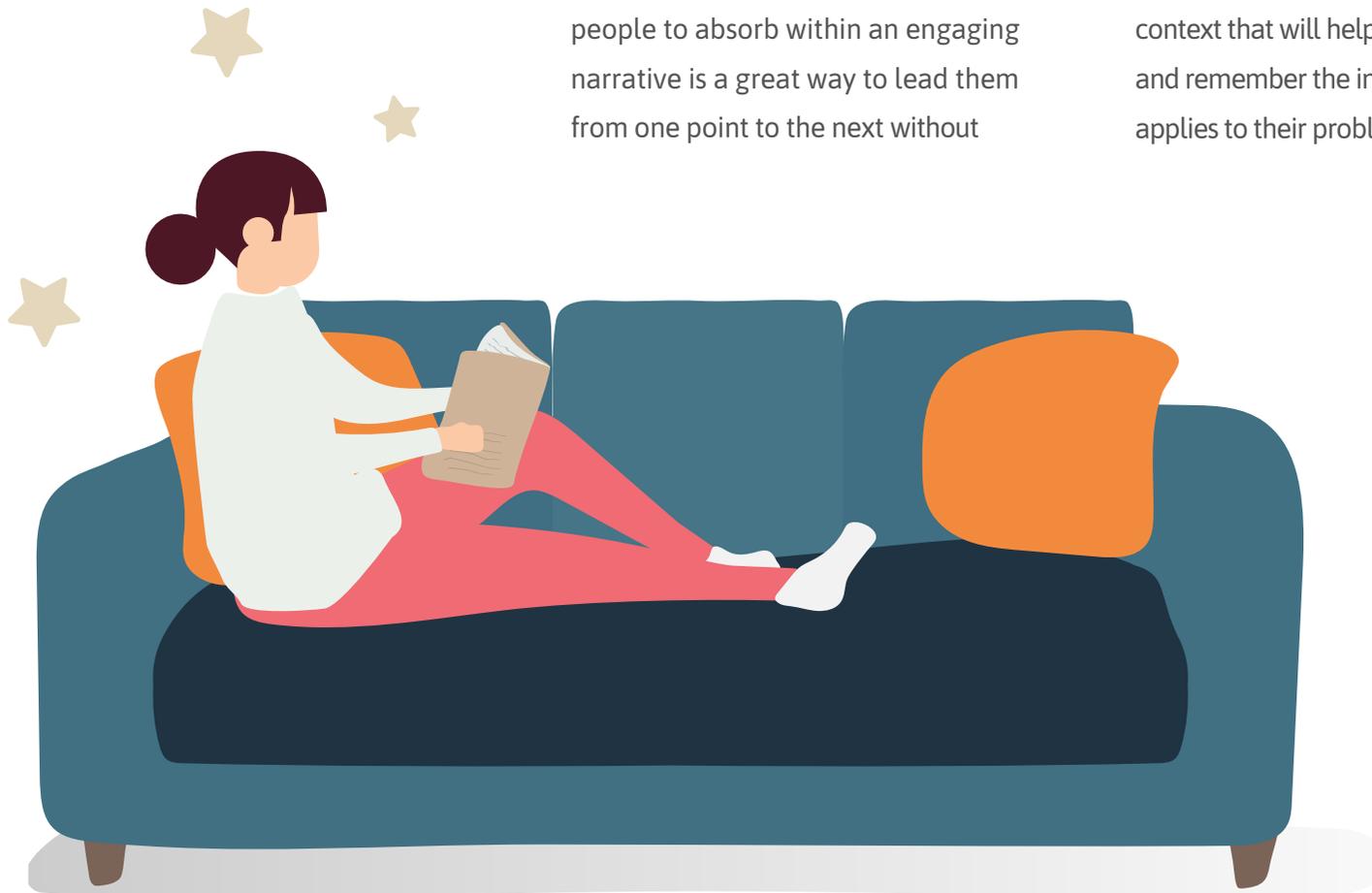
//

HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY

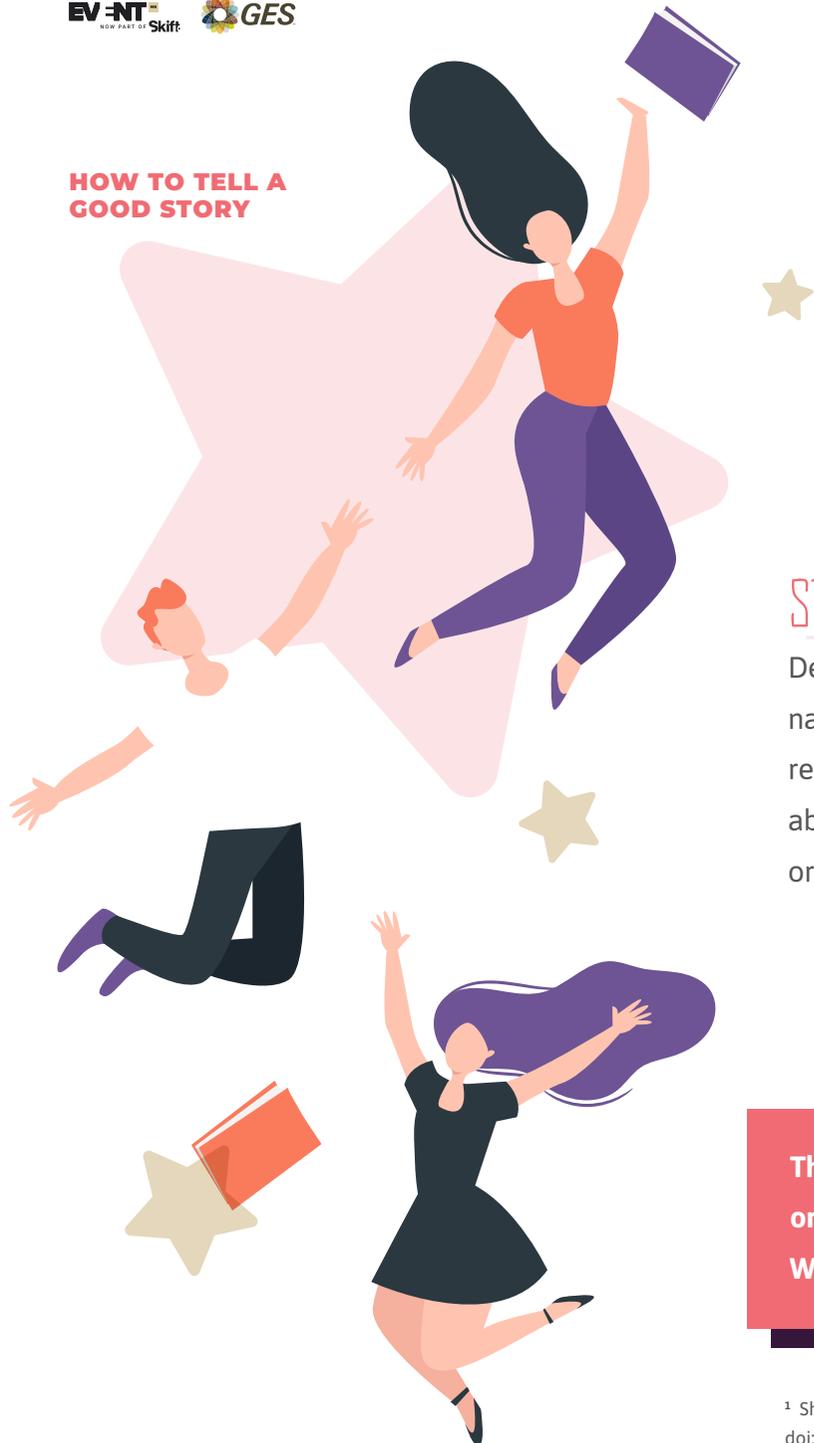
Good stories take something complex and render it simple and comfortable to digest.

Plotting the key takeaways you want people to absorb within an engaging narrative is a great way to lead them from one point to the next without

letting their attention drop off. Plus, it adds context that will help them appreciate and remember the information, and how it applies to their problems.



HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY



Building your own stories

Simplifying Nalin Sharda’s **Movement Oriented Design**¹ approach to create educational stories, we’ve determined that your story framework should incorporate three elements:

1 STORY

Develop a clear, meaningful narrative structure that will reveal the primary message about your product, service or event.

2 VISUALS

Develop branded, attention-grabbing visuals that reinforce your message. If you can create a compelling image that refers to additional unique selling propositions (USPs) within your products and services, all the better.

3 VOICE

Develop a voice and tone for consistent message delivery, so that all your communications fit your overall brand story and express the narrative around your products and services.

These three branding expressions allow the story to be experienced sequentially in a predefined order of events, or to be picked up in disparate communications and assembled by the audience. Whichever way they encounter your marketing, the story will always be the same.

¹ Sharda, N. (2007). Applying Movement Oriented Design to Create Educational Stories. *The International Journal of Learning: Annual Review*,13(12), 177-184. doi:10.18848/1447-9494/cgp/v13i12/45141

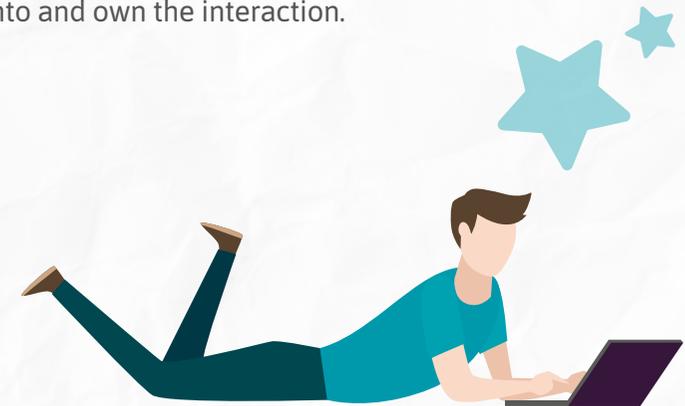
HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY

4 Tips to Make Sure Your Story Resonates

1.

SAY LESS TO COMMUNICATE MORE TO AN AUDIENCE.

No brand ever put a user manual on a billboard, but you've all seen booths that do exactly that. Build a meaningful story around the activation with narratives that highlight USPs, imagery that immerses the audience in the environment, and a consistent, easily recognizable message. Pressure-free product accessibility and a well-briefed staff will increase engagement and let the booth visitors opt into and own the interaction.



HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY

4 Tips to Make Sure Your Story Resonates

2.

BUILD YOUR AUDIENCE INTO YOUR STORY, SO WHEN THEY ARRIVE, YOUR EVENT IS ALREADY THEIRS.

Sharing ownership of the event with your audience is an important way to recognize that it's their story too. Your audiences have the power, so tap into it early. Use the data you collect from previous marketing activities to understand which stories will resonate.



4 Tips to Make Sure Your Story Resonates

3.

MAKE A LASTING CULTURAL BOND WITH YOUR AUDIENCE.

A story-driven conference or event is a conversation, not a transaction. Take the time to understand your audience and they will take the time to understand your brand. Then, look closely at your event or conference. Is it an end-point or a start of something? When your audience leaves, what do you want them to do?



HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY

4 Tips to Make Sure Your Story Resonates

4.

SYNC YOUR CONTENT WITH YOUR AUDIENCE FOR THE ULTIMATE TAKEAWAY.

Make sure that you're speaking to your audience's pain points and values. As **Joanna Sinclair**² suggests, your narrative should recount and represent these in a way that makes your story feel like a personal truth for each member of the audience. Not picking a language that speaks to the audience is one of the most common mistakes of beginner storytellers.



² Sinclair, J. (2005) *The impact of stories*. The Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management, 3(1), 53-64.

HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY



Test Your Storytelling Efficacy

Having established a pattern of **STORY, VISUALS** and **VOICE**, you can apply the framework to your conference, exhibition or event.

Adapting the elements and drivers discussed in “Getting Started in Transmedia Storytelling: A Practical Guide for Beginners” by **Robert Pratten**³, here are six event-centric story design tests to keep your human-centric focus.

Apply these to your story cascade at every touchpoint you create.

REALITY

Make sure your story is based on reality. While the term “story” may conjure up fictitious worlds, that is not the goal behind an event story. You want your audience to believe it, to resonate with it, to subscribe to the values it expresses, and to want to support it going forward.

DO THIS

Create better personas for your event. Personas are fictional characters that represent your ideal attendee. By defining who they are and what they want from your event, you can more easily cater your story to resonate with them, creating one that they are sure to connect with.

³Pratten, R. (2015). *Getting started in transmedia storytelling: A practical guide for beginners*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY

EMPATHY

Recognize that your story is not for you, it's for your audience. Align your narrative with their values, because you want *them* to identify with it. Your story is alive: your audience has as much a part in creating and perpetuating it as you do. As you can control the narrative, make sure it's consistently aligned with what they care about.

FRICION

A good story requires a challenge that is overcome. Your audience has challenges. Your event solves them in some way. Ensure your story makes that connection clear.



DO THIS

When designing events, it is very easy to be self-referential. Understanding what's 'in it' for the attendee will help you to craft a better story with them in mind. Use the 'Who should attend this event' section of your pre-show website and marketing to clearly communicate to different target audiences how your event delivers on *their* problems.

DO THIS

This element of great stories is especially valuable for brands willing to engage with customers through live events. Your activation or exhibit has to clearly communicate how your product will help attendees overcome the issues they face in their life or at work. When booth design budget is limited, consider training your sales personnel to approach attendees with a clear message that demonstrates their understanding of the friction or problem the company is trying to solve.

HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY

TENSION

Guests need a reason to feel emotionally drawn to your story and invested in it. Tension keeps them wondering how it will end, which makes them invested in the outcome.

DO THIS

You can keep the tension of your story high by cleverly using music before and after each session, keeping the energy levels from dropping between them. Entertainment stunts are always a great way to battle event fatigue. Consider hiring entertainers that align with your story and can keep the tension high.

SIMPLICITY

Make your story easy to follow; you want attendees to get swept up in the story, not struggling to understand it.

DO THIS

Avoid any form of clutter in your stage or exhibit design. Make clever use of AV technology, such as large screens, to allow also those distant from the action to enjoy the evolution of your story. If you deal with large crowds, you don't want them to miss out on the point of the story because your stage design is too complex. **Simplicity = Accessibility.**



HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY

CULTURE

Your story must reflect your culture and brand while still being identifiable for your audience. Asking attendees to consider something completely foreign to them may stretch their minds but it will distract your audience from the power of story, thus weakening the effect.



DO THIS

Consider paradigm shifts and cultural trends to better connect your brand to attendees. Live experiences are a great opportunity to help attendees to ‘make sense of the new’. Can your brand or event capitalize on the opportunity to align with your attendees on cultural shift?

A hotel that exhibits at a large hospitality trade show could make the decision not to use plastic straws, concentrate their messaging entirely on how they’ve been able to save the lives of thousands of sea creatures by doing so. This is a powerful message that aligns with the current trend of replacing single use plastic.



HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY

CASE STUDY

Date with Destiny

Tony Robbins’ “Date with Destiny” is arguably one of the most sought after self-improvement seminars around the world. It has also been featured in the Netflix documentary “I Am Not Your Guru.”

Motivational speaker Tony Robbins has delivered self-improvement events for over 40 years. There is an incredible lack of information about what happens at the event. Most of the anticipation is built by referral and word of mouth.

Yet the schedule of the event is used cleverly to communicate what will happen during the event, without disclosing all the logistical aspects.

The schedule looks like this:

- Day 1:* PREPARATION DAY
- Day 2:* EVALUATION DAY
- Day 3:* DISCOVERY DAY
- Day 4:* RELATIONSHIP DAY
- Day 5:* TRANSFORMATION DAY
- Day 6:* INTEGRATION DAY

This schedule takes you through the journey of transformation that the event promises on paper. The prospective attendees can guess what will happen at each stage, without looking at the hour by hour breakdown.

The schedule is a tool to communicate the personal attendee journey and the likely outcome: transformation and integration of change in their day to day lives.



A BUSINESS CASE FOR STORYTELLING

Storytelling and business.

Using storytelling as a powerful business driver began with brands buying into the brand narrative trend and influencing our behaviour. It stuck. It hit home because it involved us, the customers. It worked pretty much by changing the way we think about brands and our attitudes to their products.

Storytelling proved good business, but ultimately these brand stories were designed to connect a retail product with a customer and deepen the relationship between them.

Events, conferences and exhibitions are less binary. They are more sophisticated, community based, immersive. Overall, they're more multi-dimensional, more transparent, and less transactional.



**A BUSINESS
CASE FOR
STORYTELLING**

6-point Plan for Resonating With an Audience

To ensure your story hits home with your audience, we have developed this 6-point plan that sums up literature from **Paul Zak⁴, Stephens, Silbert and Hasson⁵**:

1.

CREATING THE DEMAND FOR YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE.

A clear, meaningful story structure will position the products and services to reveal the primary USPs in a context the audience will appreciate and remember. Keep the narrative and value props consistent across your imagery, interactions with staff, physical spaces, etc. The story should be appreciable from any point of entry to your brand.

⁴ Zak, P. (2013). How Stories Change the Brain. Retrieved March, 2019, from https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_stories_change_brain

⁵ Stephens, G. J., Silbert, L. J., & Hasson, U. (2010). Speaker-listener neural coupling underlies successful communication. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107(32), 14425-14430. doi:10.1073/pnas.1008662107



**A BUSINESS
CASE FOR
STORYTELLING**



2.

VALUE-ORIENT YOUR NARRATIVE.

This is about adding backstory to your USP/solution-based story components. Value-orienting your marketing is about speaking to your audience’s broader moral/social concerns. USPs and key differentiators are great, but a company that shares your values is one you feel good about supporting. This is about your values, so your storytelling must be honest, interesting and compelling to your target audience. Let them find out who you are. Be human, generous and vulnerable.



A BUSINESS
CASE FOR
STORYTELLING



3.

BUILD TRUST THROUGH A BRAND PROMISE.

In business terms, you are 'storifying' the trust for your product or services. A customer must **trust** the business behind the message, and have a basis for evaluating it against its claims.

A BUSINESS
CASE FOR
STORYTELLING

4.

BRAND YOUR IDENTITY WITHIN AN EVENT.



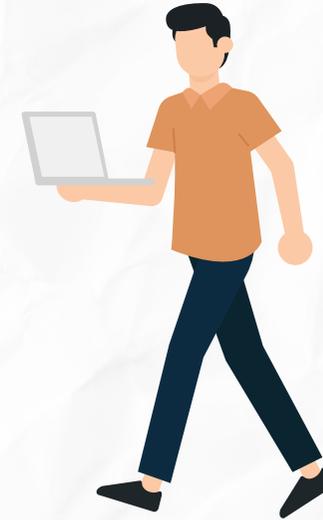
Storifying the **context** for your product or services is about defining where your brand and services fit into this event and your industry ecosphere in general. Your target audience must intuitively be able to relate to your story. When parties engage in familiar structures, they sync; make sure they get it, and the next chapter is their story.

A BUSINESS
CASE FOR
STORYTELLING

5.

KEEP YOUR BRAND STORY SIMPLE AND RELATABLE.

Your target audience must intuitively relate to your story, without risk of losing your meaning. Brevity gives your audience space to think, digest, reflect and reciprocate, which leads to better engagement and more relevant questions.



**A BUSINESS
CASE FOR
STORYTELLING**

6.

POSITION YOUR STORY AS THE START OF YOUR CUSTOMER'S JOURNEY.

Create a continuity in which your solution is a starting point for a better future, moving forward with you supporting them.



**A BUSINESS
CASE FOR
STORYTELLING**



THINK

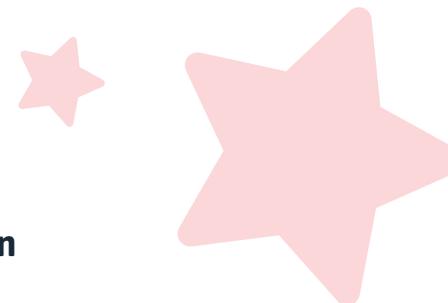
*What is an expectation you can meet or exceed?
Make that your brand promise.*

IDEA

➔ **Make your brand promise the center of your exhibit. Concentrate all your visuals to eliminate noise and highlight it specifically.**

'Show your colleagues who the data king is!' or 'This is what growth hackers look like!' could be displayed above a booth made of mirrors. These are just examples of how a software company might communicate the power of their solution through a meaningful and transformational story.

Applying a Story to an Event: The Attendee Journey



To be able to transfer the basics of a story to the complexities of an event, it is essential to draw a map of your attendee journey.

As your story will carry its message with a plot, characters, a familiar structure and a powerful tone of voice, you may ask yourself how to apply these key concepts to a live experience.

Stories offer their best opportunity to events when considered in the context of **the attendee journey**. Our industry currently does not offer a clear

definition of what an attendee journey is. It is fair to say that an attendee journey represents the sum of all the interactions between the attendees and your event **and** between attendees.

If you consider a typical live experience, there are four macro moments that define events. These moments are the playground for your story to unfold:

- ★ **Pre-event** - The weeks or months leading up to the event
- ★ **Event** - The actual event
- ★ **Post-event** - The days after your event
- ★ **Buffer** - The months leading to the next edition of your event

A BUSINESS CASE FOR STORYTELLING

Mapping these moments in great detail offers a strong opportunity to further develop your story.



PRE-EVENT

Craft a series of videos or emails that give a sense of anticipation. The speakers or performers of the live experience will set the stage for the challenges and give a hint of the potential resolution. Make sure your website is already telling the story of your live experience. Align the message with the look and feel of your online assets.

EVENT

Use venue, decor, technology, activations entertainment, speakers/performers, sponsors, staff to deliver the climax of your story and a path for resolution of the challenge. Your story can unfold from registration and check in to coffee breaks and closing remarks.

POST-EVENT

How did the attendees perceive the story? Was it effective? Use event data to analyze how attendees engaged with your story. What were the aspects they reacted to the most? Stimulate their feedback by reaching out through mobile apps or surveys.

BUFFER

Use social media, pictures and video from the event to refresh attendees memory and keep the tension for next year's event. Consider a chapter 2 of the story or a spin-off based on your most popular angle.

DO THIS NOW

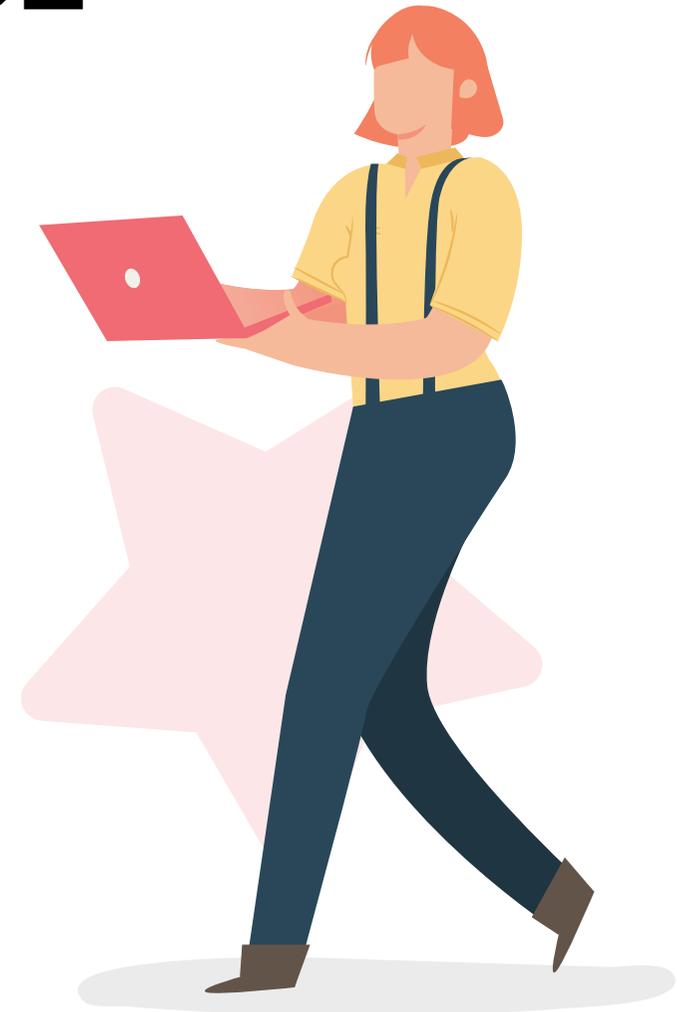
Map your attendee journey in great detail. Using your project management template or run of show will help you to identify the different elements of your attendee journey. Identify in your attendee journey map where you can introduce elements of your story.



LESSONS IN STORYTELLING FROM HOLLYWOOD AND MADISON AVENUE

Hollywood and Madison Avenue have made billions weaving stories for audiences. However, while there's a lot event professionals can learn from Hollywood, some aspects of silver screen storytelling work better in events than others.

We'll go over some *teachings from Hollywood and Madison Avenue* that will make your event stories more powerful.



LESSONS IN
STORYTELLING

Good Stories Are Universal

Novice storytellers lament that all the good stories are already written. While one can argue this is true, that is not a problem for the event planning story. It's a benefit.

You want your event story to resonate with the audience, to feel vaguely familiar. This is not a mystery to solve or some sort of esoteric exploration into the human condition.

Your event story is not a Sundance Film Festival entry trying to win for most original concept in a short. You want your audience to connect with your story, and for that, they need to recognize it.



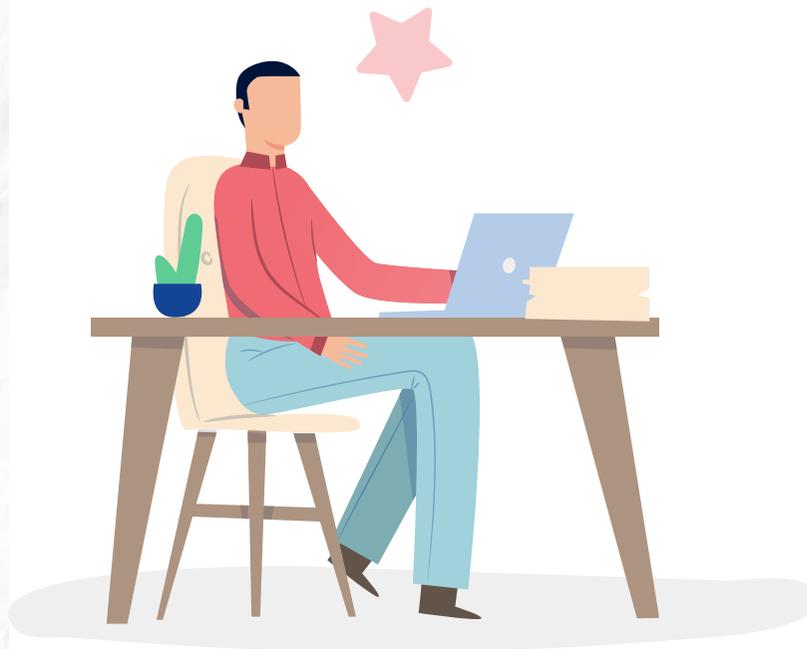
**LESSONS IN
STORYTELLING**

See if this plot sounds familiar:

A disadvantaged person longs for more.

They want to leave their current situation because they find little satisfaction in it. They feel like they're being held back and are destined for greatness if only they had the chance.

If you said that sounds like Luke Skywalker in "Star Wars," you'd be right. But it could just as easily be "Alice in Wonderland" or the "Wizard of Oz" (or any of your attendees, for that matter).



In those stories, the protagonist was aided by someone else (a hermit, a rabbit, or a good witch) in order to attain their dreams or desires.

That 'sage' role is yours, as you are showing your attendee hero how to become better and overcome challenges. The hero's journey format has been found to be used in the majority of **Hollywood movies**⁶.

Speaking of heroes...

THINK

How can your brand help live attendees transform? How can your event help participants evolve?

⁶ Densham, P. (2011). *Riding the alligator: Strategies for a career in screenplay writing-- and not getting eaten*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions.

LESSONS IN
STORYTELLING

The Flawed Hero is an Endearing and Relatable One

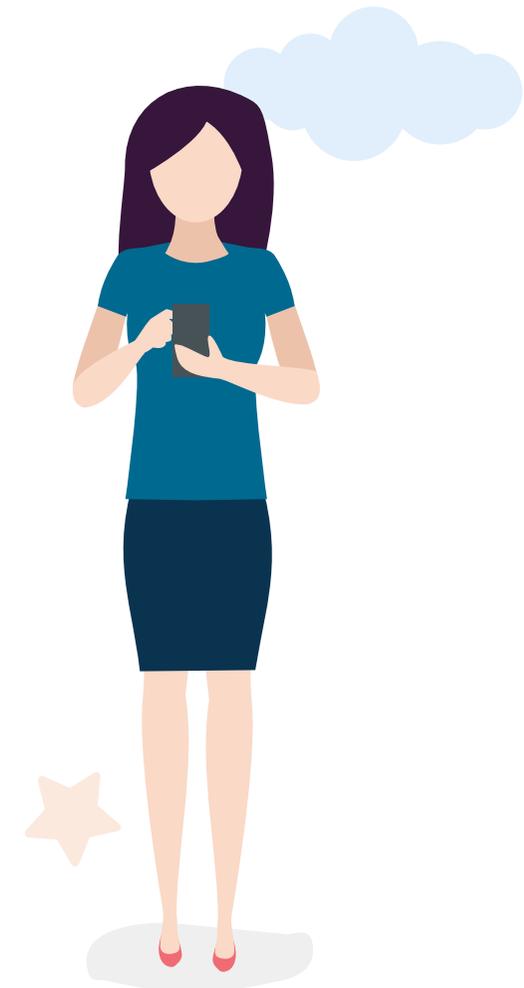
In a story, the audience needs someone to root for, and if the person is not perfect, it's easier to identify with them.

So play up a flaw and/or a struggle.

Let's take a look at a powerful ad campaign.

Is Dove the first brand to come up with pushing the value of inner beauty? Not exactly. But they are doing it as a way to add more depth to their product campaign.

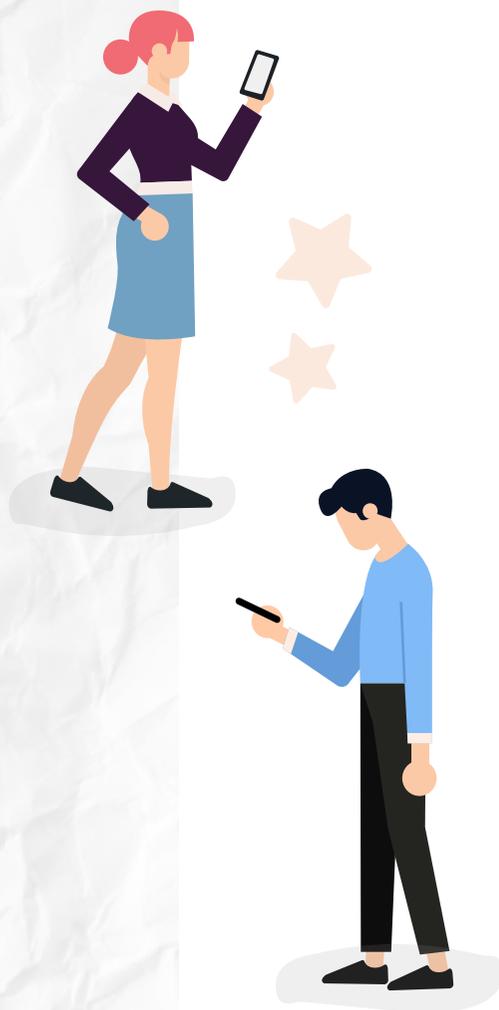
Their ***“Real Beauty” Campaign*** looked to highlight the beauty in the individual even if she wasn't what magazines would've deemed traditionally beautiful. The campaign showed women laughing and being comfortable in their own skin. These women have their own stories and Dove helped give them the confidence to tell them. This example shows how a brand story and stories from the audience become interwoven into a powerful statement. Dove positioned real women's stories explicitly in the heart of the value-centric narrative they were spinning.



LESSONS IN STORYTELLING

The Struggle is Real

Now, let's switch gears slightly to show not a flaw, but a struggle and a promise.



When framing the story, remember that you needn't belabour the emotional and physical depth of the struggles and challenges you're trying to solve. Concentrate on the audience and what they may desire, such as comradery. Show that you understand the struggle and the need for something else.

The Tough Mudder is a race that calls upon its participants to endure cold water, lots of mud, and physical challenges. It attracts a hardcore audience. While this event does capitalize on the appeal of a display of incredible endurance, it also goes past that. In this example from Melbourne, the event planner showed a side of the event you might not expect: the comradery and assistance racers give to one another.

In **this video**, they not only showed the challenges, but the assistance as well, and they do it through

visual storytelling. They never say racers build bonds with one another. They show them through excellent visuals, like hands extended to help other participants, pats on the back, and smiles through the struggles. The video paints a very strong visual of the brotherhood/sisterhood that is built among participants.

Again, as an experience planner you don't want to be the hero of your own story. You want an attendee to play that role. But you want to show that you have a deep understanding of their struggles, that you empathize with them, and that you're there to support them as much as to commiserate.

Both of these types of stories help people feel good about themselves (either through harnessing the power of user stories or the power of who is helped) and transfers those good feelings onto the brand.

LESSONS IN
STORYTELLING

Make Your Attendees Care

No one wants to invest time in something they don't care about, especially not a story.

If you want your story to resonate with your audience and be something they talk about well into the future, you need to give them a reason to care. Hollywood and Madison Avenue do this by creating characters that we can connect with through an emotional hook.

There's something small and vulnerable about the hero, situation, or sage that surprises us or resonates with our own fears or desires:

- ★ **The undefeated warrior just wants to be a gentleman farmer (“Braveheart” or “Rob Roy”)**
- ★ **The indefatigable explorer who's afraid of snakes (“Indiana Jones”)**
- ★ **The kid with a heart of a lion but the body of a mouse (“Rudy”)**

These unexpected attributes hook us because they automatically set up the tension.



LESSONS IN STORYTELLING

Here are some similar characters you might have come across in your events.

★ **The overworked employee trying to find work/life balance while raising two kids alone**

★ **The retired veteran who wants to lead a quiet life but can't find meaningful work without professional connections**

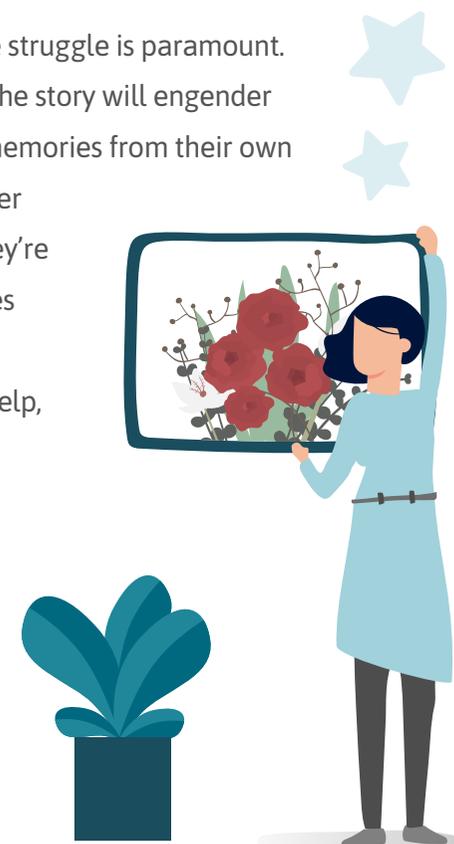
★ **The tireless leader who seems impenetrable but represses a mountain of volcanic stress just beneath the exterior**

Even if your audience isn't comprised of veterans, parents, or leaders, every person in attendance has likely felt overworked, undervalued, and stressed at some point in their lives.

If you tell a story that evokes those powerful emotions, even if they're not currently experiencing them, they will understand exactly what that person is going through and what that feels like.

The audience will also appreciate a group that can help with the struggle, and that's where your experience comes in. What did you do to assist those attendees in their situations? Talk about that from the perspective of the attendee.

The attendee's perspective of the struggle is paramount. Overcoming the struggle within the story will engender positive feelings (and potential memories from their own experiences), and they will transfer those onto your experience. If they're still struggling with the challenges you depict, they'll look to you as someone who might be able to help, engendering trust and authority.



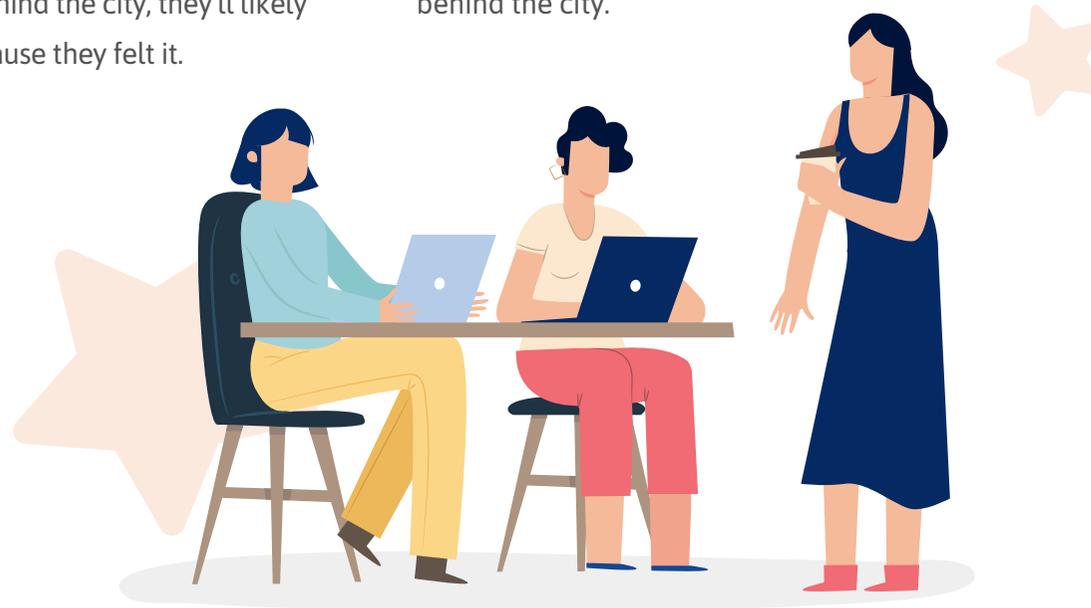
LESSONS IN
STORYTELLING

Conferring a Concept, Mood or Reputation onto a Place or Event

Another popular Hollywood and Madison Avenue technique is transferring an idea or mood/feeling onto a place or event. Often the backbone of marketing and advertising, but these days, it's done through storytelling.

For instance, let's say you're hosting a tourism event for the city of Houston. While it might be effective to show images of exciting places to go in Houston, your crowd will quickly forget when the images are no longer on the screen. However, if you can find a way to evoke an emotional response from your audience by telling the stories behind the city, they'll likely remember the mood you set because they felt it.

This was the case with **Houston LIVE at Super Bowl LI**. The goal was to showcase the city of Houston as a center of culture and innovation. This was done through exhibits, experiences, performance art, and other components that were woven into a story conveying the ideals and emotions behind the city.



LESSONS IN STORYTELLING

Transport Them Elsewhere

One thing that makes fantasy such a successful genre is a director’s ability to transport the audience to another world. The big screen allows for an immersive experience that becomes so real, it’s easy to suspend disbelief, and the graphically rich environments and surround sound support the movie’s overall ability to draw you in.

DISCOVER PANDORA

Avatar is an example of this type of world-building that was continued into an exhibition for those who wanted to experience Avatar after the movie.

BELL

At your event, immersive environments can provide a great appeal factor. Take what they did at Bell for CES. They used multiple virtual reality simulators to transport attendees to the cockpit of their new aircraft, allowing them to experience something truly memorable.

SANTA’S TOY FACTORY

Another impressively immersive story is the holiday retail experience that called on children to be toy testers for Santa. This delighted children, helped ease their fears of the man in the red suit, and made parents happy that the interests of their children were taken care of. Notice how the design does more than just encourage play. It “transports” guests to the North Pole for a memorable experience.



IN CONCLUSION

Storytelling for business is extraordinarily effective.

As a format, it is the future. It's conversational, hyperpersonal, and accommodating for the individual. Story-based formats can deliver 2,000 personal versions of one story to 2,000 delegates. Like a concert where the band plays their biggest hit, and a crowd of 20,000 sing the number for them. 20,000 versions of one song – that's the power of storytelling.

The universal nature of the story-based narrative cuts through information overload, and the digital maelstrom that surrounds us and helps us make sense of our worlds. Story-based narratives are a shortcut we are already hardwired to use.

Live experiences can and should use the power of story-based narratives to represent the attendee journey. In event experience terms, storytelling is well-suited as a marketing tool and can deliver a sensory experience – in the sense that the story format makes sense of what's happening around your audience, which, in turn, means a higher level of retention and engagement.



//

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

EventMB Studio Team

This report is brought to you by EventMB Studio.

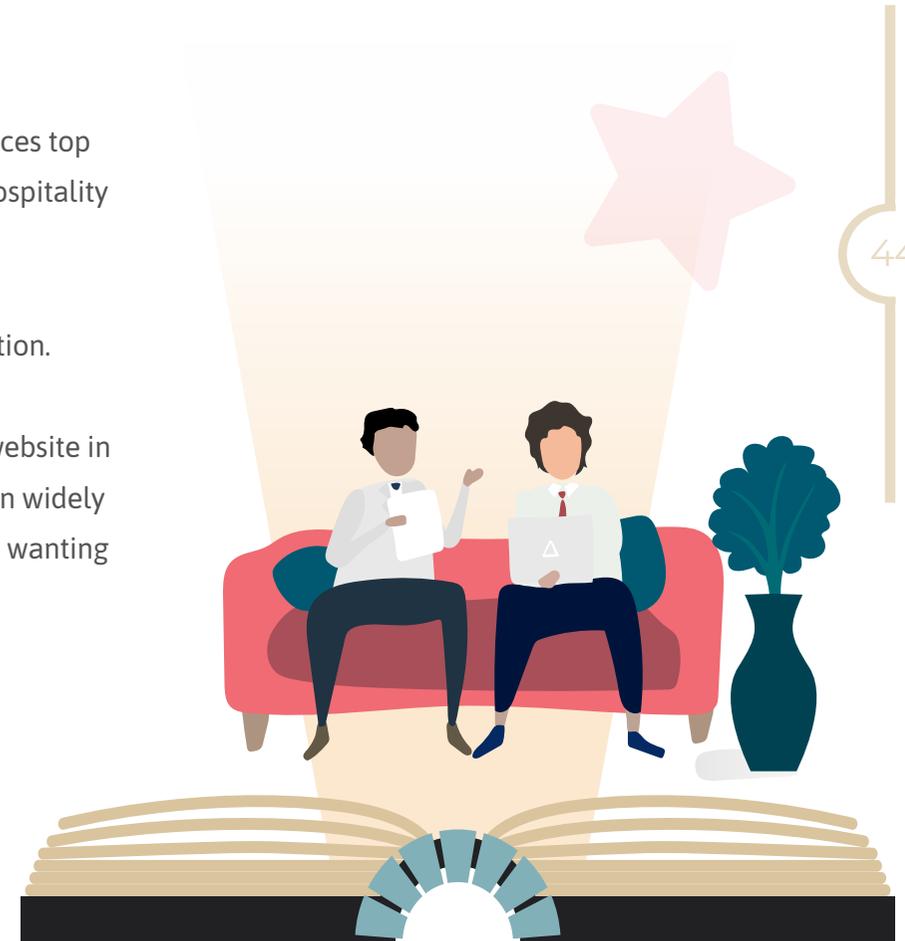
EventMB Studio is a boutique content marketing service that produces top quality digital content assets for market leaders in the event and hospitality industry.

Get in touch (contact@eventmanagerblog.com) for a free consultation.

EventMB Studio is powered by EventMB.com, the most influential website in the meeting and event industry. Founded in 2007, EventMB has been widely referenced as the go-to resource for innovative event professionals wanting to learn more about trends in the event planning industry.

EventMB releases industry reports and intelligence about event technology, social media, and engagement at events.

Thousands of event professionals have downloaded EventMB's free reports at <http://www.eventmanagerblog.com>.



About GES



GES, a Viad Corp (NYSE: VVI) company, is a global, full-service provider for live events, producing exhibitions, conferences, congresses, corporate events, exhibits and entertainment experiences.

GES provides a wide range of services, including official show services, audio visual, cutting-edge creative and design, marketing and measurement services, and event accommodations – all with an unrivaled global reach.

With operations around the world including Canada, the United States, Europe and the Middle East, GES partners with leading shows brands, including Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada, the Canadian International Auto Show, Pfizer, Merck, Bell, Spring Fair, and CONEXPO-CON/AGG and IFPE.

For more information visit <https://www.ges.com/about-GES>.

CMP CREDITS

EventMB is a CMP Preferred Provider accredited by the Events Industry Council and provides Continuing Education credits for learning activities.

This report is worth 1 CE Credit.

To acquire CE credits through this or other reports, webinars and reading material from EventMB, please refer to <http://www.eventmanagerblog.com/cmp>.

For more information about the CMP credential or Preferred Provider Program, please visit <http://www.eventscouncil.org>

DISCLAIMER

While this report has been sponsored, EventMB's analysis is completely unbiased.

Publishing date: April 30, 2019.