

Tell Tales

Stories have been around for millennia; probably as long as humans have existed on earth. Some may claim that stories help make the world go around.

By Martinlindstrom.com, author of Brand Child and BRAND sense

Well, stories are no less powerful today than in the past. And with the help of new technologies, stories are hitting the world of brand building in a big way. Viral videos enable rapid transmission of stories that captivate an audience. Ever heard of the 'Back Dorm Boys', 'JuHua Jie Jie', or 'Tian Xian Mei Mei' for example? Each of the four teenagers represented by these names has been viewed by more than one billion consumers. And this exposure was achieved without spending one single dollar! In fact, these self-made web stars, whose escapades they filmed themselves on webcam and published on the net, were not even aware of their fame until Pepsi, Motorola and Sony Ericsson approached each of them with offers of enough money to retire.

These kids communicated their own stories in a way that was irresistible to viewers. Wanting to share the entertainment, the viral links were spread by viewers responding to the characteristic that is shared by the best of those viral videos - an intriguing story.

Now brands have begun to take a leaf from the story telling tradition themselves, tying their approach into a phenomenon I discuss in my latest book, BRAND sense: 'HSP', the Holistic Selling Proposition, describes a technique which conveys information within a whole context, a technique that enables the world of religion to captivate audiences.

For example, we see brands going to the movies, in a big way. When Burger King recently wanted to harness the attention of its customers, the second largest burger giant created its own branded TV channel: Diddy TV. http://youtube.com/watch?v=XLcPIolG_8E is a casually-styled online TV channel which uses Diddy's star power to direct to attention to, in his words, another 'king' - Burger King, that is. Burger King has become a media entity as well as a

food outlet chain. And Burger King is not alone. Amazon has been running 'Fishbowl' for close to half a year with great success. The branded TV channel has generated such popularity that authors are lined up years in advance to secure a spot on the online screen. In short, brands are becoming, more and more, their own channels for their own promotion.

And this is just the beginning. It's a trend which lightheartedly mixes editorial content with commercial messages, blurring the once essential editorial boundaries and producing a mismatch of information and entertainment. And a characteristic of it is that brands convey their brand values through story lines, and the medium of video brings the brand to life. Take Dove's excellent attempt to distance the brand from the perceived superficiality of the cosmetics world. By developing its own 'Dove Movie'. Visit the website named Campaign for Real Beauty <http://www.campaignforrealbeauty> and watch this short video. In just a moment see 'the girl next door' transformed, by makeup artists, hairstylists and couturiers into a swan. The implied story recalls 'The Ugly Duckling', and the underlying message is that the world of beauty is built on fakery. This is an interesting proposition coming from a member of that industry. The appeal to the familiar tale serves to captivate the onlooker and, in so doing, manages to sell more than Dove soap. It's communicating a shared human moral and selling Dove's part in it to the inevitably sympathetic viewer. The video technology brings the tale of Dove values to life, and, like all good stories, the tale spreads quickly, supported by ordinary consumers sending on the viral link.

So, are you in the mood for more stories? Check out my video brand stories at MartinLindstrom.com. The days of the simple brand website which served the brand with one-dimensional 'about', 'products' and 'contact' links, are well and truly over. These days consumers expect to be entertained and educated at the same time. Self-promoting online brochures won't do it. What brands need is fresh content, preferably every day - an enormous pressure for every brand builder.

It's not enough to be a promoter of products. You have to be a gifted teller of intriguing tales as well. And that's the moral of the story.

For more, visit MartinLindstrom.com. Martin Lindstrom's books "Brand Sense" and "Brand Child" are available at BT Store; tel: (011) 255 5871, 077 768 5200