

the **Story Stock Playbook**

Build a story library that sounds like you.



Strategy and creativity redefined.

When was the last time you saw a movie?

Now think about the last time you saw a slide deck.

Which one do you remember? Whether it was the movie or the presentation, we wager it was the one with the better story.

Good stories fire up our brains. They spark emotions with bright, bold visuals and relatable, universal themes. When a story is just-that-good, we can't wait to tell someone else about it. After all, getting other brains fired up is fun.

Your brand stories can do the same thing.

With every conversation, every communication, and — yes — every slide deck presentation, you can use clear, concise, and consistent storytelling for effective messaging and communication about your brand.

The Marketing Collective philosophy and approach to brand storytelling is simple. First, we break it down into three types of stories:



Then we bring these stories to life in what you're reading now — our Story Stock Playbook.

Think of it as a content library designed to spark creativity and conversation. Refer to it, work on it, start over again and again to craft a world that your customers and clients can't wait to be a part of. It's always on, always flexible, and always customizable. It can grow as big as you do.

Every brand has a story. Let's discover yours.

At this point, we bet you have some questions.

You could be asking yourself, "I get it, but how is this different from every other 'storytelling' playbook out there?"

It focuses on **a) clear, concise, crisp communication**, **b) flexibility**, and **c) authenticity**. And it does not stray. Here's why we commit to clarity, flexibility, and authenticity:

1 Because your potential customers don't have time.

They demand to understand who you are and what you bring to the table without any mental gymnastics. Clear, concise language makes your story both trustworthy and easy to understand.

2 Because YOU don't have time.

Your story is out there, looking for you. By unearthing the timelessness of your brand, you can put it to work for you now — and 20 years from now. When you have a metric ton of lines and ideas to choose from, your "story stock" will never disappoint.

3 Because the most distinct voice out there is yours.

Too much over-used corporate-speak can start to sound like — well — like everyone else. And we both know it's the total opposite. You're bursting with stories to share. Use this process to dig past the same-old jargon and discover your sparkling gems.

How might you use this playbook?

Do the work. Trust it. And it will work for you.

It is packed with brainstorming, mapping, and storytelling exercises to help you elevate how you talk about your brand. Go through the exercises. Be clear and authentic. And just like that, you will have created a library of lines, ideas, and nuggets of inspiration.

This is the story content library that can help you transform from ordinary ("We make tents") to extraordinary ("We design passports to the roads less traveled").

What else is in here?

Reality checks and questions to “test yourself.”

Writing means letting your guard down and being a bit vulnerable. Both are tough to do — even for professional writers. But that’s OK. We’ll get to the best version of your company’s story by taking a few bold, brave steps.

Look for the “Reality Check” prompts and give yourself permission to speak freely!

Story points transformed into story lines.

Sometimes it helps to get down what you mean. THEN write it. Look for “Story Point” and “Story Line” examples like the following to see your language go from corporate to conversational.

Ready to get started?

Let’s talk about you.

EXERCISE TWO • 5 MINUTES

Add dimension.

Let's give your primary potential user/customer some definition. After all, they are multidimensional – just like you. *One-word answers only:*

They _____

They believe _____

Their super power is _____

They practice _____

They are a _____

EXERCISE THREE • 3 MINUTES

Love and nemeses.

Make a list of your customers' **"Top 5 Things I Value"** and **"Top 5 Things that Make Me Cringe."**

THINGS VALUED	CRINGE-WORTHY
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

EXERCISE FOUR • 3 MINUTES

Be a stream of consciousness.

Now switch characters and be your primary customer from the minutes before they have a problem to the seconds after they have secured a solution. *What is their internal dialogue as they journey toward your brand?*

Time for a reality check.

Read what you wrote. Are you bored by it? Are you bored by your customer? Be honest with yourself. If you are bored, your stories will fall flat. Maybe try another draft and give yourself permission to imagine all the possibilities.

Now map your progress.

Look back at the past four exercises. Pull from the content you generated to answer the following:

SET THE SCENE

She is _____

WHAT'S AT STAKE

She wants _____

CUSTOMER JOURNEY

She thinks _____

YOUR BRAND SOLUTION

How can you help? _____

Let's write a customer story.

Using the lines and phrases from the above, let's stitch everything together. Write a short story that starts with a description of who your customer is, what she's searching for, and how your brand can help. Don't feel like you have to use your lines word for word. *You can paraphrase or bring in new ways of describing the 'essence' of what you wrote.*

Save the eye rolls.

Your first drafts aren't wrong. They just might come across as a little... brand-centric.

Your first drafts usually include the essence of what you want to say. Stay true to it. But take in the world from your customer's point of view. People aren't thinking about brands all day. They are thinking about their lives. *How might you fit in?*

STORY POINT

She loves it when brands understand her.

STORY LINE – INSTEAD TRY THIS:

A win is when she finds something that makes her think, "Wow, I wish I had thought of that."

STORY POINT

She gets ideas from Facebook and Instagram and loves it when brands publish tips and tricks.

STORY LINE – INSTEAD TRY THIS:

Always up for trying something new, she looks under every rock for inspiration. Ideas are everywhere.

STORY TWO

Origin story – what is it?

In a world...

An origin story gets people excited and explains who you are and how you are different. It also explains how you got there and why your work is important. Said another way: *Where did you come from?*

When it comes to telling the world who you are and how you came to be, authenticity is key. We're going to discover that authenticity by first getting something down on paper. We're going to tap into your imagination and not let go. Don't worry – we'll pull it back and make it sound professional.

In this section, we'll draft your origin story by following this process:

- We'll warm up by thinking about YOUR personal origin story.
- Then, we'll make a short, fun play about your brand (alert Broadway!).
- Finally, using the "play" as a bucket of content, we'll map your origin story.

Take a deep breath. Trust yourself. You are creative.

Let's get a little personal.

We'll warm up with an origin story you know very well: your own. Let it all go and feel free! You won't have to read this aloud, and this won't be a part of your brand's origin story. But it's a good warm up.

EXERCISE ONE • 5 MINUTES

Write down a bit of your own history.

Who were your parents? Where did they live? What did they do, and what kind of life did they lead?

EXERCISE TWO • 5 MINUTES

Now, think of yourself as the “parent” of your company.

Think about what you were doing at the moment your thought, “I want to do it this way.” What did you do next and why? You got this.

EXERCISE THREE • 5 MINUTES

Now let’s work on an important part of every origin story – describing what is at stake.

What would happen if the world existed WITHOUT your company? You’re really going now.

Your brand play (in nine minutes).

It's Friday evening, and you have tickets to a new play. You get dressed, have a nice dinner, sit down in your seat, and wait for a riveting story. Two hours later, you're still waiting. The actors took the stage and they had conversations — but — nothing memorable happened. No conflict, no struggle, no subplot. It was just a nice look into someone's normal day.

You probably won't rush to social media to tell all your friends about it, right?

We're all humans with day-to-day stuff to deal with. We like to know we're not alone in our battles. Origin stories bring to life conflict, struggle, and sacrifice, all without saying it. They add dimension and breathe life into the brand, giving customers something to rally behind. These types of stories can provide a sense of affinity or a sense of recognition — a reassurance that someone else has the same struggles, values, and aspirations, too.

So let's tell the story of your company in an imaginary play...

CURTAIN RISES.

Set the scene. Go back to the last day of your world BEFORE you were involved with your company. *What is happening to you? What are you thinking about? Describe your 'aha!' moment.*

ANTAGONISTS AND CONFLICT. BOO.

Tell us what you are fighting. You are the protagonist/hero of your brand identity. *But what antagonist/villains are you encountering?*

NEXT UP: DISASTER.

Your first failure. As your brand is coming to life, something “not good” happens to your customer. Your protagonist/hero has to do something about it. *What happened, and what does your hero commit to doing to fix it?*

OH NO. DISASTER TIMES TWO.

Your second failure. We’re in the middle of the play. Another critical disaster has hit and your protagonist’s solution isn’t working. *They have to try something different. What is it?*

THE CURTAIN CALL.

There IS a solution after all. Will your protagonist’s solution work? It does! And now it’s here to protect the world from “bad things” forever. *Tell us how their solution works and what it fights.*

HUZZAH! THE END.

Time for a reality check.

Read back over your paragraphs, pretending you are telling this story a 5-year-old. Do they get it? Did you hold their attention?

Now we're going to build an origin story.

Take a few favorite lines/phrases/ideas from the play exercise and drop those lines/phrases/ideas into "thematic buckets." Which categories do your favorite lines fit under?

Scene setting and "aha!" moment.	The antagonists are introduced.	The first disaster and protagonist's solution.	The second disaster and protagonist's solution.

Explain your solutions and what you are here to fight! Think about the buckets as modular blocks. Write stories with them in any order. Flip-flop two or three buckets, take one out, or double down. Consider how you've talked about your story before and test out what resonates with family and colleagues.

The difference between the almost-right word and the right one?

The difference between the lightning bug and the lightning. *Or so said Mark Twain.*

There are so many ways to say the above statements, whether with tone or word choice, phrasing, or the way you seamlessly connect thoughts. You can be serious or playful, inspiring or reassuring. There are more than 150,000 words in the English language to choose from. The world is your oyster. Have you played around with different ways of saying things enough to know what's right for your brand?

STORY POINT

Our protagonist is approachable and never exclusive.

STORY LINE – INSTEAD TRY THIS:

They're that friend who likes everyone, and everyone likes.

STORY POINT

Career changes are difficult to navigate, but help is here.

STORY LINE – INSTEAD TRY THIS:

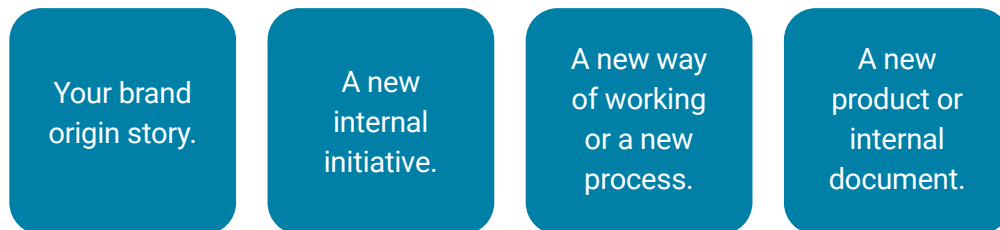
The time to plunge into something great is now.

STORY THREE

Your moon shot story – what is it?

Dream too big and mean it.

Innovation stories describe how “nothing-to-see-here” turns into “this-is-what-the-world-needs-right-now.” *Moon shot stories can support:*



Whatever purpose your moon shot story serves, your team should be able to tell it in a way that gets people thinking, “I don’t know what that is, but I want to be a part of it.”

A responsible moon shot story inspires irrational thinking. “Irrational” in a fun way, of course.

In this section, we’ll draft your moon shot stories by following this process:

- First, we’ll capture how your brand innovates.
- Then, we’ll commit to sharpening how that innovation is communicated.
- Finally, we’ll make it relatable and unforgettable.

Let’s start by generating innovation themes.

Innovation stories run the gamut of universal themes. Some are tales of underdogs, while others are about an inspiring chain of events. You don’t have to commit to one theme – but commit to one theme per story. Let’s explore a few different narratives below.

EXERCISE ONE • 2 MINUTES

In some cases, customers’ problems lead to innovation.

Describe a problem your customer had and how you solved it.

EXERCISE TWO • 5 MINUTES

How did you find the solution?

Describe the chain of events that got you to your solution.

EXERCISE THREE • 2 MINUTES

Solutions like yours probably exist.

But what opportunity did you spy that the others missed?

EXERCISE FOUR • 2 MINUTES

Most likely, your solution lives in an established industry. That's OK.

How are you changing that industry and challenging it to grow?

EXERCISE FIVE • 5 MINUTES

Why do you believe in your solution?

What made you so sure this innovation would succeed? Defend it. Provide evidence.

Now defend the other side. Why could it fail?

EXERCISE SIX • 2 MINUTES

Your team and how they work together may be a huge part of the story.

What about them should you include? How does your way of working contribute to your innovation?

For example: Our process is _____ .
Our methods are _____ .
We will decide how to move forward by _____ .

This time with feeling!

Don't forget that you're a person, too. The essence of your vocabulary and phrasing is authentic. Stay true to it, and free your lines of corporate cliches.

STORY POINT

Our core competency is teamwork.

STORY LINE – INSTEAD TRY THIS:

We thrive on team energy.

STORY POINT

Our corporate values are trust, integrity, and sustainability.

STORY LINE – INSTEAD TRY THIS:

We trust each other. We do what's right. We care about our planet.

STORY POINT

We think outside the box.

STORY LINE – INSTEAD TRY THIS:

Imaginations are welcome here.

Give your solution/innovation an I.D.

To tell stories about your innovation is to know your innovation. Let's break down different aspects of your innovation and plug into the core of its awesomeness.

This is paper, so we can't insert character count limits. But don't feel like you have to over-explain. In most cases, you should limit your answer to 50-100 words. 200 tops.

What is the objective of your innovation?

Who does it benefit and how?

What kinds of things does your innovation team make (other than cool innovations)?

When would another team use this innovation or engage your team?

What do you call it and why?

Innovate with brevity.

Have you heard this one? As Bobby Kennedy toured NASA, he stopped to talk to a man mopping the floors. “What do you do here?” he asked. The man answered straightaway: “I’m here to put a human on the moon.”

Whether you believe that story or not, you want one like it. Clean. Simple. Repeated 50 years later.

Craft an 8–12 word phrase or sentence that answers why you are here, in terms of your innovation.

If you can’t get it down to 8–12 words, don’t fret. The hardest part is getting it down. Then you craft it.

Need help? You’ve already done the work! Look back at what you wrote in the Innovation exercise (page 19) for inspiration. There are gems in your prose.

Thought starters:

- We _____ to _____, even though we _____.
- With _____ and _____, we finally _____.
- We _____ for a _____.
- We saw an _____ that they _____.
- _____ could be costing _____.
- _____ needs a makeover. Could _____ be the answer?
- [your company or benefit] is [ways of saying ‘getting interest and attention’].

Time for a reality check.

Pretend a friend asks why you get up every morning to work on your innovation. Read one of your lines as the answer. *How does it sound? Could your friend remember it? Would they repeat it?*

You did it. Congratulations!

Getting brand stories down and making creative decisions is tough.

Don't stop now! You're just getting started. You worked through these exercises, and you have the start of a beautiful story library.

Commit to the stories you want to surface. Align on consistent language and use cases. Then, start sharing these stories with your colleagues, your customers, and your partners by weaving them into your multi-channel communications. Parts of or all of these stories could live on your website, in your social content, on your platforms... the possibilities never end.

If ever in doubt, remember “clarity, flexibility, and authenticity” and “sound like you.” And if you need someone to bounce lines or ideas off of, give us a call.

We believe every brand has a story – let's never stop rediscovering yours.



PHONE

859.512.3374

EMAIL

info@marketing-collective.com

WEBSITE

Marketing-Collective.com

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL

