

# Storytelling

for Tours Ebook




**LISTEN**  
TECHNOLOGIES

Entertain, Educate & Engage

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“Stories are  
the most  
powerful  
weapon in  
a leader’s  
arsenal.”

**HOWARD GARDNER**

# INTRODUCTION

## TELL A STORY, CREATE AN EXPERIENCE, GROW YOUR BUSINESS

As a tour operator, you're an expert at welcoming visitors to your destination. You know how to navigate your routes and manage the flow of people who take your tours. But you may be missing a crucial step in the experience of your destination. One that could transform your business and turn visitors into advocates.

## WHAT IF YOU COULD EXPAND YOUR BUSINESS AND ATTRACT NEW VISITORS, JUST BY TELLING A STORY?

There's a world of visitors from diverse backgrounds and cultures ready to hear your story—1.326 billion according to UNWTO (United Nations World Trade Organization). People with accessibility issues make up 15% of the population, and they want to hear your story, too.


See your world through their eyes, create an experience they won't forget, and something magical happens:

**You unlock your potential and find an easier way to sell more tours with less effort.**

- How can you create compelling stories for your visitors that will expand your market?
- How do you create tour offerings that stand apart and make the competition irrelevant?
- How can you turn visitors into advocates who post 5-Star reviews about your tour?

Listen Technologies tours are heard by 40 million people in 49 countries—we're experts in storytelling, and we know HOW to tell your story in a way that's accessible to a much greater audience. This eBook is about sharing our success in story with you, because we believe in the power of connectedness, and sharing is a big part of that story.

**Intrigued? Want to grow your business?** In Chapter 1, let's look at why creating an experience can grow your business with the power of storytelling.



“Stories are powerful because they transport us into other people’s worlds, but in doing that, they change the way our brains work and potentially change our brain chemistry.”

**PAUL J. ZAK**

# CHAPTER 1

## THE POWER OF STORYTELLING TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

Storytelling works because we're wired for storytelling. We go home and talk about our day, and at night we dream up more stories. As cavemen, we drew stories on the walls, and as children we made up imaginary friends and adventures.

Stories are how we think, share, and connect with one another. That's because emotions are a key driver in our lives. We love our families, protect our children, have sympathy for our friends, stand up for our core values, and feel sad when someone is hurt.

Visitors want to be "in the story." Will he find his true love? Will she reconcile with her mother? Will the child be rescued? Will the girl find her lost dog? Will the fire consume the whole town?

In the same way that we experience a hero's challenge in our favorite movie or novel, we want to picture ourselves making fateful decisions and saving the world or the love of our lives.

Visitors who experience that emotion during your tour engage with you in the same way they do with other storytellers. Who can deny the power of Harry Potter, Anne of Green Gables, or the Starks and Lannisters to sell t-shirts and mugs?

Neuroscientists have discovered that our brain chemistry actually changes when we hear a story. We become more engaged, more trusting, more receptive, and much more likely to give or buy.

## IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE STORY, CHANGE THE EXPERIENCE

One of the biggest advantages of the tourism industry is how it creates lifelong memories for millions of people every day. That's power.

**Power to excite, inspire, and transform experience.**

## THE POWER OF STORYTELLING TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

This power presents a massive opportunity that many tour operators miss. And that can be a huge advantage for you, because once you understand the power of story and how to deliver it, your message becomes something your visitors want to hear, and just as importantly, it makes them want to take action.

**Want to be the Storyteller your visitors trust?** In Chapter 2, let's take a look at how Call to Action is only a story away.

"When we are being told a story, things change dramatically. Not only are the language processing parts in our brain activated, but any other area in our brain that we would use when experiencing the events of the story are too." **LEO WIDRICH**

## CHAPTER 2

### HOW STORIES ACTIVATE A CALL TO ACTION

Storytelling is how we bond through common experiences and cope with stress by imagining success. It's that sense of resolution through shared experiences that makes us comfortable with the unfamiliar and leads to commitment.

By sharing experiences, real or imagined, we learn to trust others and **gain the confidence to make a buying decision.**

"Storytelling is a powerful tool. It connects strangers, triggers emotions, and allows us to know each other in a deeper and more meaningful way. This can work for businesses and organizations, just as it works between individuals," says Senior Copywriter and marketing expert, Karina Barker.

Visitors on your tour can experience that sense of trust in buying from you, just by listening to the stories about your destination.

## HERE'S HOW STORIES CREATE CALL TO ACTION:

**Storytelling beats the competition.** If you had the option of taking a tour that gave a list of facts or one that wove an experience full of larger-than-life characters fighting the odds and winning through the ages, which would you choose?

**Storytelling builds trust.** Trust translates into sales, not just for “bums in seats” or feet on guided tours, but for attractions, galleries and museums, restaurants, walking tours, boat rides, and other partners along your route.

**Storytelling boosts sales.** Great experiences create an emotional value-add for your visitors and additional sales for you. Visitors who engage in your stories have a positive outlook and are more likely to trust the source of those stories—and buy what you offer.

**Storytelling builds brand.** An immersive experience that evokes emotional responses from your visitors will be remembered—and associated with you—for a very long time.

**Stories turn visitors into advocates.** A great experience goes far in the digital age where people can't wait to share their experiences online or message a friend. You can harness that power and fill seats or walking tours with larger groups, just by letting your visitors do the talking for you. With the power of storytelling, you can grow your business with higher satisfaction ratings and 5-Star reviews.

## A BUSINESS CASE FOR STORY

International **tourist arrivals grew 7%** in 2017, the highest increase since 2009 according to a 2018 report by UNWTO and the eighth consecutive year of sustained growth. Gaining the biggest piece of that massive global pie depends on making your competitors irrelevant.

**Using story to differentiate your tour makes solid business sense.**

## YOUR CALL TO ACTION CHECKLIST:

- Focus on creating engaging stories that transform your customers into participants. Deliver tours that build confidence and trust in your guides.
- Create a value-add experience to achieve higher sales with less effort.
- Build brand by differentiating your tour in a sea of dull commentary.
- Become the leader in your market, the one tour everyone must take.
- Turn your customers into advocates to increase your ratings on TripAdvisor and other social media platforms.
- Make the competition irrelevant by offering your customers an experience.

**Ready to tell your story and grow your business?** In Chapter 3, let's look at some story examples that will attract and engage your visitors.





“Storytelling needs to be considered a best practice.

Not something that you just do before work or after work, at coffee hour, lunch break, but something you consider part of your communications tool kit. Frankly, I think it is the single most powerful communications tool you have, bar none.”

**ANDY GOODMAN**

# CHAPTER 3

## THE MAGIC OF COMPELLING STORIES

If you think of your visitors as family, ready to hear all about your fascinating life in FabTown, you'd want to show them what you love most, and tell them stories about what happened to you at the library, that historic monument, your local pub, or the beach. All the things people want to "write home about." Or in today's digital age, post on TripAdvisor, Twitter and Facebook, or message a friend.

There's actual science behind this process. Our brains produce cortisol in response to emotional distress, and oxytocin when we feel empathy, love, and connection. These physiological responses are the same when we are engaged in a story.

"The brain, it seems, does not make much of a distinction between reading about an experience and encountering it in real life; in each case, the same neurological regions are stimulated."  
Says Annie Murphy Paul in the New York Times

**How does this apply to your tour?** Ask yourself which of these stories is more compelling:

### AUDIO COMMENTARY, FACTORYTOWN

FactoryTown Plant was established in 1890 and still makes widgets today. There are two hundred employees here, and everyone has a benefits plan. Our widgets are distributed around the world.

### AUDIO TOUR STORY: FACTORYTOWN SAVES 9-YEAR-OLD HEART PATIENT

When 9-year-old Cindy was diagnosed with a heart condition, doctors wondered if she would see another Christmas. Her family slept at the hospital, exhausted, afraid, and hoping for a miracle. The people at FactoryTown Plant wanted to help. We worked day and night racing the clock, and here on this site, a century of widget-making resulted in a technological breakthrough: FactoryTown engineers developed a replacement valve that saved Cindy's life. And because her mother works at this plant, all her medical bills were covered by benefits.

If you've ever loved a child, the areas of your brain that activate empathy will light up. You'll want Cindy to live and her family to be happy, and once you hear that Factorytown's benefits paid the hospital bills, you'll feel a resolution that emotionally concludes the crisis in this story.

We don't all have a story so life-and-death critical about our destination, but if you see the stories you want to tell from the hearts and minds (and the empathy-centered areas of the brain) of the people on your tour, you'll see that their willingness to engage in your message is a powerful motivator. Not only will you have your visitors' attention, you will have their engagement.

**Your visitors will never forget your destination or what you stand for, and more importantly, they'll want to interact with you in a meaningful way.**

“Storytelling is central to meaning-making and sense-making, says executive coach Leo Widrich.

It is through story that our minds form and examine our own truths and beliefs, as well as discern how they correlate with the truths and beliefs of others. Through story listening, we gain new perspectives and a better understanding of the world around us.”

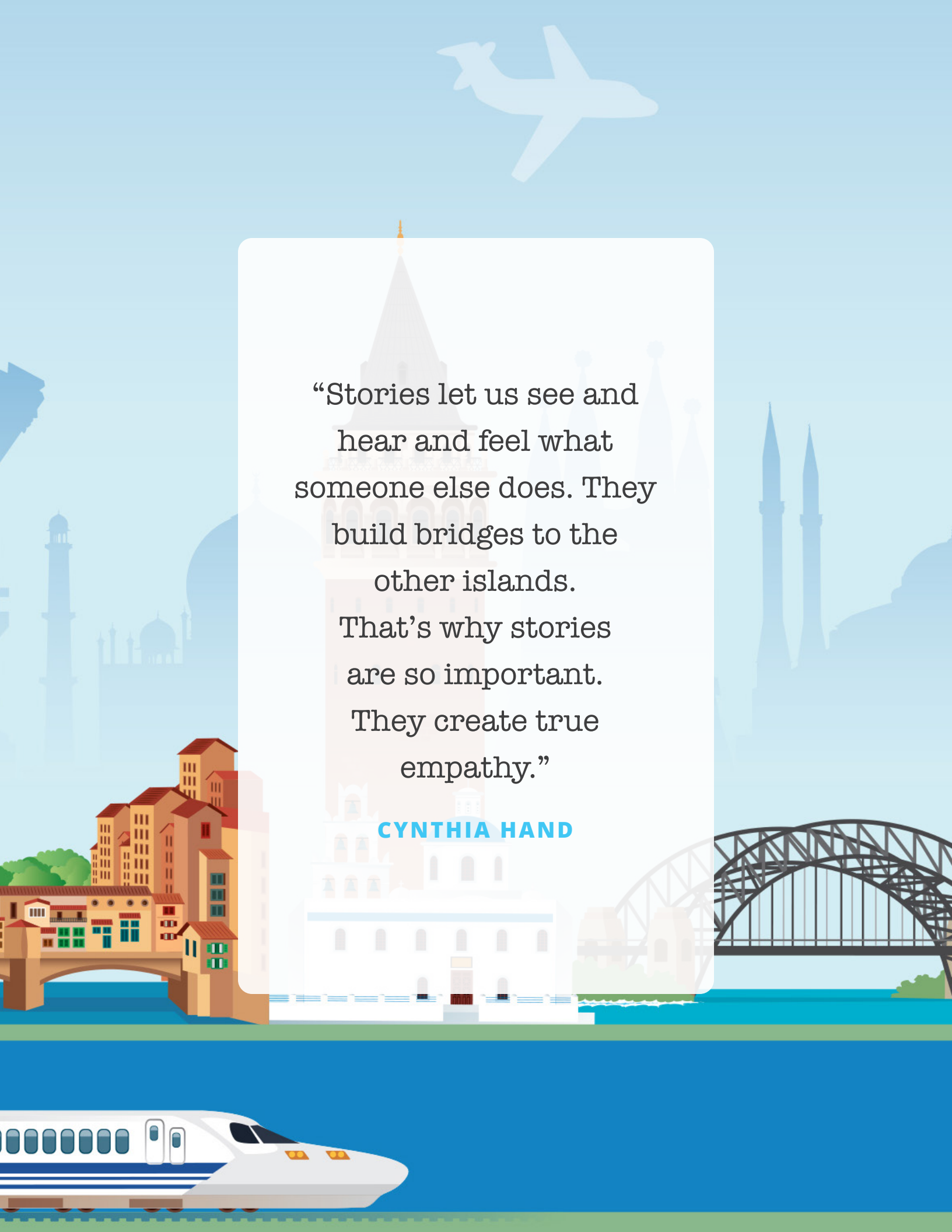
### HOW DO YOU THINK THIS STORY ENDS?

Once upon a time, a group of people from different backgrounds came to Storyville. They had heard so much about this magical place that they wanted to see it for themselves, meet the people, hear the music, and experience the history and rich culture of this storied place. Once they arrived, they were presented with a problem. They didn't know where to go to find these stories! So, they took a guided tour to see the sights and learn all they could...

Do the people who visited Storyville live an unforgettable experience? One that they can't wait to tell family and friends? Do they laugh, tear up, exclaim in delight as they walk or ride through the sights? Does Storyville live up to their expectations?

Whether you're running a destination tour for out-of-towners or a plant tour for Chinese business executives, visitors want commentary that entertains, engages, and enlightens. When they leave your tour excited with what they've seen and learned, they're eager to talk about it and ready to share. That's good for your business.

Ready for your next story? In Chapter 4, let's look at how you can become the superhero of your own epic tale.

The background features a stylized cityscape. At the top, a white airplane flies against a light blue sky. Below it, a white rounded rectangle contains text. The cityscape includes a large white domed building, a brown bridge, and a blue river. In the foreground, a white and blue high-speed train is shown on a track. The overall style is clean and modern with a soft color palette.

“Stories let us see and  
hear and feel what  
someone else does. They  
build bridges to the  
other islands.  
That’s why stories  
are so important.  
They create true  
empathy.”

**CYNTHIA HAND**

# CHAPTER 4

## SUPERHERO RESCUES VISITORS FROM DULL COMMENTARY

You've probably experienced this "death by dull commentary": a list of historical facts and dates that don't mean much to you and make you feel like you are back in grade school. What these facts lack is a personal connection to a real human experience that creates empathy for the people who lived at that time and place.

For stories to be effective, they need to have a narrative arc. Each story in your tour should have a relatable arc that leads your visitors through a journey they can experience for themselves.

### THE NARRATIVE ARC FOLLOWS A 3,000-YEAR-OLD TRAJECTORY:

- Introduction of a character and what they want/need;
- An inciting incident that changes their world and makes them go on a quest to find what they want/need;
- Conflict and rising conflict, as our hero faces obstacle after obstacle;
- Climax as the hero faces the ultimate conflict;
- Resolution, as our hero wins the day;
- Falling action or denouement, where all the loose ends are sewn up;
- Final resolution, as our hero gets what he or she wants/needs.

### HERE'S A SIMPLE STORY WE ALL HEARD AS CHILDREN ABOUT A LITTLE GIRL WHO BRAVES THE DARK FOREST:

1

Mother warns Little Red Riding Hood not to stray from the path as she sets out to visit her beloved but ailing grandma.

2

Girl strays from path and meets Wolf, who swallows first Grandma, then Little Red Riding Hood!

3

Woodsman rescues Red Riding Hood and Grandma by cutting open Wolf and releasing his victims, lightly digested but a little wiser.

This story engages emotion by making us care about the little girl concerned for her sick grandma, then creates worry as she strays off the path, which we know is treacherous because Mother already warned us.

Anxiety turns to fear as Wolf appears on the path to tempt Little Red Riding Hood. Fear turns to horror as Grandma and Little Red Riding Hood are eaten by Wolf. Horror turns to hope and then to relief and triumph as the woodsman appears to protect and rescue the little girl and her grandma.

Once Little Red Riding Hood and Grandma live happily ever after, we can feel safe and move on as well, content with the journey we've just been on and what we've learned and experienced.

Telling stories is simple and masterful at the same time. The complexity of a story can vary, but the framework is the same: a beginning, middle, and end, also known as the 3-Act structure, that take us through a range of feelings to a satisfying conclusion.

The introduction is where we meet the character and understand their problem. The middle is the inciting incident, the conflicts, and the climax, where we cheer the character on to overcome obstacles; and the end is the resolution and denouement where everyone wins except the bad guy.

"You need to also make sure that you present the traditional story structure so that the brain recognizes the pattern and can work its magic," says Shane Jones in **The Psychology of Stories: The Storytelling Formula Our Brains Crave** on Hubspot. "That means framing your story with a clear beginning, middle, and end."

How can you use this framework to create stories that resonate in your tour? Engagement comes from feeling a story, caring for your characters and relating to the dilemma they find themselves entangled in.

## HERE'S A THREE-STEP PROCESS TO CREATE STORIES THAT ENGAGE YOUR VISITORS:

1

**The Beginning**—Introduce us to characters: Even a tree can be a character if we feel something about it, so find a unique aspect of a person, animal, plant, or object and bring it to life by telling us what it wants or needs.

2


**The Middle**—Put us in peril: Why is this character at risk? Is a building in danger of being torn down? An archeological site being covered by modern expansion? A historical figure in fear of his life, trying to build the greatest cathedral against great odds, hoping to win his lady love? Make us feel the peril and want the character to survive or achieve his epic goal.

3

**The End**—Make the hero win: Even if our hero tried to save the city from fire but two thirds was destroyed, at least he acted heroically and saved St. Paul's Cathedral. Little Red Riding Hood was devoured, but the woodsman saved her. The ancient trees came down in a massive storm, but preservation techniques were instituted later that saved the forest.

The more stories you tell, the more they add up to a personality and a sense of triumph that characterizes your whole story or destination: the Story Within your Stories.

**Ready to bring your full story to the world?** Let's take a closer look at the Story within Your Stories in Chapter 5.



“In telling the story  
of how you became  
who you are, and of  
who you’re on your  
way to becoming,  
the story itself  
becomes a part of  
who you are.”

JULIE BECK



# CHAPTER 5

## THE UNICORN IN THE MAGICAL FOREST

Your destination is a character in your favorite story. In all the world, there isn't another destination like yours. Your visitors agree, or they wouldn't have traveled from their home or business to explore it with you.

What's the personality of your "magical forest?" What makes it the most unique plant, harbor, city, park, or attraction in the world? That's the sweet spot that drives your whole story. Each story within your story fits like a multi-colored puzzle piece of a spectacular picture. Once your visitors fit all the pieces together, they can be wowed by how glorious it is.

This may all seem far-flung as a business model, but **excitement, adventure, discovery are the tools that raise your story to the level of engagement that your visitors came to hear.**

## DISCOVER THE UNICORN IN YOUR DESTINATION

Let's say you run a cement plant and that cement is used in concrete around the world to build bridges, roads, buildings, and houses. Most visitors to your plant already know that. But do they know that cement from your plant was used in the world's largest building or the Confederation Bridge that connects Prince Edward Island to the mainland?

The story emerging is one of **iconic value**, a bridge that connects people's lives. You are doing great things that impact the world. That's the story people want to hear, along with the mechanics of how you make cement so special.

In Paris, visitors come to the city of lights to see historic sites, eat amazing food, and live like a sophisticated Parisian for a week or two. **What does your tour say about Paris that is unique at a human level?** What is the feel of Paris you want your visitors to experience? How does Paris move, breathe, communicate its unique personality? What is the scent of French baguette, the touch of fine Parisian fabric, the taste of local wine and cheese?

## THE STORIES WITHIN YOUR STORY

Telling visitors about the day the first patisserie opened; the young girl who realized her dream of singing in the Paris opera; the day Napoleon declared himself First Consul and took command after the French Revolution creates a dramatic picture of the lives of Parisians and the character of the city. The story builds, puzzle piece by puzzle piece, into a whole story, the picture you want to paint of the destination you love and care about. As the full image emerges, you will soon find that your visitors love and care for it too.

**Ready to bring your story to life?** Let's take a closer look at how stories jump off the page and into your tour commentary in Chapter 6.



“In today’s age of brand experience, it seems that emotional engagement is proving to be more and more critical to achieving winning results, and effective storytelling is at the heart of this movement.”

**BILLEE HOWARD**



# CHAPTER 6

## SUPER HIGH DEF, SURROUND SOUND, FX TO THE MAX

Be epic! Have fun! Your visitors surely want to. Maybe they had a long day of travel upsets or a hectic bus ride to get to your destination. Once they arrive in your personal Storyville, they want to be entertained.

### SOME SURE-FIRE WAYS TO ENTERTAIN, ENGAGE, AND ENLIGHTEN

- 1 Humor:** Laughter is a great way to engage with people. Tell them why a pirate stripped down to his underwear; or let them overhear two dogs in Paris argue over fashion sense.
- 2 Surprise:** Include stories you might not expect to hear, like how the workers on the Hoover Dam relieved themselves, or the Globe Theatre hired young boys in Shakespeare's time to don dresses and play all the female parts.
- 3 Delight:** Stories that engage our emotions delight us, like how a girl goes to the ball and meets the love of her life or the sleeping beauty who finally awakens.
- 4 Dare to Be Different:** Reveal that "unicorn in the forest"; the Natives who believed in the Sky God; that moment the boy prodigy wrote a brilliant symphony and transformed Austria; the people who formed a singing festival that brought Russian tanks to a standstill.
- 5 Use the Five Senses:** Even people with disabilities can envision sight, sound, taste, touch, and scent. Draw a picture of the story surrounding your sites, and people will respond. In pre-recorded commentary, your story can be enhanced by professional voices telling a consistent and vivid story. Bells can be clanging at the pier, fire roaring in London 1666, a child can be laughing at a playground, horses clopping on main street 1866.

As Annette Simmons explained in *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins*, the most persuasive communication has a human element delivered through stories. "Your goal is to tell a story that activates the imagination of your listeners, so they see, hear, smell, touch, and taste (through imagination) your story as if it was really happening."

### TELL YOUR STORY, YOUR WAY

Every story is personal. The story of your city, plant, harbor, historic site has human elements that make it unique. Visitors can't go anywhere else in the world to hear your story.

## THE STORY OF YOUR STORY

- 1 Make it Personal:** What is at stake in your story? What can be lost if things go wrong? Make us root for the hero and mourn the Little Match Girl. Novelists use this technique to engage their readers, and the same principle of raising the stakes can work for you in your tour.
- 2 Make it Relatable:** Whose story is this? Who is the central character with something to gain or lose that we can root for? You can capture your audience by personalizing your tale, depicting a problem we can all relate to in our personal lives. Will Cinderella get away from her mean stepsisters and find the man of her dreams? Will Babe Ruth pull out of his slump and hit that game-changing home run?
- 3 Senses Tell Stories:** The smell of fire, softness of fabric, shots fired in the night, image of trees as far as the eye can see, taste of freshly baked cinnamon rolls awaken our olfactory senses and bring stories to life. Studies have shown that engaging the senses evokes strong emotions through memories. You can capture your visitors' attention through their own past experiences just by using all the senses in your stories.
- 4 The Eye of the Beholder:** Take another look at your destination from the perspective of your visitors. What do you experience that maybe you never noticed before? What has changed in this place? What's different here than anywhere else? What will people from different backgrounds and cultures find interesting that you may not have thought about before or may have taken for granted?
- 5 Dig Deeper:** What happened here yesterday? A hundred years ago? What was lost, gained? What changed the lives of the people here? Your destination is a treasure trove of hidden gems. A visit to the local library or archives, or a search online of newspaper headlines from another era will turn up some interesting stories of how your destination looked and what happened here decades or even centuries before now.
- 6 Play is the Thing:** Have fun, and use the principles of "entertain, engage, and enlighten" outlined in the last section. Falstaff engaged audiences for centuries by entertaining them with humor and insight. He makes audiences come back through three Shakespeare plays because his stories are unforgettable. The way you tell your stories makes your visitors remember you, and then they tell all their friends not to miss this experience!

## THE BUSINESS OF STORYTELLING—THE STORY OF YOUR BUSINESS

So now you have a framework for telling stories that create an experience for your visitors, and a desire to reap the benefits, both personal and economic. Getting back to the central reason for this eBook, the business case for adopting a storytelling approach to your tour is clear. You want to engage with your customers in a meaningful way so that they will engage with you and help you grow your business.

“The most successful brands do this by balancing emotion with just the right amount of information,” says Celinne Da Costa, Marketing Expert and contributor to Forbes. “A great story is easy to understand and simplifies big ideas in a way that sticks in people’s minds. Even more, it surprises, delights, makes audiences think and feel, and motivates them to act in ways that data cannot.”

The science behind this is proven, and so is the personal connection that makes it meaningful.

“Stories are how we think. They are how we make meaning of life,” says Pamela B. Rutledge, Ph.D., M.B.A. in Psychology Today. “Call them schemas, scripts, cognitive maps, mental models, metaphors, or narratives. Stories are how we explain how things work, how we make decisions, how we justify our decisions, how we persuade others, how we understand our place in the world, create our identities, and define and teach social values.”

That’s a strong endorsement for why stories matter to your business, and why they matter to your visitors. If you create an experience for your visitors, they will reward you with more business, whether that’s creating new markets for you, buying more tours you offer, purchasing tickets from you for partner attractions, buying additional products, or recommending you in reviews and on social media or at the boardroom table.

Quite simply, stories make you unforgettable. They make more people want to do business with you, and they grow your business.

**Ready to explore your next story on a deeper level?** Need more information to get started? We’re here to help.



## HAPPY STORY TELLING

Contact Listen Technologies at  
**+1.801.233.8992** or [sales@listentech.com](mailto:sales@listentech.com)

for additional information about growing  
your tour business with stories.

**LISTEN**  
TECHNOLOGIES

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