

OUTSIDE THE BOX

by Tom Field, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Big Jake's Guide to Marketing

Utilize storytelling in your marketing plan.

Marketing has lost its way. Far too many companies have fallen into the trap of loading up gimmicks into a campaign that panders to the issue of the day and then emits a continuous stream of messaging in the general direction of potential customers.

The end result is most days marketing messages are tolerated, but vastly ignored. Thousands of companies, organizations and influencers clamoring for customer attention results in an overwhelming cacophony of desensitizing chatter. No industry is immune, not even the seedstock business.

Not long ago an entrepreneur introduced me to Donald Miller's concept of story branding. His premise is straightforward: there are two fundamentals in marketing that must never be violated:

1. A brand is only valuable if it helps people survive and thrive.
2. The message MUST be simple and clear.

The vehicle that allows us to connect to customers is the story. Human beings are hardwired for storytelling. We've been sharing information in this format for thousands of years. The story has survived all the technological changes — stories worked when social media was centered around a firepit, and when it was virtualized, Gutenberg's

printing press made stories more available. Miller recognized every story has seven core components:

1. Hero
2. Problem
3. Guide
4. Plan
5. Call to action
6. Possibility of failure
7. Hope of success

John Wayne's body of film provides a useful case study. In his acclaimed movie *Big Jake*, the hero is actually Jacob McCandles' estranged wife, played by Maureen O'Hara. Martha is the courageous woman who held the ranch and family together in the absence of her husband. However, she encounters a challenging problem when her youngest grandson, little Jake, is kidnapped and held for ransom. Jacob returns as a guide to help his family get the boy back. Furthermore, he brings together an old friend and his sons to execute the plan — a plan that, if it fails, will result in the death of his namesake, but if it succeeds will reunite the family.

The seven-step model to storytelling reminds all who desire to connect with clients that the hero is not the brand! Inviting people into the brand story works best when the customer is honored as the hero — a hero with a problem that gets in the

way of survival or is a barrier to living well. When the brand is authentically repositioned as a guide offering a plan and call to action while also presenting a pathway that sets the hero up for success, the message begins to resonate. As the seven-step story unfolds, the listener is drawn to the cadence, and what was once a blast of dissonance transforms into the harmony of music — something meaningful and memorable.

Pick up any agricultural publication and ask the seven questions of each ad you encounter. Who's the hero, what's their problem, who plays the guide, what's the plan; plus is a call to action presented, and what are the consequences of the available choices? If the answers to these questions are not readily apparent, then the company in question is contributing noise, not music.

Which do you prefer?

Want to learn more about the power of storytelling? I recommend Donald Miller's *Building a Story Brand* as a resource to guide you towards the creation of effective marketing. [A](#)

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