



## *Tell Your Story Newsletter (TYSN):*

Specializing in Entrepreneurial and Organizational Storytelling

*Let me tell your story!*

### **Welcome Mid-November 2019!**

As I prepare this issue of "Tell Your Story Newsletter," the cold air and bitter wind are moderating and today's forecast promises +6 C by Friday. Immediately, our spirits are buoyed!

In this month's newsletter, I highlight some insights from Marieke van de Rakt, CEO of the web marketing company, Yoast.com, on how we can use storytelling in business.

And in "Storytellers' Corner," I cite Bryan Garner's explanations of two very story-centred terms, "from hence" and "from thence."

In "Shop News," I mention the latest workshop that I'm offering on resume preparation (coming soon, on Nov. 26th!). Will you please join me, or promote the talk to others in your network?

May the best of winter . . . the warmth (physical and emotional) that can be cultivated indoors, by nourishing food and sharing stories by a crackling fire . . . may the best of winter be with you, as we approach the end of 2019.

Sincerely,  
*Elizabeth*

**Principal**  
**Storytelling Communications**

[www.elizabethshih.com](http://www.elizabethshih.com)

**Article One:** *What does it mean to use storytelling in business? Marieke van de Rakt shares these insights*

Many of us use stories on our websites and in other writing, but we may not always realize it: It's actually quite hard to write any marketing (or other) copy without telling a story of some kind. We all

use metaphors, similes and figures of speech--all basic components of storytelling. For instance, any evidence we might provide to support our claims often takes the form of stories.

Two days ago, marketing guru Seth Godin and novelist and writer Bernadette Jiwa announced a new "Akimbo workshop" they have just launched, to teach creatives to become better storytellers. Here's the link: <https://thestoryskillsworkshop.com/>

Godin stresses that a good story "is about the listener, not about you," and that it can "make things better. Storytelling is a skill. It's not something you're born with, it's not based on charisma or authority. It's more simple than you think, but it takes practice."

And Godin is, of course, right: Because I regularly practice storytelling in the workshops that I write and deliver, and in my blog postings and e-newsletter copy, I rebranded my business at the end of last year ("Storytelling Communications").

From the earliest epic poems from Ancient Greece and Rome, to the lives of the Old Testament patriarchs (and these are only examples from the West), storytelling is an essential part of the fabric of our lives. It has longevity and far exceeds its status as the latest marketing device. But some marketers have interesting insights to share on storytelling for business:

In a series of recent blog postings, Marieke van de Rakt, CEO of the web communications company, Yoast.com, reminds us that business reviews or "testimonials" are one example of stories. She says that "treating examples, cases, reviews and testimonials as little stories will help you improve your product pages."

From her blog postings, I've extracted five helpful tips on how to effectively adapt storytelling to promote your product or service.

**(1) Show, don't tell:** It's much more convincing to *show* people why your product or service is a game-changer, instead of simply *telling* them so. Simply put, narrative and metaphorically rich language trump non-figurative copy, any day.

Would you rather read a spreadsheet of features and benefits of a product, or be spellbound by the following story (on the topic of baby carriers):

*"Sue and John have a little baby. His name is Jack. Jack is 10 weeks old and cries a lot. Sue and John don't know how to stop Jack's crying. They get very nervous of his crying, they sleep poorly, they are agitated, tired and scared.*

*One day, a good friend gives them a present. It is a baby carrier and it's supposed to help calm their baby. John decides to give the baby carrier a try. Jack loves the carrier. He instantly relaxes, stops crying and falls asleep. From that moment on, Sue and John carried Jack in their baby carrier all day long" (van de Rakt).*

The greater persuasive power of a simple story is undeniable.

**(2) Focus on the problem, not the product:** van de Rakt tells us that the four elements of a good story are *character*, *a problem*, *action* and a *solution*. If you interweave your sales page with these story elements, “you’ll automatically shift away from your product [or service] to the problem and solution” you’re selling. That shift can appear to happen without much, if any, effort.

**(3) Receive your testimonials or reviews as little stories:** Every customer testimonial (or review) you receive should naturally tell a “little story.” Testimonials quote “real customers [who] share real experiences. Those experiences increase trust.”

Consider the reviews that you find on a site like Amazon.com: the effective ones tell good stories that influence your buying decisions. So, when you ask a client/customer to prepare a review, ask them to ground it in themselves: Ask them to “make [the reviews] human; make sure that people can relate to this person.” That “person” becomes the main **character**. And that character should aim to solve or do something.

Every story needs that “something”—a “**problem**”: Ask your reviewers/clients to describe what drove them to try your product or service in the first place. Ask them to detail how lives were transformed when the problem was solved.

The “**action**” may be *why* your prospect or customer bought your product or service and if the sales process was memorable in some way.

van de Rakt concludes that the “**solution**” consists of how your client or customer’s life improved afterward—i.e. how using your product or service “solved” the problem and let them live “happily ever after.”

**(4) Collect user stories:** You may qualify as the best storyteller, yourself. So elicit feedback from customers (e.g. through a survey) about your product or service and how it changed their lives for the better. Use the customer comments to write stories of your own. Photos and video can be even more persuasive forms of users' storytelling and can set your service or product far above that of your competition.

**(5) Write example stories:** Storytelling can clarify and make more vivid any complicated or confusing aspect of using a product or service, by shifting focus to the end-goal of the problem that it solves. Here again, you can apply fictional storytelling (i.e. a fable or vignette) to outperform the usual strategy of listing features and benefits. (The latter is virtually a spreadsheet of data—borrrriinnng to most readers!) Your “example story” could include the most crucial sales features “and show a remarkable improvement” after your “character” started using these features.

By shifting the focus of your copy “away from your product, to the character, the problem your audience and your solution,” as van de Rakt suggests, your sales copy will be “much more engaging,” and therefore, persuasive.

Storytelling does not need to be the grand thing of epic poems or the Old Testament. You can (and should) draw on your own experience, so long as it connects with the message of your posting.

If you hesitate on how to write stories, van de Rakt recommends using interviews as an effective strategy. You receive a personal story from anyone you interview.

Here’s an example of a "career story":

*There once was a writer named Julie. Growing up, Julie was not sure what she wanted to do for a living. She had been raised her to defer to the judgment of her disciplinarian father, who demanded that she study mathematics and the sciences.*

*Julie worked very hard to learn them, but they made her stressed and sad—they gave her no enjoyment or satisfaction, whatsoever. One day, Julie put away those books and started to read another—a book about finding one’s own career path, according to one’s aptitude.*

*Julie made notes about the kinds of activities that she enjoyed doing. She did some exercises and then started to write down—for the first time—the stories that had floated inside her head, since childhood. A few days later, she had written her first novel!*

*She remembered her parents’ anxiety that she should follow her father’s career plan for her, so as to earn "good money to live on." But when her first novel won a national literary arts’ award and sold hundreds of thousands of copies, Julie had found much more: her life’s purpose.*

Now if the career aptitude book Julie read was the classic study, *What Colour is Your Parachute*, by Richard Bolles, then Julie's story could promote that book far better than any publisher’s summary.

In fact, there are many kinds of stories: “user” stories, “origin” stories, “value” stories, “success” stories (i.e. case studies), “quest” stories and more. The limit is really only your imagination.

*And now it's your turn: Can you think of memories or experiences that lend themselves well to storytelling? Please write in; I'd be delighted to hear back from you.*

STORYTELLER's CORNER . . .

STORYTELLER'S CORNER: Words, Stories, Riddles and Jokes on Writing and Editing . . .

## This month: the thorny case of "from hence" and "from thence"

American etymologist Bryan Garner wrote recently about two phrases that harken back to old fashioned storytelling: “from hence” and “from thence.”

He says that both phrases suffice without the preposition, “from.” “Hence” means “from this time, from this place.” “Thence” similarly means “from that time, from that place.”

But grammarians, he writes, “have never considered ‘from hence’ to be incorrect, and the word ‘from’ may help orient readers who aren’t very familiar with these increasingly creaky words.”

Here's an example of “hence” that tells a story of its own: “After many years of dating and several break-ups, the couple finally wed in Saskatoon. The priest began the service, saying, “*Hence* anyone who objects to this union must speak now or forever old their peace.”

And Garner’s example of “thence”: “Mr. Scott of University College, Oxford . . . accompanied [Johnson] from thence to Edinburgh” (*Life of Johnson* 16: 1791).

## SHOP NEWS:

Special thanks this week to Lenore Swystun, Monica Kreuger and Ashleigh Mattern for hosting and participating in yesterday's episode of "Civically Speaking" (CFMR 90.5 FM, community radio). Due to family care issues, I took a break from the panel, but tuned in to hear them discuss how we can change Saskatchewan's currently ailing education system.

Hasn't everyone found that the traditional, public education system in our province has failed us?

Monica Kreuger has participated in a reference committee that created a report over the past year and a half, including 12 actions we can take to change our outdated and "broken" system (dating to the Industrial Revolution) that no longer meets the needs of anyone.

Please join me in reading the report and actions and in lobbying our provincial government to make long overdue changes, before we lose the potential of another generation:

<https://www.reimagineeducation.ca/>

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***Would you like to land a better job before the New Year starts?***

**Is your resume not getting you traction?**

**Do you have the resume blues and don't know how to shake them?**

Register for my upcoming talk, "Resume Basics," a "lunch 'n learn" on Tuesday, **November 26th at 10:30 am-12 noon**, at the office of NSILC, **237 5th Ave. North, Saskatoon**.

Seats are \$20 each, and the fee includes a comprehensive seminar, lunch, a networking opportunity and a handbook of resume tips 'n tricks that will power up your job search!

Register below:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/resume-basics-a-lunch-n-learn-tickets-77528284185>

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I'm also delighted to reprise my business communication seminars at the [Praxis School of Entrepreneurship](#) in two weeks' time. I look forward to helping current entrepreneurs-in-training on how to write their own marketing materials.

## ABOUT US:

I'm grateful to close friends who have provided me with emotional and social support, as I care for an aging family member: the list of names is long (and I wish to preserve their privacy), but they know who they are. And I send my gratitude to each of them!

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Between 2011 and December 2018, Elizabeth Shih Communications chronicled the stories of B2B marketing and communications on the Prairies and across the country.

Effective January 1, 2019, I rebranded as "[Storytelling Communications](#)." I now assist SMEs in closing more sales by communicating more effectively; I help Canadian newcomers land better jobs; and I write the legacy stories of major companies.

Interested in learning more? Please contact me through my CASL-compliant website ([www.elizabethshih.com](http://www.elizabethshih.com)).

After I receive your message, I'll be pleased to discuss projects with you!

Please visit my website for more information ([www.storytellingcommunications.ca](http://www.storytellingcommunications.ca)).