

Brand storytelling needs 'baddies and goodies'

By  Louise Marsland

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Apple was named as the top storytelling brand in the UK in the 2014 Brand Storytelling Report based on consumer research, released this week. What is also interesting is to note how the brands are measured, according to their storytelling ability.

The top brands demonstrate a "heroic sense of who they are, what they stand for and what their ultimate purpose is". Storytelling is as old as the hills, obviously, as I've explored in a previous Bizcommunity.com trends column '[The most important story of all](#)', but labelling it a discipline of marketing, as 'content marketing' or 'brand narrative' is relatively new.

The 2014 Brand Storytelling Report by brand storytelling agency [Aesop](#) (great name!) in association with OnePoll, identifies the top brands in the UK according to their key storytelling characteristics, such as 'which brands do you consider to have a unique character or personality'; 'which brands tell a credible story' and 'which brands have a clear opinion'.



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As the Brand Storytelling Report states: "With brands, as with literature, people seek characters to relate to and when brands lose track of who they are, their story falters."

Apple was ranked first in five storytelling elements, followed closely by Cadbury. Apple was voted by consumers as being the most "intriguing" and considered as a brand with "unique personality/character".

Storytelling elements that brands were polled against included: whether they had a unique character and clear opinions, told clear stories and produced content that respondents wanted to share and talk about.

Aesop advises brands to take a stand, no matter what - they have to be recognised for "something". And in good old storytelling tradition, there need to be heroes "goodies" as well as "baddies".

As director of narrative at Aesop, Ed Woodcock, recounts: "Marketers are waking up to storytelling's ability to engage and make an emotional connection with audiences. Brands on the whole are often scared of setting an agenda. That doesn't necessarily mean having a campaigning attitude or a strident tone of voice, but rather being courageously clear about what you stand for. The truth is, narratives need baddies as well as goodies. And it's this contrast that brands often fail to spell out.

"Emotional connections have a long 'half-life' - the more heartfelt our attachment to a brand, the longer it takes for our affinities to decay."

The top storytelling brands in the UK also included: Walker's; Coca-Cola; McDonald's; IKEA; Virgin Media; YouTube; Macmillan; and the British Red Cross.

Fear factor

One of the biggest obstacles to creating a great storytelling narrative is that brands are afraid to set an agenda. Because of course, if you stand for something, you have to remain true to that stance or you will be called out for it.

Standing for something, such as 'happiness' or innovation, or taking on a noble cause, means there is something tangible to measure a brand against. That requires courage and authenticity because you can't 'fake it' forever.

The [Aesop 2014 Brand Storytelling Report](#) asks consumers the following questions to measure brands against:

1. Which of these brands do you consider to have a unique character/personality?
2. Which of these brands have a clear opinion?
3. Which of these brands has vision or purpose?
4. Which of these brands are you intrigued to know what they'll do next?
5. Which of these brands tell a credible story?
6. Which of these brands create their own world?
7. Which of these brands produce content you want to share or talk about?
8. Which of these brands are entertaining?

9. Which of these brands are memorable?

Brands really need to ask themselves how their own brands measure up. Are all these elements incorporated into your campaigns? What are you the hero of? Why should consumers look up to you?

It takes courage to be known for something, but sitting on the fence and pushing out boring, stereotypical, mundane marketing messages are not what great brands are made of, only mediocre brands.

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