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Article

"We believe in the core principle of storytelling, which is: show don't tell..."

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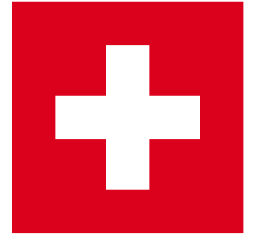
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Storytelling in Marketing & Sales



Universität St.Gallen

„We believe
in the core
principle of
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Today it is not enough to communicate the brand's story in order to get attention. To differentiate from competitors, you have to create a unique user experience by bringing the story to life and make your customers part of it. Pascal Rosenberger is a specialist for corporate communications and gives insights into how storytelling works at Swisscom.

**The interview has been conducted by Christoph Wortmann,
Research associate at the Institute of Marketing, University of St. Gallen**

Mr Rosenberger, how do you see the use of Storytelling techniques in internal and external corporate communications?

Storytelling is a craft gaining more and more attention and popularity within a business context. On the downside, as with most trends, the term has become a buzzword. Overall I'm happy about this development as it enriches discussions and measures. Today most companies or agencies seek to increase the impact of their communications with storytelling – with good reasons: Storytelling is a promising approach for brands to gain (more) attention, increase an audience's involvement and be remembered. In times, when product differentiation shrinks, user experience and communication can make the significant difference. However, storytelling still is a difficult phenomenon to grasp and a challenge to operationalise in day-to-day business. Models like the hero's journey have conquered the field and offer a practical approach to structure and convey a story. But there's much more to storytelling and the biggest challenge is to create a compelling and consistent story over a longer period of time, on brand and product level as well as over various communication measures and customer touchpoints. Corporate communications in particular far too often solely relies on bare facts and figures and neglects aspects like emotions. In this regard, marketing communications is way ahead. Storytelling now forces communication managers to root a message in human perception and experience.

What makes stories powerful and communicative types of

content? What does effective Storytelling mean to you?

A great story brings an idea to life. It creates an atmosphere, even elicits emotions and glues attention to it. Something that previously was abstract becomes specific and can easily be understood, even without cognitive effort as humans are used to listen to stories – and to love them. If a brand invests in storytelling it increases its chance, to become relevant for its existing and potential customers. On the bottom line: Due to the experiences and emotions a well-crafted story triggers, brands are more likely to become top of mind, consumers first choice and in the long run to profit from higher loyalty.

What role does Storytelling play in your company's communication strategy?

Storytelling is company-wide in the spotlight and not only discussed within corporate or marketing communications. In general, we believe in the core principle of storytelling, which is: show don't tell. A story is not just a communicative add-on once a product is ready for the market. The services and products themselves as well as everything the brand actively does, are episodes or chapters of the bigger story. This point of view is sometimes summarised under the term storydoing. At the same time, this is where the greatest challenge begins, especially for a multi-faceted company with a well-established presence in many markets. Swisscom is tightly woven into our country's history and people's everyday life. People actively and passively combine every signal we send out and thus create their ver-

Pascal Rosenberger

is a communications expert in the corporate communications division of Swisscom. He is responsible for the development of the communication strategy and communication channels, such as online communication, influencer relations and storytelling. Previously, among others, he was head of the PR team responsible for private clients. Part time he is working together with his business partner to build eggheads.ch, a community and marketplace for further education. The startup positions itself as a Tripadvisor for further education. After concluding his studies in journalism at the University of Zurich, he successfully graduated from a screenplay seminar in Los Angeles. Until this day he is sporadically active as an author.

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sion of the story. Our aim is, to keep it as consistent as possible by building on the brand.

From a marketing communications point of view, media consumption has become highly selective and people have developed strategies to ignore advertising. The increasing popularity of ad blockers raises the bar to reach peo-

ple with our messages. We've concluded, that we need to create events and thus stories audiences want to talk about. If we succeed, people share our messages and we increase relevance in their lives. That's why we increasingly stage our ideas and messages. Besides these primarily marketing communication driven efforts we also count on online-based storytelling platforms. For enterprise customers we publish our dialogue magazine, SMEs are addressed with the SME business world and for private customers we launched "Swisscom Storys" in the autumn of 2015. All these publishing measures address topics that arise around the almost infinite digital possibilities. We want to inspire readers and invite to discuss.

How can companies successfully use Storytelling to build relationships with their customers?

It's a prerequisite that storytelling is a long-term commitment with company-wide support. If it's just applied as

the latest hot marketing trend, I doubt a brand will see positive results. Telling stories on brand or product level forces a company to focus and sometimes even to kill its darlings. The more consequent and persistent a brand and its managers are, the higher the chances of success. Storytelling means simplifying and then enriching the

stripped down idea with elements, human beings can relate to. Most of the times this is counterintuitive for communication and marketing managers as products, services and features stand in the foreground. If an immediate increase in sales is expected, conventional promotions still do a better job. Of course, content is also a way to generate leads, but it's not primarily a sales measure. It pays off in the long run through the previously mentioned benefits.

What future trends do you see in the use of Storytelling and Content Marketing techniques?

Professional storytellers can be optimistic about the future. Exclusive content has become a key differentiator and the web further increases demand. Some of the biggest digital companies of our age pursue different content based strategies to strengthen the bonds with their users: Facebook strives to become an indispensable news distributor. Netflix not just streams

content, it sets benchmarks for Hollywood with its own productions. In a strategic partnership Axel Springer creates exclusive content for Samsung customers. This development underlines the relevance of great content for major platforms. Same applies for smaller brands. As a consequence, the battle for attention enters the next round with such diverse contestants like tech companies, established media brands, online influencers, brands and even private individuals. With more available content every piece needs to convince a reader or viewer to dedicate his or her time to it. Brands need to stick out of the noise with unique stories which will more frequently be told in motion pictures. This increases demand for storytelling skills. However, creativity alone won't win – it has to be combined with a solid technical understanding. Almost every day new platforms pop up offering new possibilities and attracting specific audiences. Storytellers need to jump on and play in order to find out how stories can be told in these new environments. Once all these questions on the content production side are solved, distribution becomes key. As only few brands possess their own reach, higher media investments – most likely for native ad formats – will be required. Storytellers will be successful, if they embrace these chances digital offers. 