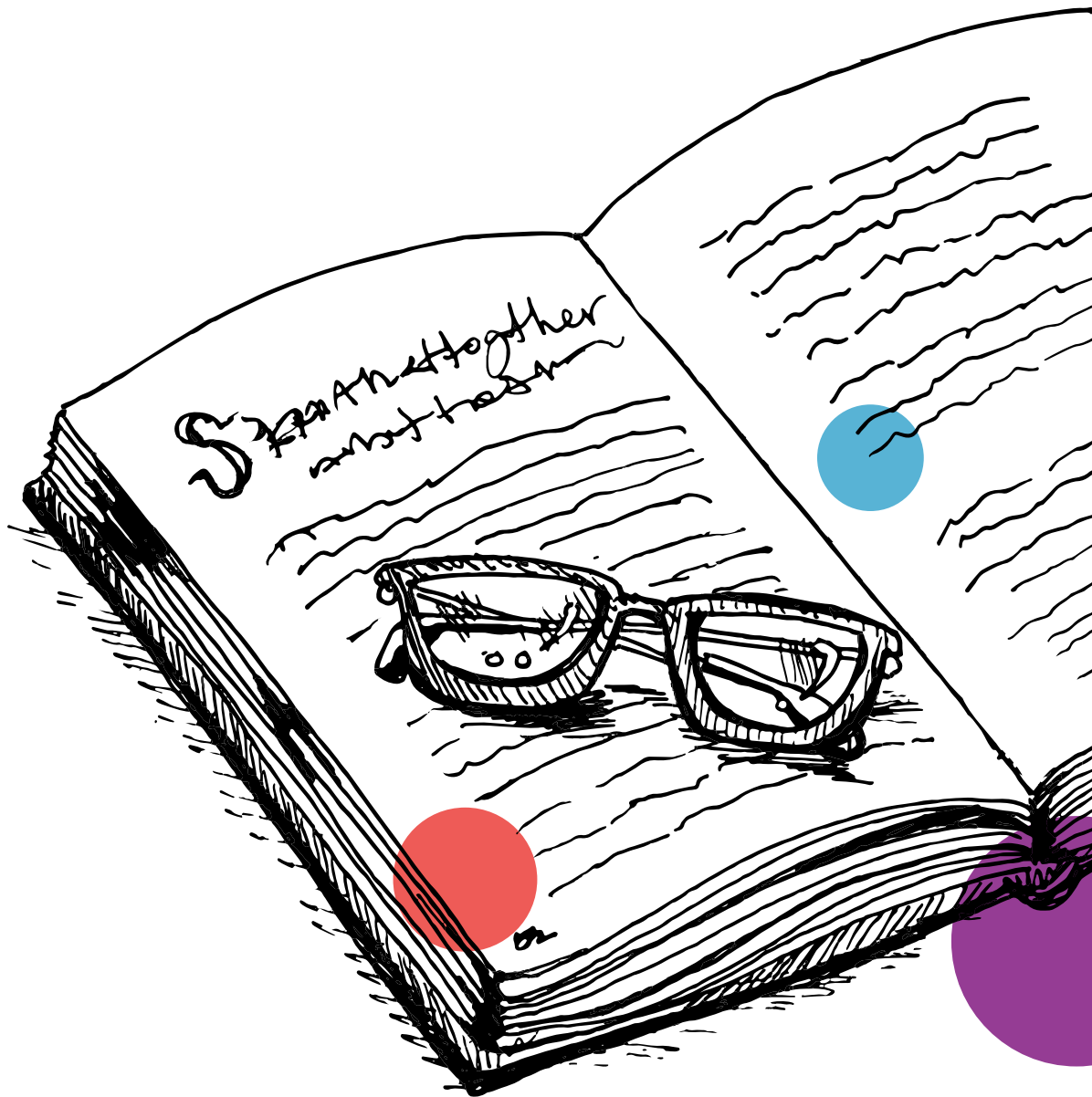


Ariel

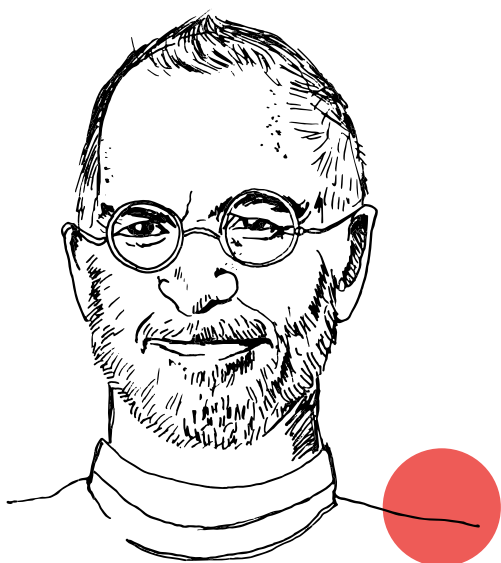
Selling Through Storytelling:

Powerful and Effective Sales Communication



Ariel
Australia





“The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller.”

STEVE JOBS

You're at an upscale restaurant. Before you is a list of wines with fancy names and even fancier prices. Just as you're trying to fathom how anybody could pay this much money for a drink, the sommelier comes by. He begins sharing the backstory behind a particular wine—how the family has been in the wine business for generations, how the winemaker perfected his craft, how the weather of that year created a rare vintage. The wine in front of you is no longer just a beverage but a beautiful blend of history, culture, and art in a bottle. Suddenly the price doesn't seem so extraordinary. Why?

After the birth of your twin girls, you decide to start putting money away for college tuition but, unfortunately, you don't know a 529 plan from your elbow. After hours of online research leaves you more confused than before, you call a financial advisor recommended by a friend. A mom of triplets, the financial advisor is able to speak from her own experience. She tells you how she navigated college plans, points out additional expenses to keep in mind, and helps you rework your budget to both save for your future and go on the occasional family vacation. You happily sign on with her even though you can technically access the same services online for less. Why?

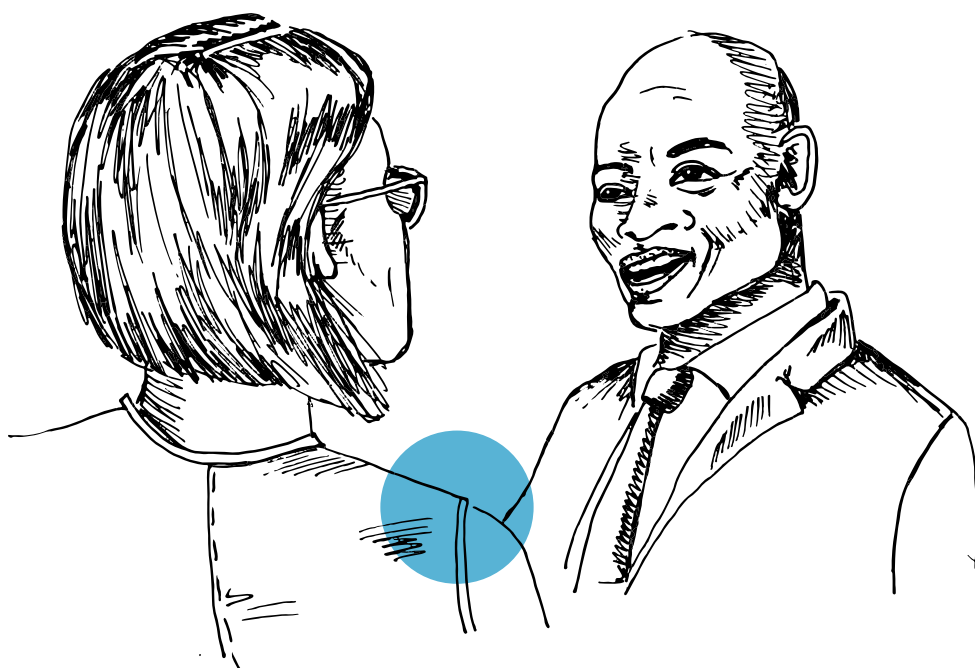
You receive an unsolicited sales email referencing negative Glassdoor reviews about your company's bureaucratic inefficiencies. In a few short bullet points, the rep then shares how a competitor shortened their product development cycle after launching a successful information-sharing initiative that included the use of an online collaboration tool. You're surprised, because you work in a conservative industry and had always thought online collaboration tools were for tech companies where everyone is under 25 and speaks with emojis. You immediately set up an exploratory call. Why?

In all of these examples, salespeople used stories to connect with the hearts and minds of their clients and prospects to influence action.

A powerful sales communication tool, stories can capture attention, build trust and credibility, and deliver messages and insights with impact. They can also help differentiate your team in an increasingly commoditized world and shift the focus of sales conversations from pricing to value. In this eBook, we take a look at the psychology behind storytelling and explore how to leverage it within the sales process.

CHAPTER ONE:

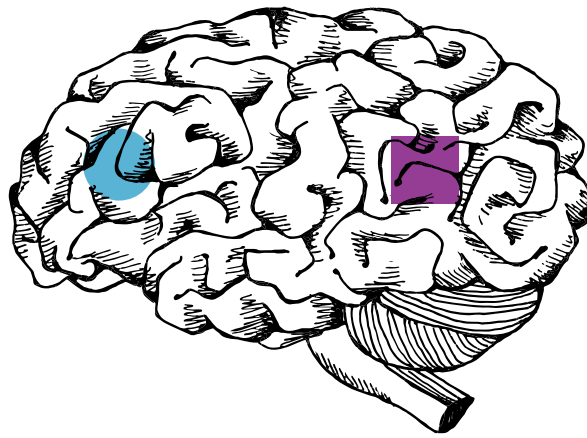
The Psychology and Research



How We Process Stories

Sales pitches and presentations can easily fall into a facts-and-figures conversation. But the truth is that stories present information in a format that makes it easier for the audience to receive, comprehend, and retain.

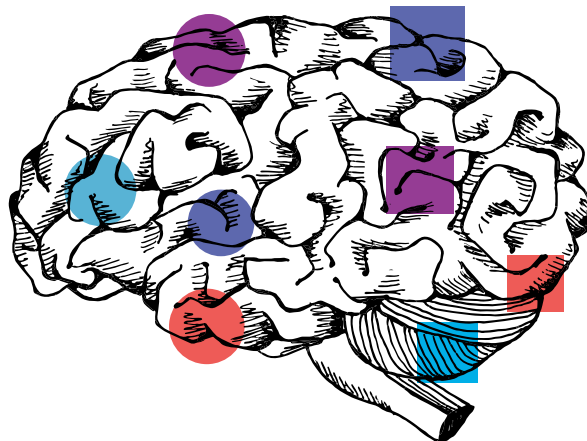
Your Brain Receiving Facts



● WERNICKE'S AREA: *Language Comprehension*

■ BROCA'S AREA: *Language Processing*

Your Brain Receiving Stories



● SENSORY CORTEX: *Touch*

■ MOTOR CORTEX: *Movement*

● WERNICKE'S AREA: *Language Comprehension*

■ BROCA'S AREA: *Language Processing*

● AUDITORY CORTEX: *Sounds*

■ VISUAL CORTEX: *Colors & Shapes*

● OLFACTORY CORTEX: *Scents*

■ CEREBELLUM: *Touch*

Your Brain on Storytelling

Stories “light up” more of the brain than factual reporting.

Neuroscience imaging shows that facts and figures activate just two areas of the brain: those responsible for language comprehension and processing. But [stories activate up to eight areas of the brain](#): those having to do with touch, movement, scent, sound, color, and shape in addition to language comprehension and processing. This implies that the brain responds to the story events as if they were actually happening to the listener. If you're skeptical, think about why you cry while watching a movie, even though logic tells you that the story and characters are fictional.

Stories command attention.

The human brain has a strong tendency to lose focus. In fact, it is estimated to engage in up to 2,000 daydreams a day and spend up to half its waking time wandering. In the presence of a compelling story that creates tension, however, the brain [snaps to attention due to the release of a stress hormone known as cortisol](#).

Storytelling connects listeners to the storyteller emotionally and motivates cooperative behavior.

In a [series of studies](#), neuroscientist Paul J. Zak tested the brain's response to engaging stories. When humans are presented with something that is familiar and deemed trustworthy, our bodies release a neurochemical called oxytocin that creates a feeling of connectedness. Furthermore, rising oxytocin levels trigger reactions. In one study where participants watched compelling public service announcements, Zak found that “when the PSA elicited an increase in both ACTH [a fast-acting arousal hormone that rises when one is paying attention] and oxytocin, donations were 261 percent higher than when one or both of these biomarkers did not rise.”

Stories synchronize the listener's brain with the teller's brain.

Perhaps the most fascinating research is this [evidence of connectedness through mirror neurons](#). A study by Uri Hassen of Princeton University found that when a speaker is telling a story, the same areas of the both the speaker's and the listener's brains light up despite the fact that one is producing information and the other is receiving it. This creates coherence between a speaker's brain and the brains of his/her audience members—it ensures that you and your listener are on the same page.

Information presented through story is more easily remembered than plain statistics or facts.

According to Stanford Graduate School of Business' research, [stories are 22 times more memorable](#) than facts alone. This is likely because [stories universally activate brain regions dealing with emotional processing and memory](#). The study by USC linked above found that “the regions...

- the medical prefrontal cortex: plays a role in decision making and memory recall.
- the posterior cingulate cortex: active in episodic memory recall.
- the inferior parietal lobe: plays an important role in understanding emotions and interpreting sensory data.
- the lateral temporal cortex: active in emotional association and visual memory.
- the hippocampal formation: where long term memories are processed.”

CHAPTER TWO:

Applying Storytelling to Sales



Digital transformation has fundamentally shifted the way we connect with and serve our customers. Armed with immediate access to information and endless options, today's buyers have more control than ever before, forcing brands to rise to the occasion to compete. To stand out in a market environment where self-service is on the rise and the majority of the purchase decision is taking place before ever speaking to a human salesperson, sales teams must go beyond product or service differentiation to win the sale.

B2B eCommerce is projected to hit **\$1.2 trillion** by 2021 in the United States alone. By that same year, **13.1%** of all B2B sales will be conducted online. ([Forrester Research](#))

The science tells us that storytelling helps connect with the thoughts and feelings of others in the moment, enhances memory, commands attention, builds trust, and influences behavior. But what are the best ways to leverage this powerful tool in the sales process?

Strong sales teams have found that storytelling:

- **fosters trust and builds credibility**

Today's buyer is experiencing information overload. By the time they weed through the endless online information to finally speak with a salesperson, they are likely confused and a bit overwhelmed by all of their options. Sharing personal stories at the initial stages of a sales process helps you connect with the buyer emotionally—building the trust necessary to be successful through the rest of the sales process. Sharing stories about your personal experiences with similar clients can also build credibility.

- **helps new ideas resonate**

CEB reports that [53% of customer loyalty is driven by a salesperson's ability to deliver unique insight to the customer](#). Because storytelling helps command attention and drive connection, it's a great vehicle for delivering insights and changing perspective. Stories told using characters in like industries facing similar challenges can help contextualize the insights, making them resonate more impactfully.

- **creates deep connections to brands and products**

New York Times columnist Rob Walker created a series of experiments that showed that useless thrift store finds [commanded a 2,700% increase in value when accompanied by an engaging narrative](#). You can help set the tone for a value-based sales conversation vs. a price-based sales conversation by telling a story that connects the prospect to the brand or product emotionally.

- **paints a clear picture of success—or failure**

Most sales involve problem solving—either pointing out a problem a prospect doesn't know they have or responding to a client's request for help by digging into the needs behind a challenge. Either way, telling stories is a great way to help your prospective client visualize what success looks like and create urgency to move toward a solution.



“Stories cater to the part of the brain that decides to trust—the part that says, ‘I’m going to change.’”

BOSWORTH AND ZOLDAN
What Great Salespeople Do

CHAPTER THREE:

Master the Art: A Tale of Two Approaches



*“Narratives that cause us to pay attention
and also involve us emotionally are the
stories that move us to action.”*

PAUL J. ZAK
Ph.D.

When it comes to telling stories in a sales situation, there are two main approaches that should be learned and mastered: agile (informal) storytelling and strategic (formal) storytelling.

Agile Storytelling

Agile storytelling describes the ability to spontaneously select and insert small, informal stories or pieces of stories into conversation in reaction to what the other person has just said. Before you worry about this type of improvisation in the moment, realize that we already do this naturally as part of everyday discourse. Research by evolutionary biologist Robin Dunbar shows that [storytelling accounts for up to 65% of informal conversation](#).

When to use agile storytelling:

Agile storytelling will help build trust and credibility throughout the sales process. In the beginning of a relationship, it is a powerful way to quickly develop trust and help the prospect or client see that you understand their values and challenges. When you respond to a statement with a relevant story that moves the conversation forward, it continues to build trust and credibility because it shows you are actively listening.

How to use agile storytelling in conversation:

LISTEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify the need/concern to be answered.• Identify the emotional openness to listen to a story.
REFLECT BACK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflect back their need, values, and what is important to them, e.g. “What I heard was...”
CHOOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose the best story that highlights the same need, value, and area of importance.
TRANSITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improvise a segue that builds on what you heard, e.g. “Imagine this...”
TELL THE STORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use techniques to connect intellectually and emotionally.
TIE BACK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tie the story back to the client’s need/concern, e.g. “The takeaway from this was...and it relates to you because...”

Strategic Storytelling

Strategic storytelling describes the ability to intentionally leverage a story to achieve a specific outcome or move the sales process to the next stage. Strategic stories are usually crafted ahead of time with a specific purpose and situation in mind.

When to use strategic storytelling:

You can use strategic storytelling to deliver an insight that resonates, at the beginning of a formal pitch or presentation to connect with your audience and capture their attention, during a product discussion to help a prospect understand features and benefits or how a product could be used to solve a challenge, during negotiations to keep the focus on value instead of price, or to create urgency to influence a close.

How to use strategic storytelling for a conversation or presentation:

IDENTIFY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the purpose for telling your story?• What type of story will resonate with this audience?
CHOOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Source a personal client story where the hero has a similar moment of truth as what your client wants to have.
PRACTICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Run through the story with a colleague, using an appropriate mix of sensory language and dramatic tension for the situation.
TRANSITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When it's time to tell the story in your presentation, create a smooth transition to the story.
TELL THE STORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use techniques to connect intellectually and emotionally.
TIE BACK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tie the story back to the client's need/concern, e.g. "The takeaway from this was...and it relates to you because..."

Elements of a Good Story

To achieve an emotional connection through story, you'll need to master storytelling techniques. Before we dive into how to hone your storytelling skills, it's important to understand the [fundamental elements](#) of every good story:



Structure

The best stories have a beginning, middle, and end, each serving a distinct purpose. Simply put, the introduction should hook your audience, the middle should build conflict and interest, and the climax should involve a change or turning point—a success or failure that serves as a learning moment.



A Hero

Listeners tend to empathize with one strong character more than a group. This is why personal stories are often the most effective to change the hearts and minds of our listeners.



Truth

No story is complete without the illumination of a universal truth. This is where the storyteller goes beyond the plot to uncover what the hero learned, gained, or can apply as a result of the experience.



A Goal

Powerful stories include a central goal that your hero is trying to achieve. This points listeners to the potential for greatness or triumph.



Struggle

A story without conflict will undoubtedly fall flat. Revealing the hero's struggle will make him or her a more dynamic character and create an opportunity for true resolution.

Techniques for Making a Story Come Alive

Strategic stories used in formal pitches or presentations can benefit from a more dramatic delivery style than informal stories being used as part of a casual conversation. Depending on the situation and audience, select a mix of the below techniques to activate your story and connect with your listeners.

- **BULLET PHRASES**

Keep your story concise and focused by distilling the story down into a few key points.

- **VOCAL VARIETY AND BODY LANGUAGE**

Ensure that your choice of non-verbal language and tone of voice are supportive of and congruent with your message.

- **HERO'S POINT OF VIEW**

If it's appropriate for your situation, tell your story in the present tense from the perspective of the hero. This pulls the audience in and helps them empathize with the dramatic tension.

Always Be Listening

How do you build your personal library of stories so that you can reach for them when the time comes? Always be listening. The best stories are happening all around you—in your personal life, with your clients and colleagues, and in their industries and organizations. Here are a few types of stories that every salesperson should have on hand:

- 1. PERSONAL STORY**

(who you are, why you do this, why others should trust you)

- 2. PERSONAL CLIENT STORY**

(how your other clients have dealt with a similar problem)

- 3. INDUSTRY STORY**

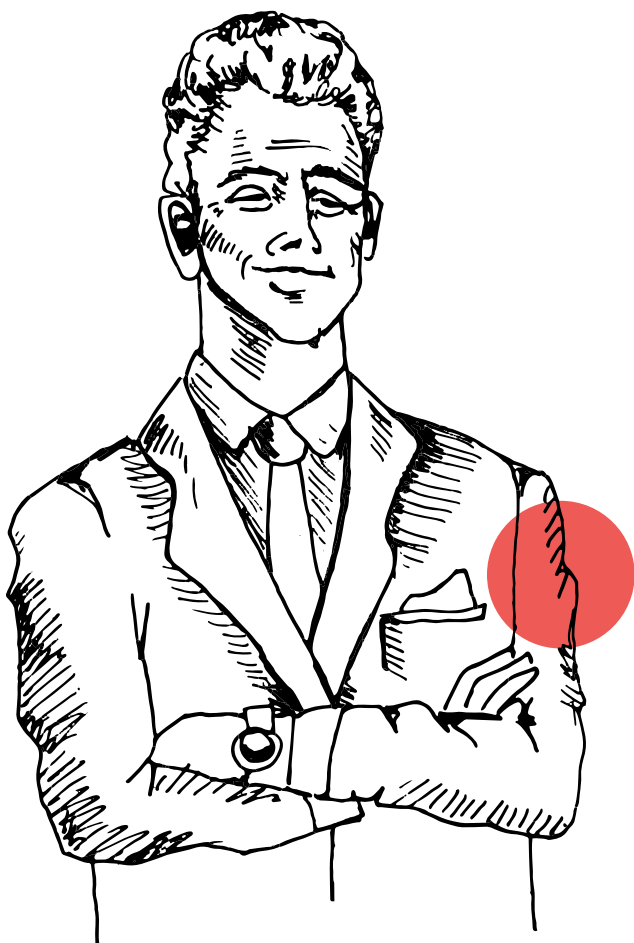
(what other people in your industry are experiencing, what your client/prospect can learn from them)

- 4. PRODUCT STORY**

(what's possible with your product, its impact on other people)

- 5. ORGANIZATION STORY**

(how you're different from your competitors, why this prospect should care about working with you)



Storytelling is not just made for the movies or nights out with friends. It is an essential piece of an effective sales process. Consumers are bombarded by hundreds of advertisements and sales messages every day through a multitude of channels. Being able to leverage storytelling in both formal and informal contexts will help you command attention, build trust and credibility, move the sales process along, and differentiate yourself from the herd.



Interested in learning more? Check out more [sales](#) and [storytelling](#) content from Ariel or email us at info@arielgroup.com.au

Ready to see how sharpened storytelling skills can benefit your sales teams?
Talk to an expert today 1300 784 233