

# Transmedia Storytelling for Marketing and Branding: It's Not Entertainment, It's Survival

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There are three reasons why you should be using transmedia storytelling for branding and marketing:

1. **Persuasion:** Transmedia stories are the most fundamental and immersive form of communication, engaging our brains at the intuitive, sensory and executive levels
2. **Audience Connection:** Transmedia strategies create many points of entry that reach and link multiple demographics and target different user needs to effectively expand the customer base
3. **Financial Impact:** Transmedia storytelling redefines ROI, extends brand self-life, and creates value-added IP assets and ancillary revenue streams.

Marketing 10 years ago was competing for your audience's attention. Today you're fighting for your audience's whole brain because you've got to deliver your message amidst the din of digital noise. This sophisticated transmedia landscape is full of social networks and 24/7 interactive information. You're not on Madison Avenue anymore. You're on the new Main Street.

Today's Main Street Mayor is Transmedia Storytelling. Transmedia storytelling is telling a story across multiple media outlets. It's not one story repurposed for multiple media. Each platform furthers the story with a unique contribution, yet is a satisfying experience on its own. Together, the stories across the media platforms create a deep, rich narrative experience. It's one part psychology, one part new media technology, and two parts story.



There is a new consumer brain, thanks to a participatory culture with on-demand information. The networked world has unleashed our basic human drive to connect. Individuals have new expectations about how they relate to everything—people, products, organizations, and society. In the new consumer brain, media is experiential, relationships are fundamental, and collaboration is essential. Transmedia storytelling creates a meaningful relationship with your audience with participatory elements that transform pre-customers into customers, fans and brand advocates.

Transmedia storytelling allows you to: 1) deliver a clear and memorable message that engages the brain at all levels; 2) use the distinct properties of different media distribution channels to reach and engage different audience segments with different points of entry; and 3) create mutually-reinforcing channels as you tap into the power of audience participation. Transmedia storytelling has unique characteristics that allow you to amplify, build and expand stories across many different communication technologies, some old and some new, and capitalize on what we know about brains.

## Why Transmedia Storytelling Approach Is Different

The key words for transmedia storytelling are coherent, experiential, and participatory. A traditional marketing pitch places the brand and consumer in adversarial positions—the buyer and the seller are on opposite sides of the table. This model no longer works with the new consumer psychology. A transmedia story model positions a brand as a co-participant and collaborator by inviting each member of the audience to participate personally in the story world. Connecting with brand through story shifts consumer perception and allows consumers to create their own understanding of the brand in a social context.

Using multiple media in a transmedia storytelling campaign creates many points of entry for different audience demographics, needs, learning styles, and interests. You can get lucky with a 30 second television commercial that goes viral, but you will leverage that 10-fold if you have multiple pieces of the story in webisodes, Tweets, podcasts, comics, or an Augmented Reality Game (ARG). (For an example of transmedia storytelling applied to The Three Little Pigs, see <http://athinklab.com/transmedia-storytelling/case-study-example-the-three-little-pigs/>.)

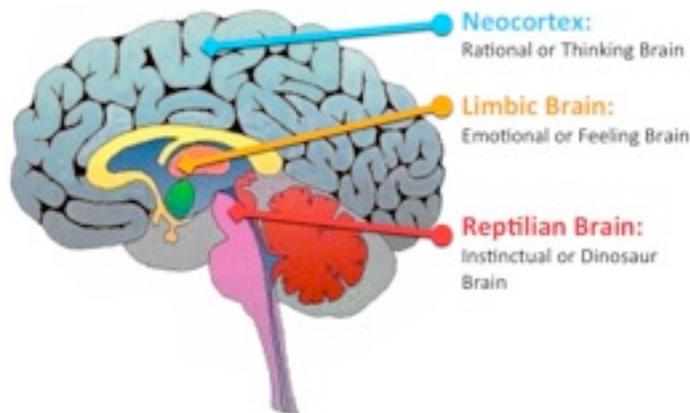


## The Communication Magic of Stories

Like most things, you must get the fundamentals right. The fundamentals of transmedia storytelling depend on a good story, one that is meaningful and in line with the company's culture. Without the right story, it doesn't matter how much you invest in mass media rollouts, Facebook ads, or web videos – it won't stick. (You can read about our StoryOpenings™ approach to developing a story that authentically reflects an organization's core and taps universal narratives.)

Why story? Storytelling is an ancient art. From earliest times, we have used story to pass down histories, culture, and rituals. We are all natural storytellers. Your day is full of stories, whether you realize it or not. You tell a friend what it was like to eat at that new restaurant—that's a story, too. We use and seek out stories because they provide us context of time and place and an emotional framework so we can make sense out of the world around us and, more importantly, figure out our own place.

Our brains experience a story as if we were experiencing it ourselves. Research also shows that people remember the messages in stories far longer and with greater accuracy than any other form of communication.



Story also activates the sensory brain, which triggers our senses – taste, touch, smell, hearing and vision. That’s why you salivate when you watch close-ups of someone peeling an orange, want to move (or at least tap your feet) when you see dancing to a compelling beat, and feel thirsty when you watch someone drink a Coke. Close your eyes a minute and think about the commercials where a Coke is poured into a glass. The bottle is dripping with sweat and little bubbles burst to the surface as your pour. You not only see the image in your mind’s eye, but maybe you also smell the coke, feel the bubbles on your face or feel the condensation on the icy cold glass. Laying this sensory information into story brings the consumer to experience and experience drives behavior.

### **From Story to Transmedia Storytelling**

Transmedia storytelling capitalizes on the psychology and power of story and new media to create 360-degree marketing and branding. A transmedia storytelling campaign invites consumers in, so they voluntarily seek out more information about a company’s story, whether it’s delivered on a website or YouTube video, or delivered in increments on a smart phone. These are all voluntary, self-motivated activities that extend customer engagement by involving them in the story process.

TOMS shoes is the poster child for the use of transmedia storytelling applied to brand. TOMS’ customers upload photos of themselves wearing TOMS shoes around the world, create user-generated ads uploaded to You Tube, blog with the founder, and interact with campus clubs in activities such as design-your-own-shoe parties. The story of TOMS is about building a unique business model to provide for children in need. Each shoe bought provides a shoe for a child. In this story, TOMS allows the consumer to become the protagonist in a heroic story of saving children worldwide. Every aspect of the TOMS story, whether generated by the company or the customers uniquely further the TOMS company story.

### **Learning to See with Transmedia Vision**

In today’s world, consumers are hypersensitive to being sold a ‘marketing message’, instead of a genuine brand dialogue. Research shows that consumers trust each other far more than they trust companies. Audiences want companies to recognize their value as customers. Transmedia storytelling uses the authenticity of story to reflect core attributes and values to engage customers. As the story unfolds across multiple media platforms and welcomes audience participation, it builds a bond in a new dimension that enhances brand trust. You don’t have to launch a major transmedia campaign to reap the benefits. But you do need to use Transmedia Vision to evaluate your company’s strategies, both inside and out.

Don’t get stuck on Madison Avenue when you can be using the psychological and biological power of story to connect with your audience. Transmedia Storytelling catapults brands into relationship with customers in dynamic and integrated ways that no jingle or clever copy can do. It opens a door for authentic communication between consumer and brand. It makes Main Street a very exciting place.

<b>MADISON AVENUE</b>	<b>MAIN STREET</b>
One-way messaging	Dialogue between consumer and brand
All people can be reached with one media channel	Audience choice in engagement path
Single message or theme is adapted to fit different media	Each media platform expands narrative with unique contribution
Creator controls message	Audience collaborates in story development
Profitability limited to ROI of a given platform, no cross media leverage or narrative leverage	Broadens life cycle and profitability of a campaign beyond traditional retail windows because content is monetizable
Audience attention through interruption	Audience attention through invitation
	Audience participation enhances brand identity and creates customer loyalty
	Consumer is engaged long-term by providing value beyond the product
	Audience is validated and celebrated

### **About the Authors**

Bonnie Buckner and Dr. Pamela Rutledge are the co-founders of A Think Lab, a consulting firm that helps companies become more responsive, flexible, innovative and effective by learning to see in a new way. They do this through workshops and projects on the topics of Creativity, Finding the Company Story, Transmedia Storytelling, and the Impact of New Media on Corporate Culture & Messaging. They have developed and teach a new course for UC Irvine Extension called Transmedia Marketing through Storytelling. Buckner and Rutledge are also on the faculty of Fielding Graduate University teaching media psychology, cognitive psychology and visual design, political psychology, and social media and emerging technologies. They are based on the west coast. You can find out more about their work online at: [www.athinklab.com](http://www.athinklab.com) or on Twitter @athinklab.