

# FACE TIME



## How authentic employee and customer stories build trust, sell products, and grow revenues.

The recent financial crisis has proven just how complex and interwoven our global economy has become. It isn't just a simple case of cause-and-effect any more.

To prosper and thrive in business today, your organization must break through geographical, social, and cultural barriers, and synchronize a cross-disciplinary workforce to a clearly articulated set of vision and values.

So, how do you communicate that vision? How do you build trust and enthusiasm with your target audience? How do you create an emotional connection to your brand, your products, and your services?

**The answer to those questions is not as difficult as you might think: why not let your model employees and loyal customers do it for you?**

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storymasters.ca

Storymasters is a creative services firm specializing in multimedia corporate communications. Our specialty is bringing corporate brands and products to life through engaging and energizing videos featuring real employees and customers.

We develop videos that ignite conversation, build trust, and inspire action. We turn authentic stories into powerful communication tools that drive home business messages - whether you want to sell more products, recruit more prospects, or simply communicate your brand or business strategy. If you would like to know more about the work we do, the clients we serve, or the results we achieve, visit our website at [www.storymasters.ca](http://www.storymasters.ca)

## Employee Stories: A Little Recognition Goes A Long Way.

*Research in the UK has shown that dairy cows with names (Buttercup, Betsy, Daisy, etc.) produce more milk for their owners than their anonymous counterparts.*

Interestingly, the same holds true for employees whose contributions are recognized by their supervisors and peers.

Recognition is one of the key ingredients of employee engagement. It should come as no surprise that employee engagement is a critical to your bottom line.

But how would a two-minute Facebook video about an enthusiastic new advisor from Winnipeg make you more profitable?

By profiling model employees, you are not just recognizing and rewarding great behaviour; you are making a powerful

statement about your corporate values and principles, your definition of leadership, your best practices, and most importantly, your brand. The practice sparks a chain reaction, or ripple effect, that aligns and connects people across your organization to common themes.



So, what makes a model employee? The answer to that will be different for every organization. One thing is certain; model employees are not hard to spot.

Just about every working group or department can identify at least one model employee.

Formally recognizing these brand ambassadors, exploring their work ethic, and sharing their perspectives across the company will resonate positively and loudly with your stakeholder groups – from employees to senior management, from new recruits to customers. Your audience will connect to these employees (and ultimately to your brand) in a relevant, emotional way.

Employee stories are highly effective communication tools that can be featured on your corporate intranet, your careers website, or used in your executive town hall meetings, sales conferences, and road shows. When employee stories weave in concepts like teamwork, workforce diversity, corporate responsibility, and regional focus, their power multiplies exponentially.



*Niva*

Read her story on page 5

## Customer Stories: Put A Face On Your Best Customers.

*A recent study found that 80% of consumers believe that business is too concerned about profit and not enough about responsibilities to customers, workers, and the environment.*

Mix in the ability for everyday citizens to Google your company's corporate responsibility or employment equity record, and a growing distrust of traditional marketing practices and you have a customer demographic that is hard to win over.

Brand relationships are just like personal relationships, if your character is shallow or inauthentic, your friends won't stick around. These days, truth is the key to consumer brand loyalty.

**“Customer stories show where your brand meets the street.”**

So, how do you market truth to the masses? If price point is the key differentiator between you and your competitors, then low price guarantees and Saturday morning sales flyers may do the trick. If the freshness of your coffee and donuts will drive customer traffic to your door, mouth-watering photography and free samples may be a good marketing approach.



But in the world of hospitality, healthcare, education, and financial services, customer relationships are based much more on trust. Marketing promises made about caring staff and great customer service ring hollow until consumers experience it first hand – or hear it from a trusted source.

And that's where customer testimonials come in. If you introduce someone that your audience can identify with, and share an authentic story about a great experience they had with company, you lay the foundation for a closer (and more profitable) relationship with your prospects.

The goal of a customer story is to leverage common ground and engage people in an emotional and relevant way. The story you choose to share will vary depending on your target demographic and your strategic objectives. If you want to appeal to a certain market segment, (female boomers, for example) you will feature a woman from that segment and share a story about her experiences with your company that her peers identify with.

Customer stories are like business referrals from friends and family. They provide personal insight and context that current and prospective customers will appreciate.

When you combine model employees and loyal customers in the same story, you get the best of both worlds.



## Success Stories: Communicate What Went Right.

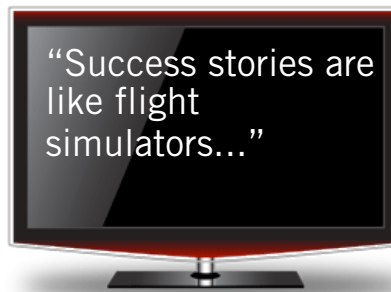
*“Hey, have you heard the one about the Trojan horse, that mega-sized gift, left by the ancient Greeks with 30 soldiers hidden inside?”*

Humans have been sharing success stories since the dawn of civilization, and the best ones often result from teamwork. They have been used strategically to inspire audiences around great leadership, loyalty, bravery, and innovative thinking.

The ingredients of a modern corporate success story often combine the best character traits of your brand (leadership, integrity, customer focus, for example) and show how these traits help a team of people reach a difficult goal.

Launching the new product, landing the big order, or completing the merger, are certainly success stories worth sharing inside your organization.

Stories like these present opportunities to communicate the value of innovative thinking, teamwork, and collaboration, and to recognize the working groups who operate behind the front lines of your organization.



There are also a myriad of other stories that can be shared publicly and strategically to build your brand (and business reputation) in the minds of the consumer. Fixing a customer problem, donating to a charity, or

cleaning up a stream, are stories that speak volumes about your corporate values and community commitment.

Thanks to the Internet, the distribution opportunities for a well-crafted story are almost limitless, and the cost per “eyeball” drops dramatically when you appeal to larger audiences.

Videos can be creative, impactful and engaging, and highly customizable. They can range from a 30 or 60-second television spot, a light-hearted animation, or an inspiring mini-documentary.

The form the story will take (and the budget to produce it) depends on your audience and how you want to touch them.



## Anatomy of a Great Story

We've taken the liberty to outline the hypothetical story of Niva, a customer service advisor with a fictitious financial services organization to show how a simple, inspiring, recruitment video can address a long list of strategic communication objectives.

We'll hypothesize for a moment, that the original goal was to post a fun, informative video to their careers website to highlight employment opportunities with the company. And, what better way to communicate that than through a model employee who is passionate about their career.

# Niva's Story

Niva is a caring and charismatic front-line customer advisor at a busy Edmonton branch. She has been with the company for 8 years and loves her job.

Niva and a close colleague named Tim, a University student and recent hire, are part of a unique job-sharing program implemented by the company last year. Both enjoy part-time flexibility, with full-time benefits.

For Niva and her young daughter, the arrangement allows her to pursue a fulfilling customer service position while maintaining a sense of balance in her life.

One of Niva's loyal customers is Doreen, an active fifties-something woman with a home-based business.

"Niva takes genuine interest in our family and in our financial needs. She has introduced us to many of the bank's specialists. We have our mortgage here, a line of credit, and our personal investments too." says Doreen.

Niva is passionate about customer service and proud of the contributions her employer has made to the local community. Both staff and customers worked side by side recently on a company-organized campaign to restore a local landmark.

Why is this company the employer of choice for Niva? Her daughter sums it up: "My mom is jazzed when she leaves for work, and jazzed when she gets home."



As a recruitment video, Niva's story provides audiences with a clear picture of what it's like to work at an established, team-oriented, results-driven, employer of choice. By weaving in a customer, a colleague, and core product offerings, we've made Niva's story much more than a simple careers video.



By integrating a few other elements into the story, we've managed to develop an authentic communications tool featuring a real employee that is remarkably versatile. Niva is now this company's newest brand ambassador. Let's take a quick look at some of the other objectives we addressed along the way:

### Internal Objectives

- Recognized like-minded advisors and employees
- Celebrated inter-department collaboration
- Recognized a geographical region
- Engaged employees around the customer experience
- Communicated product knowledge and best practices
- Brought diversity and social responsibility values to life

### External Objectives

- Supported recruitment and retention initiatives
- Put a face on the company
- Introduced a happy customer
- Promoted products and services
- Built trust with customers and prospects

## Understanding The Value Of A Good Story

To appreciate the power of a good story, you have to put on your marketing hat. Like advertising, storytelling is a persuasive form of communication that paints a picture of your organization, educates your target audience, and sells your product and services.

And, just like a marketing campaign, storytelling starts with a clearly articulated objective. You may need to move your audience from A to B, align them to your values and principles, or simply inform them of your products or services.

Strategic stories can be crafted to elicit an emotional response in your target audience and achieve specific measurable outcomes.

Of course, there are many often-overlooked benefits, too. The process of researching and identifying the stories that shape your brand is very powerful and often the most valuable part of the exercise. The resulting videos are like energizing souvenirs that can be shared with thousands of other potential brand ambassadors.

## Leveraging The Engagement “Ripple-Effect”

It’s no surprise that asking employees for their favourite customer service stories will spark engaging conversations about customer service. Polling your business units for stories of teamwork and innovation will focus their efforts on teamwork and innovation. By understanding this phenomenon, you can design a storytelling initiative that touches specific stakeholder groups with razor-like precision.

Let’s consider this example: You want to engage your frontline employees with a story about a specific credit product that is gaining traction with a narrow, but influential customer segment. Finding an authentic story that will do this is not as hard as you might think, but let’s not stop there.

Are your West Coast and Maritime regions feeling neglected? Choosing a story from Nanaimo or Charlottetown will earn

additional brownie points from employees who live outside Toronto or Montreal. And what about your employment diversity program? Featuring a model employee who speaks several languages will say much of about your brand values and principles.

Finding and sharing employee and customer stories isn’t brain surgery. But, making the stories work on an emotional and strategic level relies on good journalistic sensibilities and a keen understanding of the fundamentals of storytelling.



## Maximizing Your Investment

Well-told stories have a remarkable ability to create common ground and “stick” in the minds of the audience. It’s common for executives to share a short story or anecdote just before they tuck into a serious speech. A two-minute video can achieve this with pictures, sound, and music – and do it memorably and consistently every time.

The strategic messages woven into a typical two-minute video make it perfect for your public website or corporate intranet, tradeshows and live events, conferences,

road shows, town hall meetings, training sessions, webinars, video podcasts, and your customer-facing sales tool kit.

If we choose, for example, to dial up product and service features, we can turn an employee story into an effective marketing piece for the company homepage.

The great thing about stories is that they enjoy a tremendously long shelf life. Employees and customers may come and go, but the themes contained in their stories remain timeless.

## Determining The Cost

Costing out a story without any details is a bit like asking a contractor to ballpark a kitchen renovation without telling him the scope of his work.

Stories can come in many forms - from a polished 30 or 60-second TV spot, to a spontaneous feeling Facebook video. If you have a specific budget in mind, the creative and production approach can be tailored to suit. But what are some rough guidelines?

An engaging, branded profile of a local customer or employee that can be taped in several hours and edited in one to three days can start around **\$8,500**. More polished videos that require pre-production research, a specialized crew, or additional shoot days, can range **\$20,000** and up.

The variables include production format, the number of shoot days, size of crew (or degree of specialization), and any special post-production services that may be required.

One thing is for sure, the larger your potential audience, the more worthwhile the investment. If you think your story can be repurposed or shared publicly, (on your website, Facebook, or YouTube, for example) it makes sense to invest a bit more to ensure your brand (and your message) is communicated effectively.

Depending on your communication objectives, and the audiences you wish to target, you may wish to consider a series of thematic corporate stories that celebrate different employees and customers from various regions or business units.

This long term, strategic approach to marketing and corporate communications can be remarkably cost-effective when compared to traditional tactics – especially ones that involve media buys. ■

