

Storytelling for Business Blogging: Position and Navigation

Han-yuh Liu and Chia-yen Wu

Abstract—Truly successful bloggers, navigating the public to know them, often use their blogs as a way to better communicate with customers. Integrating with marketing tools, storytelling can be regarded as one of the most effective ways that businesses can follow to gain competitive edge. Even though the literature on marketing contains much discussion of traditional vehicles, the issue of business blogs applying storytelling has, as yet, received little attention. In the exploration stage, this paper identifies four storytelling disciplines and then presents a road map to business blogging. This paper also provides a two-path framework for blog storytelling and initiates an issue for further study.

Keywords—storytelling; business blog; blog content; blog position; blog navigation

I. INTRODUCTION

WITH the move from traditional marketing communication to the current digital generation, many new media tools have allowed storytelling to become an emerging e-skill application, particularly in the realm of business blogging. For current business models, the forms of knowledge process, from learning, to sharing and relearning, stand in contrast to those seen before [1, 2]. However; communications between customers and businesses in knowledge-based societies exist not only in the physical world, but also in the virtual world. It is well-known that various blogging applications can change patterns of information usage, with these communications generating more social interactions, and building better social network relationships [3]. Companies, through mutually interactive communication platforms like business blogs, are able to achieve rapid marketing diffusion, increase economic profits, and attain various other competitive advantages in a way that is difficult to imitate [4, 5]. The General Motor's FastLane Blog and the Microsoft's Channel 9 are ones of best practices [6, 7].

Business blogs are not only used for interpersonal communication, the interchange of ideas, and transmission of value propositions, but are also widely applied, directly or indirectly, to enhancing profit performance [8]. Compared with existing business models, business blogs provide new opportunities to create interaction platforms in real time, generate storytelling marketing applications to promote customer understanding, reinforce customer relationships by getting real feedback, and continuously gather new marketing

opinions [9-11]. While business applications for blogging have increased sharply over the past few years, many business blogs still have not become popular, as yet. Maybe the problem in these cases is that the companies fail to fully understand the storytelling characteristics of business blogging [12]. Therefore, there would appear to be an imperative for more understanding regarding the category of content for business blogging. With an increased understanding in terms of category, a business can better find and adopt a sustainable position and discipline toward storytelling.

Business blogs present their particular contents as being critical vehicles for storytelling marketing, although storytelling is actually a traditional skill for business communication and one frequently used [13]. In the digital era, corporations know that they must have the e-skills that can earn profit and foster sustainable development [14, 15], and recognize that blogging represent a different marketing strategy which can set them apart from on-blogging or non-storytelling competitors. Still, many businesses seem to have a dubious grasp on the relevant e-skills, which sometimes results in them telling an inadequate or unsatisfactory story, which can result in customers' dislike, misunderstanding, or inability to make sense of the points.

Although most companies understand the importance of storytelling, some don't know how to use it properly, especially in terms of knowing where to start and having a clear view of their final destination. Also, story contents especially in websites appear too many messy points on divergent issues which are not easy to make customers remember what they received and result in losing their appeal for the target customers [16]. Solving these problems requires that we first construct storytelling categories, according to story attributes. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to provide a framework to explore the storytelling process, moving from an initial discipline towards just sale products or services, to building relationships, building a brand, and finally, to social marketing orientated storytelling applications. The present study focuses on the content expressed in these categories, and provides practical advice regarding storytelling direction and content aspects, adding to the academic research on storytelling theory.

II. THE FUNCTIONS OF BUSINESS BLOGGING

A review of the related literature on business blogging reveals five main functions of business blogs. First, businesses believe that loyal customers will identify themselves through businesses blogs with interactive communication, which provide information transparency and customer intimacy [17]. Because blogging allows information to be transmitted in real time, blogs simultaneously satisfy personal desire to gain

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firsthand information and to make an opinion matter [18, 19].

Second, businesses organize their blogs and use them to publish their opinions, to publically manage customer problems, and even to achieve organizational communication goals for external customers [11]. At the same time, internal employees can use company blogs to share their knowledge and creative thinking with each other, and the space is also provided for them to talk about grievances and express emotions.

Third, businesses may regard a business blog as one of its cost effective marketing tools [20]. For marketing, information technology (IT) provides storytelling platforms that involve interaction between webmasters and readers. Use of words, pictures and video mash-up technologies (such as real simple syndication (RSS)/Atom syndication format (ATOM)) by blogging service providers (BSPs), represents the implementation of marketing activities containing abundant digital content.

Fourth, businesses which use blogging can clearly position their disciplines. They can discuss the functional value of their products and services, tailoring the content to customers and establishing the enterprise's desired characteristics in terms of brand, image and reputation [21]. Enriching blog content can lead to more stakeholders gaining knowledge of and remembering a particular blog, which can then function to continue to attract more customer awareness.

Fifth, when a business blog attracts a significant number of stakeholders, businesses can rely on the interactions it generates to learn which strategies will allow them to approach real demand, and the business can respond quickly to any changes [11]. It is thus very important that businesses interact closely with their stakeholders. Businesses can create participatory communities whenever they provide new ideas or topics regarding new product or service innovations, a process which involves outsiders becoming communicators and advocates [22].

III. STORYTELLING AS MARKETING POWER

Storytelling and marketing researchers [16, 20, 22] have argued that the niche for storytelling must be filled by businesses in order to attract customers to visit their sites. Only if a blog has enough appealing issues, will customers continue to revisit it. This requires businesses to have specific storytelling content which makes customers want to read the story. Moreover, storytelling must be based on fact and must be attuned to readers' feelings. It must also enhance customers' understanding of products and services. Storytelling, when properly navigated, increases marketing power in four aspects: sale, relationship building, branding, and social marketing.

From a sale point of view, a business's products or services must be sold to gain profit. Products and services without stories, however, do not always attract customers to buy them in a competitive environment. Faced with similar competing products and services, a business must have some stories to stimulate sales [23]. Therefore, a key for successful marketers is to have good storytelling abilities. Exciting stories have an almost magical power to change customers' purchasing attitudes, turning wants into needs, but the stories must make

the readers feel they are true [24]. Storytelling oriented towards sale must retain customers' attention, as well as making information available quickly.

From a branding perspective, while customers may actually dislike getting promotion material directly from a business, storytelling represents the best path to sell indirectly, through dialogues which stimulate customers' desire to purchase [24]. The power of stories is based on their plots; following a protagonist going through encounters with enemies, incidents, bursts, and breakthroughs, through a series of emotionally fluctuating processes, tending toward their own experiences, and letting customers "live" the stories [15, 25]. Businesses must apply storytelling, given the unique vitality of contents for conveying brand concept, building on customers' consumption experiences so as to evoke their emotions, and reflecting reality that marketers want to increase the visibility of their businesses' brand [5, 15].

In terms of building relationships, storytelling marketing generates experience linkage with customers, and as part of the self-interpretation processes, achieves the outcome of communication satisfaction [11, 15]. Many businesses look to interactive communication on business blogs to generate business performance and enhance customer value, and to inform changes to their Internet business models, when necessary. Through the interaction process, business can further understand and affect customer behaviors, and can adjust the way they manage customer relationships, reflecting the desires of marketers to achieve continuous relationship marketing utility and satisfy their need for outstanding achievement [26].

In terms of social marketing, businesses can use storytelling for driving change, enhancing leadership efficiency, achieving boundary integration, establishing entrepreneurial businesses, and allowing chief executive officers to share in running the process [27-30]. Moreover, an organization's strategies packaged into story form will not seem abstract and business actions or projects should appear as information structured so as to be accepted, making them topics of conversation, increasing their persuasiveness, and influencing their anticipated effects [29]. Therefore, a company can make a series of "greening" ideas appealing through storytelling on its business blog [31], by discussing issues of business social responsibility (CSR) in a way that can influence customers' views, while simultaneously receiving feedback which can help to improve sustainability practices [17, 32].

IV. THE FOUR CATEGORIES OF STORYTELLING

In actual fact, customers browsing business blog content may adopt specific viewpoints they have been presented with, and may thus become a part of message propagation. Qualified storytelling means refers to cases where there is a good match between the natures of a business and real customer needs. In achieving such a match, using a particular subject in some categories of storytelling is quite important to satisfy certain demands of both the business and the customer [21].

Using one among categories of storytelling, businesses should choose what should be telling starts and what could be

used immediately to link demand properties of customers, eulogizing these stories for potential customers. Because each story has its inherent implications, this study references some academic perspectives [20, 22, 33, 34] comprising two dimensions: communication (internality or externality) and subject (products or customers). Four categories show in Fig. 1.

		Communication	
		Internality	Externality
Subject	Products	Sale Discipline	Relationship Discipline
	Customers	Brand Discipline	Social Marketing Discipline

Fig. 1 Four categories of storytelling

When the target of communications for internal employees and the subject is their products, storytelling should select sale discipline story (SD). If the subject is their customers and internality of communication, it should adopt brand discipline story (BD). Communication to externality, the subject is product which should apply relationship discipline story (RD). Finally, external communication and the subject of customer should employ social marketing discipline story (SMD).

The four categories of storytelling may follow from an initial discipline towards sale, moving on to building relationships, building brand, or social marketing. Various aspects of these categories may exist simultaneously in any given story, but plot developments follow one of two paths, as shown in Figure 2. The starting point in storytelling is a SD, because customers should first understand what the products and services are, and be familiar with how to obtain them for themselves. The final discipline is SMD which all businesses would like to reach the ideal destination that can achieve triple bottom line sustainable performance.

From business perspective, they have their particular BD story for themselves through that internal customers (employees) tell to other external customers who are authentic spokesperson, and product brand emotion and identity [33], which will be the most effective communication. From marketing practice, businesses want to build relationship with customers usually through products or business itself. Because most of customers are not actively able to maintain relationship with business, there have many causes resulted from products and services business provided lead customers to switching other business [35]. Therefore, businesses should create some RD story about their products, it not only reaches communication but also let their products connect with customers.

From this starting point, there are two paths which can be followed to develop the plot of a story (refer Fig. 2), as illustrated following:

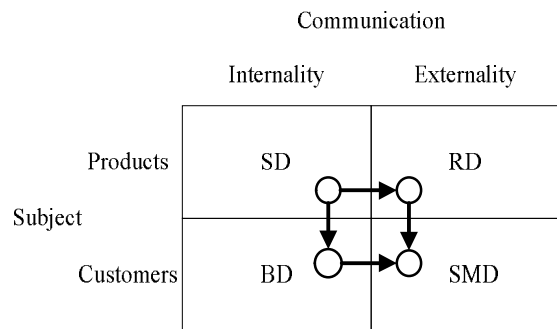


Fig. 2 The path of the storytelling process

In the first path (SD → RD → SMD) for storytelling, businesses not only talk about SD, but also tend to building customer relationships [11], because building long-term customer relationships assists the business to obtain a competition advantage. Adding external communications voiced by the owners of products can strengthen innovation, development, and market share [1]. Therefore, this kind of storytelling involves telling a RD story. Furthermore, the best relationships result from achieving social marketing communication strategies, particularly when businesses turn their attention to realizing the sustainability of a business. Through these relationships, businesses with “green” thinking will easy obtain support for “green” initiatives through SMD and will put them into practice [32].

In the second path (SD → BD → SMD) for storytelling, describing products or services makes customers familiar with them, and businesses’ SD points are selected to affect customer perceptions of products and services. These stories explain exactly what products and services are. These stories not only help to accomplish marketing goals in terms of gaining market share, but also increase public awareness of the business [36]. When a good product is packaged along with a brand story, using the BD story can stimulate customers desire to own and upgrade business brand equity [26]. A corporate brand is rooted in the customers’ consumption cognition. When, for example, a business transforms the appeal of “greening” a brand into an actual increase in the sustainability of their operations, this represents brand values being promoted through SMD and actually enhancing profit performance for the business that is fulfilling CSR, through enhanced reputation [37].

The next part explains the functions and points of the four categories in terms of contents, processes, and strategic marketing goals of the storytelling.

A. Sale-discipline

Because businesses must survive in the face of competition, their profitability is a necessary condition. In line with reference [33] view, sale involves a business focusing on existing products and services and making capital of sale programs or promotion plans to produce sale quantities, but doing so may not really meet either market or customers’ needs, and may actually neglect relationships which could bring about profits. In fact, the behavior of encouraging purchases by means of sales promotions may actually produce customer

distrust of a business, resulting in a loss of market share. It's difficult to find a business that does not try to sell products or services by telling a story. Qualified stories, not only change customer consciousness toward a firm, but can also give a firm superiority over other competitors.

Reference [24] argued that the most effective method to make products stand out is to tell an authentic story, that is, to utilize sale discipline storytelling. This discipline concerns itself with, in particular, product or service sources, design, and the production process. Such functions, if provided, meet customers' ease of use requirements, but are not in and of themselves an alternative to meeting customer expectations for high quality of life and price, the latter of which both show the benefits accruing from features of the products or services. However, people love to hear story which can bring visions and dreams for customers, good sale story trigger off customers' motivation and needs [15].

In addition to induce customers' desire to purchase, the disciplines of this stories, and in particular, providing a feedback mechanism on the story properties, leave an open end to allow users to join in the process. Businesses should retain some customer results and experiences in their stories, and in the end, incorporate some interaction designed as a prize game or an area for sharing experiences to consolidate story conclusions and bring about significant rewards.

B. Relationship-discipline

Sometimes merely sale products or services do not produce customers' respect and trust, but building both are critical issues for businesses. In the past, some markets were controlled by sellers pursuing short term achievements [33], but now, technological advances have turned the tables, handing control to buyers [11]. As a result, businesses must respect sustainability and make a point of customer equity. Therefore, business investment in customer relationship management enables customers to become advocates of the business. Businesses could design particular programs to strengthen the feeling of customers [38]. They could understand customer needs better after constructing relationship storytelling by paying attention to the customer intention.

Businesses wishing to build their relationship discipline storytelling need provide content that trusted of some preferential information and increase the value-added for customers, in order to retain present customers and attract potential new ones. In terms of designing relationship discipline storytelling, businesses should develop an interactive process for collaborating with customers, whereby customers can dissent or voice their opinions so that a mutual relationship is gradually formed. In addition, sound employee relationship management also brings profits to businesses [39].

Leaders who regard employees as assets of a business are the best storytellers when it comes to relationship discipline storytelling. If leaders, in particular, tell stories about themselves or the company, this will motivate employees' efforts to strengthen their commitment towards the firm, and will also influence external investors' acceptance of new strategic actions [40]. Besides, a story of organization should

can lead members accepted and felt sympathy and the story include company's vision, blueprint about future or a truth story leader break through barriers, resulting in inspiration, influence and persuasion effects [39, 40]. Ultimately, businesses can bring superior performance by successful accumulations of social capital.

C. Brand-discipline

Storytelling is one of the best marketing tools for promoting a business brand [15, 23, 24, 26] because the brand represents corporate images, awareness, and the firm's attitude toward customer recognition. Overall, brand storytelling makes comprehensive value propositions and narratives part of the brand itself, emphasizing the concept and spirit. The purpose is to enable customers to remember the brand, and thus become a major source of intangible assets for business. Customers are willing to believe a story and dialogue incorporating the psychological elements of the brand. Customers, once convinced, become the best invisible endorsers of the brand, generating word-of-mouth to make the story action play out everywhere [23]. However, how people talk about these stories underlines what is going on behind the brand, and why they deserve to be spread because of brand identification [15].

A brand story may establish through story elements: role characterization, plot, conflict events and meaning in stories packed with humanity [41, 42], but the story itself still needs to maintain brand personality and convey the symbolic meaning that may be the organization's central idea or status symbol. Personality is the core pillar for the brand and construct schema that business want to tell customers whose perceptions were impacted [43].

On the other side, brand story must stress the unique characteristics and brand identity. Generally, businesses' brand stories include origins, the brand evolution, customers' experience, and messages linking the product or service to social position. The main purpose of brand story generates emotion by linking with customers, and fits in well with customer culture and activities, enhanced their consciousness can be attributed to the power of storytelling marketing.

D. Social Marketing-discipline

Many corporations simultaneously began to pay attention to maintaining relationships with stakeholders, to be concerned with their brand, and to carry out CSR practice, with an eye on triple bottom line performance [33]. These businesses have given more consideration to social and environmental performance in addition to seeking economic profits, and they emphasize making the world better in terms of sustainability and the "green" economy [37]. Through adopting a social marketing discipline, businesses are not just pursuing profit short sighted, but are creating a long-term vision and seeking to produce less environmental damage in the course of the production process [44].

In adopting a social marketing discipline, businesses can explain sustainable strategies, direction, and actions, and can initiate social activities. This shows the critical influence of social marketing; stakeholders can better understand CSR

practices and can help shape a business's reputation. For this reason, stories can be divided into external and internal categories. For internal cases, employees are an important force in implementation sustainability. The purpose of this type of story is to inspire employees and make sense of things for them, leading to a symbiotic relationship. The involved persons have beliefs, missions and visions woven into the stories, which encourage employees to do their best.

For external storytelling cases, the purpose is to enable stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of a business's social marketing. This includes resolving any doubts about the organization, reporting on the firm's participation in non-profit activities, or other firm undertakings to benefit the public welfare. These stories also generate multi-party communication, and the effects of transshipment. This not only increases exposure, but more completely reaches and fulfills social marketing objectives, bringing about win-win situations and making the company stand out from the competition.

TABLE I
 SUMMARY OF FOUR CATEGORIES STORYTELLING

Categories	Key Story Content	Expectative Outcome
SD	product process	profit
RD	value-added and business relation	social capital
BD	brand personality	intangible assets
SMD	sustainable development	sustainability

V. CONCLUSION

The present research establishes different categories of storytelling, and builds on recent studies [29, 39, 40] which mostly concern themselves with story management for organizations. In contrast, however, this research focuses on business blogs using storytelling marketing to explain what should be posted in content-based stories, where to start storytelling, and the contents and features of each storytelling category. This is done with a view to advancing storytelling skills that businesses can use to appeal to different groups.

This research provides a two-path framework of storytelling, and a business blog story plot may include these discipline contents. This framework can help to make sense of the current research situation as regards business blogging, and can also help our understanding of the trends in the application of storytelling marketing. This storytelling process is a dynamic one, which combines theory and practice. Storytelling is not only relevant for the analysis of business blogging, but can be applied in other Internet technology usage contexts. The main contribution of this present research is to construct storytelling categories that can be discussed from two perspectives; namely that of the customer and that of the business.

First, customers want to know information about businesses; information that was not easy to get from looking at a building wall in the past. The evolution of technology applies the

Internet to business, making it easy for customers to obtain vast amount of information. Through these four categories of storytelling, customers can quickly familiarize themselves with the propositions the businesses wants to express.

From the organizational perspective, storytelling marketing has long been a source of soft power; it provides a collaborative base for innovation and knowledge management. It also is a marketing tactic that makes it easier to touch customers' hearts, provide instruction, and reach marketing goals. This is a normative statement, as hard power cannot make the same kind of impression. For this reason, these four storytelling disciplines can clarify Internet business models and enhance new core competencies through business blogging.

These two different paths of storytelling, as previous mentioned, are often used by marketers, but the path directly from SD to SMD may be a hard road in terms of implementing storytelling marketing. Beside above, there have other optional paths, as $SD \rightarrow BD \rightarrow RD \rightarrow SMD$ or $SD \rightarrow RD \rightarrow BD \rightarrow SMD$, but a story in some period had better only one clear position or proposition informed. If given too much information or complex setting, the story would provide customers with the noise which may blur the main messages and let them do not catch the real points. Therefore, business must understand their characteristics, position in a competitive market when design storytelling process will reduce the unnecessary resources.

Further study can do efforts on several developments based on the framework. First, the category can explore market discipline issues or environmental factors to confirm the effectiveness of the storytelling process. Second, to measure the drivers of each category, content analysis may be used because it is a good fit for making valid from text to context with systematic, objective analysis [45]. Content analysis also makes it possible to compare information at different times, and can thus be easily adapted to longitudinal research looking at online storytelling trends, as well as to the development of theoretical propositions [46]. Finally, blogs are full of complete contents that provide real-time interactive information and in-depth discussion for some urgent issues development. Recording, one characteristic of blogs, can help us understand the evolution with business storytelling, and it can be used in panel study to trace the path, to check their current position, and to navigate appropriate vision for the future.

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