



Your Very Best Story™

The most effective marketing system.

A most valuable organizational asset.

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Your Very Best Story™

Marketing *Dramatically* Amplified.

Introduction

On The Following Pages Is An Idea As Old As Humankind. And Utterly New To Business.

Many times you have been riveted by the drama on a movie screen. Totally absorbed in a paperback novel. Delighted by a Broadway musical, community theatre or pageant. But in those moments have you ever asked yourself, *Why can't our organization tell our story like this?*

If you've never asked yourself this question it's for a good reason, because nowhere in the business magazines, the MBA journals, or the hot new business books has the subject ever been considered.

Because never in all those college classes, agency presentations, or strategy weekends did anyone ever suggest that such a thing was possible.

Yet it is.

Of course it is.

You are about to read how your company can tap into the most powerful marketing practice on the planet: Your Very Best Story™.

We suggest—and to our clients, we guarantee—that it will deliver results as powerful as the stories that have moved you ever since childhood.

Because a long time ago, before you knew about brand, about promotions, about marketing budgets, you knew about *a long time ago*.

You knew about story.

I. Your Very Best Story™ proposition

The proposition is dramatically powerful. And it is fundamentally simple.

When all of your business building activities are aligned to Discover and Create and Perform Your Very Best Story, you will enjoy transformative success.

All of your organization's market campaigning, all of your strategic positioning and product development, all internal motivation, all of your organization's service performances, all industry and media relations, and all resource recruiting—every one of your organizations value creating activities—are most successfully accomplished when Your Very Best Story is fully developed to fully inform all those activities.

II. What is Your Very Best Story?

It is the most effectively dynamic marketing practice and it is a uniquely powerful corporate asset.

It is the marketing practice that Discovers and Creates the best promise you can Perform for Particularly Important Audiences, the promise to be of Uniquely Significant Value as you satisfy their needs and their aspirations.

It is the corporate asset that *Amplifies* your all of your marketing and business building investment: it will *dramatize* so as to arrest *attention*; it *informs* to shape *behavior*; it is *intimate* to build *trust*; it is *bold* to excite *passions*.

III. Why Story is the Best Business Building Practice Ever.

Isn't the worth of any business system the measure of its achievement of the maximum performance—the greatest output—at the minimum of new investment and therefore at the least risk?

The promise of Your Very Best Story as a marketing system is that transformative 10X returns are available from a practice whose rules you fully understand right now, and are universally present, and are so simple the system can begin serving you today.

IV. Why Your Very Best Story is the Best Business Building Asset Ever.

By definition, it would seem the best business growth occurs either dramatically, with the capture of an important new customer, or in the regular and powerfully constant victories found in the inches and the minutes.

Your Very Best Story as a corporate asset is the Dramatic Input that drives Dramatic Results.

Your Very Best Story is the language of meaning and purpose that informs each day in and day out service Performance so you enjoy successes in Each Inch and Every Minute.

And while most corporate assets can only be invested serially—you can assign a senior executive to head up an important initiative, but then not the next one; you can allocated capital to the expansion of a new facility but then not the upgrade of an existing one —Your Very Best Story gains strength the more widely it is applied.

V. The Power of Story...

- Language is the oldest Information Management Technology there is, and Story is the oldest Knowledge Management Technology. It is easy to imagine that not only the materials list and process protocols but also the aspiration for building Fire was captured in a Story as it moved from this valley to that clan. We were discovering what it means to be human in the stories we told, and the stories we created shaped next generations of understanding and behavior. Nothing we've invented or discovered is as effective delivering information and inspiring lasting enthusiasm as story.
- There is a very short list of forces that can transform people's beliefs, their behavior, their lives, their communities. And Story is on everyone's list.
- When you tell me a fact, I remember it. Tell me a truth, I will believe it. When you tell me a story, I will carry it around in my heart for the rest of my life.

- A man was on a pilgrimage through medieval Europe, intent on visiting a cathedral that was under construction. As he arrived at the building site he came upon one of the work crew, a man chiseling a large stone. The pilgrim asked the workman what he was doing. “Me? Oh, I’m cutting stone.” The pilgrim walked on, and found a second workman, also chiseling stone, but making twice the hammer blows as the first. The pilgrim asked what he was doing. “Me? Oh, I’m feeding my family.” The pilgrim looked up and saw a third member of the crew. He was also working at an increased rate, but then paused to assist two less experience craftsmen working next to him, then returned to his work. The pilgrim asked what he was doing. “Me? Oh, I’m building a cathedral.”

...And the Power of Your Very Best Story.

Your market campaigning, the investments you make to move the market in the direction that favors you, can only be extraordinarily successful when Your Very Best Story moves them in a direction they really, really, want to go. That is why it is so important that the Discovery and Creation of Your Very Best Story begins with close listening to your Particularly Important Audiences.

The Power is the Dramatic Amplification of your Unique Significance—the completion of some vital piece of a Particularly Important Audience’s Very Best Story that no one else can deliver like your organization can. That creates long term success.

...And the Power in a Service Economy

It is common wisdom that we now live in a service economy and that most of our companies deliver value to their customers most of the time not by selling and delivering manufactured products, but through the delivery and performance of services. There is a significant human relationship in the delivery of a service, so it is vital we recognize our success in delivering value through services is contingent upon the successful day in and day out Performances of our employees for our customers. And companies offering manufactured goods recognize that most often the value added competitive advantages available to

them are most often found in the proper leveraging of service Performance. How your employees Perform for your customers will be determined by the Story they understand and appreciate and want to participate in creating and re-enacting each time they are engaged in one of their service Performances. Story is such a powerful and universal Knowledge Management tool that there will always be a Story. Only when members of your organization are Performing Your Very Best Story in each of those service performances do you have the opportunity to turn Each Inch and Every Minute into a Dramatic Result. You could be creating hundreds of successes every where, all the time.

VI. How Your Very Best Story Works:

The System defined at three levels:

Your Very Best Story is a marketing management practice and it is a corporate asset. It is useful to consider it as a Knowledge Management Technology, certainly one of our oldest and most tried and true technologies. We further define it here...

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- A. As a managed process of Discovery and Creation
 - B. As a set of strategically powerful Marketing Tactics, also thought of as Performances of Your Very Best Story.
 - C. As a set of Proven Principles.
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A. Your Very Best Story as a managed process of Discovery and Creation.

At the management level of Discovery and Creation of Your Very Best Story, experience and insight reveals a business process that seems to add useful efficiency and effectiveness to this inherently powerful and universally practical system. This experienced practice can only serve your business if it has certain steps and measurable milestones.

If we were invited to help you find Your Very Best Story, we would guarantee this practice's creative performance. If you are applying this yourself, we hope we have provided you with sufficient direction to improve your efforts.

You may find it interesting that the story telling process begins with Discovery, which is to say, with listening, with lots of active listening. When you listen carefully, attentively and respectfully, and feed back the findings that came from your listening, you will find that not only are you learning important information, but that people come to like you. Through respectful listening the recruiting of Important Audiences to Your Very Best Story has already begun.

Step 1 - Prioritizes our Discovery

We begin by identifying and prioritizing your Particularly Important Audiences. There are many interested and interesting Audiences, but usually just a very few that will have profound impact on the success of your business. So the first conversation we should have as we set about helping you Discover and Create Your Very Best Story would answer the two-part question: "If your organization is going to be twice as successful three years from now (Is that a suitable definition of Transformative Success? For a mature company, that might be overreaching. For a young firm, that might not be ambitious enough. Substitute your own, but quantifiable goals are always the best) which Particularly Important Audience must you own three years from now. And to be successful with that Audience then, which Particularly Important Audience must we own today?" Select that Particularly Important Audience, or Audiences, and identify individual members who are representative and willing to talk.

There is purpose behind the introduction of the label Particularly Important Audiences. Everyone understands the fundamental importance of engaging an Audience at an emotional level, not just catering to their needs but also their desires and aspirations. When we call customers and prospects, and strategic partners like distributors and dealers, as well as employees, our Important Audiences, we are reminded that if we are to establish the sorts of intimate

relationships that are most certain to motivate the behavior we need from them, we must respect them and care for them, deeply. For that is what they want. And need. And dream about.

Step 2 - External Discovery Begins

We must understand the needs, but also the aspirations and loves of the Important Audiences we've identified. We expect you will direct us to Key Customers or Potent Prospects first, though frequently we start with pivotal trade allies found in distributor or dealer networks or other strategic partners. We have found it is often useful to recruit selected Audience members to membership in an Advisory council whose purpose will be to be open, direct, available, and readily engaged with you in this first Discovery stage.

We ask a lot of questions and much of our creative success relies on our knowing which questions to ask, and how and where to ask them, and why. One of our most useful prompts is to ask them to tell Their Very Best Story, the outcome for their business in spaces and places you interact with them that best capture their aspirations. We have found that most everyone is delighted to talk about what we need and what we dream about if only asked properly, respectfully, sometimes even dramatically.

When this step is properly managed—a lot of professional respect and maybe a bit of Dramatic flair for fun—you'll find that Your Very Best Story is already working for you and your organization.

Step 3 - Discovery is Interpreted

We begin to capture the scenes and the elements and outlines and examples of Particularly Important Audiences' Very Best Stories that seem most useful. Many will be obvious and obviously relevant; inviting Audiences to tell their Stories, urging them to include their greatest dreams and desires in those Stories, will often reveal the less obvious, will often uncover exciting new relevance.

We verify our understanding of these first insights into your Audiences' Very Best Stories with Audience members.

We help you make sure your Particularly Important Audience's stories of needs and desires and loves are fully appreciated within your organization by engaging them in these interpretive efforts. As the Story elements become focused we help you share these findings with your senior managers and then recruit their support in sharing them with your front line folks.

Step 4 - Discovery is Internal

Now well armed with the most useful background there is—story lines that capture your Particularly Important Audiences' needs and desires and loves—we start looking for your organization's best story lines, your most powerful story elements, that answer focusing questions: what does your organization care for most, what does your organization enjoy doing most, what are you unusually qualified to accomplish, that will delightfully and Dramatically complete your Particularly Important Audiences' stories about their needs and aspirations?

We've learned that there are two types of organizational stories that are most important to Dramatic Results and Success in the Inches and Minutes, and we will look for examples of your stories your Important Audiences will want to hear that are *We* and *Me* stories.

a. *We Stories* will Dramatize the ways the members of your organization talk and act and define your heritage as well as today's great news, story lines that align everyone in the same best directions. Company Creation stories are necessary, for stories must be deeply felt if they are going to shape Performances everyday, everywhere.

b. *Me Stories* consider how each person in the organization can Perform their specific roles to create their greatest success and reward. We are all flattered by stories that portray our best behavior—our most Heroic Journey—and are ready to be called to that behavior, for we all hope our contribution is vital.

The Hero's Journey and Creation stories are most widely acknowledged and universally understood to have transformative powers.

Step 5: YVBStory: Crisis, Opportunity, and other Changes

Traditionally the dramatic narrative that informs Story begins with a crisis. It then chronicles the changes of fortune and circumstance that the characters struggle with as choices and opportunities arise. This crisis and the characters' responses to it transform "the way things were," that is, what was a normal state of affairs, as the Story builds.

Story invariably shows us a lead character struggling to achieve a goal, to accomplish a quest, in the face of this crisis. In YVBStory, your lead character is a dramatic representation of the key prospect or customer that represents your top priority growth opportunity—that is, a composite character representing what we call your Particularly Important Audience.

When a target prospect group has a driving need or aspiration that is unmet, this creates demand, and demand of course defines a market opportunity. Traditional marketing seeks to exploit the opportunity by meeting the target prospect group's demand.

Similarly, the crisis of YVBStory is precipitated when a Particularly Important Audience's driving need or aspiration is unmet and as such, creates tension, which defines a creative opportunity. YVBS seeks to capture that tension—that unmet need and the aspiration behind it—in a dramatic moment, and then to relieve that tension by offering a vision—a story—in which that driving need is met in the most satisfying way.

Authors, screenwriters, all sorts of storytellers will insist that when your lead character has a goal—a need to be resolved, an aspiration delivered—it must be a plausible goal. Better: it must be the **ONLY** goal they could logically set. This doesn't mean it is a reasonable goal. The goal might be to fly to Venus. But it must be the most reasonable goal given the person's character, personality and circumstances.

Achieving the goal has to solve the problem, that is, has to satisfy the unmet need or fulfill the aspiration—and THAT must be plausible as well. That’s what we Discover and Create: a Dramatic Amplification of the resolution of the goal that promises to transform your Particularly Important Audiences’ situation.

YVBStory Creative Dynamics

The Creation process is built on Discovery and then relies on insight and inspiration, experience and hard work. We are guided by a series of steps, prompts and exercises we have developed over the years to generate YVBStory lines that will be woven together to Create YVBStory.

1. The Power of Both. Also known as the Power of Paradox. Take two ideas that may not usually get linked and may even at some level be in conflict and find an equation or a vision or a picture that allows Both to be True, that uses each to complete each other, to Create one wholeness. Or, use each to leverage the other. There is something very smart and very powerful about The Power of Both being the dramatic completion of an Audiences’ Very Best Story, because it communicates a respectful and exciting attendance to that place where the often-competing needs and aspirations are reconciled.

2. Everyone wins. Perhaps another way to talk about the Power of Both, one that reminds us that Your Very Best Story must be rooted in Important Audiences’ successes, and there we will find our own.

3. The Drama of the Unexpected. It is one of the most obvious concepts we work with because it is so very useful. A Story can only be effective when it holds the Audience’s attention—which means only when the Audience is attracted and engaged by the unexpected, the fresh, the true. Perhaps the best example today is JetBlue: they provide a TV in the airplane so folks remember the whole experience of flying their airline.

4. Inherent Significance. One of the most powerful YVBStory line developments is when we Discover that there is something about you that that can’t help but be important to the Audience. Often this exercise results in us looking harder for that Audience for whom you will be Inherently Significant and then making sure we are speaking their language as we frame it for them.

5. *The Drama of Tease.* After attracting an Audience we need to maintain their attention. ‘To be continued’ is a proven Story device for building an Audience’s anticipation of what’s to come. Making large promises of future greatness is also powerful, especially when you can validate it before you reveal all of it.

6. *The Drama of the Promise.* Promises are anchored by guarantees. Promises speak to our aspirations. Promises are in turn anchored by Guarantees, which answer our fears. Guarantees shape new markets’ perceptions of what should be important to them as they are making a first-time purchasing decision. They help the company offering the Guarantee to organize its business around the delivery of service to a market whose perceptions they now influence, perhaps even define. And since The Drama of the Promise is not usually expressed in the delivery of a service, it can be used to excellent results.

7. *Universal Themes.* There are Story Archetypes that have resonated with Audiences since the beginning. Love makes the world go round. Renewal is central to biological and spiritual life. Creation stories, whether of worlds being shaped in seven days or of the heroic founder overcoming early failure, are standard fare for communities worldwide. The Hero’s Journey portrays how an individual’s success best serves the needs of the community.

8. *Breaking rules.* Opportunity is often hidden in the new view, the fresh look, the conversion of the paradigm. A breaking of the rules is often a pivotal moment in Your Very Best Story, one leading to resolution.

9. *The Happy Ending.* Painting a picture of the best outcome, for you and your Important Audience, and then imagining the steps needed to get there.

10. *Larger Than Life.* We all hope to be a Zorba the Greek, or a Cleopatra. We all hope to be honored, we are all appreciative of being treated as not only special, but uniquely important.

11. Lead Character Intimacy. This is an exercise that often reveals new ways of considering your Important Audiences' Very Best Story. Make a scrapbook collage of photos, drawings, headlines, text, found objects, small items, knick-knacks that come from your Audience's world. Use the collage to build a picture of the lead character—how he looks; how he dresses, the car he drives, where he lives and works, what he eats and reads, the music he listens to, a few lines of his philosophy or poetry that represents his values or ideals. Include what the character's life is like--the daily pandemonium and swirl of people, places and things, events and occurrences, normal and unexpected, which constitute the mosaic of his existence.

12. Protagonist Intimacy. In many stories the lead character and the protagonist are one and the same. Not in Your Very Best Story. Your Lead Character is your provided by, and seeks to represent, your Particularly Important Audience. Your Protagonist, on the other hand, is your company. So in this exercise, the collage is created, as above, to create a picture of your organization as a character.

13. Know The Opposition. It is the same exercise above, but this time you are building a picture of the antagonist. Not necessarily someone bad or evil, but that which opposes your lead character. Most likely, this is your customer's competition: what stands in their way. The Opposition be equally matched to the Lead Character in strength, skill and competence. Regardless what most companies say about their competition, they are usually well-matched.

Step 6 - Creative is Tested

Your Very Best Story must at all times, through all stages of development, be seen as authentic—either a true expression or a legitimate aspiration—and we help you make sure these newly created theme lines are appreciated by your organization and rightfully represented in both *We* and *Me* stories.

Step 7 - Your Very Best Story Creative and Campaigning Plan 1.0

The creative work takes the form of a set of documents that define and dramatize Your Very Best Story. Our presentation of completed creative products will include:

a. Your Very Best Story, the most power promise you can deliver about your Unique Significance to your Particularly Important Audiences, Dramatically Amplified.

This will be developed as a marketplace narrative and captured in Your Very Best Story book, usually a 6 to 10 page illustrated and attractively bound book. This version of Your Very Best Story is primarily for internal use, to inspire and recruit and re-recruit members of your organization, to use as a touchstone for all market campaigning and business development work, but can also be used with key trade allies.

b. Particularly Important Audiences. Their Very Best Stories will be foundational and integrated into Your Very Best Story book. And we will also deliver a qualitative matrix that prioritizes them, that describes them, that illuminates their needs and aspirations, and that identifies and aligns your Uniquely Significant Value with those needs and aspirations.

c. Your Very Best Story copy modules. We will take the broad marketplace narrative of Your Very Best Story and distill it into various action-oriented, easy to apply formats. These will include theme lines, tag lines, elevator speeches, press releases and press release copy blocks, preliminary ad layouts and additional copy blocks for brochures and ads, and visual cues and icons.

d. Marketing Dramatically Amplified ideas. Throughout this Discovery and Creative process we will send marketing ideas as they occur to us. At the conclusion of this process we will offer strategic initiatives and tactical Market Campaigning ideas that demonstrate ways that Dramatic Amplification of Your Very Best Story can create Dramatic Results.

Step 8 - Discovery as Campaigning

The greatest market campaigning, both internal and external, demands close listening, and since our business practice of story telling invites an special intimacy, and intimacy offers a special authority, we look for opportunities to have the Discovery process itself benefit your organization and build the Authority of Intimacy to your advantage. For instance, if an Advisory group was established to help with the Discovery process, we will share ideas that will extend the value of this group, resulted in their helping you're your Very Best Story.

Step 9 - Missionary Work

Recruiting all of your Important Audiences to Your Very Best Story is vital, and we will help you get employees and key strategic allies excited and committed so that efforts directed prospects and customers will be more effective.

And we will teach you to continue the practice, and offer our help to extend it, to spiral it to higher levels of achievement, as we refresh and repeat.

Note there are sample Discovery questions in the Appendix.

B. Your Very Best Story as a set of marketing tactics.

At the execution level we have found that certain marketing strategies and tactics are most effective at telling Your Very Best Story and turning it into Dramatic Results. You'll find traditional marketing tactics but also an emphasis on the often overlooked value of being intentional in your internal marketing.

First, some thought about the strategic thinking we use to select marketing tactics

Engage in Market Campaigning, not Marketing Campaigns

Successful marketing investment—those dollars in your budget that must increase the value of your company—must have clear direction and constancy of purpose to be successful. A marketplace narrative requires a clear direction and constancy of purpose from you and your organization.

Your Very Best Story only has value when it is being heard, and the intentional attitude that we are continuously and constantly engaged in Market Campaigning is a core strategy behind the tactical management of your marketing investment. We have found that using the active verb Market Campaigning makes an important distinction from the inert noun of 'a marketing campaign'. Marketing campaigns are things begun and ended that can be unto themselves, that don't require relationship one to the other, that don't demand the next wave of marketing effort. Marketing campaigns don't express the forward physical force of Market Campaigning and that forward physical force is a constant in all growth. Market Campaigning begins and continues—one of the most powerful story devices for building attention is 'to be continued'—and 'to be continued' requires a planned and focused constancy of purpose, an undeniable requirement of growth.

It is rare that an audience can absorb the full meaning or significance of a Story all at once; we are wise to plan for Your Very Best Story to be understood over time and so it should be revealed to them over time. Market Campaigning selects a Particularly Important Audience and teases and informs them to prepare them to be moved, then cultivates and motivates them to want to move, building on your Unique Significance to their very best story, adding dramatic impact to accelerate action.

Internal Market Campaigning

We believe that the most effective campaigning an organization can do is most often overlooked or given short shrift at best, and that is campaigning Your Very Best Story to your internal audiences, the members of your organization. If it is true that our national economy has become a service economy then most of our organizations must be service organizations. And that means that most of our organizations are delivering value to customers through service relationships more than by products, and services are performed for customers by our organizations' members. When those performances are informed by Your Very Best Story, when Each Inch and Every Minute of the service relationship is treated as an opportunity to Perform Your Very Best Story, your organization is creating victories all the time, everywhere. That can result in the most Dramatic success. This can only happen when an organization makes it a top priority to market Your Very Best Story to its members with the same care and attention exercised in traditional external marketing, so your members are enthusiastic about Your Very Best Story, and you are continually recruiting them to Perform it.

Don't budget to spend. But rather budget to invest.

You must grow Your Very Best Story, and growth requires investment, not spending. Spending just maintains, and we frequently find so much spending is wasted—we're spending more to maintain than we need to—that a smart investment program in building and enhancing Your Very Best Story often uses fewer marketing dollars.

When building the budget, understand what Performances you must earmark by the end of the year to get where you need to be three years from now, and plan how Dramatic Amplification gets you there sooner and cheaper, and plan where the next Inches and Minutes narrative development happen should occur.

Your Very Best Story: The Tactics

Internal Market Campaigning

Recruiting Your Results

As with market campaigning, we insist on the active verb. Perhaps the very first practical business insight story telling as a business metaphor offered showed up in the appreciation that the anticipatory excitement virtually everyone feels when starting a new job—beginning a new adventure into much that is unknown but hoping it will be the adventure of a life time—that this anticipation just might be the most powerful human emotion an organization will ever be offered. If that wonderful anticipation is respected from the beginning of the Recruiting activities, if you use this opportunity to tell Your Very Best Story, you not only leverage powerful primacy effects in your favor—which is to say you influence their search for what they want and you want them to find—but you intentionally create the ongoing expectation that you’ll be continually recruiting them to the best your story can be. And that expectation guides you to proper action.

It is of course simplistic to suggest all you need to do is tell a proper story of success during recruiting to create a self fulfilling prophecy, but if you set out to attract with Your Very Best Story only people who think it is attractive will be working for you, and once you have an organization made up of people who believe Your Very Best Story, you are assured of those successes built in the Inches and the Minutes of employee Performance.

Internal Celebrations

What employee service Performance, what product feature-set benefits, helps you complete Particularly Important Audiences’ Very Best Stories? We have found that staging internal events—the build up and celebration of innovation fairs, new initiative challenges, sales competitions—that celebrate the needs and aspirations of your Particularly Important Audiences and your Unique Significance to them, especially when the staging has the extra authenticity of deep organizational involvement, helps inform the Inches and the Minutes and uncovers opportunity for Dramatic Results.

The Classroom

Doesn't it seem that to be a successful organization you must be intentional about what you teach your members, and doesn't it follow that you must therefore be intentional about how you teach your members? There are only two venues for intentional teaching and Your Very Best Story can work to transform your organization's success in both places.

The first is the most importantly potent teaching venue: it's in the day in and the day out, it's Each Inch and Every Minute. When your organizations' senior members embrace Your Very Best Story and practice it as a platform for their goal setting and direction, for job definitions, for recruiting and strategizing, for operational management and for performance evaluation, and especially for conducting regular meetings and hallway conversations, you'll discover dramatic successes in so many of your Inches and Minutes as your organization follows their lead and you create victories all the time, everywhere.

The second key teaching venue is a more structured classroom-like setting, and we've seen great success in Your Very Best Story discovery and creation through structured and highly interactive sessions that are one part Very Best Story presentation, one part senior seminar about important new information, one part town hall, and one part celebration. These teaching sessions can be small or large, inter department and intra department, new employees taught by experienced hands, regular and frequently refreshed, and should be all at one time or another. It is powerful when an organization has intimate discussions about core principles that deliver solid information to its members while recruiting more enthusiasm for Your Very Best Story.

A corollary thought, about Company Meetings. A common complaint in many companies is that they have too many meetings. Whenever I have been the CEO of an organization or the senior executive of a marketing department, I have stated out loud for all to hear that when the only complaints I get are that we have too many meetings, then we are having the right amount of meetings. It was my goal to use meetings as a key element in my internal marketing of Our Very Best Story. To do so, I needed to teach the folks I was responsible for the importance of coming together into meetings quickly, to convene sharply, so that we could meet efficiently and effectively and then get back to

the jobs at hand. And while that was good discipline for all sorts of meetings, I made sure we could gracefully get in and out of session so that I could call regular and frequent meetings that would be designed to keep everyone fully informed on the crucial issues of the day, so I could help everyone see how important those issues are, and brag on the progress they were making and remind them of the next series of best Performances they must master for continued success.

External market campaigning

Key City Meetings

Isn't it exciting when someone has something so important to say that a room full of people will get together to listen to it. Those moments carry such extraordinary opportunity for the Dramatic Amplifications that generate Dramatic Results, that a smart company actively searches for opportunities to host customers and prospective customers, distributors and dealers, employees or prospective employees, trade allies and media, to stage dramatic presentations of their very best stories. Which 20% of your customers generate 80% of your business, and what aspect of Your Very Best Story must they hear next? What distributors will open the doors to vast new markets when Your Very Best Story informs their understanding and offers them new motivations? These audiences have a Dramatic impact on your business, and you can use Dramatic Amplification to increase or accelerate that impact. Start looking for that version or aspects of Your Very Best Story that can inform a most entertaining or rewarding or action filled evening, and if you can't find one, Create one.

The opportunity for Dramatic Amplification of course begins when the Key City meeting invitation is sent, so look for the tease, the fun, the intriguing message that gets the event off to its most promising start.

Advisory Boards

For Your Very Best Story to be most powerful it must be well grounded in your industry. For that power to be fully realized, it must be authenticated and repeated from many sources, even many points of view. Recruiting a Board of Advisors—a group of industry and trade thought leaders—by special invitation

to a special role of wise counselor and respected spokesman both builds a story and communicates it. Your special invitation alerts prospective Advisory Board members that something noteworthy is occurring; their support and evangelizing is itself noteworthy.

The idea of an Advisory Board is not new, and many companies select key distributors or long term customers to serve such a position. Re-examine this idea from a couple of perspectives. First, are you continually recruiting your Advisory Board members to support the best version of who you can be, or simply meeting once a quarter to talk about the business? You should be staging demonstrations of Your Very Best Story to this Particularly Important Audience, you could be asking excited employees to take a spot on the agenda to talk about why they are excited or inviting your Advisory Board members to speak to your employees, to share their visions of your future success.

Then, consider the usefulness of a series of Advisory Boards, each one convening for a specific purpose and disbanding once that purpose has been fulfilled, so that you have the opportunity to be recruiting lots of key industry players to Your Very Best Story.

The Marketplace Narrative:

This is the stuff most folks think of when they consider marketing communications: Public relations, Direct response, The Internet, Sales and Distribution Promotions, Sales Collateral, and Advertising. Telling Your Very Best Story to Particularly Important Audiences is such a vitally important part of Dramatically Amplifying your investment of marketing dollars for Dramatic Results that we leave it for last, to make the point that investing in these external communications are most likely to have 10X impact on your organization when a proper balance of the previous marketing tactics has been established and given an opportunity to work for you. Before you take Your Very Best Story out to the public, the members of your organization must have a genuine appreciation for its integrity and authenticity, and of course the version of the Story you spotlight in your market communications affects your employees' view of themselves.

Public Relations.

The current wisdom from the hottest national ad agencies and cutting edge brand strategists is that Public Relations is proving more effective than Media Advertising in building brands. That is a smart perception on their part, but they are confusing themselves and losing some of the usefulness of their insight by choosing the wrong language: it is most useful to think about Public Relations as a story telling medium, not brand management. Press releases can do so much more when treated as chapters in Your Very Best Story and not merely viewed as product announcements. Events should be staged for Dramatic Amplification, as often as you can justify them. And Your Very Best Story works harder for you when others accept your invitation to write their own views of it in independent pieces.

Direct Response.

All strategic thinking about Your Very Best Story marketing tactics demands we bring your Particularly Important Audience to the center of the stage and respect them as a Particularly Important Audience, and Direct Response provides us with a special view of the importance of that step.

It is useful to remind ourselves that we can offer something extraordinarily dramatic for a very close friend tomorrow, and it can be delivered at very little cost; we have an intimate knowledge of the friend's dreams and aspirations and can personalize a message that would promise to be of Unique Significance. When recruiting the attention of thousands we don't know as well it will take much longer to plan and cost much more. And it will likely be less effective. So we emphasize defining Important Audiences' Particular interests as narrowly as possible.

Direct response programs allow you to unfold Your Very Best Story carefully over a period of time, fully utilizing the power of 'to be continued', as we measure the Particularly Important Audiences' interest and recalibrate our treatment of the story to build and maintain the greatest interest, motivate and inspire the most useful behavior.

The Internet.

The Internet is a wonderful story teller's medium. When Discovering and Creating and Performing Your Very Best Story, consider the many ways that your organization can uniquely capitalize on your existing Web capabilities.

Websites. Many of the special business building powers of stories are leveraged through the smart use of Websites. The Internet is the place everyone turns to survey and collect stories of interest and importance to them and their organizations. As Your Very Best Story is being built, as it is unfolding, it must be presented to your audience. When a story is refreshed regularly and immediately—when a story is offered in real time—it provides vital forward momentum. 'To be continued' is a proven technique for building an audiences' interest and stories on Websites can be extended and enhanced every day. When I hear my Very Best Story I am certain to pay close attention and Web Sites can be individualized. Tease and tension are great story telling techniques, and Web Sites are very effective at maintaining interest through mystery, misdirection and other techniques.

Intranets and Extranets. Internal marketing is one of the most important applications of Your Very Best Story. The intranet/extranets that your employees, particularly your sales and customer service representatives, already use to communicate with each other and orchestrate efforts can be enhanced to share your organization's Very Best Story, in an incremental manner, with your employees and to collect and publish the ongoing success stories of your employees in the victorious Inches and Minutes of your organization.

Electronic Signatures. The electronic signature that your sales representatives, business developers, and customer service representatives use on their emails to communicate to your Particularly Important Audiences should do more than convey simple contact information. Electronic signatures can be expanded to efficiently and effectively share, in an evolving and unfolding manner, your organization's Very Best Story with those whom you most want to hear it.

Electronic Newsletters. Electronic newsletters are an incredibly effective and low-cost way to share, over an ongoing period, Your Very Best Story with your clients and potential customers. The interactive capabilities of electronic newsletters also enable recipients to engage with your organization, its story, and its offerings immediately and in ways that print and traditional media cannot.

Distributor Programs

Your distributors and dealers should be integrated into a version of Your Very Best Story that promotes them to their Important Audiences. The Story all distributors and dealers want to hear is that your organization is recruiting them not so they can work for your success, but rather you are recruiting so that you can work for their success.

Sales Collateral

A valuable understanding Your Very Best Story informs is that all Collateral material must be kept fresh, very fresh. An unfolding story adds its own forward momentum to fuel organizational growth, and when collateral is filled with last year's images it can stunt next year's aspirations. Since it is vital your internal audiences are performing Your Very Best Story, all collateral must be created recruiting their performances.

Media Advertising

There is an environmental shift that makes Media Advertising different in kind rather than different in degree from the other market campaigning tactics Your Very Best Story calls on. At market campaigning meetings we know who is hearing the story and can judge how they are responding to it.

In Direct Response story telling we can focus so tightly on a Particularly Important Audience. In Media Advertising we must accept that we are granted less presumption of attention so we must concern ourselves with discovering how we will demand it more. Is it with a flourish of loud horns or with a mysteriously beating drum or the explosive crack of an unbelievable promise?

C. Your Very Best Story as set of proven principles.

At the conceptual level, Your Very Best Story is a system of maximum output for minimum new investment for it leverages the ways that story has been transforming belief and behavior forever and for all, to amplify marketing, to drive 10X returns. The rules are simple and universally understood; the system is fully integrated, fully networked, intimately interactive, and proven effective. So effective, in fact, it is even possible to enjoy a transformative output from a smaller marketing investment than you are currently making. You and everyone in your organization already know how the principles in this system work. Here are some reminders that deliver the power of story.

Your Very Best Story.

Discovering and Creating the most Uniquely Significant promises your organization can Perform for Particularly Important Audiences, using Dramatic Amplification for Dramatic Results.

Particularly Important Audiences.

Storytellers aspire to intimacy with their audiences. It is very useful to think of your marketplace as clusters of Audiences, each with distinct interests, whose attention you must earn by respecting them, whose understanding you can only cultivate over time, who want you to engage them through the proper use of Drama to entertain and inform them, and with whom the most intimate relationships are allowed and are worth working towards.

Some Audiences are more important than others, and the more you focus on the specific needs of a Particularly Important Audience—when, for instance, you are committed to understanding and completing their Very Best Story for them—the more likely you will find an intimate relationship of service to them.

Unique Significance

Your Particularly Important Audiences have needs and dreams. What does your organization love doing that matches up with those needs and dreams, that accomplishes something for them that is vital to their aspirations, that delights them, and that they can't get anywhere else? Discover it, Create more of it, and stage Performances where your Unique Significance can be Dramatically Amplified.

Dramatic Results Require Dramatic Amplification

When your organization's goal is explosive transformative growth, Amplification of your market campaigning investment is required: there is a physics operating that can't be denied. You'll need to spend a lot of money to Amplify, or you'll need to apply the Amplifying leverage of Drama as an input. Your Very Best Story Amplifies that Drama to create Dramatic Results.

Inches and Minutes

Powerful growth occurs when an organization accomplishes successes in the day in and the day out, when it rises to the challenge of offering special Performances with Each Inch and Every Minute. This is only possible when Your Very Best Story guides, shapes, and informs the Performance of the members of your organization, when your story is so widely accepted you can picture that a story teller sits on everyone's shoulder and whispers in employees ears the values and ambitions captured in Your Very Best Story as they help solve customers' concerns or distributors demands.

The Authority of Intimacy

Stories build intimacy between the storyteller and Audience, and that intimacy shapes the trust and loyalty that fuels great market ownership. The most effective Authority is that which is granted, gladly, and the more Intimate an organization is with the marketplace the more likely it can assume Authority.

Keep it refreshed

You should take advantage of Story's momentum by keeping Your Very Best Story fresh and regularly refreshed. 'To be continued' is one of the most effective story telling devices, and you should use media that can be easily updated. For instance to the smallest print run of your collateral so that it can be updated to more accurately reflect next year's Aspirations rather than last year's images.

Delighting Audiences

Audiences like to be flattered, but they don't like to be pandered to. They like messages that are clear but they also like to be teased. They like tension, they like suspense, they like clever denouement.

Market Campaigning

You need to move your Particularly Important Audiences and that takes a continual and constant effort. Market Campaigning is active, directed to a purpose, and much more powerful than the static notion of Marketing Campaigns.

Me Stories and We Stories

There are certain story typologies, certain categories of stories, that all cultures have used to capture their most important beliefs and aspirations, to describe their most important behavior and performance. Two most powerful story types are Creation stories and the Hero's Journey. Telling your stories in a fashion that respects and relies on the most fundamentally human modes of relaying information and motivating behavior is a practice of Your Very Best Story.

VII. Case history

Case histories are useful at portraying aspects of the Discovery and Creation and Performance of Your Very Best Story. This first case history was selected to represent full expressions of the power of Your Very Best Story.

Cellular One / Providence Journal Cellular

Providence Journal Cellular *dba* Cellular One was one of the most successful cellular operating companies in the country, and the dominate service provider in the Southeast. Its sale to GTE in the 90's, for just under \$800 million, set a record for the highest purchase multiple in the cellular industry at the time.

I had the good fortune to be the senior marketing executive at the time this operation was founded in 1985 to bring service to the Raleigh-Durham market, and a year later was promoted to CEO as the company expanded to offer cellular service to nearly twenty markets in North Carolina and South Carolina, and in Virginia and Georgia, with smaller operations in Oklahoma, Indiana, and Michigan. Our success was a result of hundreds of Cellular One employees' passionate and professional Performance of Cellular One's Very Best Story in Each Inch and Every Minute of our operations, as well as our Dramatic Amplification of our commitment to extraordinary levels of service.

Background

The Cellular One Very Best Story was Discovered in the needs of our Particularly Important Audiences and Created to complete their Very Best Stories.

I was hired as the senior marketing executive as the cellular network was being built and spent nearly three months in the field calling on business and community leaders, asking them about their companies, listening to their insights about the Triangle as a business community, inviting them to share their dreams and aspirations for the future of their businesses and their community. What I heard was a sense of great pride that this market had arrived—that the growth of the Research Triangle Park had reached a critical mass with thousands employed at IBM, at Northern Telecom (now Nortel), at

Glaxo and Burroughs Wellcome (now GlaxoSmithKline) and at other major corporate facilities; that the entrepreneurial spirit was beginning to bloom; that the legacy businesses were benefiting from both and enjoying their own explosive growth. Cellular service was brand new then—it was viewed as the hot technology in a way the Internet was just a couple of years ago—and it was clear that many business and community leaders felt that the investment Providence Journal Cellular was making in building this state of the art telecommunications network was a significant milestone—some even saw it as a capstone—in the growth of the Triangle.

Our competitor in this first market was United Telephone, soon to become Sprint Communications. As we grew into other markets we also competed with Bell South, Southwestern Bell, and GTE's wireless operations. We predicted that these companies would follow the organizational patterns they were most familiar with and run highly centralized business operations, and indeed they did.

You may not remember that when cellular was first launched the telephones were expensive—I remember selling them for \$2,000—and that they were mobile, not portable, which is to say 99% of them were installed in a vehicle, and that they were purchased for business use exclusively. A key marketing decision made at time of launch was the sales and distribution issue: would we use employed sales reps or would we recruit local businesses as dealers (Motorola Two-Way radio shops, car stereo shops, and young entrepreneurs who could be enticed to start a Cellular One dealership). The common wisdom in markets where cellular companies were approaching their first anniversary of service—Washington DC and Chicago—was that independent dealers would not work hard enough for the cellular carrier and that it was necessary to build and manage an in-house sales force.

Cellular One's Very Best Story

Our story development was Discovery and Creation: we listened for what the Important Audiences would want to hear and we determined where and how we could create a story that would delight them. The first story line was clear: there would be great advantage in being seen as the local company, as the company that was making a serious investment in the business community and wanted to be part of the local business community, a company that was emblematic of the Triangle's coming of age. Sure our parent company was in New England, but we were confident we could become the local company by telling stories of the tangible business choices we had made and would make that would lead our Important Audiences to accepting us as the local company:

- We located all of our most senior management in the market, in Morrisville; the senior management for our competitors was in Kansas City or Dallas or Atlanta. .
- While Motorola had sold their telecommunications switch to 100% of the operators who had made a purchase decision in the first phase of network construction, we were the first to buy a switch from Northern Telecom, who employed about 5,000 in the Triangle at the time, who agreed to host sessions where we could tell our story to their top and middle management, and who would run local public relations campaigns about our decision to Buy Local.
- We also swam against the tide when deciding our distribution strategy by recruiting ten dealers scattered across Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, and Cary, and our recruiting of the principals and managers of these businesses included the creation of an advisory council that honored them by asking for their advice and counsel in matters beyond distribution policy. We declared we would promote them aggressively in our communications and we did.. And in return they promoted us, in their places of business, in their clubs and churches, at cocktail parties.
- And we named our company Cellular One of the Triangle.

The first story line came out of our careful listening to our Particularly Important Audiences. We started telling our story while our cellular system was still being built, in a radio and newspaper campaign we titled “Excitement is Building in The Triangle”. We wanted our Important Audiences to see for themselves that important work was being done here, in their home town, and not imported from a distant office, and we wanted them to enjoy a sense of participation in it as it was occurring. We updated our Audiences weekly on such matters as cell site selection and construction—reporting on the cell site being built on top of the BB&T building in Raleigh, or the tower being built in a tobacco field outside of Durham—or about the new dealers being trained and ready to install and service phones, and about hiring our customer service staff and how they are prepared to serve the Triangle area exclusively.

We enhanced our story telling of our local commitment with a strong marketing investment in the areas’ three major universities. We understood from the first years’ sales in other markets that the majority of lead adopters would be business owners, especially in the real estate professions and the contractor trades. We knew from our Discovery process that it was almost a certainty that these men and women would have a powerful allegiance to one of the athletic teams of UNC, NC State, or Duke. So we decided we would not only invest the great majority of our marketing dollars within the athletic programs of these three schools, further anchoring us within the community, but we would engage in the types of personalized communications campaigning that would represent a local sensibility. We created spots with Jim Valvano, Dick Sheridan, and Mike Krzyzewski that captured the time and the place, the personalities and the reputations our Audiences were passionate about. (And for you UNC fans, we attempted to engage Coach Smith in similar spots and he respectfully declined.)

For instance, we produced the first TV spot Coach K ever did, a spot we cut a few days before a Duke vs. UNC basketball game. We asked Coach K to wear the same clothes he would wear at the game, and filmed a scene that captured Coach K leaving the locker room to draw the winning name in the ‘Excitement is Building in Triangle Sweepstakes’ we were running at the time. We bought a 30 second spot during the half time of that Sunday afternoon game to run the spot—the on-air professional talent thanked Coach K for his help and wished him luck in the second half—and the next day we received

over a hundred phone calls asking us how we were able to get Coach K to leave the locker at half time of this game that had monumental importance to the local community. We created a moment of Dramatic Amplification, a Story the community talked about and our employees were very proud of.

Internal Marketing of Cellular One's Very Best Story

But with all our Creative Story telling to external Audiences, the most important place the Cellular One Very Best Story was being told was within the organization. By the time I took on the CEO's role after a year of leading the market campaigning, I had already seen a couple of examples of how telling Our Very Best Story internally so our employees would Perform it was vital to the great success we were steadily building.

The best example might be how we viewed our dealers and how the stories we told ourselves about dealers affected that view and defined our service Performance. At the time we started in the Triangle the cellular industry had such minimal success with dealer sales that the trade magazines were writing articles labeling dealers as 'necessary evils'. We took a different approach. As I was out recruiting dealers I explained that I understood that most businesses in virtually all industries sign up dealers so that the dealers can work for them. But my goal...and as I said this to a dealer I was recruiting I unbuttoned and began rolling up my shirt sleeves...my goal, I told them, was to recruit dealers so I could roll up my sleeves and go to work for them and their success. That we knew that the only way we would achieve outstanding support from them is if we delivered outstanding support to them. That was our standard, and we asked them to hold us to it. And when we delivered, we could only expect outstanding support from them.

The first time a dealer heard me say this he was intrigued but of course not convinced. When I returned and repeated this claim they were interested, and looking for evidence it might be true, and saw that evidence in the marketing support programs we showed them we were creating for them. And when we moved into operations and they called on my employees to Perform a support task and found that roll up the sleeves and work for them attitude informed our service Performances, they did what I expected them to do: they became very loyal and worked hard for someone working hard for them.

And they did find that that service attitude, for as I led the recruiting of employees who would serve our dealers, I made sure that during the interview process all prospective employees were told the story of how I would roll up my sleeves and promise to go to work for our dealers, and every meeting we had discussing our dealer market campaigning, our dealer training, our dealer policies, our dealer activities, I began the session by rolling up my sleeves and asking what we were going to do in this meeting that would result in our dealers finding new evidence we were working hard for their success.

A parallel Story line we were working on with Internal Market Campaigning was our service commitment to customers. We were confident our local CSR staff could be demonstrably better at educating first time customers. The first month we were on line we had lunch meetings every day with our CSR's and invited them to talk about the questions that were arising and to educate us on how they were handling them. On a rotating basis we invited members of the engineering and technical teams to hear about system problems, members of the finance and accounting teams to hear about billing concerns, and senior executives to assure CSR's that their individual efforts in solving customer complaints were making them the most valued members of our team. We developed a Quality, Service, Value stamp and gave one to every CSR and invited them to stamp memos or reports or any other physical representation of a job well done.

We saw how our pre-launch ads that had reported on our progress building our local company could evolve into ads that educated Important Audiences about the topics that were most frequently arising as customer problems, and we highlighted them and showed how our CSR's were either solving those concerns themselves, or calling on others to assist them. With our CSR's permission, we began using the QSV stamp in those ads as a visual icon of our local company's commitment to great service.

The next chapter of Cellular One's Very Best Story

One of the powerful aspects of Story is that it must continue to grow, it has its own momentum. So we needed a next chapter of the Story of Cellular One being the local company after the first 12 months or so of operations. It came when we found we had harvested the low lying fruit, the pent up demand, the early adopters, and our continued careful listening to the market indicated the next wave of likely adopters had an appreciation for the increase in productivity a cellular phone would provide but there was also concern about how well the technology would work, and whether mastering it would be frustrating.

Keep in mind that this was the late 80's. No one had laptops in their briefcases and only assistants had PC's on their desks; you were told no more often than yes when you asked if you could fax something to a customer's place of business; voice mail was being experimented with by the more progressive companies. There was not yet the general appreciation for technology as a productivity tool and in fact our research showed the next wave of adopters had very high levels of technophobia. We decided the next chapter of our story would be one the local leader, Cellular One, was tee'd up to make: we would be the Quality, Service, and Value leader, and our promise to deliver a technology that would be of the highest quality and the greatest value to our local community was so important to us, we would Guarantee it. But to do so, we needed to make sure we had the strong support of our folks, that the service commitment was strong, was our compass. So the three part Guarantee was created over the course of two lunch sessions attended by all of our CSR's and representatives of all other departments.

Our Quality Guarantee: The cellular network we have designed and built and maintain is of such excellent Quality, we Guarantee it. If you drop a call—a not infrequent problem in the first years of cellular service—or even if the static is so poor you can't conduct a conversation—in the days of analog service, also a frequent occurrence—simply call our local CSR's, give us the number you were speaking to, and we will not charge you for that call. Of course other cellular companies would also credit a customer's complaint, but we understood there was a much more powerful Story in declaring our promise of our delivery of Quality.

Our Service Guarantee: Here, the concern was not a legitimate one, but many prospects shared it. They were concerned this cellular phone would be another piece of consumer electronics that would fail to work for them. We assured our Important Audiences that the phones we selected were easy to operate and highly reliable, and Guaranteed that if the phone breaks all they have to do is take it to a local Cellular One dealer and we will either repair it in ten minutes or install a new one at no cost to the customer.

Our Value Guarantee: As is true today, there were a range of price plans available. But in the early days of cellular there was little common knowledge about how much cellular airtime one might use and therefore which plan would be most cost efficient. Our Value Guarantee promised customers that if in the first six months of service they found their usage would have more efficiently been billed on an alternative plan, we would switch them over to that plan, and apply the change retroactively.

The Transformative Results of Cellular One's Very Best Story

When Providence Journal Cellular was sold to GTE, their due diligence uncovered findings so startling they couldn't believe them, because the findings challenged everything they believed about telecom success. GTE was a company certain that success in wireless communications, in every one of their telecommunications businesses for that matter, was driven by designing and building and maintaining top quality networks. They had a very sophisticated network quality matrix they used to grade out all of the networks they had built in the dozens of markets they operated, and had a corporate policy that no system's quality would perform below an A-. When they applied that matrix to our networks, we achieved an average quality grade of C+. What stunned them was that the customer perception research they did showed our customers perceptions of Cellular One system quality was measurably higher than the customer perceptions of GTE quality—I understood that the great work our CSR's did in responding to customer problems was the determining factor in customers' over all sense of service quality—and that our average market share of 63% (wireless was a two horse race at the time) was almost ten points higher than

their average share, and that our market penetration was a good 15% ahead on a comparable market basis. They did not understand the transformative power of Your Very Best Story, and in fact they denied it. My hope for you is that your competition denies it as well, and my invitation to you is that we work together to Discover and Create and Perform Your Very Best Story, to accomplish Dramatic Results.

We would look forward to sharing other examples of how Your Very Best Story is the best marketing practice, including Curtiss Wright, the best business story in the history of American enterprise, and Ayuda, the service company created for Mexican immigrant heroes.

Appendix A

Why Your Very Best Story expands the work done under Brand management

One of the common questions asked about Your Very Best Story is how it compares to branding and brand management. It's a tough question to answer because one of the problems we see when we look at branding is how much confusion exists in the field. We have participated in branding initiatives where the first couple of sessions are given over to creating a common understanding of what brand development is all about; we have reviewed leading marketing journals and found a number of articles written with the express purpose of, once and for all, clear up the confusion about brand and found that they don't reach the same conclusions; we have asked those non-marketing types who are still crucial to the success of an organization's market campaigning—CEO's and VP's of sales and front line troops—what they think about brand and have gotten mostly dismissive answers.

We wonder if some of that challenge to brand comes from the fact that brand is still a relatively new idea. It came from great marketing insights and innovations of certain consumer products companies and there is clarity within those organizations about what they mean by brand. Maybe over time more of a common practice will arise. Story is as old as human culture, and everyone knows what we mean when we say that the story we believe has transformative power, that it can change stone cutters into cathedral builders.

Brand is originally and primarily a media creation, yet so much of an organization's marketing effort is outside of paid media. We always get the same quizzical smile when, after orienting an executive to the importance of Internal Market Campaigning, we ask if they could talk to their staff about them Performing their brand and have that conversation be as useful as talking with them about Performing their Very Best Story.

We know a good deal of good work is being done under the heading of brand development and brand management, and look forward to exploring how that good work can be enhanced by the practice of Discovering and Creating and Performing Your Very Best Story. In the meantime, we have created a chart that compares and contrasts brand with Your Very Best Story.

ATTRIBUTES	TRADITIONAL BRANDING	
Grows out of your company's core values	Possibly. Requires extreme discipline and discernment.	Naturally and always. It is your story.
Informs/inspires employees and focuses their energies	Rarely. Most employees don't connect to brand.	Yes. It provides a dramatic role to perform.
Provides customers with a meaningful role	Brand focuses on your company/product/service—and then hopes to attract your customer by appealing to his needs.	YVBStory focuses on your customer and tells him a story of how your company/product/service can serve him best.
Initial cost	High. Can require huge investment over a long period before any ROI is realized—if any ever is.	Modest and pay-as-you-go. ROI is incremental and begins almost at once.
Maintenance and cost of ownership	Brand is a leaking bucket—you must constantly pour in more money to refill brand "awareness."	No leaky bucket. Just a living mosaic of story that grows stronger with every investment.
Ease of application	Requires training; still may not resolve conflict about brand and its proper use.	There is a universal, near-"DNA level" understanding of story.
Leads to the organization's next great aspirations	No. Provides an attractive snapshot of where the organization is today.	Yes. Leads to creating the next chapter your audiences want to hear.
Focuses marketing investments	Neutral. Maintaining focus requires constant vigilance.	Intrinsically, yes. Your audiences call forth specific market tactics.
It's magic	Some brands unleash creative power—but try to predict which, how much, where or when.	Undoubtedly. Stories have transformed people's beliefs and behaviors for eons.

Appendix B

Your Very Best Story Discovery questions

When you listen carefully to your audiences' needs, a couple of very interesting things occur: your Important Audiences begin to like you, and you wind up learning useful information. There is excitement in announcing bold initiatives, and when you conduct this Discovery phase as an exciting beginning, you are creating Your Very Best Story.

A sample introduction for External Audiences: Our Company has started a new strategic initiative we have begun to provide you and your company with the highest levels of value and service delight, to find new ways to help you complete Your Very Best Stories about your success. To help us serve you better we would like to spend some time with you, so we can listen carefully to your answers to some simple questions.

A sample introduction for Internal Audiences: There is a Very Best Story about our company, about what we do and how we do it. We want you to help us discover and create that Very Best Story by telling us some of your favorite stories about the work you do here.

1. Who is your Particularly Important Audience?
 - 1.1. How would you gain new insight into their business?
 - 1.2. How would you refresh your understanding of their business?
 - 1.3. How do we understand their very best story?
 - 1.4. What is your role in better understanding their story?
2. What needs do they have that we satisfy with Unique Significance?
 - 2.1. What is the next step to broaden or deepen that Unique Significance?
 - 2.2. How does that help complete their very best story?
 - 2.3. What is your role in completing their story?
3. What desires do we satisfy with Unique Significance?
 - 3.1. What is the next step to broaden or deepen that Unique Significance?
 - 3.2. How does that complete their very best story?
 - 3.3. What is your role in completing their story?

4. Who will be your Particularly Important Audiences three years from now?
 - 4.1. Who is serving them today?
 - 4.2. Who is delighting them today?
 - 4.3. What is changing in your company or the marketplace that makes them important?
 - 4.4. What will be your role in delighting them three years from now?

5. Is there Dramatic Action in your service of Particularly Important Audiences?
 - 5.1. Historical events
 - 5.2. Cyclical events
 - 5.3. Staged events
 - 5.4. Newsworthy events

6. What is your company's most Ambitious Aspiration?
 - 6.1. What makes it legitimate?

7. The Authority of Intimacy occurs when you want what I have to say to be important to you. Where does your company currently enjoy such Authority, with which Important Audiences?

8. Success is sometimes Dramatic. A major shift, or change, or event occurs and a company shapes that shift to its purposes. Where is the next Dramatic change likely to occur in your industry?

9. Success is usually found in the Inches and the Minutes...in the day in and day out delivery of operational or service excellence to Important Audiences? How are you creating successes in Each Inch and Every Minute?

10. Is there a popular narrative that reminds you of your company?
A TV show, or a movie, or a book? A historic period?

11. What stories do you tell about your company when you are out with friends and you're feeling really good about your profession, and you want them to get an insight for the delight you feel?

12. What do you exaggerate in those stories because you would like it to be more true, and because you know the exaggeration is often a more compelling version of the truth?
13. How do you describe the work you do to your children?
14. How would you imagine your Particularly Important Audiences would answer questions 11 and 12?
15. You are at an industry convention. What does your company do that makes you feel most proud when you walk the convention floor?
16. What would your company have to be doing to get everyone at the convention excited about you?
17. Which customer is the most influential customer you've got?
18. What do you think is their most important need? How do we impact it?
19. What do you think is their wildest desire? How do we impact it?
20. Which prospect can have the greatest impact on your business?
21. What do you think is their most important need?
22. What do you think is their wildest desire?
23. If you were going to advise a start up determined to knock your company out of the way, what would you tell them
24. Besides price, how does your biggest competitor most often succeed at selling against you?
25. What would the photo show that accompanied a complimentary news feature or corporate profile of your company?

26. What is it about your company you hope will never change?
- What about your job?
27. What is it about your company you wish would change tomorrow?
-What about your job?
28. Is there someone in your company who you consider to the best role model for an extraordinary story about where your company is headed?
29. Think of a time of crisis in your company. It may have been a larger crisis like a natural disaster or terrible accident. It might have been an unexpected change in the marketplace or in the corporate body. Think carefully...do you have a fond memory of this time, of how the people rallied in response? Is there some company attitude you wished had survived the crisis?
30. The best story you've ever heard about your company is...
31. The most important audience for that story is...
32. The best story you've ever heard about any company is...
33. What company that you compete with is currently creating the most excitement in the marketplace?
34. What company that you know about is currently creating the most excitement in their marketplace?
35. Take a snapshot of you doing your job that is most attractive, and tell us who needs to see it.

Appendix C

A new company has been formed to spread the message of the power of Your Very Best Story as a most effective business tool. The organization is founded by a former fishing guide who learned of the transformative power of story working with the Anishinaabe Indians then became a marketing entrepreneur with 25 years of experience who led the creation of over \$1 billion of marketplace value, who then developed the practice of Your Very Best Story as he taught classes in entrepreneurship at Duke University; a writer and marketing strategist who has worked for years in brand development and knew the language of brand was useful but the concept fell short; and a media producer who has worked in film and interactive media and carefully studied Audience's narrative needs; a creative director and graphic designer who understands the need to create visual drama to engage those audiences.

We have created the Your Very Best Story practice to help you apply the business building power of Story to your organization, and invite you to download the 2.5 version of the practice found on the home page. And we look forward to being of service to you and your organization, helping you Discover and Create and Perform Your Very Best Story, should you determine you can use our expert help.

Story Team

Carl Nordgren, Managing Director and Chief Storyteller

Nordgren spent four years as a fishing guide in NW Ontario where he learned his Guests needed more than great fishing: they yearned for great stories that would transform their appreciation of this pristine wilderness. Nordgren later worked in publishing, then went on to found six companies that sold for over \$300 million and was the senior executive employee for another that sold for over \$750 million. Two of those companies were marketing services agencies—one made INC's list of fastest growing firms two years in a row—and he's developed marketing strategy for dozens of firms. He now teaches in the Markets and Management program at Duke University, and believes the greatest service he has provided his companies and his clients is helping Discover and Create the power of Your Very Best Story.

Eric Miller, Strategist and Writer

As a creative strategist with more than 15 years experience, Eric has helped some of America's most successful companies tell their stories. He brings deep experience in brand positioning, a finely crafted storytelling ability, and perspectives gained as a journalist, video producer and political consultant. His clients have included Triumph Boats, Time Warner Cable, Cooper Tools, Circle K, Borden, Duke University Medical Center, John Deere, RJR Nabisco, SeaCat, Stihl, Gibson Greeting Cards, First Citizens Bank, Quintiles, Bayer, Siemens, Nortel Networks and scores of other companies ranging from Fortune 100 to Inc 100 to start-up ventures.

James T. Gledhill, Strategist and Producer

As an Internet focused Producer, James has fulfilled duties as a primary client liaison, COO, and interim CEO, all within the Web marketing and services arena. Before working with the Web, James worked as a Post Production Coordinator and Assistant Producer for such companies as HBO, Showtime, and the Disney Channel. He has written and directed award winning short films and understands that a clear vision supported with a well articulated story are as essential to the successful orchestration of a film crew as they are to commercial and marketing endeavors.

Bob Perman, Art Director and Visual Dramatist

A former designer who made the switch to advertising 15 years ago, Bob is known for his clean visual approach that draws readers in and sells a strong product benefit, often with dramatic flair. His client list is as extensive as it is diverse. Whether working b2b or consumer, Bob never fails to craft unique and visually distinctive looks for each and every client. It's a personal philosophy to marketing which Bob refers to as "visual branding," a belief that the consistency and constancy of what you look like is just as important as what you say. His clients have included Volvo Truck, McDonald's, Honda, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of NC, Holland Grill, Triumph Boats, John Deere and the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes.

