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Back to the Future: How to Reinvent Your Brand Story

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via SEOBOOK.COM

Storytelling is a hot business trend for a reason. In the face of growing cynicism and distrust, stores are how people decide if they belong in your tribe. Going all the way back to ancient [Sumeria](#), branding is how merchant houses distinguished their wares and allowed them to start trading goods beyond the local marketplace. The brand story is what allows your message to travel.

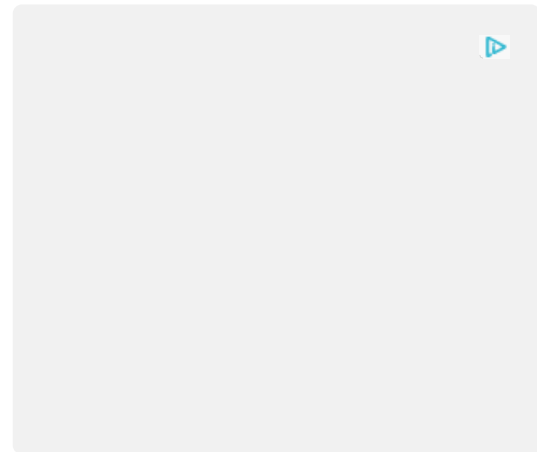
Today, your brand story is how you distinguish yourself from the storm of information overload and attention deficit. Notice how some brands give you the warm fuzzies? Apple, Zappos, Levi's. You've got an almost irrational relationship with certain brands. Why?

In part, it's how the brand makes you feel and the story you buy into for yourself. The key to a powerful brand is an epic backstory that explains how the brand came into the world.

If you're in the midst of a brand reinvention, revisit your origins and calibrate the story to support your path forward. Storytelling is how people locate themselves in your message, especially during times of reinvention.

Reinventing Your Brand Story

Every brand has a founding myth, an epic narrative that explains how it came to be in this world. It's important because it explains *why* you do what you do. *If you're clear about the end product you're trying to create, you can use the*



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The **Young Entrepreneur Council** (YEC) is an invite-only nonprofit organization comprised of the world's most promising young entrepreneurs. The

past to help tell the story of your future.

Here are 5 key questions that will help you get going:

1. **What is the source of your materials or ingredients?** Is it exotic (cacao from a private plantation in the Amazon or Scandinavia)? Plebeian (made from ordinary tap water)? Totally unexpected? Ferret out the unusual or interesting bits and make them key items in your reinvention. [Aveda](#) is a great example!
2. **Who's in your brand's cast of characters?** Whether they are actual employees, co-conspirators or incidentals, who has been part of the story? Did you accidentally run into Elvis (again!) and suddenly, a new Elvis Sightings site was born? Did that Sharon Stone movie clue you in to your big idea? Or was it you and your little brother, mucking around in the swamp? Gary Erickson, an avid cyclist, was 40 years old and still living in the garage of his parent's house. He was out on 175-mile ride with his friend Jay when he realized how much he hated the taste of nutritional sports bars. In his mother's kitchen, he perfected the ideal nutritional bar and named the [Clif Bar](#) after his father. After all, he *was* still living at home.
3. **What is your brand's heritage or pedigree?** From art galleries to Etsy, people want to know how a particular item or brand is grounded in history. Where was it created? Who has owned it before you? [Moleskine](#) establishes a lineage by being "the legendary notebook used by artists and thinkers over the past two centuries: among them Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway, and Bruce Chatwin." What events and people anchor you in history?
4. **What quest have you been on?** This one is about the mission, or the underlying purpose or reason for being for your brand. What "call to arms" did you hear and respond to? [Apple](#) may have started as two guys building a computer in a garage in the 1970s, but eventually their quest was to create and sell the most elegant, intuitive electronic devices ever. Which is why you just bought your grandparents an iPad, and every school wants a Mac lab.
5. **Can you give people a glimpse the shadow?** Everything hasn't always been peaches and cream for you or your brand. Letting people in on your struggle – even admitting your failures – lets people know you're more human than cyborg. Scott Harrison was a burned-out nightclub promoter in New York who traveled to Africa and found a cause to champion. In just 5 years, his brand [charity:water](#) has raised more than \$40 million and funded 6,185 water projects.

All good things may come to an end, but in that end, there is a beginning (of a new story). The key is to align a great backstory for whatever you're doing next. People don't buy your product, your solution or your idea – what they buy is the story that's attached to it. Narrative is the basic unit of meaning-making. No matter what twists and turns you experience along the way, it can all help you tell a story that people resonate with.

And regardless of how you do it, here's the end goal: tell a story that people can identify with as their own. If you can do that, then the need to persuade, convince or sell them on anything disappears.



Courtesy of YEC

[Michael Margolis](#) is the president of [Get Storied](#), a global education platform for marketers, change-makers, and creators. Through e-courses and workshops, Michael has taught thousands to use storytelling for better business and social impact. He also keynotes and speaks frequently around the world with appearances at [BlogWorld](#), [Etsy](#), [NASA](#), [SXSW](#), and [Zappos](#). Join him on April 16-20 for the [Reinvention](#)

[Summit 2: Storytelling's Biggest Online Conference](#), with 20 sessions on transformation storytelling.

YEC leads [#FixYoungAmerica](#), a solutions-based movement that aims to end youth unemployment and put young Americans back to work.

The author is a Forbes contributor. The opinions expressed are those of the writer.

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