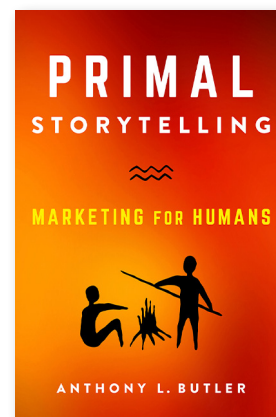


Primal Storytelling

Marketing for Humans

by **Anthony Butler**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

“I woke up to my mother’s screams.” These are the first words of Anthony Butler’s book *From a fire in Montana to the streets of Fallujah, Iraq, to the war for attention among 1.5 billion websites globally, Butler proves time and again that stories are the most effective way to capture human attention. Two years into running his own digital agency, Butler was stunned when a new client left. The work was good, they said, but the results weren’t consistent. In **Primal Storytelling: Marketing for Humans**, Anthony Butler, founder of the digital marketing agency Can-Do Ideas, set out to fix the system. This book contains his design for a reliable digital marketing system that would always come out ahead.*

The result is a cutting-edge approach that combines evolutionary psychology with age-old story techniques to create high-performing digital content that cuts through the noise. Whether you’re competing for local foot traffic or global downloads, *Primal Storytelling* will help you forge authentic connections with your audience, improve your brand performance in social media and SEO, and supercharge your content results.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How marketers can influence behavior.
- The components that make a great story.
- A content creation framework that stands the test of time.
- An easy-to-follow process for creating high-performing content.
- Questions to ask yourself as you create a Primal Storytelling program for your company.

Introduction

Decisions are an emotional process. Many brands are struggling to cut through the noise and get noticed. They publish information on their website and social channels, but they fail to connect on a human level.

Primal Storytelling is the culmination of years of work and study of a single question, “How can marketers influence behavior?” It is equally applicable in business to business (B-B), business to consumer (B-C), and even for account-based marketers. It is based on a deep understanding of human nature and storytelling, neither of which has changed in thousands of years.

The book you’re reading contains the entire Primal Storytelling system as well as examples on how to use it and questions to ask yourself as you create your own Primal Storytelling program for your company.

The Brand Dilemma

Marketing communication follows technology, but the humans whom marketers are communicating with do not intrinsically change over time. The amount of data on the internet is accelerating and it will become more difficult for brands to be noticed online. By paying close attention to the primal urges and emotions of their Tribe and utilizing age-old story structures, brands will improve their ability to connect and influence audiences. The Primal Storytelling formula is a tool for creating high-performing content.

Caution: Guard against crossing the line between influence and manipulation. Although it may produce positive short-term results, the long-term consequences are dire. Honesty and authenticity are not just buzzwords. They are cornerstone virtues of marketers with a long view of their market.

Key Questions: What stories does our brand already tell well, and how might we improve them by utilizing primal urges and emotions? Of the four stories outlined in this chapter, which story is most important for our brand to develop and tell? What do we already know about our Tribe that will help us identify their driving primal urges and emotions?

Tribes

It is possible to strategically build a Tribe from the ground up. By understanding the social dynamics that drive individuals, marketers can focus their efforts on creating tribal

customs, language, clothing, and other social indicators that help attract and retain members.

The natural tendency of Tribes is toward growth, and to recognize the reluctance of individuals to depart from a group and lose their social ties. These two ideas can be baked into the marketing of a business.

Opportunities to build social ties among members and the leadership team should be part of the retention and growth strategy. Social ties will help the group maintain cohesion over time, and they will also attract new members who share the core interests and traits of the group. Once you begin to understand the commonalities of a group, you can use them to identify potential new members. What are the internal reasons they want to belong?

One way to help strengthen socialization within a group is to establish a hierarchy. By elevating a well-deserving member to a leadership position, that person’s social tie within the group will strengthen, and many other members will covet the position, the recognition, and the tribal standing that comes with it. The power of social standing cannot be underestimated.

Primal Urges

Incorporating spirituality without the trappings of doctrine or rituals of any individual religion can be a powerful way to connect with a group (unless you are targeting a particular religious group, of course). Spirituality taps into individual longing for a connection with the sublime. Very often, beautiful images, uplifting music, or even prose can evoke spiritual wonder in individuals. Another often-used tactic is to incorporate size disparity by conveying the vastness of the world and even the universe and how we are just a small part of it.

Many brands that are marketing for a destination harness the spiritual urge. They employ beautiful pictures of nature, moving water, and sunshine to convey a back-to-nature feel. They tap into the image of a harried person who just wants to get away from the pace of modern life and get back to their roots of a more serene and spiritual life.

Primal Emotions

Some feelings, such as relief, guilt, shame, horror, nostalgia, and awe, are not fully recognized by the scientific community as emotions, but they are still useful to content creators. The purpose of learning about emotions is not to definitively

detail every possible emotion or deeply understand every nuance. What we are trying to do is understand what emotions are generally a driving force into human behavior and use them while crafting stories as a way of not only holding the readers' interest but to connect with them on a human level.

The stories that have stood the test of time tap into primal instincts. They don't just convey information; they connect with readers on an emotional level. They use our shared humanity to say something memorable.

Whether we are aware of them or not, primal emotions are present and prompt us toward action. Human instinct has not been dampened by our technology. We still respond to our primal emotions and the triggers that precede our emotions.

When creating something new, something unique, it is helpful to ask the questions, "How does this emotionally connect with the audience?" and "What emotions will connect with the readers?" "What about this evokes one or more primal emotions and fascination triggers?"

The Storytellers

Stories have the power to influence and change perception and culture. If you want to influence behavior in a certain direction, first look at the current narratives around that behavior, and begin to think deeply about how to change the stories people are telling.

Caution: Like with the exercise of any type of power, there is a fine line between good intentions and destructive behavior. Avoid trying to manipulate the market with your stories. Manipulation can be effective in the short term, but long term it is a losing strategy.

Key Questions: What stories does your brand currently tell that define its place in the market? What is the story your brand would like everyone in your target audience to know? Which of Robert Cialdini's six principles should your brand focus on to tell your story more effectively?

Brand Stories and Their Archetypes

Celebrity and status are powerful marketing forces. If you can build even a niche celebrity within a small Tribe, such as within an association or industry, the dividends are large. You don't need to be recognizable to the entire world, just to your target audience. If it is not practical to build your own celebrity, then buying a celebrity endorsement can be

a powerful tool in the marketing kit bag. And the celebrity doesn't have to be an A-lister. There are local brands that successfully hire well-known individuals in their area to speak for them and they will often produce fantastic results. It is one of the reasons politicians so often seek the endorsement of local officials and local groups. The status and "celebrity" of those groups transfers to them.

Caution: Seeking celebrity through anything but authentic means can and will backfire. Negative social media attention can move like lightning and is merciless. It can be very difficult to reverse the reputational damage of fake stories. If you are going to seek the spotlight, be as authentic as possible.

Nonfiction Plots for Brands

Curiosity is a powerful driving force in the human psyche, and if used well, it will capture the attention of your audience and help them connect with your brand.

Caution: Curiosity and "secrets" are often overhyped. If they are used as clickbait and do not deliver any type of real insight, they can push the audience away. The point of using curiosity is to attract the audience to the brand. It is important to deliver real value.

An outrage-inducing headline may be fine, but the content has to deliver value to match. It is non-negotiable. You are trying to build a relationship with someone you just met. If you leave them feeling tricked, it will be difficult for them to trust you and believe anything else you say. Imagine being caught in a lie on a first date. How likely is a second date? Not likely at all.

The Art of Marketing

Planning is a shortcut to success. A content marketing program with a detailed action plan will almost always outperform a haphazard program that depends on last-minute, "just get it out the door" thinking. Don't be afraid to produce long-form content that covers a subject in-depth. If it is well done, informative, and targeted, it will have a great chance of performing better than most short pieces.

Caution: Don't overthink it. Nothing will be perfect. Make a plan and start executing on it. Don't wait for inspiration or a lot more data. Gather just enough data to get started and begin. You can make changes as you move forward.

Key Questions: Am I holding back from publishing my best work because I am afraid of being judged? Does our content

marketing plan include at least ninety days of content? Is my content short because I think short content outperforms long content, or is it short because that fits the message?

Primal Storytelling in Action

To create your plan, follow the formula in order. Begin with defining the Tribe. Review the process described in Chapter 2 for gathering demographic and psychographic data on your target Tribe and implement it. It is the foundation for everything else that follows. If you do a good job gaining an understanding of your Tribe, everything that follows is easier. I included some Tribe examples at the end of this section. Use them as a model to create your own Tribes.

Next, choose two to three Primal Urges and a couple of emotions to focus on for your preliminary campaigns. Ask yourself one guiding question, “How do I want the customer to feel when they buy?” Your goal is to evoke this emotion with your content over time. You are going to weave these emotions and urges into your stories and as they are consumed. If done well, they will help connect your brand with the Tribe.

Finally, you will begin to create storylines by choosing a narrative voice, archetypes, and at least one plot structure to get started. Keep in mind, at the beginning of the program most everything is an experiment to help you understand what will connect most strongly with your Tribe.

Most brands can benefit from all four story types: origin, vision, transformation, and value. But for some brands, the origin and vision stories are too difficult to get through company bureaucracy or don't make sense for the situation. In those cases, focus on the transformation and value stories.

The transformation stories will help the Tribe understand what it is you do for them and what it looks like before, during, and after working with your brand, and it will help them connect with you and your sales process.

Conclusion

The future of marketing is not hard to predict. The rate of technological change will continue to increase. Virtual reality, augmented reality, and likely an emergent technology that hasn't been invented yet, will surface, and alter some of the ways content can be accessed online and in the home.

What won't change are the people themselves. They will still love stories like they always have. Their primal urges and emotions will also be the same, and they will continue to buy emotionally and then attempt to justify their decisions with logic. The structure of stories and how they connect with the human language will also remain constant.

One thing will change, and the marketing world is just now starting to wake up to this new reality. Audiences will grow increasingly immune to brand advertising that is blatantly promotional and has no connecting story or message. Brands that don't adapt to this new reality will face becoming ignored and irrelevant.

Brand storytellers who understand the primal nature of their audiences and are experts in the structure of stories will be in hot demand for many years to come.



Anthony Butler is the founder of the digital marketing agency Can-Do Ideas and the creator of the Primal Storytelling content system. A highly regarded expert in brand storytelling and digital marketing, Anthony graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point and the US Army Ranger School. He is a combat veteran and commanded an infantry company in Iraq during the invasion of Baghdad. He is also a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu blackbelt and currently resides in Montana with his wife and two sons.

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