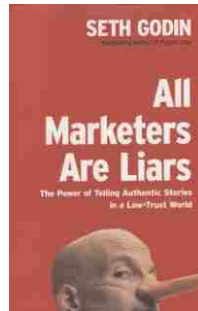




All Marketers Are Liars

The Power of Telling Authentic Stories in a Low-Trust World



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■ About the Author



Seth Godin

SETH GODIN is a bestselling author, entrepreneur and agent of change. Godin is author of six books that have been bestsellers around the world and changed the way people think about marketing, change and work.

Permission Marketing was an Amazon.com Top 100 bestseller for a year, a *Fortune* Best Business Book and it spent four months on the *Business Week* bestseller list. *Unleashing the Ideavirus* is the most popular ebook ever written. *The Big Red Fez* was the #1 ebook (worldwide) on Amazon for almost a year before it was published in paperback in 2002. *Survival is Not Enough* has made bestseller lists in Germany, the UK and the United States. *Purple Cow* was a *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestseller. *Free Prize Inside* was an Amazon Top 50 bestseller and a *New York Times* business bestseller. Just out, *All Marketers are Liars* has already made the Amazon Top 100 and has inspired its own blog.

Seth is a renowned speaker as well. He was recently chosen as one of *21 Speakers for the Next Century* by *Successful Meetings* and is consistently rated among the very best speakers by the audiences he addresses.

For more information on Seth Godin, visit www.SethGodin.com. To know more about the difference between commodity marketing and storytelling, visit www.AllMarketersAreLiars.com

■ The Big Idea

What sells a product these days? Is it price point? Is it the buyer's need? Are product features and benefits the deciding factors for customers to buy? Seth Godin says it is none of the above.

Consumers buy products when they fall for a marketer's story. A successful marketer has to be able to come up with stories that consumers want to believe. The stories should fit a consumer's worldview and encourage people to talk to others about it. When a marketer's story is authentic and remarkable, the product will sell.

■ Highlights

Telling stories is an age-old tradition used by people to make sense of natural phenomena such as seasons and sicknesses. Marketers did not invent it, but they have used it for years to sell products, services, and ideas.

Godin suggests that marketers and consumers are conspirators in this lying, or story-telling business. Marketers tell the stories. The consumers, who lie to themselves, buy the stories.

What makes a great story? Great stories should:

- be true.
- make a promise.
- be trusted.
- be subtle.
- happen fast.
- not appeal to logic, but often appeal to our senses.
- rarely be aimed at everyone.
- never contradict themselves.
- agree with our worldview.

Marketers Also Have Responsibilities.

Since marketing is about spreading ideas, they have the power to affect people and even whole societies in both positive and negative ways. Storytelling, in the hands of the marketer, should always recognize its responsibility to the society.

Marketing, Then and Now

It used to be that marketers sold commodities that people needed by promoting practical and objective matters such as price and product features. These days, marketers answer more to consumers' wants than needs. Wants are things they covet for emotional reasons such as \$125 Pumas or an \$80,000 Porsche Cayenne.

In the Golden Age of television, marketing was a matter of buying 60 seconds of airtime, and using that time to tell a simple story to create demand. It is not that simple now. Marketing, albeit still a very powerful tool, has become more complex and challenging.

■ Step 1: Their Worldview and Frames Got There Before You Did

A person's worldview is his set of beliefs, values, rules, assumptions, and biases influenced by one's family, friends, affiliations and experiences. As each combination of influences is unique to each individual, there are many diverse worldviews out there.

What Do Worldviews Affect?

1. The consumer's attention - will he notice or ignore you?
2. The consumer's bias - his points of view
3. The vernacular - the choice of media, the tone of voice, the words used, colors, images, typefaces that influence the consumers' attention and bias.

The Power of Frames

Marketing is not about changing these worldviews. It is about using the appropriate frames. A frame is an element (e.g. words, images, interactions) of a marketer's story that is aligned with a consumer's worldview. A successful frame makes your consumer buy the idea, product, or service you are selling.

In Godin's words, "Different worldview, different frames."

The marketer's job is to find a worldview that is already existing and providing the story with frames that match that worldview. Marketing stories such as those of Starbucks, Fast Company, and Porsche Cayenne, are most successful when they address a previously untapped consumer worldview.

When a story, with its appropriate frames, successfully latches into the consciousness of the consumer, that consumer will tell others the same story. These other consumers will, in turn, tell others. These consumers who talk and exchange stories may be collectively called communities.

Communities' Worldviews

People share common worldviews. Some are environmentalists, tea-drinkers, Nascar enthusiasts, soccer moms, UFO buffs, conspiracy theorists, etc. It does not mean, however, that a community will all have the same worldview.

Godin substitutes the word "community" for "market." People within a community may share some common worldviews, may have some similar but not identical worldviews, and may also have worldviews that are different from each other. What makes them a community is that they talk to and influence each other.

The Most Important Worldview

They are called thought leaders, early adopters, even sneezers. These are people who not only buy your stories; they are also compelled to tell others. These people yield the most success to the stories marketers tell.

■ **Step 2: People Notice Only the New and Then Make a Guess**

By nature, people only notice changes. This point is illustrated by using the example of the frog, which is programmed to catch food by noticing only moving flies. Consumers, similarly, only notice something when it breaks the status quo.

The usual steps we follow are:

1. Looking for causation or coincidence.
2. Making predictions based on the causation.
3. Relying on cognitive dissonance.

■ **Step 3: First Impressions Start the Story**

Consumers, more often, make snap decisions based on little or no data, then stick to those decisions. This ability was inherited from our ancestors who had to make quick judgments for survival. This is the phenomenon at work in job interviews, speed dating, and selecting politicians.

This phenomenon of First Impression is an important factor for marketers. This means that once a consumer believes something, it will be hard to change that worldview.

The challenge is being able to tell when the first impression occurs. The first point of contact is not only during the TV or radio commercial. It can be through a telephone call response, a good location, a cool signage, or interaction with a customer service provider. Do wrong in any of these areas, and your story will flop. This is why authenticity, consistency, and coherence to the story are important.

■ Step 4: Great Marketers Tell Stories We Believe

The complicity between marketers and consumers is about consumers wanting to believe the lies they themselves created in their minds. Believing the lies makes them feel good about the products they desire, the ideas they buy, and even the candidates they vote for.

In a developed country, the tug between needs and wants usually favor wants. This is why some consumers buy bottled water even if potable tap water is available. It's a want, not a need.

■ Examples: Stories Framed Around Worldviews

The case of Banquet Crock Pot Classics is a classic example of using the right frame to address a worldview. The worldview in this case is the belief that home cooked meals, those that are slow-cooked, are better for our families. Even though the facts of the product would belie their claim, the story is one that compensated the guilt felt by busy Americans who relied on microwave dinners.

Subtlety Matters

Because of the worldview that marketers are liars, it is important not to brag. It is better to hint to be noticed. Factual proof is just not enough. You have to enable your consumer to *discover*

Expectations are the Engine of Perceptions

When people tell themselves stories, they build up expectations. This applies to their expectations that:

Ralph Lauren outlet stores' bargains are worth the drive.

The \$300 deluxe sushi at Masa in New York is truly the world's best.

The stereo speakers being sold from the U-Haul truck by Harvard students were really stolen and are therefore being sold dirt-cheap.

Organic foods are really healthier and buying them is one's contribution to saving the earth.

Never mind the facts. Consumers need to buy the lies.

■ Important Aside: Fibs and Frauds

Storytelling, however, is only effective when the consumer truly realizes the benefits she wanted from the product in the first place. When those \$125 Puma sneakers really make her look and feel cool, when the wine glasses really make her think that wine tastes better in them, then the storytelling works.

The stories that Mercedes marketers tell are authenticated by actual consumer experiences, because the Mercedes manufacturers match the stories with truly premium detailing.

Frauds are Inauthentic

Cadillac, Nestlé, Phillip Morris, and McDonald's are brands that told stories but did not deliver the promise. That their lies ended in tragic deaths and health problems is confirmation that storytelling also entails responsibility.

The stories we tell should not result in consumers regretting believing the story. Or else, consumers will become skeptical and angry. Trust, once lost, would be difficult and would take a long time to regain.

■ Step 5: Marketers with Authenticity Thrive

Godin refers to an earlier book he penned; it's about the purple cow. A purple cow is a product or experience that is so noteworthy that people enthusiastically and voluntarily endorse it. He says that every marketer's goal is to have a purple cow. Hype alone, when not backed by truly remarkable goods and services, does not make a purple cow.

Every Picture Tells a Story

Stories only magnify, not replace purple cows.

The Toyota Prius, for instance, tells a story to the consumer who wants to feel and look smart. By developing a smart key, the car engineers ensured that the story is integrated into the car. The story works.

The winning proposition is to tell a story, and to ensure that every point of contact with the consumer supports that story. A restaurant, for example, should authenticate its story through its menu, staff, and décor. Godin contrasts two real restaurants:

The New York hangout, The Soy Luck Club, is made authentic by an owner who reaches out to communities of people who share her worldview.

Cold Stone Creamery also had a story that was authenticated by its first few stores. As it expands into franchises, however, the authenticity is being watered down by lowly paid employees who do not believe the story.

It's the Combination of Senses that Convinces the Skeptical Consumer

Marketing is an art form that convinces by appealing not just to one sense, but also to multiple senses. Godin likened the story we tell to a symphony, a combination of many notes. He suggests that we look at marketing success stories from different industries to find models for the way we tell and authenticate our stories.

Here are some possible promises that your story should highlight:

- A shortcut.
- A miracle.
- Money.
- Social success.
- Safety.
- Ego.
- Fun.
- Pleasure.
- Belonging.

■ **Competing in a Lying World**

The way to compete is to tell a different story from the one being told by your competitor. If your competitor's story is a lower price, you will wage a losing battle using this criterion. It would be better to communicate a different story (e.g. convenience, speed, health).

Be the First to Tell that Story.

In the case of the Kerry versus Bush presidential election, it was Bush's party who first made the flip-flop story against Kerry. Kerry was beat. He tried to save his campaign by renaming flip-flopping as flexibility, but it was too late. The story had already been told.

Finding the Right Community

The challenge is finding a community who will believe your story. The 7-Up UnCola campaign, for example, was about finding a community of carbonated drink drinkers who have the worldview of needing an alternative to Coke and Pepsi.

Splitting the Community

Sometimes, your competitor has gone in ahead of you telling a believable story to a certain community. When this happens, it is now necessary to split the community.

You must find a niche within the community and present them a story that is different from the one they previously heard. This was the case for Masa, who targeted the community of sushi diners, and successfully sold the story of a “deluxe” and “best in the world” sushi category.

The Other Way to Grow

An alternative to splitting the community is to present a different story to address an additional worldview. For the bike-buying community, the worldview has always been on speed as the most important factor for buying a bike. American bike company Trek, targeted the same community and framed their campaign to a new worldview on comfort. The baby boomers bought the idea.

■ Remarkable? The Cow Has Not Left the Building

Telling a story is not about inventing a story. The cow needs to be remarkable to be considered purple. It has to be so remarkable that its buyers are compelled to tell other people about it.

It's not about faking it. It's about living, believing, telling, and staying true to your story.

Going to the Edges: Getting People to Vote

Storytelling has a high chance of success when the story is told to people on the edges, not the ones in the middle of the curve. Go for what is risky and controversial as opposed to safe and boring. The concept of cognitive dissonance works in getting people's attention.

When Storytelling Doesn't Seem to Work Very Well

Godin shuns the middle ground citing:

Small - When one does not have enough time to communicate all the facts, a little story can get the attention.

Big - The big story, the one that seems exaggerated or over the top, drives the story that one's product, service, or idea is the best or the biggest.

Medium - Do not expect a home run when your story itself creates the boundaries. Your story has to break status quo.

■ Bonus Part 1: Master Storytellers and Those who are Still Trying

Storytelling is not a one-shot thing. Once you start telling it, you have to continue telling it. Jackson Diner succeeded in attracting foodies to sample Indian food. The story spread and made its way to *Zagat Survey Restaurant Guide*, and now the diner is crowded.

Master Storytellers

Here are some master storytellers:

The Nissan Armada and the Mitsubishi Montero - utilizes the "Look how powerful my SUV looks" story by using exaggeratedly big flared wheel wells.

Avalon Organic Botanicals - continues to tell the story that organic products are good for the planet.

Fox News - tells the "fair and balanced" story to an audience that has the worldview that they are disrespected by other established media.

Sirius Satellite Radio - could have capitalized on its excellent technological features, but instead focused the story on Howard Stern, and won both Howard Stern fans and non-fans.

Blue Nile - With the story that "you are smart enough to buy the right diamond at the right price," Blue Nile sales of engagement rings surpassed that of Tiffany's.

Wilco - This rock band won a community of music enthusiasts by giving free music at Napster, shattering the worldview that Napster consumers are just out to steal music. The alternative worldview they presented is that Napster fans are true blue music lovers. The move had a positive result on Wilco's record sales.

Old Media

The Goodyear Blimp continues to tell a story, but it is an outdated story using a now non-remarkable medium. The story of safety, on the other hand, makes Michelin buyers feel good.

■ **Bonus Part 2: Advanced Riffs**

Godin ends the book with these relevant concepts:

Fertility

An ideavirus is what makes successful marketing stories. It is one that is spread from one consumer to another. Finding that segment of the population that will spread your ideavirus is vital to successful storytelling.

Changing Worldviews

To quote, "Nothing is static. Nothing stays the way it was." Note that early adopters may be the first to buy your product, but they will also be the first to drop it for a new story. The marketplace is in constant motion. People's worldviews change. Your product, service, or idea can change the market too.

Old Stories Die Hard

The story of cotton as the natural and healthy option, for example, is a stubborn worldview. The fact that cotton can be harmful to the consumer, as well as the environment, cannot easily alter this worldview.

Explaining Failure

There are four reasons for new releases to fail:

1. No one noticed it.
2. People noticed but decided they didn't want to try it.
3. People tried it but decided not to keep using it.
4. People liked it but didn't tell their friends.

A good story finds ways for the above four not to happen. Marketing is a complex task. Your purple cow has to be remarkable, and you have to be ready to tell, retell, or even change, your story to get your message out there.

Oxymorons

Conflicting images can work both ways. It can grab attention and succeed. Or it can create conflict that makes your story unbelievable. For Starbucks' Soy Decaf Latte, it worked by addressing the worldview of a small group who holds 2 conflicting worldviews.

The Worldview of Fear

Fear is irrational yet common. The challenge is to come up with stories framed around this worldview by saying “I can protect you.”

It's the Story. Not the facts.

In today's marketing world, we are not dealing with reason. Rather, we are dealing with emotions. Marketing is not the business of sharing facts, but the business of telling a story.