

It's No Longer Your Story: Why Marketing Needs A Dramatic Makeover



Lior Arussy



To win customers in this new world, brands have to learn to become part of the customer's story, rather than the other way around. Here are some steps to become a story inspirer.

When I notified them that they compete with drug dealers and not with other teams in the UK premier league, they almost choked. The leaders of these famed football clubs were convinced that I lost my mind.

"Look at the bright side, you are tapping into a much larger customer budget," I said.

The football club's story was focused on its games, players, brand and fans. It was their story. The fans however experienced the story differently. They incorporated it into *their* story. The customer segment of teenagers was using the club as an alternative for escapism or meaning, something they alternatively could obtain from using drugs, playing video games or watching movies. The club's story was very self-centric and brand oriented. The fan's story was personal and the club was serving as one component in their overall story.

For years marketing professionals focused their efforts on creatively crafting authentic brand stories and inviting their customers to join that story. They were the storytellers that allured customers to be attracted to the brand and ultimately purchase its products and services. Utilizing a myriad of methods, they targeted the right audiences to join their brand story journey. Marketing combined both the art of creativity and story creation with the science of reaching out to the right customers through various channels ranging from TV and print to digital and social media.



Over the years, in the name of convenience and cost efficiencies, companies have transferred more power to customers. As discussed in my article "[Gen AI Adoption? Focus On the Customer](#)," the customer is reaching a tipping point with Generative AI in which they're empowered to know and do everything and no longer need the help of other brands in the process. It is the emergence of the One and Only customer. The one that is infinitely unique and demands to be treated accordingly. Combine this with growing power in the form of ad blockers, GDPR regulation and privacy concerns, and customers are hiding better than ever from the eyes

of marketing professionals. They are no longer willing to participate in the old marketing game. The art part of marketing is being challenged by advertising created by AI while marketing automation and personalization challenges the scientific aspect of marketing and automates it. Throw in influencer's marketing, which is estimated to reach \$139 billion by 2030, and the role of marketing is being called into a serious question.

Writing A New Story – Not Yours

In order to stay relevant, marketing professionals need to rewrite the marketing story. Not tweak it or adapt it but rewrite it completely. The confluence of shift in customer power, and the digitization of classic marketing functions calls for rethinking the story they tell, to their customers and to themselves.

The future story of every brand is no longer brand centric but rather customer centric. It is no longer an invitation to join the brand story but rather an invitation to incorporate the brand into the customer story. It is no longer treating the customer as a passive recipient of brilliant creative, products and experience manufactured by you. It is a recognition that the customer is the creator of their life stories and you, if selected, will have the privilege of providing the brushes and colors to paint their life picture. In short, your brand is no longer the destination, it is the tool on the journey. The destination is infinitely unique and individual.

Realizing that the new storytellers are the customers, what is therefore the role of marketing? They are the story enablers. They are the story accelerators. They are the providers of tools and ideas that inspire. The customer, however, is the ultimate teller. It is her story.

The implications for a brand are massive. The brand does not stand for one idea; it will be presented in ultimately infinite versions by millions of customers.

Coca-Cola's brand organizing idea was Open Happiness. From the company that invented the secret formula in 1886, we were told that drinking their dark fizzy liquid would bring happiness to our lives, even if only for a few minutes. With the introduction of Coca Cola's Freestyle, we are experiencing a radical shift in the brand's promise. The endless possibilities of creating fizzy drinks by customers using the Freestyle machines, Coca Cola is relenting to become an enabler and an inspirer of possibilities. But the end product is unique to each customer. Coca-Cola recognized the shift in power, assumed the role of story inspirer and let go of the role of a storyteller.

Transforming into a Story Inspirer

To become a true story inspirer there are several steps that every marketing professional ought to consider.

- The attitude – assuming the role of a marketing inspirer is accepting the newly acquired power of the customer. Although it has been a gradual process, the end result is here—and it is transformative. We need to approach the customer with respect and understand that they call the shots.
- The value – we no longer sell final products but rather components in a bigger story. The value proposition needs to recognize that and adapt itself to flexibility; each customer will have their own preferences. Some would want the full packages while another would prefer just some pieces.
- The business model – the one-price-fits-all game is over. You may need to adapt the business model and pricing to fit customer stories. Some would want a subscription while others would prefer a single purchase. Some would ask for a premium version, others a lower-end solution. Be ready to accommodate.
- The language – marketers tend to speak to customers as they are recipients of the brand's wisdom and greatness. The language shifts fast. They are the creators; theirs is the ultimate power and decisions. Respect it and adapt accordingly.
- The terms – business terms will vary based on your customers preferences as well. While you need to protect yourself, the usage of your brand is going to be diverse and different and will require rethinking of your legal coverage and liability protection.
- The frequency – they are not targeting anymore. A customer's choice of channels and frequency will have to reign in this relationship.

These are some of the direct and immediate implications of moving from being the storytellers to becoming the story inspirers.

Customers also are crafting their unique stories on social media and on personal platforms. Their relationships to brands are radically different. Being relevant to them means rewriting the role and impact of marketing from the customer perspective. Marketing is no longer a clever mouse trap wrapped in creativity. The profession has to evolve into an authentic dialogue provider to discover needs and aspirations and inspire them with an invitation for the customer to craft their story. Being part of that story will be the privilege of the brand.

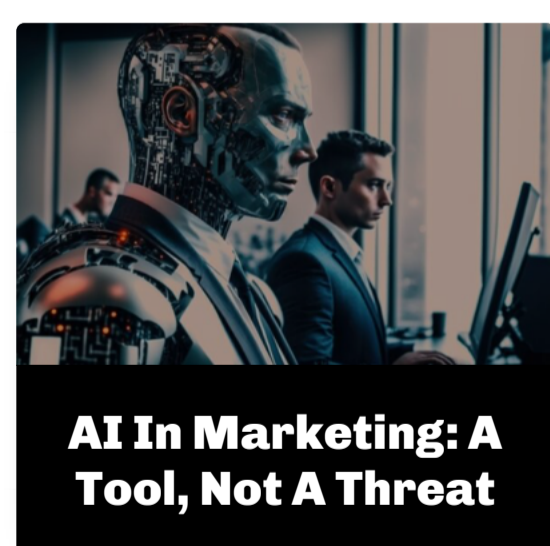
Print Article



Lior Arussy

Lior Arussy is a founder of Strativity, a global customer and business transformation firm and the author of [Next is Now!](#) (Simon and Schuster 2018). Follow Lior [@LiorStrativity](#).

MORE LIKE THIS



SUBSCRIBE TO THE CEO BRIEFING

In our weekly newsletter, get insight into the biggest issues facing CEOs, along with strategic ideas, solutions, and interviews.

First Last
 Email

GET IN TOUCH

✉ contact@chiefexecutive.net
 📞 203.930.2700



Chief Executive Group exists to improve the performance of U.S. CEOs, senior executives and public-company directors, helping you grow your companies, build your communities and strengthen society. Learn more at [chiefexecutivegroup.com](#).

Publications

Chief Executive
 Corporate Board Member
 StrategicCFO360
 StrategicCIO360
 StrategicCHRO360

Communities

Chief Executive Network
 Senior Executive Network
 Chief Executive CONNECT
 CFO Leadership Council
 Corporate Board Member Network
 ACCD

About

Leadership
 Careers
 Partnerships
 Contact Us

