Marketing Is Not About the Media... It's About the Message, and We're Still Getting It Wrong!

Pam Cox Otto, Ph.D.
Founder & CEO, Interact Communications
Interact Communications at a Glance

- Founded in 1996
- Office locations in Wisconsin & California
- 23 years in 2-year college marketing

Experts in the diverse student experience, from marketing to graduation

- 425+ community and technical college clients combined experience

In-house research-driven team specializing in industry customized products

- Worked with 200+ colleges in 36 states
Pamela Cox-Otto
Ph.D.

5th generation Californian

35 years working with community colleges

Ph.D. in communications

UofM

Reporter

KVIQ
KXTV
KCBS
60 Minutes

Faculty &

Hamline
Augsburg
Winona State

U of M
St. John’s
St. Ben’s

Founder & CEO

Redwoods
Hartnell
Rio Hondo

community colleges
First.....
Why Is Marshall McLuhan Wrong?
He Said: The Medium IS the Message.

- The medium is more important than the message.
- The medium impacts society because it is the medium...not because of what you see or hear on it.
- The medium itself is the content, meaning, and character.
Why Is This Not True?

- He saw media as “MASS” media (one to many)

- The media controlled who and what the “one” was

- He never envisioned this many media or this many people generating content

- He never envisioned the algorithms that control what we see or hear
Does It Matter What the Medium Is?

• Of course…

• Facebook is a devolving cesspool with photos of your grandchildren and cats. Lots of cats.
• Instagram is “the picture is worth a thousand words”
• YouTube is the video repository
• TikTok is the modern “let’s put on a show”
• Snapchat is the “life is ephemeral” media
We can now self-censor by the media we choose

Within that media, the content is generated by the users and advertisers...

The media no longer creates...

They manage the chaos for money using HIDDEN algorithms

We have unfiltered access to undreamed-of channels to deliver messages....
So What Matters Is Content…

Not Content Like Traditional Media
The Content That Matters Is...

Storytelling
Storytelling Is Not Simply…

• An inverted pyramid with more punch

• Or the recounting of a tale in chronological (or some other) order

• Or some story of past or present glory or accomplishment

• Or the 5 “W’s” and an “H”

That is old media, old-school, and wrong.
Storytelling Is…

• Can be anything… from an ad to a sign on campus

• An implied story of THEIR success or achievement (Not ours)

• An orientation which tells students who they are and how they fit

• The cohesion of all your messaging into a narrative that creates synchronicity between who you think you are…and how they see you
Think of it This Way....

COLLEGE META STORY

Every Single Umbrella Tells a Story...

Some Good, Some Not
Most NOT in Sync

- Signage
- Email & Database
- Website
- Facilities
- Print & Mailings
- All Your SM

- Faculty/Staff Interaction
- Recruiters

- Media Relations
- Influencer Relations
- Students Tell

- SM Sharing & Listening

- Traditional Media
- Digital Ads
- Sponsored Google & SM
- GeoFencing
So What Matters Is Storytelling…

…That Makes Our Brains Light Up and SYNC UP.

And Now, Thanks to Neuroscience…

We Know What Works.
I Can’t Cover It All…

Mechanisms of storytelling

Elements of storytelling that make the brain light up (and not)
Storytelling Mechanisms In Our Brains
Here’s What You Need to Know….

• Our brains love dopamine…

• It’s our personal brain drug that is triggered when we feel strong emotions
  
  • Euphoria
  • Anger
  • Fear
  • Hope
  • Love
  • Gratitude

Tap into these…and people “get” it

Don’t tap into them…and it’s flat
• We are HARDWIRED to like a story

• Before there was writing...there was storytelling

• Those who were good at it...passed on knowledge and survived

• If you are alive now....your brain has developed to use stories as a way toward creating meaning and understanding

• Evolutionary psychology...
If...

Stories Trigger Decisions…
Facts Are Our Cover.

Our Brains…
Will Sync

• The story is good and engages our emotions…

• We will make decisions based on it…

• Later….to save face…we use facts to explain the decision we already made

• When it works together…the listener, reader, and viewer will have brain activity that matches the speaker, writer, and creator
Finally…

- Facts are fairly useless…
- Unless your audience already agrees with the fact you provide
- If they don’t agree….there is no impact

*Stop wasting your space on statistics….***
Storytelling Mechanisms

How It Works

1. What emotion is your narrative about?
2. If none…it has no hook
3. The story format…creates emotions
4. We make decisions from the story and use facts to cover
5. When it works…the writer and reader’s brains sync…and they experience the full impact of the story
6. Facts have no impact unless people already agree with them
That’s the Mechanism…
What’s the Process?
#1. Start With Audience & Prior Beliefs

- Your audiences are students…or parents…or presidents
- The only question they have is…“What does this mean for me?”
- If they don’t already agree with you…this is your roadmap:
  4. What is their intellectual goal?
  3. What is their hope?
  2. What is their fear?
  1. What are your shared beliefs?
#1. Audience Needs - Examples

- The narrative should start with shared beliefs, answer their fears, and give them hope

**Not:** We have small class sizes…

**But:** We all want a place where we can excel and have access to the best jobs with the best employers for the best pay.
Note: Share of respondents who didn’t offer an answer not shown.
#2. Create Meaning by Answering Their Fears in a Positive Way

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience Fear</th>
<th>Fact</th>
<th>Emotive Hook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My friends who are going to University X will think I’m a loser.</td>
<td>With the money you will save, you can afford a university that may be not possible now.</td>
<td>Imagine arriving at the university of your choice in your junior year, with no more general ed to take, money in your pocket, and job skills that give you the advantage among job searchers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why Does It Work?

It takes much less energy to process positive thoughts than negative.

We have an **Optimism Bias**... (80% are happy at any one time)

We pay more attention to positive emotions and messages.

Positive emotions...broaden our thinking and our ability to consider actions we had not considered before.

Negative thoughts...if powerful enough...can shut down your thought process.
Top 10 Fears of 2018

- Corruption of government officials: 74%
- Pollution of oceans, rivers, and lakes: 62%
- Pollution of drinking water: 61%
- Not having enough money for the future: 57%
- People I love becoming seriously ill: 57%
- People I love dying: 56%
- Air pollution: 55%
- Extinction of plant and animal species: 54%
- Global warming & climate change: 53%
- High Medical Bills: 53%

Above are the 10 fears for which the highest percentage of Americans reported being afraid or very afraid.

The Chapman University Survey of American Fears 2018
#3. Build in a Sense of Control and Power

- Out of control creates anger, frustration, and resistance

- The more the story focuses on agency and choice, the more people will relate to it as who they are…or who they want to be

- When people feel like they have control…they tend to be more compliant

- It also creates a sense of trust
#3. Control Example

Student X knew his family did not have the money to pay for college, and most of his friends went to the university and simply took out loans.

But that wasn’t what he wanted for his life. So he chose to come here to Community College Y and work part time while earning a degree as a paralegal.

And when he went to X University as a junior, he had a career that paid him $30 an hour, so he only needed to work 10 hours a week.

Having a career as he started at the university gave him choices other students didn’t have.
The World's Most Stressed Countries

Share of the population that experienced a lot of stress yesterday (2018)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Stress Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on interviews with 1,000 adults throughout 2018 in 143 countries.

Source: Gallup 2019 Global Emotions Report
#4. The Magic (Listening/Changing/Complying) Only Happens When the Audience Is Not Stressed.

- In threatening or stressful situations…it takes all our mental processing to deal with the threat (We don’t hear/see the message)

- This is also true when we are frustrated, frightened, or angry

- ALWAYS think about the environment where they will consume your story

- Under Stress… We go Negative. Every Time.

- Stress and Negativity… are communicable.
#4. Stress Example

Talking to a student after they have a bad assessment score… doesn’t work

Convincing them you are the best choice AFTER they have been rejected by the university is difficult

Giving them a message to read at school when they are surrounded by peers is tough

Giving them a caring message or orientation after they have been treated like they joined the ARMY… won’t work
Stress in the US, 2019

• 57 percent of the survey respondents say they are paralyzed by stress; 43 percent say they are invigorated by stress
• 59 percent of baby boomers have never been diagnosed with a mental health issue; 52 percent of Gen Zers already have been
• Just over a third of all respondents say their job or career is a regular source of stress.
• Among millennials and Gen Zers, the chronically work-stressed rises to 44 percent

https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/united-states-of-stress/
The Single Best Format
Monroe's Motivated Sequence

Attention: Shared beliefs

Need: Fear

Satisfaction: Hope

Visualization: Imagine

Action: Do it.

Enthymeme: Leave one out
Storytelling Mechanisms

1. Audience first
2. Facts are useless unless we already agree with them
3. The narrative should start with shared beliefs, answer fears, and end with hope
4. Always answer fears with a positive approach
5. Build in a sense of control in your audience
6. It only works when they are not stressed or frightened, so think about environment
7. You can’t go wrong with Monroe’s motivated sequence
BIG IDEAS

1. ALL your Owned, Earned and Paid Media Stories Should Sync to Create Your Meta-Story

2. It’s ALWAYS emotion… Facts only work with the Converted

3. What makes BRAINS sync are Stories that build on… 1) Shared Belief; 2) Fear; 3) Hope and 4) Intellectual Needs (facts ‘n stuff)

4. Know their Fear and Meet it in a Positive (No big Deal) way

5. Make them Feel Like They Have Control… and MITIGATE Environmental Stress.
And Finally... This is how it works

God Grant Me the Serenity to Accept the Things I Cannot Change,

The Courage to Change the Things I can;

And the Wisdom to Know the Difference.
The Tool Not Talked About...

The Power of the Nudge to Change Behavior.
The Power of Behavior to Change Minds.
Favorite Books

Neuro Design
Darren Bridger
Publisher: Kogan Page
February 28, 2017
Favorite Books

The Influential Mind
Tali Sharot
Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience
Picador
2018

The Optimism Bias
2012
Favorite Books

Neuromarketing: Exploring the Brain of the Consumer

Leon Zurawicki
Publisher: Springer
2010
Favorite Books

Brainfluence
Roger Dooley
Publisher: Wiley
2012
References


Community College MARKETING MASTER CLASS

with Pam Cox-Otto, Ph.D. and Cheryl Broom, M.A.

Blog
Podcast
Vodcast
Series
20-Minute Nudge Tips
Invitation only-Card to Angela

2yearexperts.com
Oh, and One More Thing.

Get involved with the retention and the foundation…

They will be a major player when the recession hits.

• WINTER IS COMING….
Marketing is Not About the Media... It's About the Message, and We're Still Getting It Wrong!

Pam Cox Otto, Ph.D.
Founder & CEO, Interact Communications