

Notes from Building a Story Brand – by Donald Miller

Note: These notes are a collection of excerpts from Donald's book. The snippets in different colors represent some of the more profound concepts. The numbers next to each snippet represent locations within a Kindle e-reader.

255 - Customers don't generally care about your story, they care about their own.

291 - Nobody will listen to you if your message isn't clear, no matter how expensive your marketing material may be.

313 - **The more simple and predictable the communication, the easier it is for the brain to digest.**

332 - The first mistake brands make is they fail to focus on the aspects of their offer that will help people survive and thrive.

347 - The second mistake brands make is they cause their customers to burn too many calories in an effort to understand their offer.

394 - What we often call marketing is really just clutter and confusion sprayed all over our websites, emails, and commercials.

410 - What we think we are saying to our customers and what they actually hear are two different things. And customers make buying decisions not based on what we say but on what they hear.

437 - When we are engaged in a story, the story does the daydreaming for us. It engages the emotional response.

454 - just like on the movie cutting room floor, storytellers have filters to cut out the noise. If a character or scene does serve the plot, it has to go.

497 - A story in a nutshell. A CHARACTER who wants something encounters a PROBLEM before they can get it. At the peak of their despair, a GUIDE steps into their lives, gives them a PLAN, and CALLS THEM TO ACTION. That action helps them avoid FAILURE and ends in a SUCCESS.



528 - At no point should we be able to pause a movie/story and not be able to answer these 3 questions:

1. What does the hero want?
2. Who or what is opposing the hero getting what she wants?
3. What will be the hero's life look like if she does or doesn't get what she wants?

545 - A potential customer should be able to look at your website and within 5 seconds be able to answer the following:

1. What do you offer?
2. How will it make my life better?
3. What do I need to do to buy it?

This is called passing the grunt test. Could a caveman look at your website and immediately grunt what you offer?

Chapter 3 - The 7 Components of the Storybrand Framework

1. A Character - The customer is the hero, not your brand.
2. Has a Problem - Companies tend to sell solutions to external problems, but customers buy solutions to internal problems.
3. And Meets a Guide - Customers aren't looking for another hero; they're looking for a guide.
4. Who Gives Them a Plan - Customers trust a guide who has a plan.
5. And Calls Them to Action - Customers do not take action unless they are challenged to take action.
6. That Helps Them Avoid Failure - Every human being is trying to avoid a tragic ending.
7. And Ends in a Success - Never assume people understand how your brand can change their lives.

605 - Unless we identify something our customer wants, they will never feel invited into the story we are telling.

635 - Brands that position themselves as heroes unknowingly compete with their potential customers.



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680 - Simply put, we must show people the cost of not doing business with us.

685 - Brands that help customers avoid some kind of negativity in life (and let their customers know what that negativity is) engage customers for the same reason good stories captivate an audience: they define what's at stake.

708 - You can create a StoryBrand Brand Script at mystorybrand.com. You essentially create one for the overall brand, then each division, and then each product.

738 - Thousands of companies shut their doors every year, not because they don't have a great product but because potential customers can't figure out how that product will make their lives better.

The Character

758 - Before knowing what the hero wants, the audience has little interest in their fate. This is why it's critical to define their ambition within the first nine or so minutes.

802 - Story gaps exist everywhere in life. A good story constantly opens and closes a story gap. Hunger is the opening of a story gap and a meal ushers it's closing.

813 - The reality of a diverse brand suffers the same problems of an amateur screenwriter - they clutter the story by diluting their hero's desire with too many ambitions.

Note for Me: My customer doesn't have to be distraught and "near wit's end. They're just unsatisfied and maybe frustrated in their current results, plan to achieve them, and overall timeliness of progress.

837 - The need for survival is always a good opening of a story gap and can be achieved via various constructs.

Survival = The primitive desire we all have to be safe, healthy, happy, and strong.

- Conserving financial resources
- Conserving time.
- Building social networks
- Gaining status
- Accumulating resources
- Innate desire to be generous
- The desire for meaning



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872 - In the book by Viktor Frankl - Man's Search for Meaning - he postures that man was actually most tempted to distract himself with pleasure when his life was void of meaning.

Has a Problem

906 - Companies tend to sell solutions to external problems, but customers buy solutions to internal problems.

912 - Identifying our customer's problems deepens their interest in the story we are telling. The more we talk about the problems our customers experience, the more interest they will have in our brand.

927 - The villain is the number one device storytellers use to give conflict a clear point of focus.

944 - 4 Characteristics of A Villain

1. **The villain should be a root source.** Frustration, for example is not a villain; it's what the villain makes us feel. High taxes are a villain.
2. **The villain should be relatable.** When people hear us talk about the villain, they should immediately recognize it as something they disdain.
3. **The villain should be singular.** One villain is enough. A story with too many villains falls apart for lack of clarity.
4. **The villain should be real.** Never go down the path of being a fear monger. There are plenty of actual villains out there to fight. Let's go after them on behalf of our customers.

958 - There are three levels of problems heroes face.

- External problems - the physical, tangible problem the hero must overcome to save the day.
- Internal problems - are manifested by the external problem.
- Philosophical Problems - in a story is about something even larger than the story itself. It's about the question why. Why does this story matter in the overall epic of humanity.

991 - Most heroes struggle with the same problem...do I have what it takes?

994 - By assuming our customers only want to resolve external problems, we fail to engage the deeper story they're actually living.



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1104 - Is there a single villain your brand stands against? What external problem is that villain causing? And why is it unjust for people to have to suffer at the hands of this villain?

And Meets a Guide

1122 - Customers aren't looking for another hero; they're looking for a guide.

1134 - In stories, events mark the beginnings and endings of our chapters. But if we look closer, we will see something else or, more accurately, somebody else.

1196 - The Two Characteristics of a Guide

1. **Empathy - everyone wants to be seen, heard, and understood.**
2. **Authority - competence, someone who knows what they're doing.**

1238 - Four ways to add authority to marketing.

1. Testimonials - Let others do the talking for you.
2. Statistics - How many people have you helped, how much have they grown, etc.
3. Awards - they earn trust, even if they're not known.
4. Logos - Customers want to know you've helped others overcome the same challenges.

Who Gives Them a Plan

1287 - Customers trust a guide who has a plan.

1295 - If we've positioned ourselves as the guide, our customers are already in a relationship with us. But making a purchase isn't a characteristic of a casual relationship; it's a characteristic of commitment.

1316 - The plan creates clarity. They either clarify how somebody can do business with us, or they remove the sense of risk somebody might have if they're considering investing in our products or services.

1335 - For example if you're selling an expensive product the steps might look like:

1. Schedule an appointment
2. Allow us to create a customized plan.
3. Let's execute the plan together.



1356 - The success of any plan is to alleviate confusion for our customers.

1391- What's the plan called? This helps to frame it in the customers mind and increase the perceived value for the product or service.

Examples:

- Easy installation plan
- World's best night's sleep plan

1405- questions to help come up with a plan.

- What fears do your customers have related to your industry?
- What agreements would alleviate those fears?
- Do you share unique values with your customers?
- Can those values be spelled out in an agreement plan?

And Calls Them to Action

1413 - Customers do not take action unless they are challenged to take action.

1426 - human beings do not take action unless challenged to do so.

1455 - Customers can't read our minds and they don't know what we want, even if it seems obvious. We have to clearly invite customers to take a journey with us or they won't.

1459 - When we try to sell passively, we communicate a lack of belief in our product.

1470 - Two types of calls to action.

- Direct - something that leads to a sale, or the first step down a path that leads to a sale. The idea is to make it very clear what we'd like customers to do.
- Transitional -

1524 - A good transitional call to action can do 3 powerful things:

1. **Stake a claim to your territory.** Make this claim before others do.
2. **Create reciprocity.** Never worry about giving away too much free information.
3. **Position yourself as the guide.** When you help customers solve a problem, you position yourself as the guide.



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1558 - An example of a good transitional call was with a health clinic. Instead of having the waiting room filled with magazines, TV, etc. They provided a Healthy Body Checklist that allowed patients to self assess their own health. After they finished with their appt. a nurse sat down with each one and reviewed their results and let them know which services the clinic offered. Also afterwards they sent specific targeted informational emails based upon the subjects the patients were interested in.

That Helps Them Avoid Failure

1580 - Every human being is trying to avoid a tragic ending.

1589 - If a storyteller doesn't clearly let an audience know what no-good, terrible, awful thing might befall their hero unless she overcomes her challenge, the story will have no stakes, and a story without stakes is boring.

1633 - Prospect Theory - people are likely to be more dissatisfied with a loss than they are satisfied with a gain. Loss aversion is a greater motivator of buying decisions than potential gains.

1645 - 4 Step Fear Appeal

1. Make the listener know they are vulnerable to a threat.
2. Since they are vulnerable, let them know that they should take action.
3. Let them know about a specific call to action that protects them from risk.
4. Challenge them to take that specific action.

1666 - What negative consequences are you helping customers avoid? Could they lose money? Health risks? Opportunity cost? Quality of life?

And Ends in a Success

1705 - **Never assume people understand how your brand can change their lives. Tell them.**

1716 - By defining a "compelling image of an achievable future, leaders captivate the imaginations of their audience.

1728 - In a good story, the resolution must be clearly defined so the audience knows exactly what to hope for.



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1754 - 3 Dominant Was Storytellers End a Story (overall it's about being made whole by an external provision)

1. Win some sort of power or position
 1. access
 2. scarcity
 3. A premium
 4. Identity association
2. Be unified with somebody or something that makes them whole.
 1. Reduced anxiety
 2. Reduced workload
 3. More time
3. Experience some kind of self-realization that also makes them whole, often centered around the notion of the universally human desire of self-acceptance.
 1. Inspiration
 2. Acceptance
 3. Transcendence

1853 - If we don't people where we're taking them, they won't follow. A story has to go somewhere.

1864 - People want your brand to participate in their transformation.

1873 - Everybody wants to change. Everybody wants to be somebody different, somebody better, or perhaps, somebody who simply becomes more self-accepting.

1888 - Who does our customer want to become? What kind of person do they want to be? What is their aspirational identity? The best way is to determine how they want their friends to talk about them? What do they want others to say?

1957 - Great brands obsess about the transformation of their customers. It's more than selling products.

2049 - You need the one word summation of what you do. "We'll make you a pro in the kitchen"

2056 - These statements provide:

- Promise an aspirational identity.
- They promise to solve a problem.
- They state exactly what they do.



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2118 - If your company has various streams of services, it's important to find an overall umbrella message that unifies your various streams.

On Building a BrandStory within your organization

2199 - Just because you know the story, doesn't mean your team does.

2256 - Mission statements were never a bad idea. They were just never enough. A statement is inadequate to turn a mission into a story. It's like reading the tagline on a movie poster instead of seeing the actual movie.

2267 - Thoughtmosphere - is an invisible mixture of beliefs and ideas that drives behavior and performance.

2317 - In company Brandscripts, the team is positioned as the hero and the company leadership is positioned as the guide. All the activities therein are the tools and resources to help the "heroes" win the day.

2346 - A One Liner is important and must be memorized to state exactly what you do so as not to confuse people. It's a single statement that says "what you do" and helps people realize why they need your product or services. It should communicate these 4 ideas:

- The Character - who is your customer?
- The Problem - what is their problem?
- The Plan - What is your plan to help them?
- The Success - and what does it look like after you do.

This should appear in all of your various types of marketing collateral.

2361 - It is equally important to collect and tell stories of transformation. This immediately tells others how your brand can help them.

2496 - Big music star example in that most play the favorite hits each and every time they perform. It must get monotonous, but that's the discipline it takes to be successful. Because you must be a servant of your customers, fans, etc.

2647 - The "nurturing email" or really just good piece of content marketing.

1. Talk about a problem
2. Explain a plan to solve the problem
3. Describe how life can look for the reader once the problem is solved.



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2749 - The components of a good testimonial.

1. What was the problem you were having before you discovered our product?
2. What did the frustration feel like as you tried to solve that problem?
3. What was different about our product?
4. Take us to the moment when you realized your product was actually working to solve your problem.
5. Tell us what life looks like now that your problem is solved or being solved.



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