STORYBOX

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CUSTOMER STORYTELLING

CONTENTS.

1 THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

We are all storytellers by nature – it is intrinsic to who we are as human beings. This dates back to our first steps as a species, as our earliest stories are preserved in faded and primate paintings on cave walls.

Throughout our history, storytelling has played a critical role in our development. Storytelling:

- Aided us in passing along vital knowledge to family and community members.
- Taught new generations important customs and values for their society
- Educated communities about important lessons that would aid in their survival

63% of people remember stories. Only **5%** remember statistics

As we evolved, storytelling evolved with us. What started with paintings turned in to a rich oral tradition.

Stories were preserved in spoken word, in poems, in art, in music, in philosophy, and eventually in the written word.

Stories resonate with us on a deeply emotional level

As a result of the role stories have played in our evolution, they trigger automatic & subconscious responses in people of every gender, nationality, and demographic.

As a result, there are several advantages to using stories in our communication.

1 We are inherently receptive to stories

When someone starts to share a story, our body's natural response is to listen and pay attention.

We are triggered on a subconscious level, because storytelling has been used to pass on critical information throughout our evolution.

2 Stories are extremely memorable

Stories become deeply embedded in both our conscious and subconscious, making them highly susceptible for recall.

63% of people recall stories after a presentation, whereas only 5% remember facts and figures.
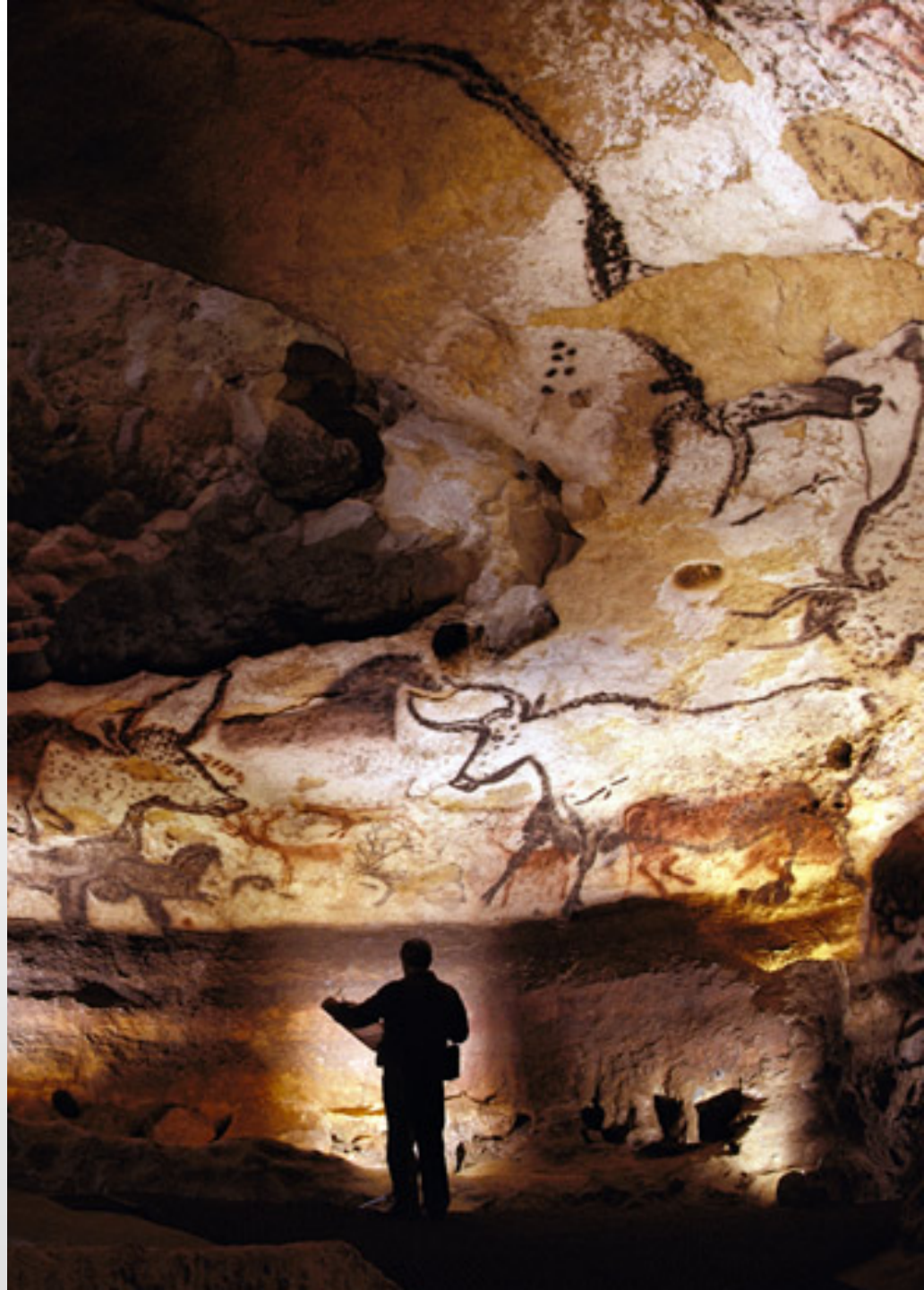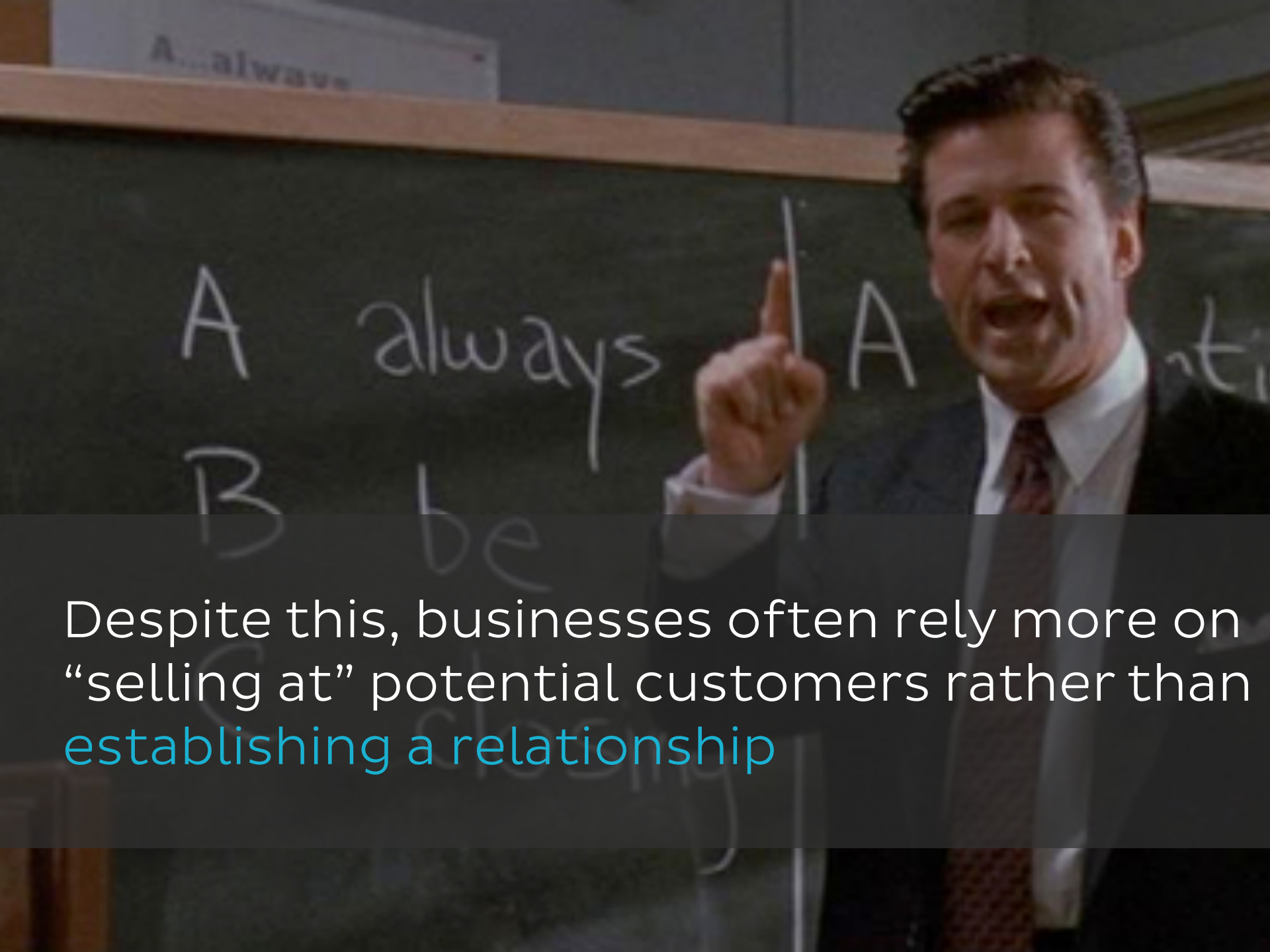
3 Stories are contagious

We cannot help but re-share, retell, and rehash the stories we've been told.

Throughout history, this is how stories stayed alive and were preserved – they were passed from one group to the next.

That habit lives on in each of us – we want to share the stories we know.

Despite this, businesses often rely more on "selling at" potential customers rather than establishing a relationship

And when it comes to establishing a relationship with potential customers, nothing beats customer storytelling

2 WHAT IS CUSTOMER STORYTELLING?

stôrē/teliNG/

A company's practice of empowering its community to share their unique experience with the world

Customer stories are more powerful than any ad

Because storytelling is such a powerful, fundamental force, there are multiple advantages when it is applied to a company's marketing and advertising efforts.

We start to see reasons why customer stories beat out ads every day of the week.

1 There are more stories than there are ads

The shear quantity of these stories are incredible. There are more customer stories out there than there are advertisements for your brand.

If a brand is able to leverage all of this incredible content, there is unlimited potential to what they can accomplish

Quantity

Trustworthiness

2 Stories are more trustworthy than ads

People trust each other far more than they trust ads.

This is more true today than it has ever been, with consumer skepticism at an all time high.

Consumers quickly filter out ads, but stories from other customers are more likely to be believed.

3 Stories have access to places that ads cannot

People are sharing stories in locations where your ads can never penetrate – in their homes, on car rides with friends, hanging out at bars.

When companies start using customer stories, they gain broader access to their target customer.

Access

Shareability

2 Stories are more shareable than ads

Customers are more likely to share and pass on stories than anything else.

When companies use customer stories, they are able to amplify the effect of each story, since it is shared with that customers friends and family.

3 ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL STORYTELLING

81%

50%

25%

10%

1 Give customers a means to tell their story

People have different comfort levels on how they would share their story.

We all know this implicitly – we've got that friend who is always the first to jump up on stage, belt out karaoke, and seems to feed off of the energy of the crowd.

And we all have that friend who wouldn't get up on stage for all of the money in the world, but may also be our go-to friend for advice on what product to buy.

People differ in how they would like to share their story

1. A Means to Tell Their Story

The data matches up – when it comes to customer storytelling, consumer comfort varies.

- 81% would share a Star Rating
- 50% would share a written story
- 25% would share a photo
- 10% would share a video

To maximize impact, provide multiple ways to participate

There is some overlap amongst these groups, but they key takeaway is that your community will vary in their willingness to share their story through a particular medium.

So, to maximize participation for your customer storytelling campaign, you'll want to include multiple ways for customers to participate.

In Part 4, we'll talk about when it comes to the impact of these stories, this cone of participation is inverted.

2 Discover what type of story they'd like to tell

A key to getting your storytelling program off on the right foot is to discover what type of story your community would like to tell.

When we first speak with prospective clients, they often have an idea about what story they'd like. More often than not, that story is, "Why I love [Insert your company name here]." These testimonials are great, and can be useful throughout your site, but they're not always the right way to start.

2. What Story Type to Tell

There are 4 basic types of topics you could pose to your community:

1. Contests or Sweepstakes: these generally take on the theme of "What would you do for a Klondike Bar?". Incentives play a big role in these topics, but they generally work for any and all brands

2. Advice & opinions: this can take on a decidedly pro-brand angle, or a more generic approach. Either are great ways to create content relevant to your community and valuable for content marketing.

3. Testimonials & Reviews: by far the most sought after content by brands, these stories take on a tone of "Why do you love us?". While this content is highly usable, many customers shy away from these blatant, branded experiences.

4. Storytelling: underutilized by brands, but extremely powerful, these tangential topics can invite widespread participation, as well as a lot of fun for your community.

2. What Story Type to Tell

A few tips to make sure you start your program with the right prompt, consider:

- **Look at what stories they're telling their friends.** Social channels provide a great indication of their natural inclination towards topics and themes

- **Review what stories they're sending you.** Surveys, emails, and customer service calls all point to possible story topics

- **Test your question on social channels.** Before you begin, do a quick test on social channels. Does it get a response? It's a cost-free and simple way to feel out interest from your community.

- **Consider the tangential.** it's a great way to uncover topics that are more unique to your community.

The story you want MAY not be the story customers wants to tell

Would you share your opinion for free?

|	% Willing to share for free
Star Rating	67%
Written Review	27%
Photo	22%
Video	8%

3 Give them a reason to share

As any fisherman worth his salt knows, in order to catch some fish, you need to know how to bait the hook.

With customer storytelling, it's no different.

As you can see from the data, some customers who will share their stories for free.

As the time required to participate – and personal exposure – increases, willingness to participate starts to decline.
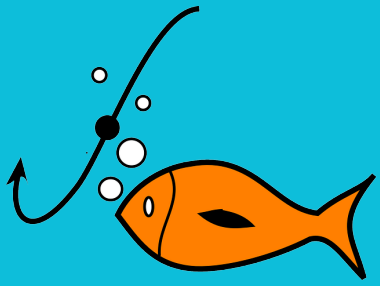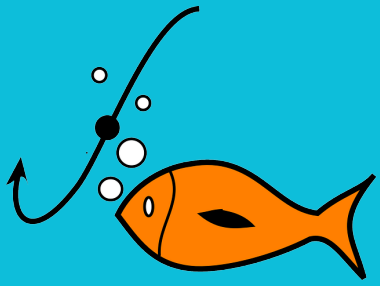
3. Give Them a Reason to Share

Before you start thinking about incentivization, it's important to know that some customers won't share their story no matter what incentive you provide.

The data below shows that – depending on the storytelling medium – some customers won't bite regardless of the bait.

	"Couldn't pay me enough"
Star Rating	4%
Written Review	4%
Photo	11%
Video	17%

3. Give Them a Reason to Share

For the remainder of your community, there's some bait you can put on the hook to reward them for their time, and drive more participation for your program.

As you can see in the data below, as the time required to participate (and personal exposure) increases, so too does the incentive required for action.

	Avg. incentive required
Star Rating	$22.78
Written Review	$49.85
Photo	$60.85
Video	$126.13

Note: people are influenced in different ways. So be creative with incentives

How likely would you be to share your opinion in exchange for each of the following

	Free Product ($25)	15% Discount	Sweep-stakes ($5,000)
Star Rating	61%	50%	44%
Written Review	64%	48%	42%
Photo	58%	40%	38%
Video	53%	28%	40%

Runner-ups

	Incentives
4	Free Shipping
5	T-Shirt
6	Featured on .com
7	Featured on TV

Incentives vary by community, but some trends exist

Free products, product discounts, and sweepstakes are consistent motivators.

But be creative to discover what motivates your community

Source: StoryBox client data
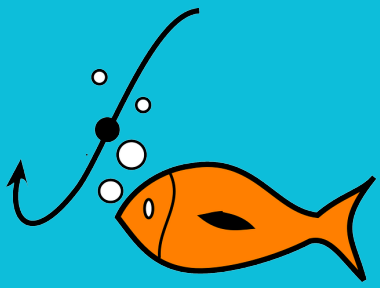
A few more tips on incentives

Seed the Tip Jar: Social proof of involvement spurs on even more participation. Before you start, make sure you have 10-15 stories in place – these provide exemplary content, but also make it easier for others to follow.

Reduce Procrastination: Limited time offers and early bird specials are both great ways to give a reason for customers to take action now rather than waiting.

Stories Spark More Stories: As we've seen, stories are contagious. Make sure to promote the stories you receive on all of your digital channels – other customers will follow suit.

4 Provide simple guidelines

Customer storytelling can be like bumper bowling – setting up some firm guidelines can help keep content out of the gutter and drive towards more wins.

So before you hit "go" on your campaign, consider these quick tips to help your customers craft and tell stories of quality.
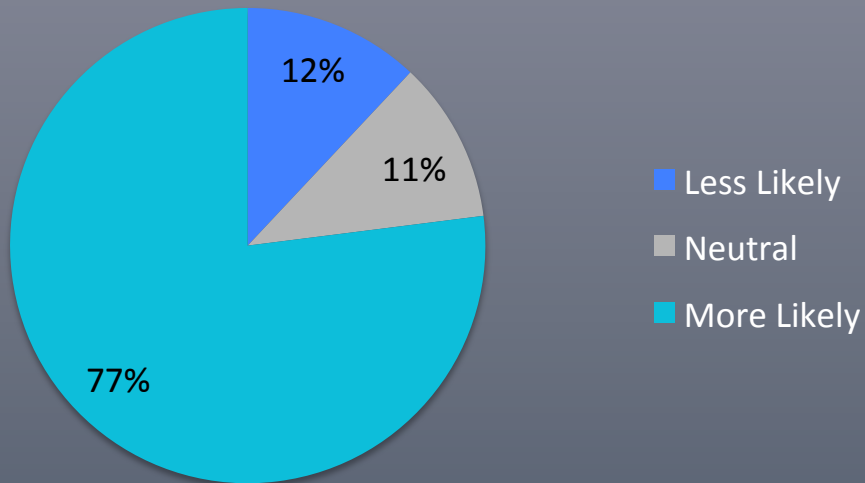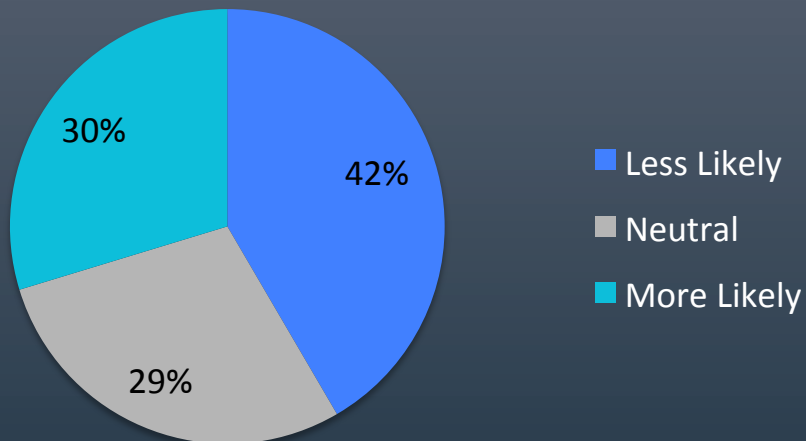
4. Provide Simple Guidelines

Here are a few tips to consider to help your customers give you stories of quality and value.

1. **Timely feedback on stories:** if you're moderating the customer stories, speed makes a difference. Quick approvals increase the chance of customer sharing. Swift disapprovals with clear reasons for rejection boost the chance of content resubmissions.

2. **Brief explanations:** a little instruction goes a long way. Wherever customers can participate, use 5-7 word sentences, icons, graphics, and pictures to help your customers.

3. **Tutorial video:** although it can take more time, tutorial videos are the most explicit way to explain to your customers how you'd like them to participate

Personal Email

- 12% — Less Likely
- 11% — Neutral
- 77% — More Likely

Newsletter

- 42% — Less Likely
- 29% — Neutral
- 30% — More Likely

Source: StoryBox client data

5 Provide a place for them to share their story

You need to give customers a proper stage for their story. In today's digital landscape, there are multiple ways that you can solicit stories.

However, this also means that customers are overrun with requests from other companies and brands.

Here are a few tips for the best ways to solicit stories.
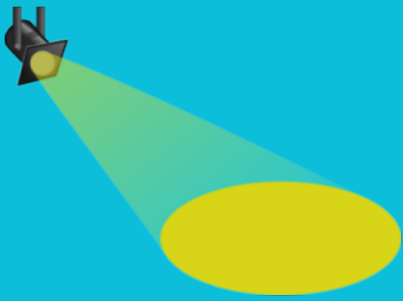
5. Providing a Place to Share

Although these numbers will vary based on your community, here are some rough guidelines for the top ways to solicit content.

1. **Personalized Emails:** 77% of customers are more likely to share their story if asked in a personalized email
    *   Make sure it comes from a person within your organization, rather than a generic company address
    *   Be clear on how and where you'll use their story.
    *   Be persistent – a cadence of three emails works best in asking for stories, reminding customers about your request, and giving them one last chance to participate

2. **Newsletters:** Although second most effective, this is highly variable based on the placement within the newsletter and competing offers. Boost your story CTA placement, and minimize noise to see the biggest impact.
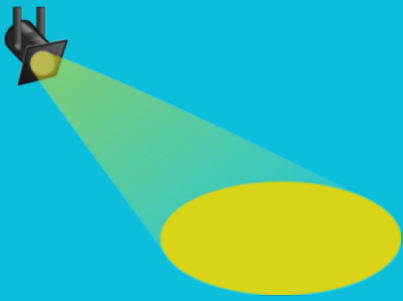
5. Providing a Place to Share

3. **Product Packaging:** whether its on the product itself, or included in the packaging, this is a great way to capture customers at the moment of delight

4. **Website homepage:** not only does this allow you to show off your stories, but it also is another potential entry point for customers

5. **Social media posts:** this will be highly dependent on your own community involvement, but is a nice cost-free way to get more exposure

6. **Ads** – if you want to get additional reach, use ads to get even more exposure

If your opinion were featured in an ad, would you be more or likely to participate?

- Less Likely — 26%
- Neutral — 32%
- More Likely — 42%
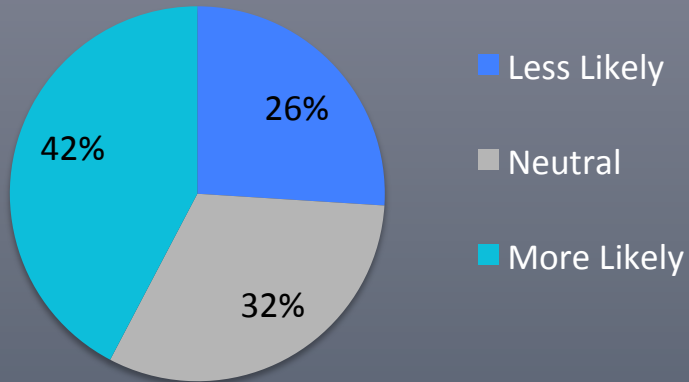
If a friend shared an opinion about a product, would you be more or less likely to share your own?

- Less Likely — 8%
- Neutral — 55%
- More Likely — 37%
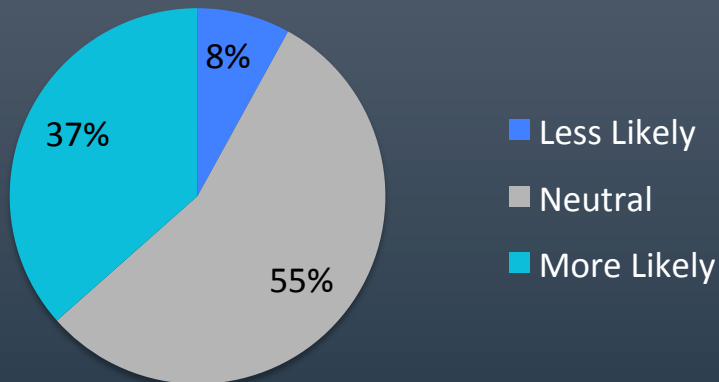
Source: StoryBox client data

6 Making your customers feel like rockstars

Making customers feel seen and heard – and making them know that they are a valued part of your community – has a big impact on participation and customer engagement .

A step as simple as adding reviews or testimonials to your digital properties signals that you are a brand that deeply values and respects your customers and their opinions about your brand.

We'll look at a few pieces of data – and a few tips – around rocking out your storytelling program.

6. Turn Customers into Rockstars

As you just saw, 74% of customers are more likely to share their story if they know it will be promoted. Here are a few tips to put that data to use:

1. **Are they rewarded?** Rockstars get paid. If people are taking the time and effort to share their story with you, it's only respectful that you reward them for this time.

2. **Are they in the spotlight?** Rockstars get visibility. Where are you featuring these stories? Your answer to that question is a powerful indication of how much value you place on your customer's opinions.

3. **Are they prepared?** Rockstars get soundchecks, makeup, and coaching. Are you providing them with all the information and guidance they need to create a story of quality?

4. **Are they VIPs?** Rockstars don't stand in line; they get perks. Apart from the reward you provide your customers, think of other ways to make them feel special.

4 SETTING GOALS + BENCHMARKS

BOOKENDING CAMPAIGNS WITH KPIs

When it comes to customer storytelling, one of the most frequent problems we encounter with newcomers is a "Ready, fire, aim" approach to establishing a campaign.

In fact, eight times out of ten, when we ask prospective clients what their goals are for their campaign, we encounter an awkward silence, followed by a, "You tell me?".

If you have a similar reaction, don't be ashamed! Figuring out how to measure the impact of customer storytelling can be daunting for first timers.

> **"Every battle is won before it is ever fought"**
> **-- Sun Tzu**
> **Art of War**

However, having goals (for both participation and impact) can help you be sure that you'll have tangible results to share with the world (or your boss) at the end of your campaign.

1 KPIs frame the story for your boss and the world

Before you get started, piece together the story you want to share with the world.

Having the end goal in sight from the beginning will make sure you're steering your campaign in the right direction.

2 Make sure your tracking is in place from day 1

There's nothing worse than getting halfway through a campaign and realizing, "Wouldn't it be great if we were tracking X?"

Getting your KPIs in place before you start can prevent these misfires.

3 Make sure you've got enough gas to reach your goal

Anything and everything is possible...but it does ultimately boil down to what you're willing to put into it.

Set your goals, and make sure you put levers in place to achieve it.

So, what should you measure? This will vary based on your goals, but here are a few ideas to get you started

1. Engagement Metrics

1. **Referral Traffic:** people love to share stories. Check out how customer stories bring friends and family to your site and social properties. If you implement your customer storytelling campaign process, it'll be easy for customers to share their stories as well as be featured throughout your properties.

2. **Increased Time on Site:** stories are immersive. Whether its video, photo, text, or ratings, stories are a great way for people to dive deeper and learn more about your company, community, products, and services. Time on site is a great indicator of how people are diving deeper with your brand.

3. **Interactions:** are customers choosing to take actions to interact with you? Are they signing up, sharing, voting – showing with their clicks and their keys that they want to spend time with you.

4. **CTRs:** is this content driving customers to your target destination? That could be your website, your store, your microsite. You can drive them from ads, emails, posts, and the content itself – make sure you have tracking for each of these.

2. Participation Metrics

1. **Creating content:** this is the metric most cited by prospective customers – how many stories are we going to get? This is highly dependent on how and where you solicit stories, and we have lots of ideas about this. Check out our post on creating a reason for customers to share their story to make sure you're baiting the hook properly for people to share the stories you'd like to receive.

2. **Shares:** great stories are contagious. Take a look at which stories are being shared the most to give you better insight into your customers and what motivates them. You can also see which social channels are driving the most shares for your content.

3. **Votes:** if you're utilizing a contest or sweepstakes, voting is a fantastic way to may your stories more interactive. Votes can measure viewer engagement, but also provide valuable clues as to what sorts of stories resonate with your community.

One important note here – participation by content creation is the most common KPI cited...but it shouldn't be

Participation is one component of many

1. Remember that: *1% of a community is content creators; 99% are content consumers*

2. Participation is 100% based on traffic and incentives

3. Focusing solely on participation overlook the value of using content broadly to drive community interactions & sales

3. Sharing & Virality Metrics

1. **Sales:** customer stories can drive additional purchases, as well as increase your customer conversion through increased trust and believability. Make sure you're setup to measure how and where this impacts your community.

2. **Email CTR:** customer stories are great fodder for emails – start sprinkling them in to your emails and newsletters and see how this impacts your open rates and click through rates.

3. **Ad CTR:** customer stories also go really well within banner and video ads. Try them out and see how they perform compared to your more standard banner ads.

4. **Social Media Mentions:** when you start a customer storytelling program, you spark an ongoing dialogue with your customers. Check out how people respond on social media channels – if you give them shout outs and kudos on their story, you'll be blown away by the response.

4. The Soft Metrics

1. **Brand Affinity:** by starting a dialogue with your community, and by featuring real opinions rather than just marketing spin, will change the way that people view your brand. Although brand affinity studies can be quite costly, they're a great way to measure customer storytelling programs.

2. **Share of Voice:** when you start a dialogue with your community, and encourage them to talk about your brand, products, and topics pertinent to your community, you'll see more conversations occurring related to your brand.

3. **Brand Perception:** similar to brand affinity, putting your customers front and center is a great way to enhance the perception of your company by potential customers (and your current customers too!)

4. **Customer Loyalty:** in today's interactive world, customers expect to be seen and heard. They value companies who value and appreciate their business and perspective, so boost customer loyalty and retention through customer storytelling.

KEY LEARNING: Consumer insights may prove more compelling than the data itself

Example data from anonymous client

Content by Source

Source: StoryBox client data
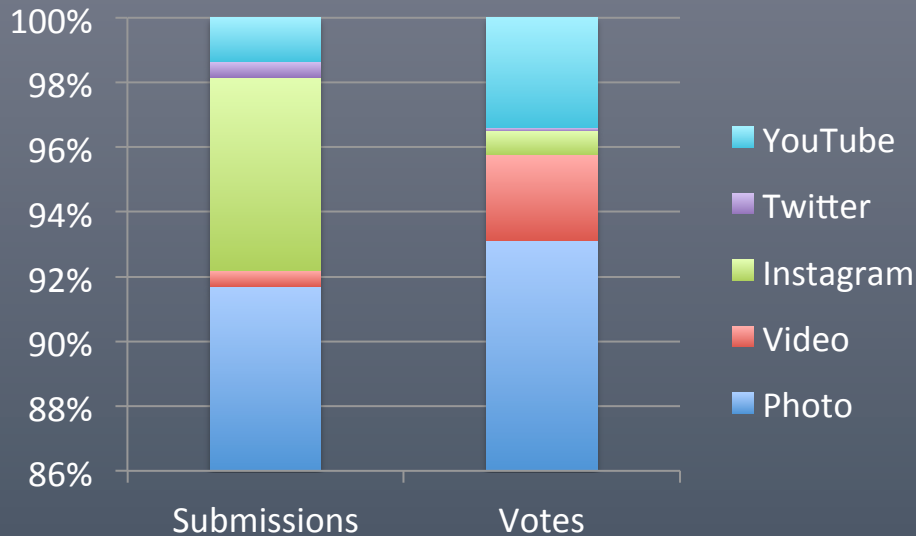
Look for **consumer insights for future campaigns**

Here's an example from one of our clients, who learned some key consumer insights in their first StoryBox campaign.

Such as:
- Videos received a disproportionate amount of their community's votes

- Instagram content received less votes than expected, and was less successful with their community
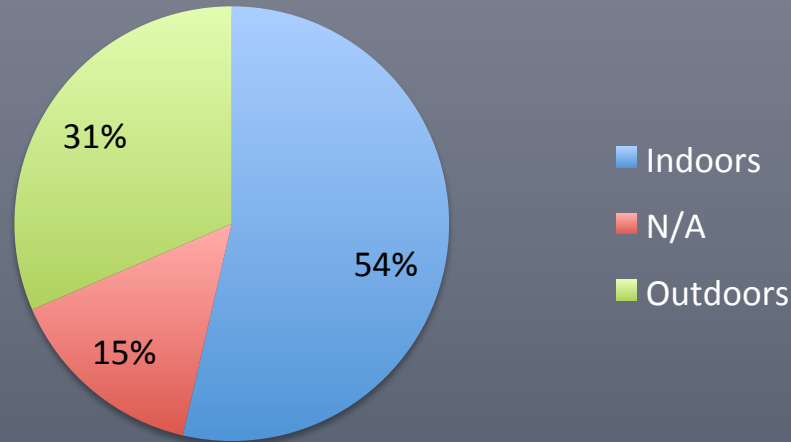
Content Subject by Location

- Indoors
- N/A
- Outdoors

54%
31%
15%

Image Content	
Woman	51%
Man	10%
Child	9%
Woman & Child	5%
Couple	4%
Dog	4%

Source: StoryBox client data

Look for consumer insights for other marketing programs

This same client learned some critical lessons that they applied to future marketing efforts.

Such as:
- Indoor imagery was more influential than outdoor imagery

- Their community is most receptive to imagery featuring female subjects, more than any other subject.

The most important thing to remember is that establishing a dialogue and program requires iteration and refinement

So test, learn, refine, and grow

5 KNOWING WHAT STORIES WORK
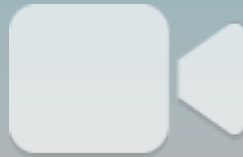
Willingness to Participate

81%

50%

25%

10%

Source: StoryBox client data

Remember how we talked about how participation varies by medium?

Well, this is actually the reverse of the impact that content has on a community.

Remember the ALS *Ice Bucket Challenge?*

What if the *Ice Bucket Challenge* were text instead of video…

A. M. @missatiabbyyy · 15m

Brr… this water is so cold. #IceBucketChallenge!!!

SHANODJOHNSON @SHANODJOHNSON · 46s

WOW! F-ing FREEZING! #IceBucketChallenge.

D.J. Craig @DavidJohnCraig · 8m

@BillNye, @BarryO – don't leave me hanging fellas. Just iced myself (not Smirnof) and this is cold! #IceBucketChallenge

Antonio sabato jr @antoniosabatojr · 13m

3-2-1 Dunk! Woohoooo! That'll get you up in the morning. This #IceBucketChallenge is no joke. @RandyQ @JillianDay you two are up next

… not quite as compelling, is it?

Video leads in customer engagement

In virtually every engagement metric, video leads the charge.

Hover over:

4.5X longer than photos

2.2X longer than text

View time:

60% longer than photos

41% longer than text

THE BUGGLES
Video Killed the Radio Star
a music video by Russell Mulcahy

Visual content elicits the most clicks
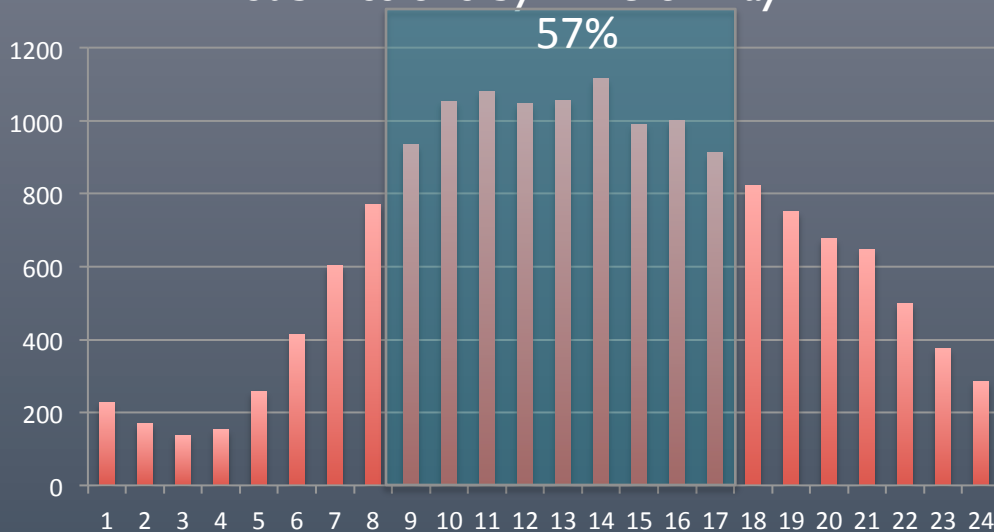
Video is:
37% higher than photos

223% higher than text

Photos are **134%** higher than text

6 WHERE, WHEN, AND HOW TO USE THESE STORIES

Participation over time

Submissions by Time of Day
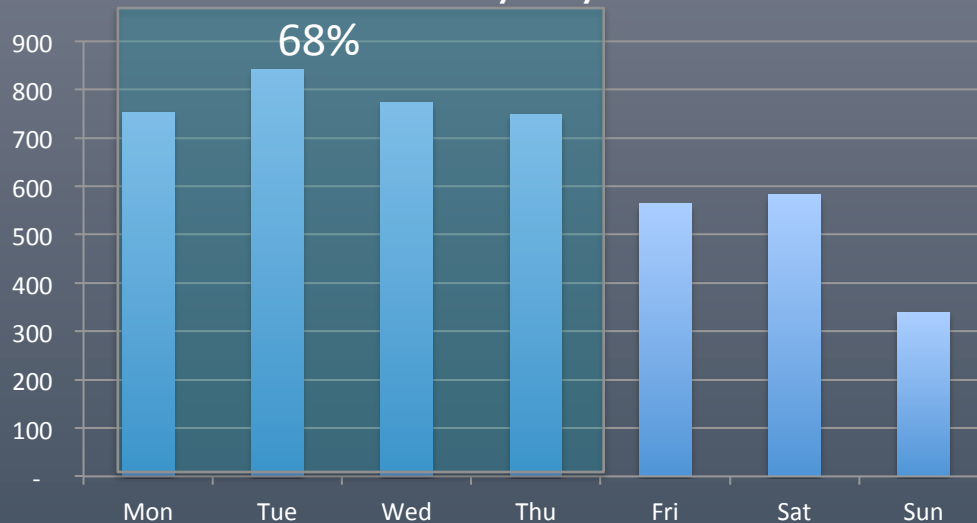
57%

Source: StoryBox client data

Most participation occurs during the workday

It may be depressing for bosses, but the truth is that most consumers are sharing their stories during working hours.

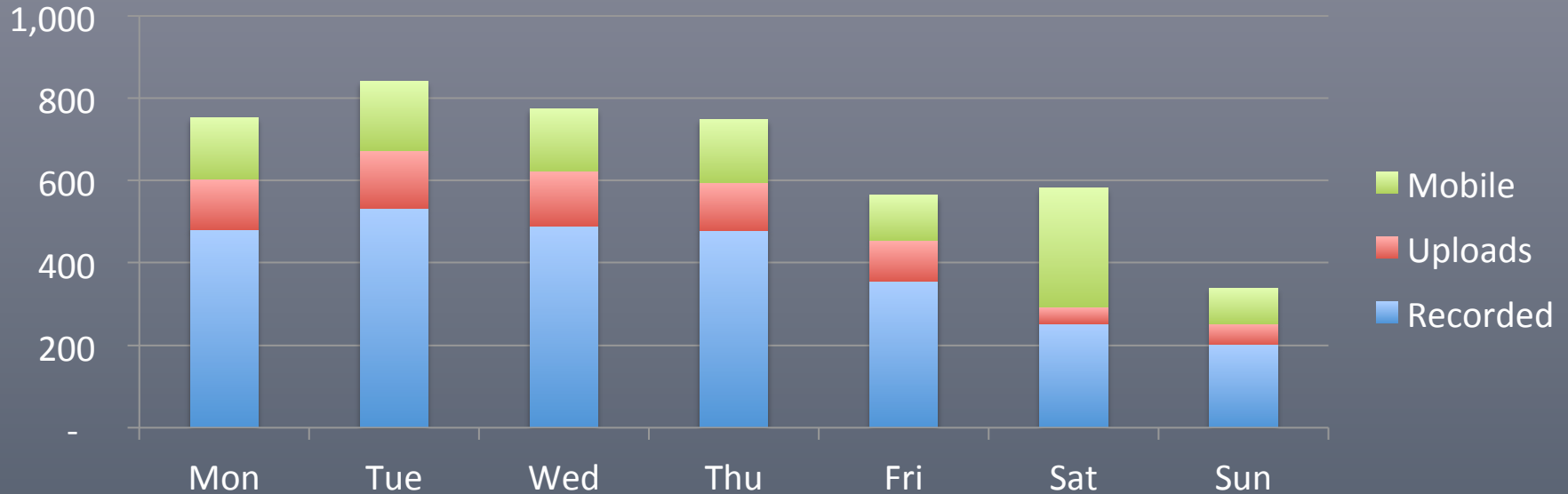Most people create & share their content between 9:00-5:00pm PST.

Participation by Device Type over Time

Source: StoryBox client data

When you look at participation on mobile devices, you'll find that it more than doubles on the weekends, going from around 20% during the week to over 50% on Saturday.

Although desktop is still the predominant form of participation, that'll soon be replaced by mobile.

WHERE SHOULD YOU USE YOUR CUSTOMER STORIES?

Everywhere!!!

Use your most powerful asset everywhere you interact with your community & potential customers

1. .com Properties

1. **Homepage:** you can replace that old, static "Testimonial" section of your website with something more visual, interactive, and engaging. As your highest trafficked real estate, your homepage is the ideal place to start influencing your customer conversion process through customer storytelling.

2. **Product Page:** a lot of great brands are starting to make the move to incorporate customer stories as part of their product detail pages. It's a great call if you can showcase your community using your product or service.

3. **Community Page:** take the # you're associating with your page, and turn it into a dedicated page on your site (eg. YourSite.com/hashtag).

4. **About Us:** No better way to tell your story than to have others do it for you. Let your customers speak on your behalf – it says a lot about who you are as a company.

2. Social Channels

Social media experts are always complaining about their voracious appetite for new content and the lack thereof. Customer storytelling is a scalable way to quench that appetite, and to do it with the most dynamic, relatable, and original content out there.

Turn your community into a content factory!

The added bonus is that – as we talked about in Section 3 – when you promote stories on social it can be an incredible incentive and motivator for others to share their stories as well.

Wherever you interact with your community on social channels, consider promoting these stories to drive a deeper customer connection.

3. Email

As we discussed in Section 3, email is an incredibly effective way to engage our community.

If you have an email system that knows the demographic information about the recipient, you can even customize the customer stories you're using to better impact the recipient.

Areas to consider are dedicated emails, newsletters, and your automated email touch points – each of these would benefit from authentic customer stories. Also, consider a member of customer spotlight series of emails.

4. Digital Ads

Digital ads take customer storytelling to a whole new level in terms of interaction. You can use your stories as static images, or interactive video and rich media ads.

StoryBox's *SoapBox* ad unit takes this one step further, by allowing both content display and content solicitation in the same ad unit. If you take this approach, each story that is targeted and shared could potentially lead to a new customer, or even a new customer story.

Remember – customers trust each other more than they trust ads; so use your advocates to better connect with potential customers.

5. TV

For those brands using television advertising, you can use your customer stories in a variety of ways.

You can incorporate the raw stories as part of the TV content. One example is *Al Jazeera*, who encourages viewers to record their own thoughts on weekly topics. The best videos are aired on TV, to which an anchor can respond or extend the viewpoint. It's a powerful way to pair on-air activity with online activity.

A second use is to edit your customer stories into a more produced promotion. *Levi's*, *UNICEF*, and *Post Cereals* have all done exactly that, to great success.

A final use is to do a casting call, where you first screen your customers through a storytelling campaign. *Angie's List* and *The Cordblood Registry* both found this efficient and cost saving.

6. Billboards

We include this example just to get you to think outside of the box. An example here is *Mammoth Mountains*, who uses their customer stories on digital billboards throughout California. This provides a very authentic way to showcase the great times their community is having.

The possibilities are endless. Think of every place you interact with your community – you'll find that storytelling can go a long way in each of these spots.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1 People remember stories more than anything else

2 Customers share their stories in different ways

3 Reward your community for sharing their story today

4 Provide examples and guidelines to receive quality stories

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

5   Don't start your campaign until your goals and KPIs are in place

6   Some of your most important takeaways will be the consumer insights behind the data

7   Although it's harder to get, visual content is more powerful than other types of content

8   Use your stories far and wide to connect with potential customers