

Social storytelling 101: Stop and sharpen your marketing axe

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

24 May 2018

On Friday, 18 May 2018, Cape Town's marketing set descended on the Park Inn Radisson, for Meltwater's latest Biz Breakfast session with Treeshake's Dave Duarte on the art of social storytelling.



Gleb TV © – [123RF.com](#)

Wesley Mathew, head of marketing at Meltwater, began with a fitting introduction in keeping with the storytelling theme, starting with one of his own

“ The year was 1656. Deep in the Scottish Highlands, two men were chopping wood for winter. One took a break every two hours, the other chopped away tirelessly until his hands were blistered and sore. Eventually, he noticed the pile next to his more rested friend was twice the height of his own. Incredulous, he asked, ‘How is that possible, you’ve worked half my time?’ To which his friend replied, ‘While you continued to chop wood, I was sharpening my axe.’ ”

Mathew said it’s a good fable explaining where marketers go wrong today. We chop away at those expected KPIs but seldom stop to see how we can tell our story better.



"Let me tell you a story..." Why marketing fails without digital storytelling

Leigh Andrews 5 Apr 2018



Duarte himself then took to the front of the stage.

Steer clear of 'social Polyfilla' stories

He said that from a corporate context, it makes you feel less alone. So be careful of your brand only talking from that “We” angle of personal success and help your readers and consumers feel like the hero in the story. Talk about stories people want to talk about. You’d think this is an obvious step but most brands blindly follow the rules without adding any creativity,

which Duarte calls “social Polyfilla that clogs up our timelines” and doesn’t achieve anything. The formulaic approach definitely does work, but you need to add a little something extra:

“ Same narrative happens so often in storytelling! It tells us a lot about ourselves. [#outsideinsight #storytelling #artofstorytelling @DaveDuarte pic.twitter.com/DoQu1ZRf2L](#)— Marketing & Media SA (@Biz_Marketing) [May 18, 2018](#) ”

Then Duarte asked the big question What content types warrant the best engagement for corporates on social media – announcements, questions or competitions?

There’s no doubt that competitions are the clear winner, but readers are also motivated by stories that aren’t just a sell.

“ It’s important ask people what stories are important to them. [#outsideinsight pic.twitter.com/bXOPpeEzXZ](#)— Marketing & Media SA (@Biz_Marketing) [May 18, 2018](#) ”

Even if you have the best brand story to tell, remember that the telling of the story is only half of its success as your listeners complete the narrative based on how they receive it.

Duarte shared three types of social media stories:

“ Wildfire: Packaging your story; Bonfire: Conversation and community - what subjects are people already talking about?; Fireworks: Launches, stunts, building excitement. Anticipation and Surprise are the key elements [#outsideinsight pic.twitter.com/4KgWYEIUhP](#)— Marketing & Media SA (@Biz_Marketing) [May 18, 2018](#) ”

1. **Wildfires**’ far-reaching success lies in how you package the story, working on the craft to make it easy to consume and share.
2. With the **bonfire**, it’s best to find out what people are already talking about on social to form long-term relationships with them. You need to show up on social every day or that spark dies.
3. Then there’s the **firework**, which takes lots of effort to build and is quite spectacular when set off.

Surprise and anticipation are key with any form of storytelling, and it’s not about balance but what works best for your brand.

Bonfires are the most rewarding but hardest to grow, while fireworks work well for big issues like fundraisers to expand the reach.

Duarte said this is one of his favourite quotes at the moment: From Alistair King of King James Group it’s about branding but definitely applies to storytelling, too...

“ Storymaking vs storytelling. Everything you do makes your story. Storymaking gives a platform for others to tell their stories. [#outsideinsight pic.twitter.com/jowS8ggo52](#)— Marketing & Media SA (@Biz_Marketing) [May 18, 2018](#) ”

Duarte says the story doesn't necessarily end once you put down your pen at the marketing desk. Through your storytelling, you need to give your audience a chance to add to and also tell your story in their own words.

Just think of the way the concept of #DayZero was drummed into Capetonians' heads at the end of last year. Duarte feels the image of proposed water collection points released in January did more than all the written posts in scaring many into drastically dropping their consumption levels.



This is how Cape Town's water collection points will work

Petru Saal 29 Jan 2018



He also spoke of the concept of crafting your headline and the importance of pulling out different aspects, rewriting the same post headline 25 times to find the most compelling headline.

But do your bit to help Google be a better librarian. Be authoritative and keep up with culture.

That said, while the craft and how we frame things matters, remember that over-optimised isn't always the best way. Write in a way that appeals to readers, not bots – we're still human (for now). Duarte also shared Daniel Kahneman's study on crisis management, where people registered the pain they experienced during colonoscopies.

“ [#outsideinsight pic.twitter.com/r0XxYEya6y](#)— Marketing & Media SA (@Biz_Marketing) [May 18, 2018](#) ”

Duarte's presentation was followed by a Q&A session with the following highlights:

When it comes to **frequency of posting on social media**, John Sanei said:

“ You want it to be like drugs, scheduled to give a hit.” It doesn't really matter what your brand's specific schedule is as long as you have one, but if your dope is just talcum powder it won't be effective. ”

So you need to put out as much content as you can, at the quality level you're happy with.

Duarte added that it's a good idea to prepare ahead of time so you have content ready and waiting, and don't be shy to ask others to help share your content.

Also, remember that frequency not always based on time but about occasions – we expect news of the Absa Cape Epic once a year around the time of the event, or something from Nando's when there's a political fiasco.



Nando's and *Sunday Times* partner to #rightmyname on Human Rights Day

Juanita Pienaar 20 Mar 2018



Nando's SA invites local bigwigs to put all beef aside on Reconciliation Day

M&C Saatchi Abel 10 Feb 2017



Lastly, when asked how he **comes up with ideas**, Duarte said it hardly ever happens when he's sitting at his desk. He encourages storytellers to attend events and be inspired beyond your own industry. Also, take care of your body, and be aware of the context and culture you put yourself in.



[Behind the Selfie] with... Dave Duarte

Leigh Andrews 21 Oct 2015



An excellent morning that left our storytelling skills refreshed. [Click here](#) for more on Meltwater's Biz Breakfasts, track the latest news in their [press office](#), and follow [Meltwater](#) and [Duarte](#) on Twitter for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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