STOP MARKETING
START STORYTELLING

CONTENTS
HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL
A PREMIUM ON THE AUTHENTIC
BUILDING MEMORIES
LEAVE THE MARKET STALL BEHIND
FEELING NOT FEATURES
LIPSTICK ON THE PIG
THE ULTIMATE POPULARITY CONTEST
SETTING THE BALL ROLLING
FINAL THOUGHTS

WWW.ROOSTERPUNK.COM
TO MAKE THEIR MARKETING EFFORTS MEANINGFUL DURING THIS TIME OF UNPRECEDENTED CRISIS.

Value propositions are being changed, messaging put on review, and a sensitivity towards the insensitivity of selling is rife. So what can B2B marketers do during these crazy times to be relevant and engage customers in different ways?

Storytelling agency Rooster Punk offers up a fresh take on the answer, as well as practical insights and guidance to help B2B companies come out ‘the other side’ in a better shape than when they started.
AS OF WRITING THIS ARTICLE — THE SKY HASN’T FALLEN IN. NOR HAVE FOUR APOCALYPTIC HORSEMEN BEEN SPOTTED ON THE HIGH STREET. BUT IT’S OBVIOUSLY A WORRYING TIME FOR ALL RESIDENTS OF B2B LAND. PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO’VE PUT THEIR HEART AND SOUL INTO FOUNDING A START-UP, HEADS OF GROWTH LOOKING TO EXCEL, OR THE MORE FORWARD-LOOKING AND AMBITIOUS OF CMOS.

The natural response to recent developments is to anticipate only doom and gloom. To view the B2B landscape as a previously abundant forest that’s been burned through to its core. A fire of epic proportions that leaves in its wake a ‘demandageddon’ of shredded budgets and tattered ambitions.

This worldview is not surprising. Psychologists refer to it as the Fixed Mindset, a dominant outlook in times of great uncertainty that shares in the negativity – and it can seep into every business decision.

You know it’s running the show when the panic sets in, when most decisions come with the label ‘knee jerk’. Amid calls to cut budgets, there can also come pressure to reappraise marketing messages in the hope of better reflecting this new reality. Decisions that are taken with little reasoned debate and scant evidence for how audience expectations have ‘changed’.

As a result, marketers can find themselves stuck in a feedback loop, where rushed decisions build on poor assumptions. The result is value propositions that attract what they deserve: the wrong type of interest from people talking to you for the wrong reasons.

That’s far too many wrongs.
THERE IS OF COURSE A SECOND ATTITUDE THAT WE’RE SEEING IN ACTION, AND THAT IS THE GROWTH MINDSET. AT THE HEART OF THIS APPROACH IS THE DESIRE TO ANSWER SOME PRETTY IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:

• How can you use this moment to grow the brand and build deeper, more meaningful customer relationships?

• Is this an opportunity to grow as a marketer, to learn new skills, and to forge a reputation as a Chief innovator?

• What should you be doing to showcase to peers and bosses that marketing can be a real growth-engine, and not just the ‘lead generation team’?

Critical questions, and in truth they should be: we’re living through the greatest cultural and business re-set of our generation. How will marketers respond? Well some, possibly even the majority, will follow the fixed mindset – however unintentionally.

If not battening down hatches, they’ll be cranking up the lever on tactical, product-led messaging to try and stimulate some form of sales engagement. Good luck to them too.

But equally there’s another group of marketers out there who have ambitions to inspire real change. Who appreciate that in this moment it’s their chance to shine – and it’s for you that we write this article.

IT’S FOR THE AMBITIOUS, GROWTH MINDSET LEADERS AND MARKETERS THAT WE HAVE WRITTEN THIS ARTICLE

MARKETING CAN BE YOUR ENGINE OF GROWTH

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL
PUTTING A PREMIUM ON THE AUTHENTIC

SUDDEN CHANGE NOW SEEMS THE ORDER OF THE DAY. BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT WE’VE BEEN ON THIS JOURNEY FOR A LONG TIME – IT’S JUST THE ACCELERATED PACE OF TRAVEL THAT’S DIFFERENT.

For example, the shift away from product selling has been gathering momentum, fuelled by the difficulty of winning people over through features and benefits that are hard to define – and even harder to measure.

Buyers have also experienced disappointment too many times, and now assess such claims through the lens of suspicion and scepticism. Hence why they’re now on the look out for brands they can trust, who feel genuine, authentic, and about something more than just a set of inanimate functions.

In turn this demands that businesses first build an emotional connection with audiences; humanize their message; and demonstrate their credentials as active members of local and national communities.

As a few recent examples show, the trailblazers are already at work:

• Crowdcube – the entrepreneurial investment platform with their Save our Startups initiative

• Farillio – a legal services firm that’s running the awesome #leavenoSMEbehind campaign

• GoDaddy – has joined with other businesses to help fund the GoFundMe Small Business Relief Initiative

• Accora Ltd – and their development of a Covid19 treatment bed inside 36 hours

In their wake, others must follow.

FIND YOUR AUTHENTIC IN EVERY THING AND EVERY CHANNEL
IT’S TIME TO BUILD MEMORIES
This is an article on storytelling, and as with most stories there’s need for an antagonist. In B2B marketing, this role is played by the forces of tradition: the ‘we’ve always done it this way’ type of thinking that encourages a blind obsession with tactical, product-led activity that more often than not trumps any thought of brand marketing.

Yet clear evidence exists to support the view that a more balanced approach is needed, between brand building and demand generation – ideally to the tune of a 46% / 54% split in budgets (a number that jumps to 70% if you’re a SaaS business).

Why? Well to put it simply, demgen is good for short-term selling but it quickly fades from memory – and does little to foster long-term growth. Brand marketing on the other hand offers a host of much-needed benefits:

**Operating at a more emotional level, this is an activity that works to create memories and associations that influence purchase decisions long after it comes to an end.**

**As a result the effects last longer, and lead to steady growth over the long-term.**

**Brand building also helps reduce price sensitivity (people are prepared to pay a little extra for a purpose they buy into) and drive up margins.**

B2C companies have long championed the impact of brand marketing, and typically devote 60% of their comms budgets to making it happen. In B2B however there’s a sizeable lag, not helped by the fact that many businesses aren’t set up to ‘go brand’ in a big way – or worse: they don’t see the need to try something different.

That said, they may not get a choice: with society’s heroes changing from film stars and YouTube influencers to health workers and delivery drivers, there’s a corresponding demand for increased empathy and integrity in business. In this light the insensitivity of product- and claims-driven selling is being exposed – and buyers don’t like what they’re seeing.

**The latest research from Binet & Field suggests the optimum mix of spend for B2B brands is:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEM-GEN</th>
<th>BRAND-GEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(And increase to 70% as a SaaS business)
RIGHT NOW, THOSE COMPANIES WHO HAVEN’T INVESTED IN THEIR BRAND ARE STRUGGLING. WHAT’S MORE, THEY’RE FINDING IT HARDER THAN EVER TO STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD BY FOCUSING EXCLUSIVELY ON PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES. THIS TYPE OF MESSAGING JUST FEELS EMPTY, TIRED, AND LARGELY IRRELEVANT (UNLESS OF COURSE YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE IS HIGHLY PRACTICAL RIGHT NOW – LIKE RESPIRATORS OR REMOTE WORKING TOOLS!).

Tough times. Which is why at Rooster Punk we’re constantly challenging entrepreneurs, founders, and marketing leaders to think differently – to find a new human truth to pivot from. Which is exactly where storytelling enters the picture.

Time for an analogy:

We’ve all experienced the noises, smells, and bustles of a local street market. Where the cries of stall owners intermingle as they try to attract you to their wares and their offers, before agreeing the price, and closing the deal.

How is this any different to B2B marketing? Sure, there’s a growing range of sophisticated tools to call upon – from automation to social listening – but marketing and sales teams still find themselves trying to shout the loudest. And here’s the rub: people don’t want to buy from businesses, as much as they want to buy into them. They increasingly want to know about your values, your culture, your vision, and your purpose for existing. Factors that are best conveyed through emotive storytelling because – as we all know at some intrinsic level – people buy with emotion and justify with fact.

Think about that for a second. Really think about it, because if you grasp the implications there’s only one logical conclusion: this changes everything.
FEELINGS NOT FEATURES

IF MUSIC IS THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE, THEN STORYTELLING IS MOST CERTAINLY THE LANGUAGE OF EMOTION. PARTICULARLY IF DONE RIGHT. AND BY THAT WE MEAN STORIES THAT SHOW A GENUINE UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR AUDIENCE THAT GOES BEYOND A JOB SPEC OR ORG CHART. KNOW THEIR AMBITIONS, THEIR HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS, ALONGSIDE THEIR FEARS, FRUSTRATIONS, AND WORRIES, AND YOU’RE WELL ON THE WAY TO FORGING MORE EARNEST AND OPEN INTERACTIONS.

It’s also a million miles away from the market stall.

Emotional storytelling however demands a whole lot more besides. Alongside the people dimension needs to exist a clear definition of your purpose – what you stand for and believe in. It’s the real ‘why’ behind your actions and needs to extend way beyond “making money for our shareholders” or some bland commitment to “transforming business through data” etc.

For example, while having a great culture or ethical vision is laudable, detailing the underlying reason behind this is what lends credibility. And yes, there’s typically a human story at the heart of it. That’s why one of our favourite jobs is working with brands to help them discover (or at least codify) their purpose, which typically unfolds across three key stages:

**FIRST** we have to get past the bombastic claims of being super awesome and totally unique

**THEN** we get to the really meaningful value, and the positive force a client’s product makes to the lives of its users

**FINALLY** we boil it all down to the underlying reason the company exists – the founder’s true vision – and how this aims to make the world a better place

Get this right and the result is a three-dimensional, authentic reason why customers would want to commit to you. Particularly now in the new reality emerging from the lockdown, where businesses will feel a growing pressure to show that they care about their employees wellbeing and mental health as much as they do their productivity.
THIS ISN’T ANOTHER HOW-TO GUIDE BY PANDEMIC PUNDITS
HOPEFULLY BY NOW YOU’VE NOTICED THAT THIS ARTICLE IS TALKING AROUND THE TOPIC OF STORYTELLING AND EXPLORING THE KEY INGREDIENTS INVOLVED, RATHER THAN SERVING UP ANOTHER ‘HOW TO GUIDE’. AT ROOSTER PUNK WE’VE ALREADY ‘BEEN THERE’ WITH TIPS AND TRICKS ARTICLES (GET IN TOUCH IF YOU HAVEN’T SCRATCHED THAT PARTICULAR ITCH YET). A QUICK WEB SEARCH WILL ALSO SHOW MANY OTHER AGENCIES GETTING ON BOARD THE STORYTELLING TRAIN. AND WE MEAN A LOT.

In fact according to LinkedIn, as of August 2017 there were 570,000 people on their site using the word storyteller in job profiles. Rewind to July 2012, and there were literally 1 or 2. Looks like steady progress is being made, though we should strike a note of caution. Much of this interest comes in response to one of the BIG industry buzzwords: content marketing (OK, 2 buzz words). And with everybody looking to win through content, storytelling has become a fashionable accessory.

The trouble with accessories is that they sit on the outside. They’re not part of the main event. Instead, the output is directed toward specific tasks such as re-ordering product collateral to sound relevant to a reader’s day-to-day responsibilities. It’s the marketing equivalent of putting lipstick on a pig.

Real storytelling however comes from the ground up. Each narrative carefully constructed from the outset to help build positive, emotional connections with an audience – be they customers, prospects, employees, or investors etc.

**NARRATIVES CAN BE ORDERED ACCORDING TO THREE MAIN LEVELS:**

**LEVEL 1:** brand level storytelling that tackles the grand vision, and comes complete with a rallying cry.

**LEVEL 2:** campaign-level storytelling that spans everything from ABM to thought leadership, and combines brand and demand generation into ‘BrandGen’.

**LEVEL 3:** tactical storytelling where a client wants to bring to life a video, case study, event presentation etc.
Where it gets really powerful is when we keep in mind that:

Scientific research confirms that we only remember 5% of what companies tell us about their product attributes

Yet we are x22 more likely to remember those same facts and features if they’re cleverly interwoven into a compelling story

Which once again emphasises the key takeaway from this article: it’s all about feelings not features – emotions not promotions. This is true because emotive storytelling (again, as research indicates) doesn’t just help turn audiences onto your offering. It also helps strengthen their preference to choose you over the competition. This is achieved by using story to craft associations between your brand, the buying occasion, and a range of emotions that prime buyers to place you at the front of the queue.

B2C has long since ‘got’ this, as any viewer of a John Lewis Christmas ad knows. B2B however continues to lurk frustratingly in the distance, or hides behind the fallacy that business buyers are far more rational – even if there’s plenty of research available that shows different.

THE ULTIMATE POPULARITY CONTEST

Storytelling, allied to brand marketing, also gives you a platform to talk to buyers before they start dipping tentative toes into the market.

And as we all know:

According to SiriusDecisions,
70% of the buyer’s journey is complete
before a buyer even reaches out to sales.

Corporate Executive Board says that
57% of executives reach a decision before they contact sales
Which ties nicely into the topic of mental availability. As the evidence shows, the most effective B2B campaigns are aimed at increasing share of mind – rather than share of wallet. Where mental availability enters the picture this is how the decision-making process actually works:

**Rational thought doesn’t play that big a role in any decision**

**Rather than applying logic and analysis, people instead fall back subconsciously on mental shortcuts (called heuristics if you’re interested)**

**The most important of these is the ‘availability shortcut’, which suggests that given a choice people tend to prefer the one that comes to mind most easily**

But surely this only matters in B2C right (shoppers after all don’t think too deeply about most purchases)? B2B buyers, working as part of a committee are far more rational – right? Well, no, not really. Yes, decisions are based on more extensive research and scrutiny, but first a brand has to earn a place at the discussion table. To be one of the businesses recognised (and remembered) as a relevant and suitable option.

Sound like you’re in a popularity contest? That’s because you are. Few companies can claim to exist in a market of one – or that their offering is truly unique. That’s why being likeable and memorable matters in both your explicit (standard product claims) and implicit (feelings and emotions you want to tap into) messaging.
FINALLY, HERE ARE ROOSTER PUNK’S TOP 10 SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT B2B MARKETERS SHOULD BE DOING RIGHT NOW (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

1. **INVEST IN BETTER EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS** and your own company culture. Start living your values and purpose.

2. **SPEAK WITH CUSTOMERS AND PARTNERS ON A ONE-TO-ONE BASIS.** Find out how they’re doing during these uncertain times. And not just via email. When you can, pick up the phone and spark real human interaction – show you actually care.

3. **REVISIT YOUR BRAND’S OVERALL MESSAGING** to ensure it has an emotional story – and one that connects to your customers and their feelings.

4. **THINK ABOUT THOUGHT LEADERSHIP,** and what you can be doing to influence audiences with more authentic, practical guidance that builds toward something deeply positive.

5. **LOOK AT OPPORTUNITIES TO BUY MEDIA MORE EFFECTIVELY,** giving you greater share of voice in your category. Those who talk now will gain a disproportionate advantage, as the market is relatively quiet – but it will get loud again soon!

6. **START STORYTELLING** – find the narrative style that works best for generating different outcomes: you’re next campaign could be a thriller, a drama, a romcom, or feature zombies – go create!

7. **LOOK AT VIDEO AS A KEY WAY TO DRIVE YOUR STORYTELLING,** particularly now with the price coming down – push the boundaries and get people talking.

8. **PREPARE YOUR BRANDGEN PLANS** to ensure you come out of the crisis with a head start.

9. **INVEST IN SOCIAL** and speak to your audience where they’re most comfortable, while taking away the hard-edged ‘corporate’ nature of any communication.

10. **FIGHT YOUR CORNER** as the pressure will come down from above to help fill the sales pipeline with immediate opportunities – lead the charge in supporting more sustainable, long-term growth.
IN SUMMING UP, WE WOULD STRONGLY ENCOURAGE YOU TO BE OPTIMISTIC OF WHAT LIES AHEAD.

The business landscape may have suffered a sizeable forest fire, and our hearts go out to those who have seen years of hard work go up in smoke. But as in nature, the green shoots of recovery will soon become evident. New businesses will emerge, and exciting opportunities will present themselves.

In effect, B2B marketers now stand at a crossroads: do they continue down more traditional paths, or do they embrace the more sustainable, sympathetic, and emotional angle offered through storytelling and BrandGen? Growth will certainly be coming, and it’s in our power to nurture this for long-term benefit rather than short-term profit.

This is the time for everybody sporting a B2B marketer badge to show the wider business community that we’re all engines of opportunity, and that now is the time to act.