

*Insights and thoughts from our Partner Markus Kramer on core branding principles with broad applicability for any marketer, communications professional or business leader. Views are subjective and our own. October 17<sup>th</sup> 2016. © Brand Affairs AG.*

<http://brandaffairs.ch/en/strategic-narrat...r-brand-building/>

# Strategic Narrative for Brand Building

Research shows our brains are not hard-wired to understand logic or retain facts for very long. Our brains are wired to understand and retain stories.<sup>1</sup>

## “I have a dream ...”

... said Martin Luther King Jr. on 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, in Washington D.C. in his now famous Freedom-Speech. Good stories have the ability to inspire people, to shift opinions – and of course to trigger actions.

The same goes for powerful brand narrative, too. Just think of Apples ‘Think Different’. A short and powerful narrative that continues to lead millions of people to choose Apple over its competitors.



<sup>1</sup> Prof. Jennifer Aaker <https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/media-network-blog/2014/aug/28/science-storytelling-digital-marketing>



The practice of strategic narrative draws on storytelling's timeless appeal. Just like the universal quality of stories, understanding how strategic narrative works can support brand building, drive campaigns or communicate a company's change in strategy.

One of the perhaps more surprising elements is that the power of strategic narrative is as much in the structure as in the content of a story. In other words, content may vary depending on context - but the structure is perennial. There may be endless ways of narrating but there are actually very few structures of strategic narrative.

How then do we create effective strategic narrative for brands?

## Hidden Codes

Aristotle was amazed when he discovered that if you join the dots of narrative or build bridges in between well-structured paragraphs you get a 'plot'. The quality of good strategic narrative is influenced mostly by deciding which dots are to be connected and in what sequence.

On the one hand 'The plot' is the codename for a strategic narrative within the field of meaningful brand management. A brand's Master plan – or call it a business plan – on the other hand, is essentially a road map on how to realize a vision underpinned by meaning.

By perpetually carrying both the master plan and the story at once or in one word – the plot - strategic narrative in the context of brand building can a priori lead to cult status over time.

## Deep-seated Needs

The raison d'être of a strategic narrative for brands is to respond to the deeper need of consumers to make sense of the world. It is fundamental in the process of turning a world in chaos into a world order. A meaningful plot or a strategic narrative is capable of transmuting our non-linear worldview into a linear one.

If brands want to occupy an important place in the minds of their target audience, then they need to begin addressing this deeper need. As the branding experts Schaefer and Kuehlwein wrote: "The best way up is to go deep."<sup>2</sup>

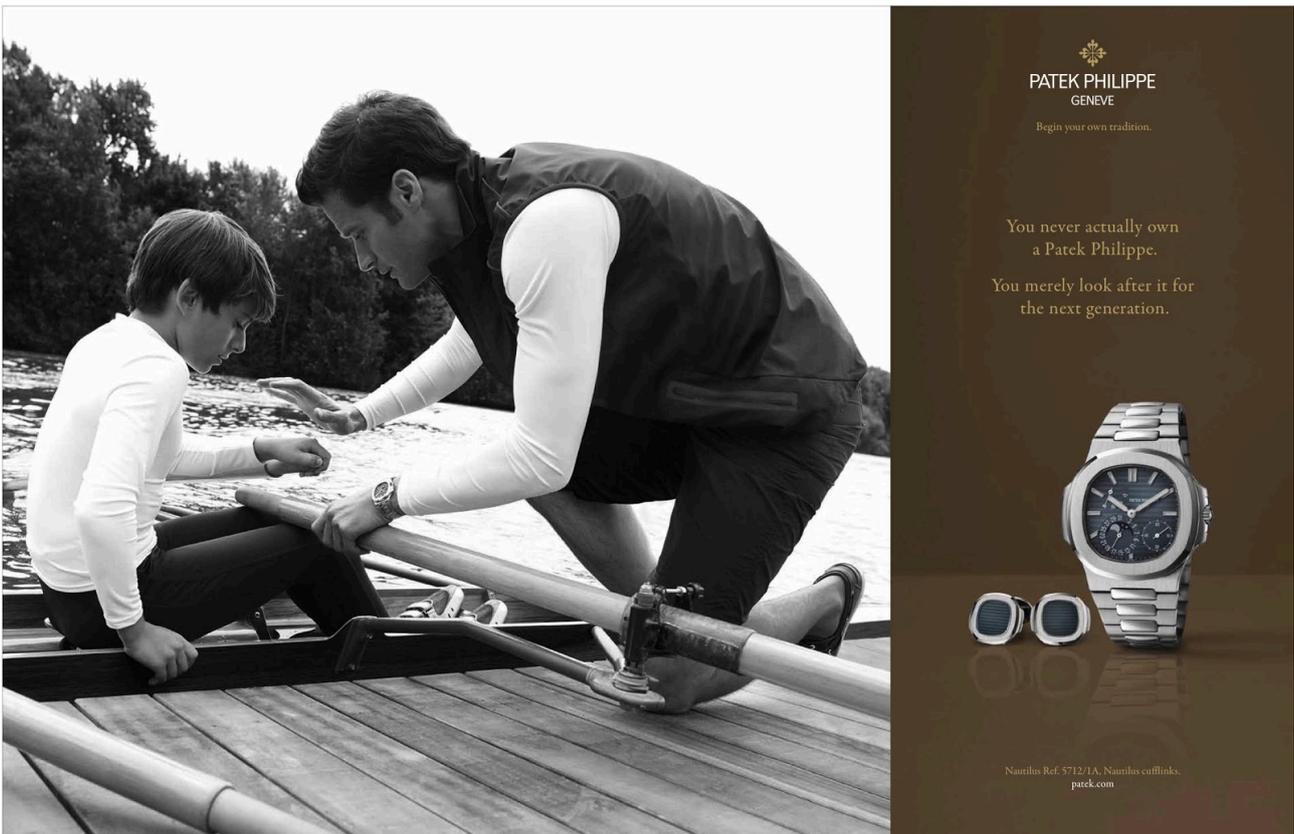
***Longevity and durability are the magical ingredients of strategic narrative that change opinion and trigger action.***

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<sup>2</sup> Schaefer and Kuehlwein <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Rethinking-Prestige-Branding-Secrets-Ueber-Brands/dp/0749470038>

This is because the two are indicators of the sustainability of the message delivered through the narrative. Perhaps the most illustrative example of this is evident in Patek Philippe's strategic narrative based on the universal bond between fathers and sons; or in other words on the passing of tradition between mentors and apprentices. At its root, the word 'tradition' means to pass on or to hand over.

The message of Patek Philippe's brand is "You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation."<sup>3</sup> is deliberately crafted to transcend generations, shifting value from price to the legacy you build and pass on.



Can your brand's strategic narrative be as perennial as that?

## The Perennial Truth

May I suggest that a well thought out strategic narrative is one of the most important areas of focus in 21st century brand management. If you don't know where to begin, here is a good starting point:

<sup>3</sup> Patek Philippe <http://www.patek.com/en/communication/product-advertising>



The key to building effective strategic narrative is hidden inside an architectural masterpiece located in Scotland – within the Rosslyn Chapel. There is only one inscription on the entire timeless stonework of the 15th-century sanctuary and it reads as follows:

“Wine is strong. The King is stronger. Stronger than these two is a woman. But the strongest of all is the Truth.”

The most effective strategic narrative has to be the one that is closest to the perennial and perpetual Truth, with a capital T. Scientific truth, personal truth, psychological truth, legendary truth etc.

In order to survive and thrive in the post-positioning era of total transparency, brands need to define and hone a non-negotiable strategic narrative that is in total harmony with the most meaningful inner Truth of what they stand for and the culture they embody. Volkswagen lost over a third of its market capitalization within a matter of days not because the company builds bad cars, but because the narrative of ‘for the love of cars’ resounded as a lie with consumers. Re-building trust will take more than replacing diesel filters. Truthful strategic narratives that are guided by a higher purpose will keep winning perpetually.<sup>4</sup>

Image Credentials: Patek.com, Youtube.com

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<sup>4</sup> When Brand Meaning and Purpose Become Your 3rd Place <http://www.markuskramer.net/when-brand-meaning-and-purpose-become-your-3rd-place/>