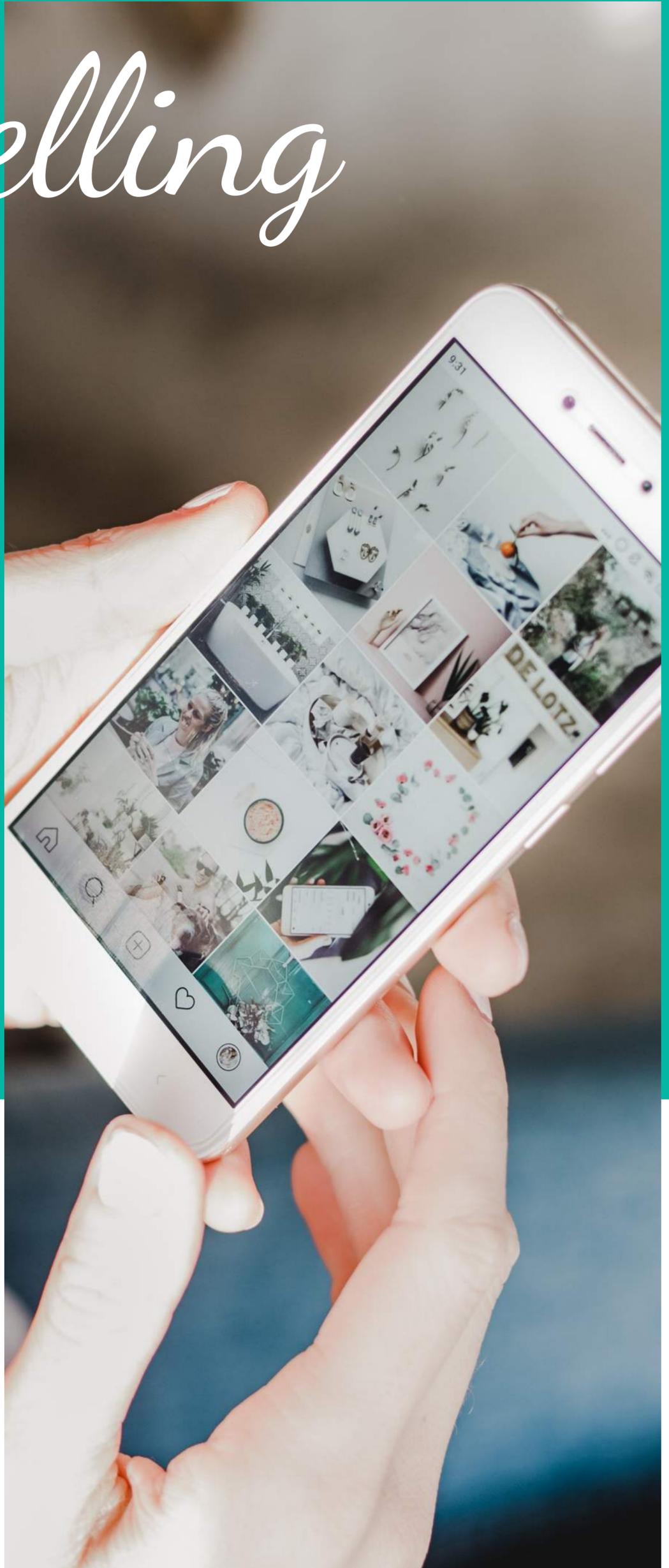


Storytelling

with

SOCIAL MEDIA



hmi

Let's share your story

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Why is Storytelling Important?

So, “storytelling”.

You probably feel a little ambivalent about how that word is used online. Tedious buzzword? Yes. Inscrutable artform so vaguely-defined that you have no idea where to begin? Also yes.

Sigh.

But take heart. This stuff isn't nonsense. It's actually incredibly powerful. And it's practical, so it can be actually be *used*. (And that's the whole point of this short book).

Let's take a closer look.



It's not just about attention

Yes, social media is an attention economy, and anything that can grab people as they scroll past is a huge asset.

But storytelling is also important because of what happens *after* that first click.

Whether you're a sole operator or a huge corporate entity, your long-term growth (and indeed your survival) is built on your ability to stand out from the crowd. In a world of tourism that increasingly favors experiences over things, it is often fruitless trying to beat the competition on purely practical terms like a reduced price.

What differentiates you from the competition is your ability to offer that special *something* - a kind of story-rich experience that makes people's hearts thump loudly. As weird as it initially sounds, if you woo would-be travelers with the right story, they will even happily pay you much more than the competition. Price isn't the reason they prefer what you're offering them.



But how can this work when in a flooded market you might only get one shot at getting their attention, and especially when social media is so ephemeral, and moving at a blistering pace?

Enter storytelling, aka. "a great way to keep people coming back for more" - and these days, it's essential. In fact, it's big business. For example, a quarter of a century ago, would the average grown adult feel comfortable admitting in public that they're a fan of Lord of the Rings? Now millions would happily book a trip to New Zealand to see where the film trilogy was made.

However, none of us have Peter Jackson on speed dial, and few (if any!) of us have a multi-million dollar marketing budget. But the same basic principles that drive tourists to New Zealand in droves can bring magic to your business, and we'll discuss those in the next section.



It's REALLY about trust and love (and obsessive addiction).

If you're telling a great story, your audience will lean in. They'll lower their guard, switch off their weary caution that usually serves them so well in the numbingly noisy online world, and they'll really start caring about where you're taking them - and how it's increasingly making them feel.

Good stories also hook, using carefully-paced gratification, rising tension, and the promise of an emotionally satisfying payoff. It is the best way to activate readers into action - and pretty much the only credible way to sell anything to them.

It's also, you know, incredibly fun. It's possible to know the ins and outs of storytelling theory and still fall head over heels for a good yarn. We all succumb to a great story.

That's just how we're wired.

Storytelling is not a talent, but a skill that can be learned and developed. It's our best, oldest trick in the book - and it will never, ever stop working on us.

That's why you need great storytelling on social media.

The Basic Principles of Storytelling

The most important thing to learn about storytelling is that it's not prescriptive.

Forget hunting for a formula, or a one-size-fits-all approach. That's not playing to storytelling's strengths.

Instead, think of it as a *toolbox*. You reach in and grab what you need. Sometimes a hammer will do the job perfectly. Other times, a screwdriver, or a wrench.

Sometimes you'll combine them, switching from one to the other.

Sometimes you'll try using *everything* until you get the results you want in a way you couldn't have predicted. (In hindsight though, it will look like a stroke of strategic genius!)

If you follow a toolbox approach, while bearing in mind the central tenets of great storytelling as outlined next, you'll quickly learn how to become a terrific storyteller.



The Storytelling Tools

Structure

For largely mysterious reasons, human beings are drawn to the number three. Our stories gravitate towards trilogies. Our most-loved quotes come in threes (“hook, line, sinker” and “mind, body, spirit”). Photographers adhere to the “rule of thirds” because it’s what pleases our eyes the most. On and on the list goes.

For storytellers of all kinds, this is a simple trick to apply: trigger your audience’s obsession with this magical number by grouping everything into threes or groups of three - including copying traditional story structure by arranging your content in three “Acts” (for example, “Part 1”, “Part 2” and “Part 3”).

Other ways that structure plays into your story:



Beginning hook: Where you first grab attention - on social media, usually in the form of an arresting headline, a few seconds of video or a stunning photo that makes you think “oh wow, where is THAT?”

Inciting Incident: The trigger for the events of the story, and the moment where the story truly comes alive and where the reader first feels compelled to know how it ends.

Rising tension: A growing expectation of something important about to happen in the story, something you’re trying to make the reader care about. *No tension?* No urgency - and probably no story.

Emotional payoff: Where all that tension is resolved, and the storyteller’s initial promise to the audience (“I promise the answers are coming!”) is delivered upon.

Character change: A journey. A revelation. A change of heart. A change that only works in one direction (an inspiring “rags to riches” tale looks very different when played backward). Without some meaningful change, it won’t feel like a proper story.

Timeliness

What are the trending stories right now, and how can your brand message play into them? Alternatively, what has worked before and how can you repurpose it (consider timeless stories that enthrall generations as they are told over and over)? And finally, what is the message your story is going to deliver that you know the world desperately needs right now?

Emotion

Good stories aim to trigger specific emotions. What are you trying to make people feel? What is that emotion *for* (for them and for you)? What do you want them to do with that feeling?

Sensual detail

As science journalist Annie Murphy Paul discovered by studying [MRI scans of the brains of people reading fiction](#), using senses-related language (“*the sand felt gritty between her toes*”) momentarily fools the brain into thinking it’s having a real-life experience - with huge implications for travel storytellers wanting to “make you feel like you’re really there”.



Dual-layered story

Better known as “the moral of the story”, this is the universal message that underpins it, which almost everyone can identify with.

For example, Cinderella is the story of a girl who marries a prince - but it's *really* an ageless fable about justice versus oppression. Without this second layer of messaging, a story's reach is severely curtailed. (How many girls end up with princes, compared with people in the world battling against unjust treatment?)

Agency

This is where you “activate” a story's readers, making them feel empowered to take action and feel like their individual actions matter in the context of the story you're telling them. This applies for any story trying to engineer a shift in behavior - from the level of choosing one destination or product or service over the next, all the way to agitating for social change on a political stage.



Advocacy and opinion

For good or ill, social media has evolved into a platform for opinion-driven storytelling - with all the challenges and opportunities that come along with that approach.

Borrowing heavily from the opinionated DNA of popular blogging, large brands and companies have become increasingly willing to take risks on social media by “taking a stand” on issues that they and their target audience believe in - in direct contrast to the old-school advice to keep opinion (particularly political opinion) out of brand marketing to avoid controversy, except when absolutely unavoidable.

In this new way of thinking, controversy is seen less as an evil and more of an opportunity to build deeper loyalty with a target customer base, even if it alienates a smaller, unlike-minded audience. It can generate powerful engagement, but not without risk, which needs to be heavily considered.

An example of this on social media include Outside Magazine’s recent focus on [sexual harassment in the outdoors](#) (which frequently [triggers discussion and argument on Facebook](#)).

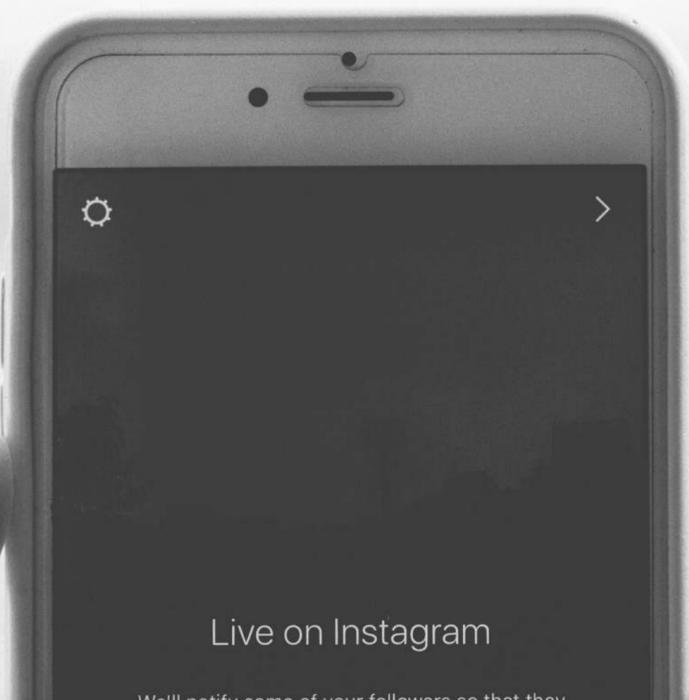
Optimism

Engineering the feeling of being able to make a difference, and making the audience feel that making a difference really *matters* can be similarly powerful.

According to recent surveys, more and more online audiences are avoiding current affairs news because of [how negatively it impacts their emotional wellbeing](#). Very few audiences seek out stories that fill them with a sense of frustrated powerlessness. For a story to inspire positive emotions and even meaningful action, it has to create optimism - ideally by giving the reader something that will help them take action to fight hopelessness in their life.

A current example of this: telling stories that raise awareness of the challenges of a changing climate and an increasingly polluted natural environment without making everyone feel those battles have already been lost

As an element of storytelling on social media, this is the least common and the hardest to employ safely and successfully - but the one with the richest rewards for the storyteller.



Storytelling on Social Media

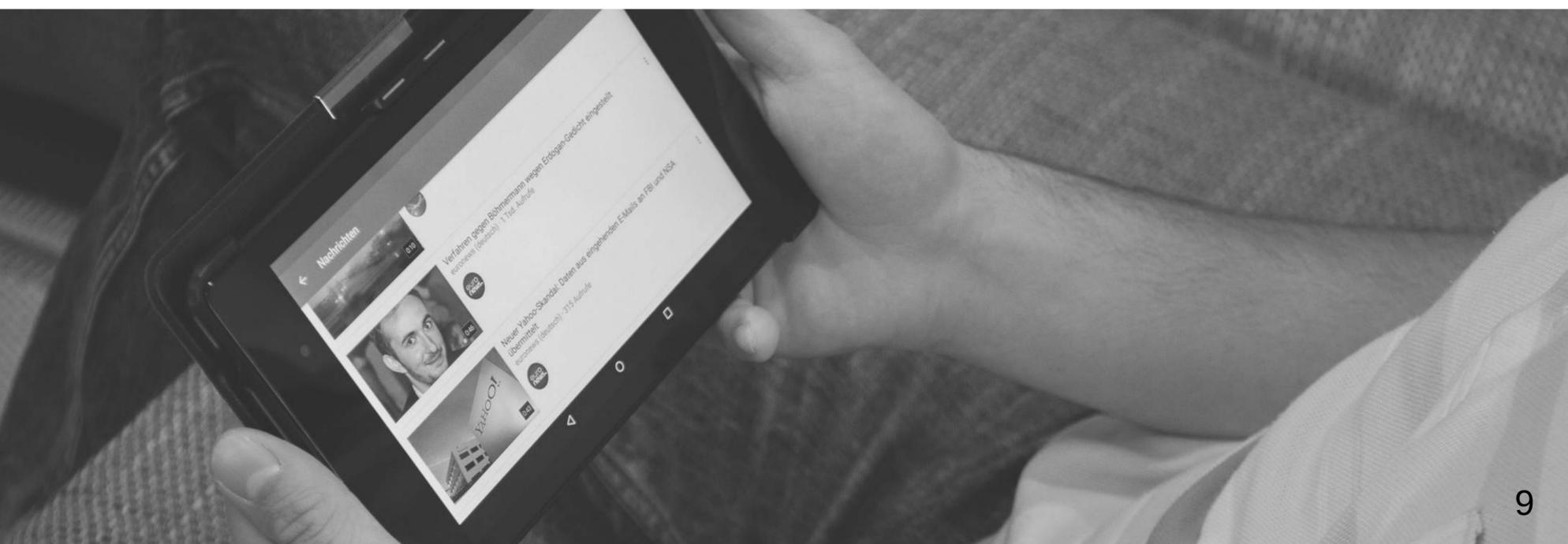
Digital storytelling borrows from the ancient principles of telling a good story that goes back thousands of years (and probably much longer). But the internet, and social media in particular, bring incredible new levels of connectivity into the mix, creating entire ecosystems of storified content that readers can enjoy by clicking a single hyperlink. It may look familiar out there, but it really is a whole new world - and it's changing every day.

If there's one storytelling rule that *always* applies online, it's "learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist" - Pablo Picasso.

With that in mind, please consider all of the suggestions in this book as useless until you run your own experiments with them.

No, really. What works brilliantly for one person or team may be a poor fit for the unique strengths of another. Your best chance of standing out is to take the tried and tested principles of good storytelling and attempt to do something new with them - and that always takes a lot of trial and error (and cross-platform experimentation, so don't take these platform-specific suggestions as gospel). Also, don't forget to consider [what platforms best fit your business](#) in the first place (i.e. Looking to attract boomers? Put your efforts into Facebook instead of Instagram).

Here are a few of the most popular and effective storytelling techniques at work on social media today.



Get Out Of The Way

The best visual storytellers know when to remove themselves from the picture.

If you're National Geographic, with 112 million followers on Instagram (one of the few non-celebrity accounts in [the top 50 most-followed](#) accounts) this means regularly giving your account over to your incredibly accomplished staff of photographers and writers.

If you're a talented artist like [Heidi Annalise](#), who loves turning empty Altoid tins into works of landscape art as she travels the world, you have a formula that rarely requires you to be in view (so the focus is entirely on your work).

If you're a brand, it could mean partnering with an established visual storyteller and giving them "the keys to your account" for a week - for example, photographer [Lolá Ákínmádé Åkerström's](#) week-long partnership with the official Swedish tourist board Instagram account. Or if you're a sole creator, you could try *curation* - attempting to build a presence by artfully reposting the work of others in a storified way, building authority on a topic as you go.



TRY

Creative ways to keep your own face out of the shot, or try showcasing someone else's work to your followers (and letting them know you're doing it).



BEST USED ON

Instagram (obviously, because it's so visual!), and Twitter (mindful curation can help to grow an audience of followers who sincerely want to know what you'll post next).

Hashtag Challenge: Create A Movement

If your platform is big enough, you can create a hashtag on a theme and encourage others to fit their own stories into it. Then, amplify those stories by resharing until it has gained a life of its own and you don't even have to be present.

For example, British adventurer Alastair Humphreys created the “microadventures” initiative - a series of weekend or evening-long outdoor challenges that anyone can do, not just professional adventurers. By using the hashtag **#microadventure** and challenging his followers to get involved and interact with one another, Humphreys also created a wide-reaching marketing channel for his own work.

Elsewhere, travel-writing sketch artist **Candace Rose Rardon** encourages her Instagram followers to step outside and sketch something once a month. The tagline for her **Moment Sketchers challenge** is “What if you could circle the globe without ever leaving home?” - and her role is to showcase all the sketches submitted to her.



TRY

Creating a hashtag that defines your branding story, then think of a way someone else could use your hashtag to celebrate their own accomplishments.



BEST USED ON

Instagram is possible, but for potential viral reach, use Twitter.

Here's Who You're Helping

If your work or your brand is designed to help people have rich, fulfilling travel experiences, your biggest storytelling asset is those experiences publicly documented for all to see.

Just as a smiling face subtly communicates the positive value of what's on offer, a well-told travel story can show the reader what they could expect if they turned up themselves - including, most importantly, how they'd feel. The most powerful of these stories are the ones told by other travellers - working both as evocative escapism (and sensory language persuasion, see *Basic Principles: Sensual Detail*) and as a subtle way of gathering testimonials for your work.

In practice, this is about furnishing visitors and customers with the tools to post their own stories so you can curate and rebroadcast them in an effective way. On Instagram, the most obvious approach is the use of brand-specific hashtags to encourage people to tag you when they post. But *any* approach for sharing these kinds of stories, on any platform, is probably going to pay off handsomely. In addition, visitors and customers often also love when their work is shared, which can endear them to you even more.



TRY

Showing the impact of the work you do on the everyday stories of other people.



BEST USED ON

All platforms will benefit from this sort of content. If the content is plentiful, then Instagram Stories may be the best way to reshare more of it on a consistent basis, without drowning your own feed.

Go Behind The Scenes

How is the perfect story made?

We'd all love to peek behind the curtain at a theater performance - and this technique is all about crafting content around that idea in an intentional yet candid-seeming way. For every artfully-posed Instagram-worthy moment, there is a lot of preparation and experimentation - and if you show that to an audience, you'll build a sense of intimacy and authenticity that will do wonders for your credibility - especially if you're brave (and smart) enough to show what happens when things go wrong, and have the ability to laugh at your own mistakes.



TRY

A fascinating "day in the life" of you, doing your thing.



BEST USED ON

Instagram Stories and Facebook Stories are perfect places to share a "day in the life". And if it resonates well, consider saving it as *Highlight*.



In Their Own Words

This is all about stripping away everything but character and dialogue. Instead of putting things in your own words, you step back and use lengthy quotes from other people that tell their story in their own words.

The most famous example of this is Brandon Stanton's Humans Of New York project, which has more than 17 million followers on Facebook. With an ever-changing cast of characters, the stories are heartfelt (emotional) and usually convey the subject's opinion on some aspect of their lives, triggering discussion in the comments. Stanton's own opinion usually remains invisible except through his editorial choices.

While the series has given him a platform for philanthropy and political criticism, he rarely steps out from behind the lens. When he did so in 2016 to criticize Donald Trump, it became [one of the most-shared posts in Facebook history](#).



TRY

Posting nothing but well-chosen quotes from other people, including lengthy ones where appropriate. This can even be as simple as sharing testimonials from clients or visitors.



BEST USED ON

With a higher character limit, Facebook is a great place to share word-heavy posts. Instagram can also be used for shorter posts.

Play It Again (And Again, And....)

If your work revolves around a story-driven tagline, the more times you can repeat that tagline, the more likely it'll stick in someone's memory, and the more chances you'll have to build loyalty with your core audience who believes in that exact same story.

This approach is all about identifying that tagline and posting (or reposting) content that reinforces it again and again - yet another example of "show, don't tell" that works so well in a visual medium.



TRY

Coming up with ten different ways to deliver exactly the same core message that defines your brand, using images, video footage (live & pre-recorded) and anything else you can come up with.



BEST USED ON

The ten different ways will likely lend themselves to different platforms. Live video can be used on Facebook and Instagram; short videos or images may be best on Twitter, etc. This should become more clear as the content is developed.

“You’ll Never Guess What Happened Next”

Twitter’s unique strength for storytelling is the tweet thread, where tweets are strung into a connected series that displays as a chain and can be easily read from start to finish. This allows the use of all the structural elements of good storytelling: an opening hook (which the reader will always be able to scroll back up to, no matter which tweet in the series they land on), rising tension, a sense of mystery and unanswered questions that can be paid off at the end, and so on.

It also allows for a kind of “playing out in real time” storytelling that is highly addictive to read - even if the events in question are retrospective. These threads can also be aggregated into storied Twitter Moments: for example, the story of a piece of poop in a purse that became so popular [it was covered by Mashable](#), and [this delightful tale of finding a typewriter museum near Barcelona](#), which starts with a classic hook: “So, something magical happened to me today, and I wanted to tell you all about it.”



TRY

Taking your story and breaking it up into 15 or 20 parts, each of which is making you want to read the next part.



BEST USED ON

Twitter, obviously!

Coming To You Live

There's no arguing that live video is growing in popularity - but its strengths as a storytelling platform might not be so obvious. Why do a Live broadcast when something could go wrong? Isn't it better to minimise that risk with a pre-recording?

This is all about tension. You can feel it when attending other live performances, like theater or musical events - and it creates a nervous energy that makes it exciting and a little scary to watch. It's also absolutely clear that even if the broadcaster has superb control over their material, they can't have *full* control, because this is live, and anything could happen - so it's easy to get hooked, because you want to see how it will end.

This is a storytelling approach that particularly lends itself to travel - "coming to you live from...". Using Live while travelling brings a few technical challenges, but with worldwide mobile network coverage improving every year, they're unlikely to be an issue except in the most remote places.



TRY

Treating a live video as a scripted piece of carefully crafted content, but delivered live as a performance (like live episodes of popular scripted TV shows).



BEST USED ON

In 2017, one out of every five Facebook videos was streaming live - and a year later, the number of Facebook Live broadcasts hit 3.5 billion. So yeah, Facebook! But Instagram is also a great place for live video, if your audience demographics trend younger.

“Granola Or Bacon?” (‘Choose Your Adventure’ linked threads)

Named after a hyper-viral Twitter thread that acts as a kind of [choice-driven adventure game about being Beyonce’s assistant](#), with a surprisingly deep narrative and a somewhat “Fight Club” style ending. At the time of writing, it’s gathered 100,000 Retweets and 250,000 Likes.

The technique here is to plan it all out in advance - so when you make the “choice tweets” (eg. “Click here if you chose the 5 start breakfast”), they’re pre-made so you can place them in the right position in the thread.

This is a lot of work, obviously - but also a lot of potential attention. This Twitter thread was picked up by [Mashable](#), [AV Club](#), [Slate](#), [The Daily Dot](#) and more, increasing its reach by millions of people.



TRY

Sketching out a branching narrative, to see if it will fit a Twitter “choice tweet” structure.



BEST USED ON

Twitter, once again.



Newsjacking

Twitter is a platform dominated by popular news cycles and trending stories - and if you can fit your story (via the right hashtag) into a popular wave of stories, you can get a huge amount of attention very quickly.

Unless the trending news story is predictable (for example, Super Bowl related tweets), this is difficult to do well (especially when discussions are heated, as they usually are on Twitter) - but with the right amount of caution and creativity, this is a good way to use already-popular stories to elevate your own.



TRY

Paying attention to the trending news stories of the day, and think about ways to (respectfully) add to those conversations in a way that puts your story in front of lots of strangers.



BEST USED ON

Trending stories are often first found on Twitter, but can easily be “jacked” and played out on other channels as well.

Unboxing

This technique is all about uncovering and resolving a mystery in a single piece of streaming and/or prerecorded video (using rising tension leading to an emotional resolution). In many cases, the storyteller knows what is going to happen, but they hide their foreknowledge because it would ruin the suspense - and instead lead the viewer through the story until the emotional payoff at the end.

Sometimes the storyteller records something where the emotional outcome is uncertain - typified by “unboxing videos”, where something is removed from its packaging on camera, mainly for the gratification of the viewer. The most popular unboxing story to date happened on Facebook, when Texan mother Candace Payne [filmed herself unwrapping and donning a Star Wars Chewbacca mask](#). At the time of writing it's been seen 176 million times.



→ **TRY**

Recording a short discovery-driven video, attempting to keep that final moment of surprise and revelation until the very end.

→ **BEST USED ON**

These are extremely popular on YouTube, but are also well-suited for Instagram Stories. And of course there is always the viral potential of Facebook, so get that Chewbacca mask ready.

Visual Essay (With A Positive Twist)

This is about delivering a short piece of factual content, tightly edited, with a strong, positive message behind it. Modern audiences respond strongly to stories of change and empowerment (and poorly to stories that foster feelings of helplessness). This technique is about saying something hopeful and meaningful in a really punchy way - one core message per short video.

A great example is Nuseir Yassin, a Palestinian/Israeli video blogger, formerly a staff member at Venmo, who started publishing [one-minute videos of his travels as he circled the world](#). With just 60 seconds to tell a story on a theme, Yassin's videos were tightly crafted (taking him up to 9 hours to shoot and edit).

While recent videos tackle more controversial subjects in greater detail, like [segregation](#) ("I hope this video makes you angry..."), his core reputation is built on a brand of micro-storytelling that's a reliably uplifting experience.



→ **TRY**

Picking an issue you want your target audience to care about, and boiling it down to a 60-second presentation designed to inform and inspire action.

→ **BEST USED ON**

YouTube is the obvious choice, as it is second only to Google, but the viral potential that Facebook offers can also not be forgotten.

Takedown

Every successful revolution is about overthrowing “The Enemy”, whether that’s a person, an institution, an idea or even a personal fear. It’s the oldest and simplest story we know, a struggle against something unjust that ends in righteous victory - and it will never stop hooking us.

This technique is about defining an Enemy, and challenging your audience to rise up against it, using heartfelt rhetoric delivered in an entertaining way. The subject could be an injustice, an increasingly outmoded idea or trend that belongs in the dustbin of history - or it could even be shining a light on [people manipulating data to cheat on Instagram](#).

A high-profile example of this is the Vienna (Austria) Tourist Board encouraging visitors to be more mindfully present as they explore the city. Instead of seeing everything through a screen or a lens, they launched an anti-Instagram marketing campaign called *Unhashtag Vienna* - with the sly tagline “See Vienna, not #Vienna”. At first glance it looks controversial - but dig deeper into the campaign, and you’ll find it’s powered by a moderate, positive philosophy on social media use:

“We don’t want to lay down the law...we want to encourage the thoughtful use of digital technology, not reject it.” - [Helena Hartlauer](#), media relations manager, Vienna Tourist Board



TRY

Identifying an issue that you and your target audience really care about, and crafting a piece of content designed to agitate for change (ideally while making them laugh).



BEST USED ON

This strategy can work on all channels, but depends largely on who your audience and the Enemy is. Go where the people are most likely to rally behind your takedown.

Lessons From Other Platforms

In its earliest days, social media was the conversation around the stories being told elsewhere, mainly on blogs and other content platforms. Nowadays, social frequently is the story - but not always. Those so-called older platforms (blogs, newsletters, everything in [the dark forest of the internet](#)) are still around and still surprisingly powerful - and they're being joined by a new wave of content-delivering methods, most notably audio, with the recent explosion in quality mass-market podcasting.

If it's reaching a lot of people online, don't write it off just because it's not on social media. There are plenty of useful storytelling lessons to learn by throwing your net a little wider.



If it works on blogs, why not on social too?

A rising force in the travel industry (with an impressive list of high-profile brand partnerships under her belt), [Oneika Raymond](#) is a former foreign language teacher who knows how to educate an audience in a fun way that sticks.

After many years of blogging, she knows the power of radical honesty. She's also smart enough to know that her brand of storytelling will work anywhere, including on social media.

Her Instagram and Facebook posts are a perfect example of this, and usually structured to take the reader on a short journey of discovery on a topic she cares about.

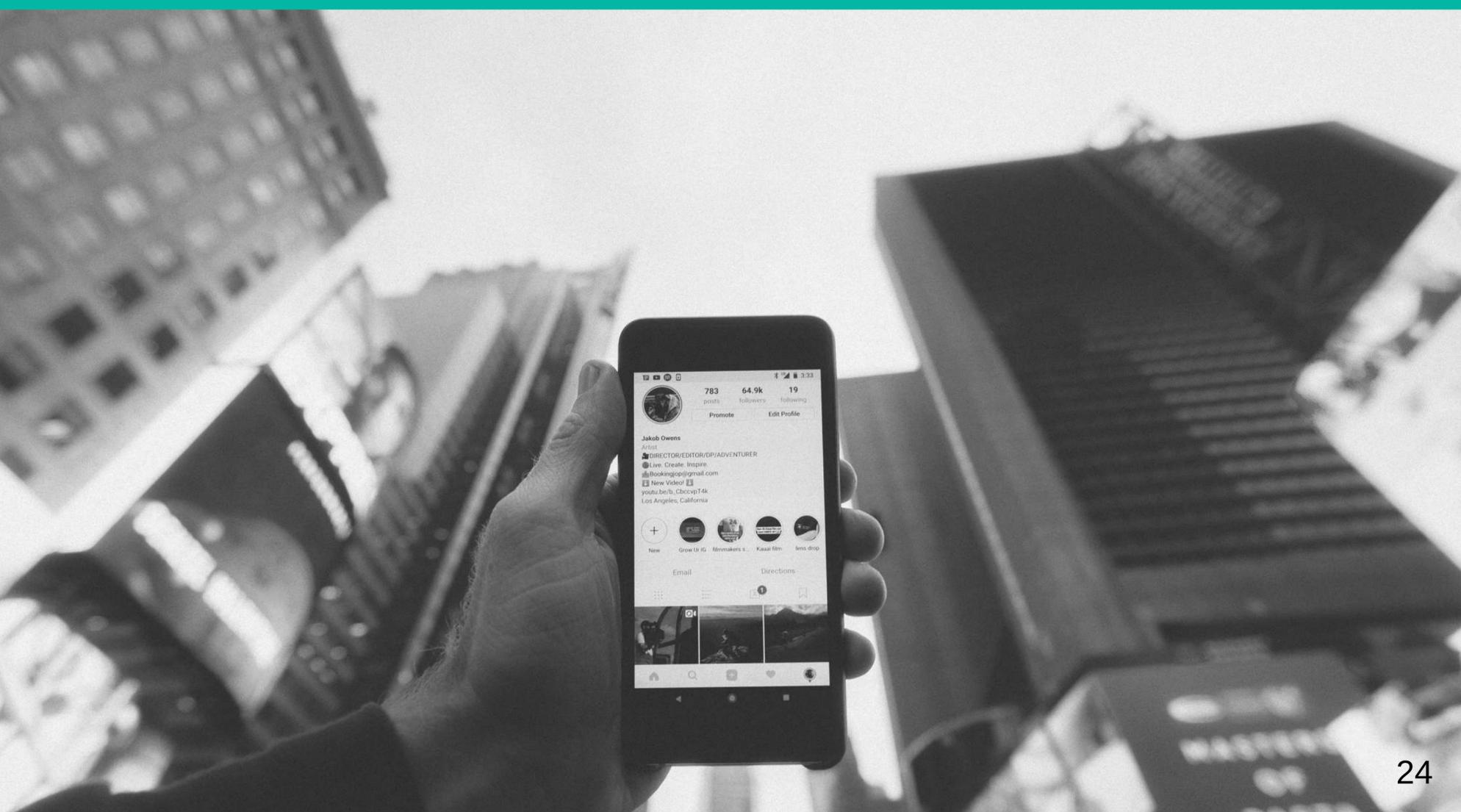
Her posts generally start with a strong beginning hook, a fact-heavy (but chatty and personable) argument, and finally a question or two at the end, to open the topic up to her readers - all delivered via an eye-catching, professional-quality image that grabs someone's attention as they scroll past.

Where many influencers might think a great photo would be enough on its own, Oneika uses her visuals to drive attention to her words, allowing her to write short blog-style essays - and thereby using Facebook and Instagram to tell the short-form stories she wants to tell.



TRY

Turn captions into a micro-blog, and see them as an opportunity to share truths about you and your business while generating thoughtful discussion.



An [example from July 2019](#) begins with:

“*ARE PAID VACATION DAYS A RIGHT OR A PRIVILEGE?* You work hard, so you deserve paid leave, amirite? However, turns out just how much you're entitled to is up for debate, depending on which country you live in.”

This paragraph promises answers - but you have to keep reading to get them. But rather than hitting the reader with a wall of text, Oneika breaks up the following paragraphs with spaces, horizontal lines and emojis, making it very easy to read at a glance.

It's a formula that works well, getting an enormous amount of engagement AND delivering small amounts of the kind of quality content you'd normally find on a blog - all without leaving social.

Intimacy In Audio (And Apps)

Podcasting is a viral success. In 2018, around one in four Americans were listening to at least one podcast episode per month. By mid 2019, that figure has risen to one in three - a jump of around 25-30 million people in 12 months.

Podcasting is a terrific platform for storytelling - partly because it's hands-off and eyes-off, making it perfect content for a captive audience on a morning commute, and partly because online audio (like radio before it) triggers the imagination by engaging just one of the senses, letting the listener “fill in” their own sensory experiences in their mind's eye to complete the story.

However, from a social media perspective, the best reason to have a podcast is so your audience can hear you speak.



Just as leaders build loyalty through public speaking, influencers and brands can build trust by using engaging, compelling voices - sometimes their own, sometimes via hired talent - to deliver their stories. An example of both the former and the latter is [Gimlet Media](#), who successfully produce branded podcasts for sponsors while running a number of highly successful and influential shows in-house.

Business blogger Pat Flynn's online presence started growing at an exponential rate when he started releasing The Smart Passive Income Podcast - and he now ascribes most of his growth to the fact that listeners could hear his sincerity and respond to it. Popular blogger Mark Manson also records audio for his site's readers - in this case, embedding it directly into his incredibly popular blog posts, using an on-site mp3 player.

It's also possible to use other people's audio story platforms to reach new people. The obvious example is being interviewed, but brand partnerships can also be fruitful. Storyteller Candace Rardon (see: "[Challenge And Amplify](#)") gained a lot of good publicity by [narrating some of her stories for the meditation app Calm](#).



TRY

Seeing how your audience responds when they hear your voice, or the voice of someone carefully chosen to represent your brand in an effective way.

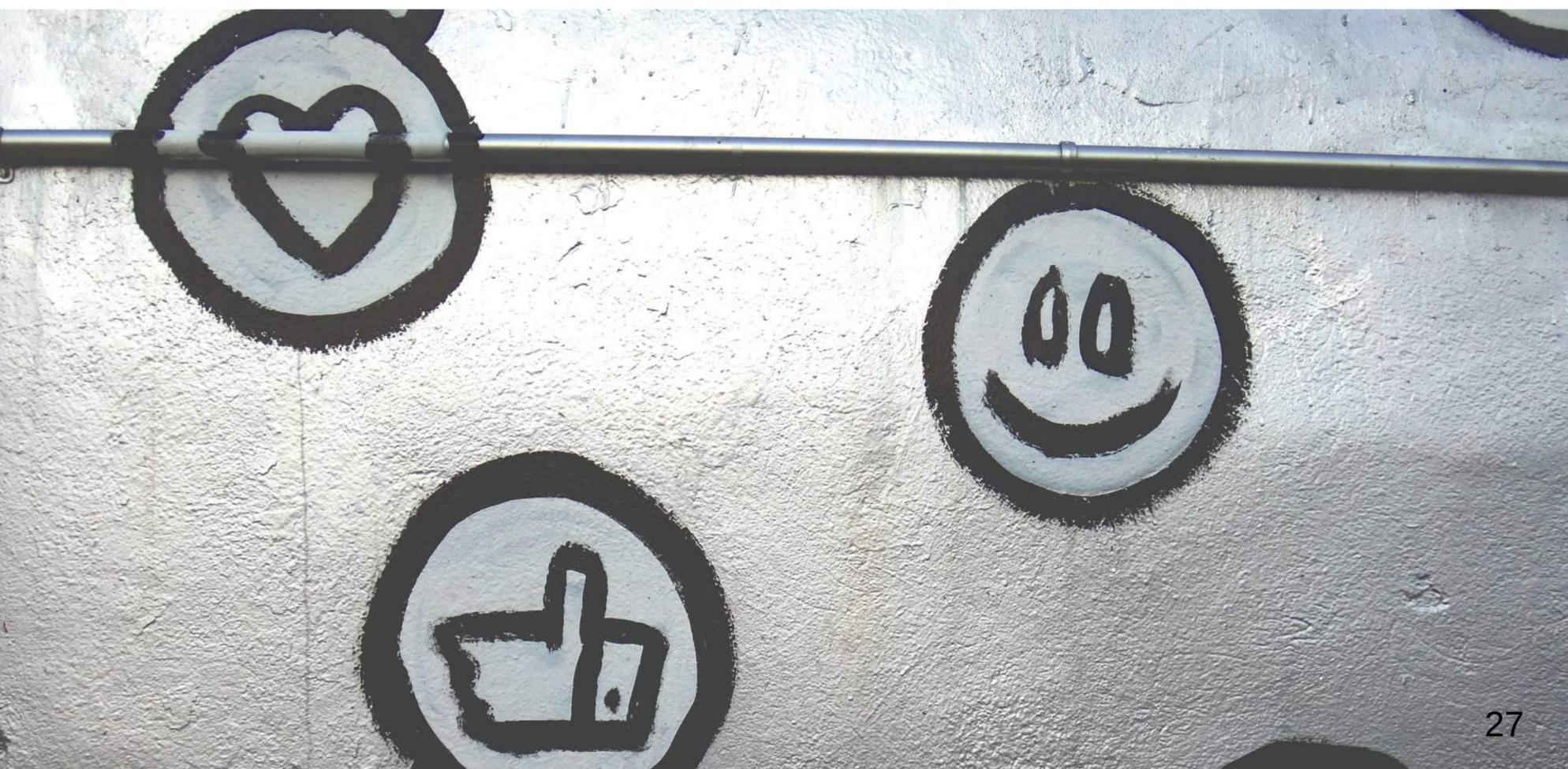
In Conclusion

One of the most misleading pieces of social media storytelling advice is adapted from content marketing, and says that everyone needs to “find their niche” - a single super narrowly-defined approach that they should devote all of their energy towards.

This commonly translates into “doing the same thing again and again, despite poor or diminishing returns”. The internet is littered with these social media accounts, grimly spamming their way up to higher and higher numbers of followers and likes by grinding out near-identical content all day long - while having basically no organic engagement whatsoever.

That’s **not** how you tell great stories.

Remember that toolbox analogy for storytelling? The same applies to *how your stories get out into the world*. The more you experiment with new ways to reach your target audience, the stronger your presence will be over time, because as the tides of the internet ebb and flow, some platforms are going to get stronger and others are going to disappear without a trace (nice knowing you, Google+).



Also? You're creating content for human brains - and they need novelty. They need pleasant surprises, enjoyably-subverted expectations and "shock twists", the kind that all good stories have in droves. If they know exactly where all your stories are going in advance, including how those stories are being told, they will lose faith in your creative spark and emotionally tune out over time. Your online presence will stagnate.

Similarly, if there's one lesson that individuals and brands need to learn from the best storytellers on social media, it's "try everything once". Despite the neuroscience of story, despite the central tenets of good storytelling that have held for thousands of years, *there is absolutely no way to know in advance what is or isn't going to work*. The only way to find out is to run controlled experiments, and actually **see** what works.

This is the real "secret of great storytelling", to have a relentlessly experimental mindset, and to use all the storytelling tools at your disposal on all the platforms you want to be visible on.

Test vigorously. Pay attention to what works. Beware of mechanical formulas, because on social, they might stop working at any time.

And optimize your stories for optimism, delight and meaningful change, if you want an audience that will fall so madly in love with your work that they'll make you the *Next Big Thing*.

Go forth and tell the stories they need, and your future will be bright indeed.