

*headstream*

# The power of brand storytelling

How brand storytelling can meet marketing objectives

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# Executive summary

Headstream commissioned in-depth independent research into brand storytelling to help define what stories consumers want to see, how well brands tell stories and how storytelling impacts behaviour.

We found that the best stories tend to come from regular people who have engaged with the brand and are willing to share their experiences with the world. The findings made it clear that customer advocacy should be at the core of all content marketing and storytelling campaigns:

- 79% of UK adults think it's a good idea for brands to tell stories
- What people most want to see and hear are stories about regular people and/or brand customers, not celebrities, employees or the brand's founder. There is also a preference for stories of real people and events vs. those about fictional characters
- 64% of people think brands are currently good at telling stories
- 43% of all adults want stories to be humorous
- The top format for storytelling is video, with photos second and articles third
- And if people really love a brand story, more than half (55%) are more likely to buy the product in the future, 44% will share the story and 15% will buy the product immediately.

# Introduction and methodology

Storytelling is the conveying and sharing of events through words and images for entertainment and/or education. Brand storytelling is where businesses do exactly that through their marketing and corporate communications.

The digital revolution of the past twenty years – and the associated content revolution – has thrown the need for stories into sharp focus. Brands have begun to realise that if they want to engage modern, sophisticated consumers they need to do more than just talk about how great their products are. Instead, they can humanise and warm their approach through narrative.

From our own experience at Headstream, we understand that marketers and consumers interpret the discipline of brand stories in different ways. There is no consistent definition of what ‘brand storytelling’ entails and no one-size-fits-all approach that brands can adopt. The only constant is that every brand, quite rightly, believes it should be doing it.

This is why we’ve carried out a major piece of research among UK consumers. Our intention is to further understand how they interpret brand storytelling, given its high importance amongst marketers, and what effect brand storytelling has on their behaviours and attitudes. Do they think stories matter? What do they consider a good story? What impact does a good brand story have on their buying habits?

This report enables us to develop the conversation around brand storytelling and help educate/influence our clients on its importance as part of any broader content strategy. It provides empirical evidence of the importance of storytelling and, perhaps more importantly, identifies the types of stories that consumers prefer to hear and see.

Headstream’s survey was conducted independently among 2,000 UK adults in April 2015. The sample was selected from our partner research agency’s panels, which are balanced across regional age, and gender demographic factors.

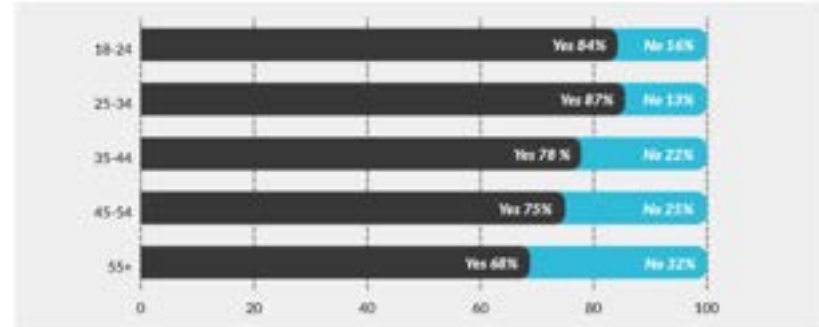
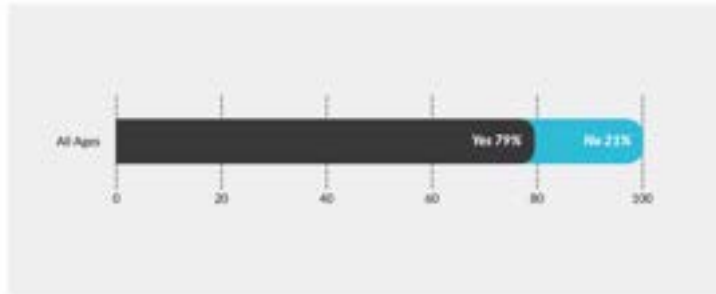


*Brand storytelling is used  
when brands want to  
present themselves as more  
human and more relevant  
to their stakeholders  
by creating advertising  
or content that tells stories.*

# Stories matter

Do you think it's a good idea for brands to tell stories?

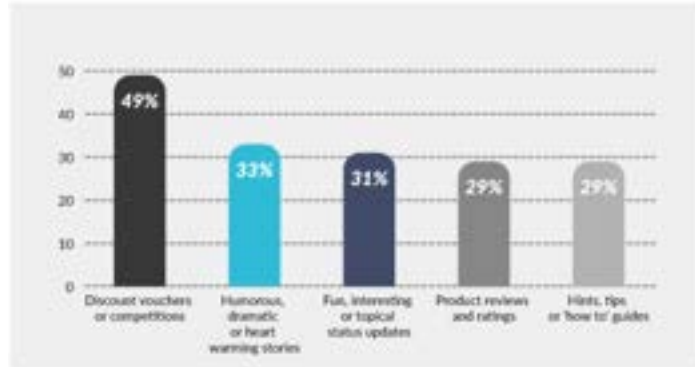
An overwhelming 79% of respondents want to hear brands telling stories, particularly 18-34 year olds. It's therefore time for brands to take a step away from product-plugging, and instead build a narrative and feed it to an audience to forge deeper emotional ties. Storytelling is a fantastic outlet to entertain, engage and interact with consumers.



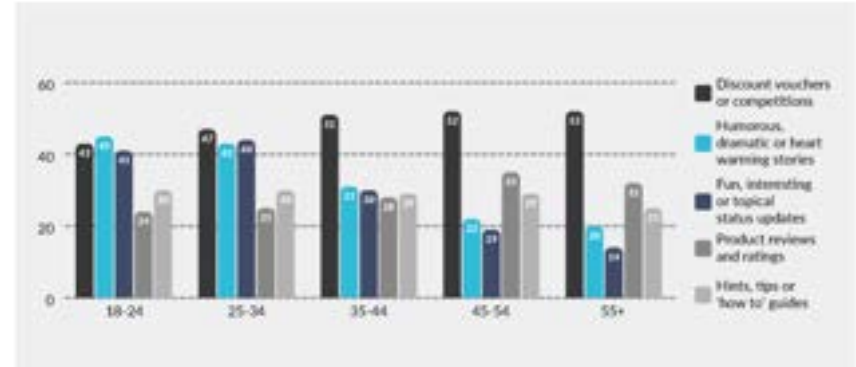
# Please tell us stories

What would make you more interested in any brand?

The second-ranked result is perhaps the most important here: a third of adults want story-based content. This is very encouraging for brands – everyone loves a bargain and of course discounts are going to be popular, but 'humorous, dramatic or heart-warming stories' are the most-desired form of non-monetary content among UK consumers. And they are especially popular among younger consumers, whose nose for quality online content is the most sophisticated.



Percentages do not add up to 100 because the question was multiple choice.

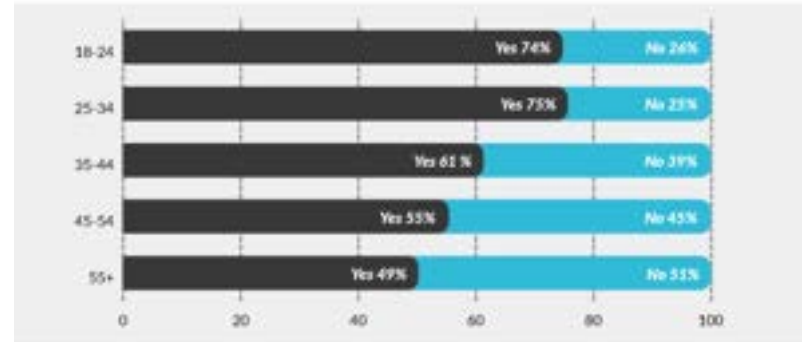
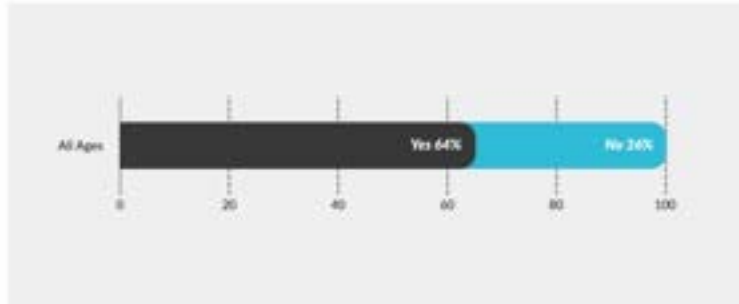


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# Current storytelling is pretty good

Do you think brands are good at telling stories?

More than half (64%) of respondents believe brands tell good stories, demonstrating how brilliant storytelling really does resonate with consumers. This is particularly true up to the age of 34, where more than 70% of people think brands tell great stories.







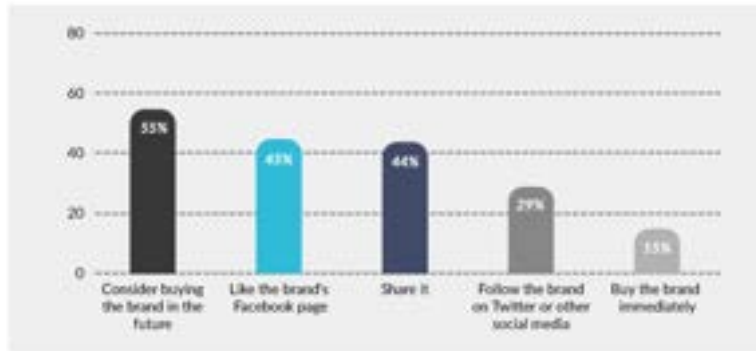
# 55%

*of people would consider  
buying the brand in the  
future if they really  
loved a story.*

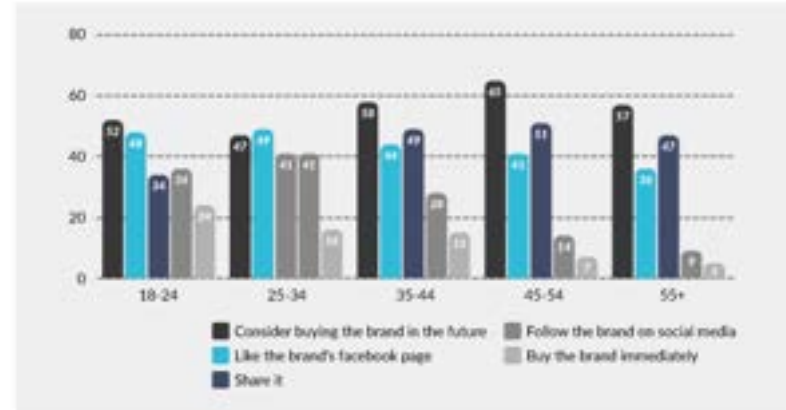
# Great stories = a better bottom line

If you really love a story from a brand, what are you likely to do?

The brilliant news is that great storytelling can feed into great sales, triggering purchase intent in 55% of respondents. While it's typically been used to boost brand engagement and recognition, effective narrative can enhance perception and thereby influence purchase intent and decision making.



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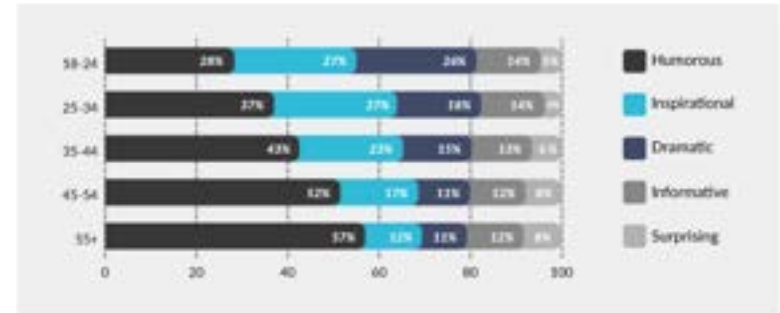
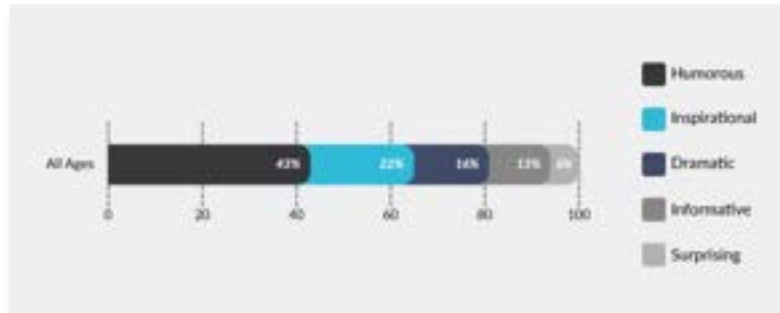


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# Tickle their funny bone

What genre do you think makes for a good brand story?

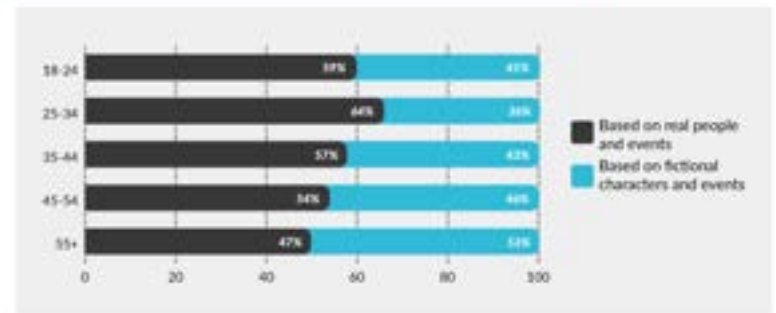
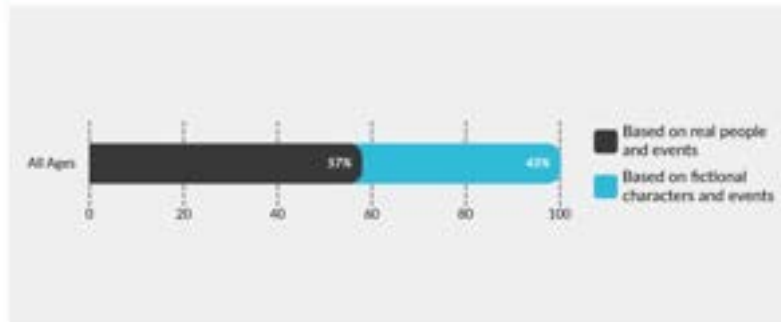
It seems laughter really is the best medicine with funny stories topping the content chart, scooping 43% of the vote. What's more, the older we get the more we love to chuckle. Humour is brand-neutral, an emotional state that we can all indulge in for some light-relief in our busy days. Furthermore, it's catching. That makes it top of the list for social sharing. Inspirational stories took second-place with 22% of the vote. These figures underpin the importance of generating stories that uplift and energize.



# Keep it real

Out of the two options (based on real people and events or based on fictional characters and events), what do you think makes for a better story from a brand?

Over half of consumers (57%) love stories based on real people and events. True tales humanize a brand, adding relevance and giving it a face and persona that consumers can attach to. Real-life stories stir deeper emotions, helping to forge stronger ties with the target audience. Authenticity is most valuable from the age of 18 to 34. The only age-group wanting a break from harsh reality are the over 55's who prefer fictional content.





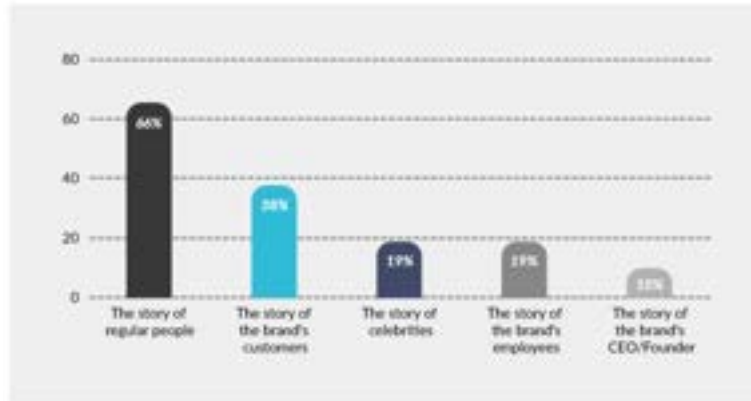
# 66%

*of people believe the  
best stories are those  
about regular people.*

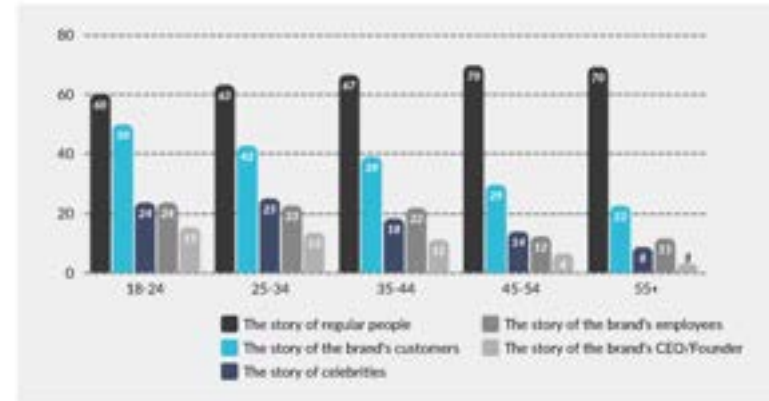
# Man on the street, not boss or celeb

Which of these options do you think would make the best story from a brand?

All ages prefer stories about real-life people over famous faces or brand bigwigs, and the importance of this grows with age. Regular people more accurately reflect the regular consumer and regular life, and therefore they provide something objective and tangible for consumers to relate to. As such, we believe that the most effective brand stories are non-fiction, placing real people and their experiences at the core. This can include tales from customers and employees of a product or service.



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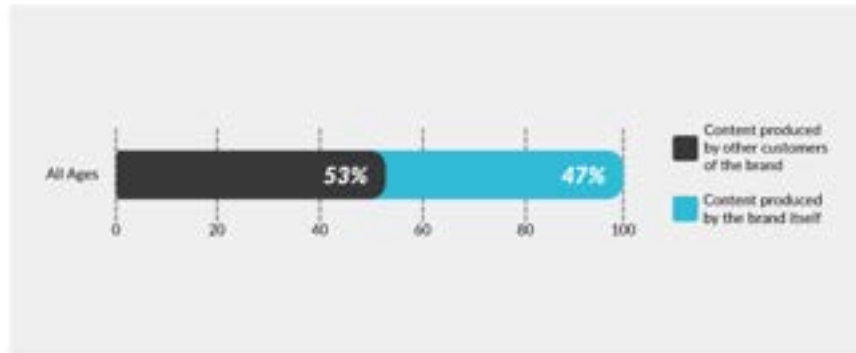


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# Brand and customers, hand in hand

Which of these would have a greater influence on your interest in any brand?

Only a slim majority of consumers (53%) prefer content generated by a brand itself, which is fascinating when you consider that a decade ago all content was brand-made. Thanks to social media and other digital channels, it's become almost absurdly easy for consumers to create their own content – and that's the type of material many of them want to see. It's advocacy in action – people want to see and hear what their peers are doing.



# The value of video

What type of formats do you think brands should use to tell stories?

If content is king, video is heir to the throne. It seems seeing is believing for consumers with video material outshining photos, and the written word falling to the bottom of the pile. The popularity of video has been fuelled in part by the increase in smartphone use and social networks that enable consumers to share clips and footage.

<b>All ages</b>	
1.	Videos
2.	Photos
3.	Articles



# Let customers find stories themselves

Through which online media channels would you prefer to receive stories from brands?

Surprisingly consumers prefer to receive a brand's story via advertising than word of mouth, with the highest ranking channel being a brand's website, blog or newsletter. This is followed by paid media channels such as banner ads and sponsored Facebook adverts. This suggests that consumers want to be in charge of finding stories themselves or through the brand.

All ages	
1.	Brand's website, blog or email newsletter
2.	Website advertising, e.g. banner ads
3.	Social media advertising, e.g. sponsored Facebook posts
4.	Brand's social media account, e.g. Facebook, Twitter or YouTube
5.	Shared by a friend, e.g. Emailed link
6.	3rd party blog
7.	Messaging app, e.g. WhatsApp, Snapchat

# Conclusion

'Storytelling' means different things to different people.

But as this study highlights, storytelling is clearly far more than a corporate buzzword – it's one of the most important ways brands can engage with customers, drive loyalty and encourage purchase. Stories can certainly come from the brand itself, but the best ones revolve around the people it services. Those are the stories people want to hear.

And crucially, it isn't just about generating Facebook Likes and Twitter followers. It has a real impact on both brand preference and the bottom line. If people think your brand tells great, memorable stories, they're more likely to appreciate what you have to say – and buy from you.

# About Headstream

We're the content marketing agency for ambitious brands.

We believe that in today's connected world a content-led approach to marketing is the only way brands can remain visible and relevant to their customers.

It all started in 2006 when we launched as one of the UK's first social media marketing companies. We built a talented team and helped those early adopters understand and take advantage of social media.

We contributed to the debate on social media performance by creating the Social Brands 100 research, which measured and ranked the best brand performance across social media channels.

As the years have rolled on the agency has grown into the successful, and modest, marketing agency you see today by evolving our capabilities to ensure our clients get what they originally came to us for – results for the modern marketer.

Through Headstream, ambitious brands such as B&Q, BBC, Fat Face, GSK, Lush Cosmetics, National Trust, P&O Cruises and Schuh have increased their visibility and relevancy with content.





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023 8082 8575

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