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Food For Thought

"You can observe a lot
by just watching."

[Yogi Berra](#)

Former Major League
Baseball Player and Manager

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Mark's Tips and Tricks

What's Your Story?

The "branding" you see the big corporations do with their marketing consultants - the glitzy, high-budget advertising campaigns can make the rest of us wonder what's the whole point of trying to compete? But personal branding—the kind that shows your customers the "real you" has never been more important, especially for small businesses. Your personal brand makes you unique and memorable. It can make the difference in whether your customers decide to do business with you, or your competitor down the street.

How do successful small businesses develop their personal brands, without expensive billboards, TV commercials and print ads in the largest publications? One way is by telling stories.

Stories make people feel more connected to each other. They make people feel like they really know someone, whether or not they have just met, or never met at all!

Take a few minutes and start jotting down your stories. You can use them during speaking engagements, at networking events, on your web site, or in newsletters and sales material.

A Possible Story?

How you thought of your business name.

I often tell the story of how "Your Creative Mark" got its name.

I was working from a small coffee shop in Lynnwood, trying to think of a fun and unique business name. I was stuck. All the good names seemed to be taken. Staring back at me was a long list of ideas that were less than impressive. Finally, I told myself, "Come on Mark.... you're creative, figure it out."

Then it hit me... Your Creative Mark. After spilling my mocha on my lap from excitement, I started thinking of all the possible meanings to the name: I was creative (and I was Mark!). I helped businesses make "their mark" in their industry in creative ways. The ideas were coming to me quickly and easily now!

Clients often comment on the name, and enjoy the story – and best of all, they rarely forget my business name!

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Other story ideas:

What motivated you to start your business?

What are the challenges you've had during the start-up phase, and how did you overcome them?

What are you passionate about?

(There are lots of topics that would be of interest to your audience)

As for my story? My career has been (and still is) an adventure. From the excitement I feel presenting marketing campaigns, the creativity I get to display while working with great photographers, or attending press-checks here and abroad, adventure is the perfect word to describe my marketing and design career.

I have had a lot of career highs (winning awards, or launching a successful campaign that catapults a product into the market place), and lows (being laid off), but I never stopped looking for ways to keep being creative and help people achieve their business goals. Okay, I'm no Indiana Jones, but in my own career, it has often felt like jungle out there, with every "native" on the planet after me, their blow-darts (be it deadlines, travel or other some other crisis) whizzing by. Cue the music.



Do people really remember your stories? They sure do!

My wife and I became very good friends with a coworker that over the years, had worked many interesting jobs. One such stint was teaching english to young students in Iran.

She returned home to Washington State, and began working with my wife and I at a medical device company in Bothell, WA. I will never forget her story about a trip to a local grocery store, where a group of women were mocking her in [farsi](#), not knowing she understood what they were saying PERFECTLY. Boy, did she let them have it! We have her retell the tale to this day.

Stories can help your audience feel like they relate to you, that you understand them well, and that you're "one of them".

For those of us that live in Washington State, a perfect example of how a small hometown business shows how they know you and your banking needs more clearly is [Banner Bank](#). Their TV campaign featured several recognizable locals/businesses in the community. They showed how through a "6-degrees of separation" game, how each client knew each other--and all through their personal relationship with Banner Bank. It was a simple campaign with a great tag-line, "We are all connected by the same bank".

Seen or heard the PEMCO commercials lately? They have a great campaign slogan: "You're One Of Us--A Little Different." Through funny, descriptive imagery of people or experiences, they show they understand us--no matter how unique or different we feel we are. Through this campaign, we recognize in ourselves this person they describe, or we know someone who is that person.

My wife and I still to this day double over laughing at "Blue-Tarp Camper - Northwest

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Profile #60” (watch the TV Ad [here](#)). We have over the years, spent many Memorial Days and Labor Days huddled around a smoking campfire in the pouring rain. We always have a blue tarp strung above our heads, teeth chattering, shifting around and around to stay under the tarp, desperate to avoid the smoke that seems to follow us no matter where we stand.

To us, blue-tarp camping is just part of camping in the great Pacific Northwest. The brilliance of the story? It’s true and relatable for thousands of faithful campers in Washington. They took several stereo types or unique Washingtonian experiences, and showed us how they understand us better than their competitors.

Do you need a huge TV advertising budget to tell your story like Banner Bank or PEMCO? Of course not! It’s the stories you tell at the front counter of your office, at the sales call you make, or in the stands of your child’s little-league game.

Stories about your hobbies, passions or goals can help people relate to you.

I have always wanted to be a professional baseball player. From the day I was old enough to put on a mitt, I knew that was my destiny ... or so I thought.

What are the odds of making it to the major leagues?

Answer: 1 in every 16,000 ball players.

Did I make it? Well not yet-I am still waiting for that call-up from the Mariners. Until then, I have purchased five acres in Lake Stevens where, unbeknownst to my wife, I intend to build my future “[Field of Dreams](#).”

Like so many little boys across the country, baseball held a great sense of wonder for me, it is after all, the great-American pass time. Through the recap of last night’s amazing play in the outfield, baseball trivia, and a shared love the game, many of my clients and I have found we have a mutual passion for, and a genuine love of the game of baseball. Baseball stories make working with each other fun, more enjoyable and help us to feel more connected to each other.

My Story. Your Story.

Though I don’t make my living from playing baseball, I am living my other passion, art and design (I also manage to play a softball game now and then!).

Finding common ground through stories and a great love for what you do, or a passion, such as baseball, can connect you to others who share that love (or fanaticism!). Your goals and stories may be similar to their goals and stories. Share them-your audience may find more common ground with you over “the big guys.”

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