



Selling With Stories - A Powerful Tool for Building Trust and Credibility

By Ian Brodie
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The art of storytelling is dying.

We live in an age of sound bites, special effects, snappy comebacks and the 30-second attention span. It seems that no one is interested in taking the time to listen to, or tell a good story.

Yet think back to the last time you were truly moved by a film or play or TV show. When you last cried in the cinema or sat on the edge of your seat thoroughly gripped by a thriller.

Chances are that it wasn't because of the special effects or any snappy dialogue. It most likely wasn't even due to great acting - although that can help.

No, the reason you were truly engaged with the film or play was because of the plot. Because the author hooked you with an interesting story. And especially, because the author got you to really care about the characters in that story.

Storytelling in Sales

Now think about that example in the context of selling.

Don't you want your prospects to really engage with what you are saying? Don't you want to grab their emotions rather than just their logical brain?

Of course, you will never build the same degree of emotional response in a selling meeting as in a thrilling drama. But you can certainly do a lot better than the majority of dry, dull sales presentations made today.

The secret, of course, is to use stories. And the most powerful stories to use are personal ones. Stories with real human protagonists rather than faceless corporations.

When you introduce your company, for example, don't tell your prospects you can save them 10% on their telecoms costs, or that you've worked with the top 5 car manufacturers. Get that same message across in a personal story and it will have so much more power.


Contrast these two different introductions:

"We work with all the leading packaging manufacturers. Our machines have the fastest changeover times in the industry, and we should be able to save you an average of 10% on your running costs"

and

"We recently worked with John Smith, the CEO of BigPack. John's problem was

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that because of the long changeover times of his existing machinery, his production was very inflexible and he couldn't respond quickly to the needs of some of his best customers. By installing our equipment, he was able to offer the sort of flexibility his customers were crying out for - and as an added bonus, he found that running costs were 10% lower than before."

Admittedly, the second introduction is a few sentences longer - but those extra sentences - and the way the whole introduction is worded - make a world of difference.

Think about how you would respond to the introductions as a CEO of a Packaging company.

The first introduction is OK. The salesman builds some credibility by highlighting that they work for the top companies in the industry. And the fast changeover times and 10% saving on running costs sound OK.

But there's no emotion here. It's cold, hard facts.

Worse, the "we could save you 10%" is almost a challenge. The natural response of most people is to silently think "Oh you could, could you? Prove it". After all, what does the salesman know about my business? How does he know I'm not already highly efficient?

But by rephrasing into a story as in the second introduction we get over these problems.

Firstly, the prospect becomes more engaged when he hears someone's name. You've indicated you work with executives just like them - perhaps even someone they look up to. And when you use the word "frustrations" - not just a business problem, but real frustrations - then they begin to feel empathy towards that person. Chances are they're feeling frustrations too - but like many executives, there are few outlets for them to vent those frustrations. Now, by talking about someone else's frustrations you've begun to create an environment where they can safely talk about their issues.

Additionally, by using an interesting story where you happened to solve the client's problem and save 10% of running costs, you're not making a direct claim. You're not risking a challenge because you're talking about something that was done for someone else. You're not claiming you can save the prospect 10% - but they will begin to make that inference for themselves. So now the prospect's thinking is "hmmm, I wonder if they can make those savings for us?" not "well, he claims he can make those savings, but I'm not sure". Your story has allowed him to reach a conclusion for himself - and so he is much more likely to believe it than if you claim it yourself.

In similar vein, when you get a prospect talking and they tell you about some of the issues and challenges they are facing; you can use your stories to build credibility and confidence that you have experience in these areas and know how to help. But notice that you're not jumping to providing a solution for the client's problem (where you run the risk of being wrong) - you're relating a story about a client in a similar situation and what worked for them. Again, the prospect thinks for himself: "Maybe this can work for me. And even if not, they were able to solve this guy's similar issues - maybe they can find a different solution for me". As opposed to their thinking if you try to suggest a solution to their problem: "How can they know how to solve my problem after 5 minutes? Do they think I'm some sort of idiot who hasn't thought about this?....."

Crafting a Compelling Story

Some people are great natural storytellers. They mentally record their experiences as stories and have no trouble recalling them in an interesting and entertaining way.

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For the rest of us, it takes a little work.

What you need to have in your armoury is a set of compelling stories - perhaps 6 or 7 - covering a variety of situations where you, your products or your services have added significant value. You can then select from the stories as needed to fit the particular circumstances you think are going to be relevant and interesting to your prospect. And you can use the same story as an example as part of your introduction, your elevator speech, or in an expanded version when the prospect opens up and talks about a particular issue they have.

To craft the stories, first think about the typical problems your product or service solves. Then think of some recent examples of specific customers where this has happened.

Next, write a short paragraph summarising the example. A few guidelines should help here:

- Make the story personal. Don't just talk about a company, talk about a named individual who "owned" the problem your product & service solved. Your story will feel much more real - and your prospect will feel much more empathy towards a person rather than a corporation.
- Talk first about the challenges the person faced. Again, try to describe them in personal terms so that the prospect builds a connection to your story. Don't belittle the person - turn them into the hero of the story - they had a problem which (by working with you) they overcame.
- Don't spend a lot of time describing what you or your product actually did. Although this might seem interesting to you - it's the least interesting aspect to your prospect. They're much more interested in whether the problem you solved is similar to theirs, and what value or benefits did your solution bring.
- Close with the benefits your product or service provided - but underplay this. Almost add it as an afterthought - as if the tremendous value you brought was just part of everyday business for you. Avoid boasting or self aggrandizing statements.

Write these examples up using natural, conversational language and revise them until they sound right. Then learn and practice their main points so that they don't sound like a script.

And, of course, make sure you get the permission of anyone whose name you use.

Putting the Stories into Action

Armed with your stories you can begin to put them into action in sales situations. Don't overuse them as you risk hogging the conversation when you should be listening. Instead, use them sparingly to spark the curiosity of the prospect, gain credibility, and provoke a reaction or question.

Personally I use one story to introduce my company and what we focus on (selected based on what I think is likely to be of most relevance). Then I may use further stories later on to illustrate a point, or to show that I understand their situation. But I will rarely use more than a couple in a sales meeting of an hour or less. To do so runs the risk of dominating the conversation and not giving the client enough space to open up about their problems. And if they don't talk about their specific problems, then I can't begin to show them how I can help them.

Ian Brodie is the Managing Director of Lighthouse Business Consulting ([Management Consultants based in Manchester - Specialists in Sales Strategy and Business Growth](#)) - a management consulting firm focused on helping companies grow their sales.

Read more about how to grow the sales of your business at [Ian's Sales Excellence Blog](#).

Profiles of Success: James Wale from Tricor Financial Group

This month we interview long-time Quotit customer James Wale, President of Tricor Financial Group, Inc. whose offices are located in Irvine, CA. With over 30 years of insurance experience and licensed in 15 states, James tells us how Tricor Financial Group's "Passion for Success" keeps them ahead of the competition.

Quotit: Tell me a little about your agency and what insurance lines you market.

Wale: Tricor Financial Group is an estate and financial planning agency and we've been in business for about twenty nine years. Before we became Tricor, we were Wale and Company. As Wale and Co. we were primarily doing life, health, key man insurance and the other typical things you would find someone who was working with a life and disability license doing. When we started hiring outside brokers, we decided to become more of a marketing company and that is when we became Tricor Financial Group. Ultimately, we became a regional sales manager for various brokers and we had about 55 or 60 brokers at one time working with us. As we went through that process, I was still cultivating my own client base which was mostly high end business owners, physicians and attorneys. And we were doing financial planning for those guys.

Then in 2000 I was invited to Las Vegas for a Wellpoint Convention. Blue Cross was looking to get me to sell more individual and group business, so they invited me to this convention to see what was going on with that business.

During the Convention, I got hooked up with John Rudy from Blue Cross, I got seated with a bunch of the guys from the Home Office at a very nice Black Tie affair. We were talking about what people were up to out there and I couldn't believe what people were involved in out there with a part of the business that I wasn't paying much attention to and that was individual business on the internet. After a long conversation with those guys, I decided that I was going to open a new division in Tricor. We were going after the internet market and we were going to

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go nationwide with it. We looked at several different providers and we liked that Quotit was local; we really had the sense that where we wanted to go was the same direction Quotit was headed. So we stepped in to this business with Quotit in June 2005. We hired some people, got 2000 square feet of office space and we started doing serious research on how to approach this market. We are now in about 19 states. In another four years we will be in 40 or 45 states, which is probably as far as we will go.

One thing I'm seeing with this business is that there are many different levels where you can get yourself in to the business and it will be profitable. If you work out of your house or if you are using this as a quoting system for your group clients, it works. You can do what we are doing now. Or, if you want to take it to the next step, which is where I want to take it, it will be like an e-health kind of a business. Now, I don't know if we will be in all fifty states and I really don't see the need to have our own quoting system; Quotit has already spent the money and the time to develop it. Really, Quotit has what I don't want to have.

Everybody has the same plans to offer at the same premiums. So we don't have a lot of opportunity there, but the one thing we do have to offer our customers is service. So we have really pushed our technology to improve our level of service in the internet division. We have state of the art servers, and have spent close to a million dollars in infrastructure in the last three years, so we have cutting edge stuff to give us the performance that we need to take the business to the level that we want. We have an underwriting department, we have a client services department, and we have a department that deals specifically with Cross Selling.

We have eight people in our office and each one of them is licensed.

Quotit: What types of traditional marketing did you use?

Wale: We don't do any traditional marketing. We have done away with the traditional approach to the insurance market, buying leads and advertisements and so on. We find that, because the people we are looking for are internet savvy, they are not the people where you are going to go to their house to sell them a policy at the kitchen table, nor are they going to be looking in the yellow pages for a "local" agent. These are people that are going straight to the internet for their information. To my mind, we are not in the traditional insurance arena, we're in an arena where we sell insurance, but we are pretty much a marketing company. We have really focused on fine tuning the online marketing process. This past month we probably bought four to five thousand leads in addition to all of the pay per click advertising and other things we do. We generate 250 to 300 calls per day per individual here. This volume of calls works because of an incredible phone system that we purchased. This phone system allows us to look at what we are doing right and wrong and fine tune that by recording all of the calls and using the calls as training tools. Those are things that I decided to do right from the beginning and not cut corners and not to make mistakes that you don't know how to approach those mistakes to correct them.

Quotit: What is your process for managing visitors to your website; both leads that are driven there, as well as organic prospects?

Wale: When an individual comes to our site, we know as soon as he clicks "view plans", we get an email. As soon as we get that email, somebody here in the office will be in contact with them by phone. Starting with that call, we service that individual, to understand what they are looking for, we do not talk price. We try to find out what their needs are, what their frustrations are, how they are approaching the process, and then guide them through the system so they can see what they are looking for and then they can make a decision. Quotit is an incredible tool for that. When that individual then becomes a client, we follow through a clear set of steps, each department doing their job. We make sure that we are right with that individual until the policy is issued. Then to policy service where that individual is contacted by us and we discuss other services that we provide. Once he is a client, we make sure that he gets emails for different things during the course of the year so that we are in touch with them more than just once or twice. Now if that same individual comes through the system but they don't become a client for whatever reason, we cannot contact them for whatever reason, then they go in to a campaign that sets them up for an email and a dial and a mailer, it is a three pronged campaign. If we cannot contact them by phone after three tries, then we put them into an endless email and mailer campaign until they ask us to take them off list.

A few weeks ago in our Monday morning meeting, where we discuss any issues that are the staff is dealing with, something that was brought up was that we were starting to get a blurring between the new and old leads. The argument was that because we're talking to so many people we don't have the time to understand which campaign has more value for us. So this month we decided to evaluate that, we decided to do a test market on our database. So, we have not done any kind of advertisement whatsoever. We have just put our database in to our dialer and called every single individual, no email, just calling them. We have forty eight sales that are in issue today because of that. So that tells me that that database is worth keeping and working. Forty eight sales with just a little "Digging for diamonds." Now, we cannot have one system new leads or old leads without the other, it is a mixture, but you have to find that happy medium.

Quotit: What do you like to do in your spare time?

Wale: Well, I'm at the office at 8:00am and I'm out of the office around 8:30pm so Monday through Friday it's very focused work schedule for me. I set weekends as off and I have done that for the last fifteen years of my business. I made that clear when I got in to this business, I wouldn't work weekends. My original background is in commodities and in stocks, so I was involved for many years in that and I was working seven days a week 5am to 8pm, including Saturdays and

Sundays. So when I moved in to this business, I decided that was not going to be the case. Look back ten years ago, I used to work six months and then travel six months. Traveling was my hobby. I've been everywhere and I've enjoyed it. When I got married we didn't have children for the first four years so during that time my wife and I did the same thing. Now, my children are my hobby. We have two sets of twins, the first set is six years old and the second set is turning two. So weekends we do things with them and we take one week out of every few months and we go somewhere. We usually go down to Cabo San Lucas; there is a resort out there we really love. We are very family oriented. Both my wife and I come from large families so we get together with them.

Quotit: Where do you see your agency heading in the next 5 years?

Wale: We have actually set our goals as 15 to 20 year goals. However, for the next five years, I see that we are just going to be buried up to our necks in this internet business. The internet is going to be where everything is going to be transacted I believe in the next ten to fifteen years. My generation is when the computer era began, but where we are focusing our attention is preparing for my children's generation. Right now, we are marketing strongly to the generation that is the 20-somethings, the Y generation. Those are the clients that we are working for today. I look at that base and I see what these guys are going to be doing when they are in their forties and fifties. For them, the internet won't be a novelty. Anything that they are going to buy from a song to insurance is going to be transacted through the internet. You have to be in this business as a business; not as a part time thing, not because that is what the trend is today, not because we will do it as a thing that will bring a little bit of business here but I'm still going to transact in this other arena. The arena of going in to the kitchen table and sitting with somebody and spending an hour is going to be obsolete. For many, that arena is already obsolete. Quotit is already seeing that.

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There are a lot of people in this business that are very, very successful and the sad part is that a lot of them are saying why waste your money going to Texas to pick up an insurance sale when you have so many here locally. I explain to them that this is where the business is coming from and even though they cannot believe that I am writing so much business through the internet, they don't understand why I need to go outside of California. I see that in the future, that that is where all the sales are going to come from... the internet. The larger your coverage is, the more states you are in, in the next five years, the better your stability is going to be for the next twenty years. The smaller your internet footprint is today, the further behind you are getting in the larger game, that is because of contracts, because of the experience and expertise you are acquiring on a daily basis and it is because of sheer volume. Early on, I met with people like the CEO of eHealth, for example, who told me James, you are crazy not to do it. He was at that convention in Las Vegas and I met him and he said this is the business that is going to blow the doors off of anything else. They were still private and they were still struggling when I met them. A problem that I see in this industry if you are really going to play big is that you need to spend money on infrastructure. I know that this industry has a lot of people who are very smart and who will do the right thing, but there are a lot of people who don't want to spend \$400 or \$500 a month for Quotit because they think that they can have somebody do that work for them, or they are still using the rate books. So if they don't want to spend money on their careers, on their business on their infrastructure, how on earth are they going to be competitive in the long run?

Quotit: What would you like to say in closing?

Wale: This is an industry that is growing in leaps and bounds. I get very excited when I talk about insurance and health insurance and servicing the masses out there that are coming in to needing this product that we have. And I get very excited about the technology industry because it has allowed us to be extremely successful in a wider market than I could ever do before. And having people like Quotit as our partners is an incredible advantage for us because there is no way that we could have created what we have today; I'm talking about myself, without Quotit being equally committed to the internet, to progress, to what we are doing here. It really is a true partnership that has allowed me to do this.

I appreciate having the opportunity to speak with you. There are many out there that aren't willing to share because they think that the competition will kill them. It is the other way around, the competition is going to make this business thrive and grow.

Exciting New Revenue Opportunities Available Year Round

You will soon be able to quote Medicare Supplement Plans from your Quotit Agent site in many states.

Now that we have reached the end of the current Open Enrollment Period (OEP) for marketing Medicare Part D (PDP) and Medicare Advantage (MA) plans, which ended on March 31, 2008, you may be wondering, "What is next?" The 2009 Annual Enrollment Period (AEP) runs from 11/15/08 through 12/31/08, but you don't need to wait until AEP to continue selling Medicare products.

Selling Opportunities that began April 1st:

- Beneficiaries becoming eligible for Medicare may be enrolled.
- Beneficiaries who are eligible for a SEP election may be enrolled.
- Beneficiaries who are coming from employer group health plans with creditable drug coverage are eligible to enroll whether they are leaving the group involuntarily or voluntarily. This is an SEP called SEP-EGHP.
- Medicare Supplements may be written all year and are not subject to enrollment period rules.

First of all, you can continue to sell Medicare Advantage Plans, but only to those individuals just becoming Medicare Eligible (three months before an individual turns age 65 until three months after the month the individual turns age 65) or in a Special Enrollment Period. More than 2 million Americans will celebrate their 65th birthday this year, so this can be a sizeable opportunity.

But why limit your selling opportunities? You CAN sell Medicare Supplement Plans year round. This is a great time to offer a variety of standard Medicare Supplement Plans to Medicare Beneficiaries. And, if your client is just turning 65, it is the best time to purchase a Medigap (also referred to as Medicare Supplement Insurance) Plan! They will have a 6 month "window" during which they cannot be turned down for coverage for any health reason. The "window" opens when they have turned 65 and they have enrolled in Medicare Part B.

Another important reason to the Beneficiary to purchase when they turn 65 is that any waiting periods for coverage of pre-existing conditions must be greatly shortened or waived if:

- The Beneficiary signs up for coverage during their Medicare Supplement Open Enrollment period and
- The Beneficiary will not have a break of more than 63 days between the end of their current coverage and the effective date of their new plan.

Some carriers offer a level lifetime commission on their Medicare Supplement plans. If you are not familiar with Medicare Supplement plans, contact your local carrier for sales information and to learn about any mandated special appointments that may be required in your state. You may also want to explore the attached

links:

2008 Choosing a Medigap Policy: A Guide to Health Insurance for People with Medicare. This is the official government guide with important information about: what a Medigap (Medicare Supplement Insurance) policy is, what Medigap policies cover, an individual's rights to buy a Medigap policy, steps to follow when he/she buys a Medigap policy and switching Medigap policies.
<http://www.medicare.gov/publications/pubs/pdf/02110.pdf>

2008 Medicare & You. This is the official government handbook with important information about the following: 2008 costs, what's covered, preventive services, health plans, prescription drug plans, and member rights and appeals.
<http://www.medicare.gov/Publications/Pubs/pdf/10050.pdf>

Beta Testers Wanted for New Quotit Product

Are you interested in beta testing the latest and greatest software features soon to be available to Quotit brokers and agents coming in Summer, 2008?

We are currently seeking beta testers for a new Quotit application. If you are interested, please read the information below.

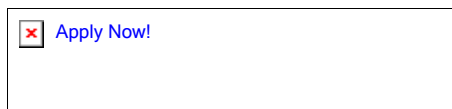
What is required from me as a beta tester?

- You will be required to spend at least 2–3 hours a week testing Quotit products during the product beta cycle. The cycle is expected to last 3–8 weeks.
- You need to complete testing of the product within one (3) weeks after you receive it.
- You need to report all problems you experienced with the product. We also are interested in any suggestions you have to improve this Quotit product.
- You will be provided with a download link to the Quotit products being tested (new versions are put on the download site several times a week) and report any problems you find either through our beta test Web page or by e-mail.

How can I become a beta tester?

To become a beta tester, you should:

- Read the beta test agreement and complete the registration form carefully and accept it.



We will analyze the survey and notify you if you are approved for the Quotit beta test program. Additional instructions on how to download the beta release software and report the results of your testing will be included in the notification e-mail.

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