

finding, telling and proving the story

An overview of the basis for the CBC experiential brand development approach

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A Three-Part Path to the Strongest Possible Brand

Your brand is the sum total collection of all the experiences people (customers, members, employees, the media, neighbors, investors, etc.) have with your bank or credit union—all the time.

It's been famously said that your brand is not what you say it is—it's what they say it is. How very true. Thus, the question financial institutions and marketers must be able to answer is: "how can we shape and influence what they say it is?"

The answer lies in CBC's experiential brand development approach: Finding, Telling and Proving the Story. Our three-part approach results in a clearly focused, authentic story that is demonstrated in everything—and we mean everything—your bank or credit union does.

Finding the Story

Rediscovering the authentic brand story that lives within your company

If you are considering a brand development initiative, the concept of Finding the Story should be very comforting to you. Why? One word: authenticity. Understandably, one of the biggest fears banks and credit unions have when embarking on a typical branding initiative is "what if our 'new brand' doesn't resonate with our customers/members?" Or, even more importantly, "what if staff doesn't buy in?" These are legitimate, valid concerns, and can become huge obstacles when the company creates a *new* story. But when you Find the Story, you're guaranteed authenticity, because it springs from who you already are.

INTROSPECTION

Finding the Story is an introspective process—take careful note that this is *Finding* the Story, not *creating* a story. Every bank or credit union has a story. In most cases, though, that story is extremely unclear, clouded and nearly impossible to articulate. It's there; it just needs to be rediscovered, and clarified with laser-like precision and focus.

When CBC leads Find the Story efforts, the process is based primarily on conversations with staff members. Our goal is to extract the story from the people within whom it lives: the employees of the company. While most agencies will focus branding strategies on feedback from external focus groups, CBC believes this is highly dangerous and misguided because external focus groups will primarily provide

feedback about what they wish the company could be...not who it truly is. The authentic story of “who we are” can only come from employees.

FOCUS

When the story has been successfully found, it has a great deal of focus. A good rule of thumb for a focused story is that it can be expressed in 10 words or less, and does not use the words “people,” “service” or “community”—the clichés of financial industry marketing. Remember, your story is about who you are (your soul), not what you do (provide banking services).

UNIQUENESS

You know you’ve successfully found your story when you arrive at a definition of your story that is truly unique to you. Your competitor down the street should not be able to make the same claim as you. In fact, they should react negatively to your story, saying “that does NOT describe us at all.” Then and only then do you know you have found your unique story.

When you Find the Story, you’re getting reacquainted with yourself at a level you never realized possible.

Telling the Story

Articulating the story with words and images

Telling the Story is what most branding and marketing is about. It’s creating jazzy brochures, a flashy website and a hip logo—what the marketing field typically refers to as

“look and feel.” Why is this what most banks and credit unions focus branding on? Because these are the fun, sexy and immediately gratifying projects to work on...and it’s the comfort zone for most marketers.

PREREQUISITE: FINDING THE STORY

Unfortunately, Telling the Story is where most marketing and branding initiatives begin. To build an experiential brand, it is absolutely critical that the effort begin with Finding the Story, before any time is spent on Telling the Story. Why? Because you can’t effectively Tell the Story if you don’t have laser-like clarity about what that story is in the first place.

Once your story is clear from the Find the Story process, Telling the Story is about articulating that story clearly with words and images through your marketing campaigns, collateral materials, websites, newsletters, etc. By itself, Telling the Story is simply lip service and cosmetics. Together with Proving the Story, however, it’s an important part of the experiential brand development process.

FOCUS

When most banks and credit unions create marketing materials, their key messages are varied, diluted and otherwise unfocused. Make sure that the single most important message in every communication produced is the story you found. Marketers typically want to communicate ten key messages in every piece (“we’re convenient, we’re friendly, we’ve got great rates,” etc.) but this temptation must be resisted. Focus on Telling the Story, and only Telling the Story.

Proving the Story

Demonstrating your story with actions, not just words

Though she didn't know it at the time, your mother taught you all about Proving the Story when you were five years old: "actions speak louder than words." When you Prove the Story, you demonstrate your clearly focused story with your actions and your behaviors...not just your words. Proving the Story is what makes the story true.

THE MOST IMPORTANT, AND LEAST UNDERSTOOD STEP

Proving the Story is where real brand impressions are made. We all know from our own individual experiences as consumers that a company can tell whatever story it wants in its marketing materials—but it's the interactions one has with the company that truly shapes the way we feel about that company. The success a company has in Proving the Story is what makes or breaks its brand.

MULTI-SENSORY TOUCH POINTS

CBC is known for its advocacy of creating multi-sensory experiences. Proving the Story occurs in everything from the way people shake hands, to the fabric chosen for the chairs, to the paper the loan documents are printed on...and all touch points in between. People experience these touch points with all five of their senses; thus, each touch point represents an opportunity to demonstrate the brand story with action, not just words. The more senses a company

can tap into as it Proves the Story, the more engaging and differentiated the experience will be. These multi-sensory touch points form the signature experiences that make the company what it is.

FOCUS

There's that word again: focus. At most banks and credit unions, focus is especially lost in Proving the Story. Most financial institutions are extremely focused on delivering exceptional service, and consequently focus on developing measurable, tangible ways to substantiate their claim of superior service. This is certainly an admirable, worthy effort, there's no doubt about it. But the company's story isn't about "superior service" (assuming proper follow-through on Finding the Story, above), so it is focused on proving the wrong story. Even worse, it's focused on proving the same story—great service—that nearly every other bank or credit union is focused on, too. This is a futile effort.

Bringing it All Together

When a bank or credit union simultaneously and successfully Tells and Proves the Story, the company is in complete alignment with its strategy. However, this cannot happen unless the Find the Story process is completed successfully. A well-proven and told story is a far more engaging, enjoyable and differentiated experience for customers, members, and employees alike. The resulting effect is an experiential brand that cannot be replicated, and creates maximum engagement in the brand.

Learn More

Want to learn more, ask questions or get started Finding, Telling and Proving the Story at your financial institution? Drop us a line and we'll chat.

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Brand and Marketing Strategy for Banks and Credit Unions

Creative Brand Communications is the leading brand development agency for the financial services industry. We help entrepreneurial banks and credit unions develop experiential brands that result in profitable customer relationships.

We provide:

- Brand strategy consulting and marketing strategy consulting
- Marketing agency services
- Word of mouth marketing