

# TELL

Storytelling for brands is nothing new – it's been  
a theme in corporate comms for decades.

# TRUE

For sustainability, we're just waking up  
to its potential.

# STORIES

# TELL TRUE STORIES

Research tells us people watch longer, remember more, and engage more deeply when facts are wrapped in stories. Stories are hardwired into our brains; they're an essential part of how humans forge social bonds and relay vital information among community members. And as our understanding of the brain evolves, there is all kinds of new evidence that we respond to them in uniquely powerful ways.

## 'True' stories

Stories in the pure sense have five common elements:

- People (who want something)
- Conflict or resistance (inner, outer, or both)
- Risk
- Uncertain outcomes
- Change and character growth

Many of the best elements of storytelling don't make it into brand communications. Especially around sustainability stories (we suspect there a number of reasons for this, but the main one is that sustainability has been seen as extraneous to the main event – secondary to the real story of the company.) Sustainability needs deeper engagement now, so there's a real need for that to change decisively. We need true stories.

## Find a hero

People are vital. We need someone with whom to identify. When's the last time you read a book or watched a movie with an abstraction, or a logo, as the hero?

The Sopranos isn't about the mafia. It's about a man for whom strength equals survival, dealing with panic attacks. Succession isn't about Fox News, really. It's about children living up to a titanic and terrifying father.

What this means: brand stories aren't really about the brand. They're about the people behind the company, or the people affected by it. To unleash the deeper power of story, we need to pull people into the narrative – even if that hero is your audience.

**Remember that it's risk, stakes and uncertainty that drives engagement: your story must be about change.**

## What to do

### 1 Centre people in the story

Bring the people driving innovation, leading teams, and taking risks centre stage. Whenever you can, make the story about them. It's by projecting ourselves into the minds and experience of protagonists that story derives its uncanny power.

#### Considerations

- Follow your company's changemakers and capture their work
- Give them the freedom to speak openly about their personal lives and the risks they take
- Where you centre audiences in your story, highlight how your sustainable innovations resolve a problem or worry in their lives

### 2 Story is change

Stories are about what has changed, or could change, for the people with whom we've come to identify. We need to see that change happen, especially if there's a bit of danger involved, to truly be gripped by a story.

#### Considerations

- Establish where you started from – and when everything changed (as a company and personally)
- Highlight inner conflict in your subjects – the tensions that need resolving
- Clearly set up contrast between past and present (and future) states

### 3 Uncertainty = suspense

True sustainability is at a crossroads. It's a work in progress. It's almost all open questions. Use this uncertainty to your advantage – and hook the audience with it. Trust us: if you're honest and disruptive, they'll want to find out more.

#### Considerations

- Don't be afraid to spotlight experimental initiatives, especially when they break new ground
- Set out a target, the point at which you will make a decision in one direction or another, based on how the story plays out
- Invite audiences to 'watch this space' as the story unfolds

### 4 Make it serial

Updates on how sustainable change has – or hasn't – taken hold will build audience engagement and affinity. Build on their attention over time and build their undying respect in the process.

#### Considerations

- Consider a transparent longer-term narrative about the status of your sustainability strategy and results
- Invite audiences to subscribe for updates on the issues that concern them most