

Building modern PR campaigns & telling digital stories in the age of social technology

Robert Pickard guest lecture

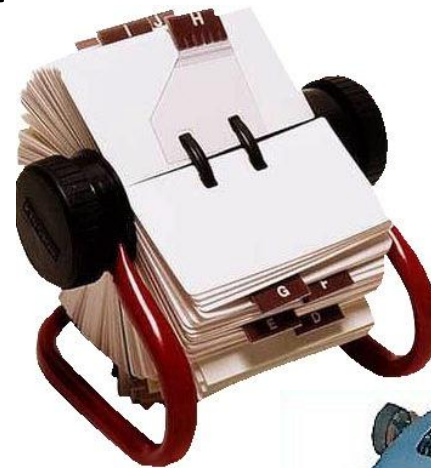


香港浸會大學
HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

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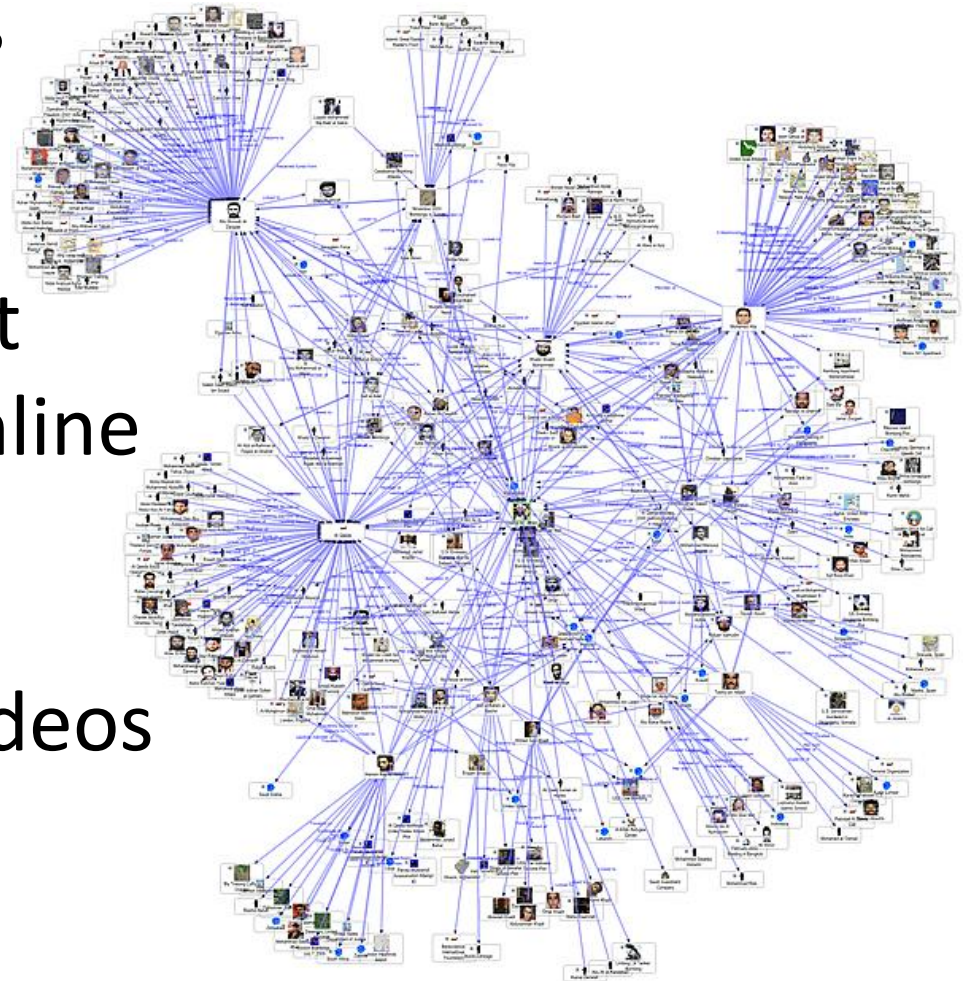
Pre-modern analogue public relations

- “ Based on relationships with face-to-face key
- “ There was attention span & focused thinking
- “ Analogue methods were used to propagate information
- “ Primitive technology
- “ Deliberate and slow
- “ Ample time for stories
- “ Text was King



Modern digital public relations

- “ Remote e-relationships
- “ Digital methods
- “ No attention span; distraction is a constant
- “ People continuously online
- “ Scant time for stories
- “ Technology massively propagates pictures, videos and ephemera
- “ Images are King



Definitions of a 'story'

- “ A narrative, either true or fictitious, in prose or verse, designed to interest, amuse, or instruct the hearer or reader; tale.
- “ A fictitious tale, shorter and less elaborate than a novel.
- “ The plot or **succession of incidents** of a novel, poem, drama, etc.
- “ A narration of the **events in the life** of a person or the existence of a thing.
- “ **A report or account** of a matter; statement or allegation.
- “ A lie or fabrication.

Source: [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com)

PR definition of 'story'

“ **The story is the most important things a company needs to tell its target audiences...**

so that

“ **Those people will do and think...**

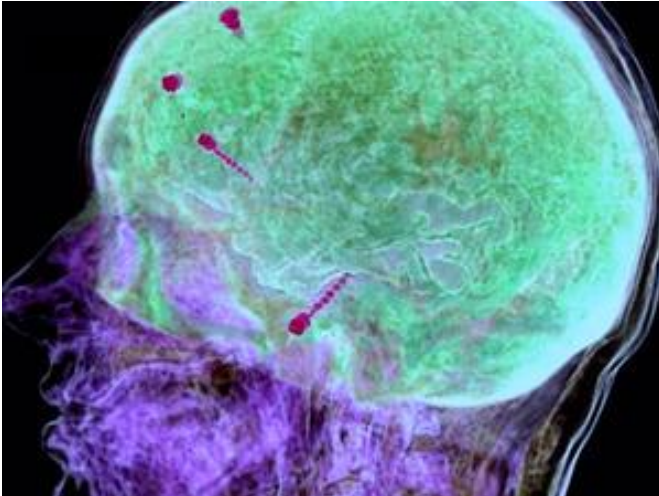
“ **...what we want them to do or think**

- . know of the company
- . feel favourable towards its brand
- . recommend its products to others
- . invest in the stock
- . make positive comments online
- . want to work there

Ten key concepts

1. No brainer: the mind is the key issue when it comes to PR.
2. The unconscious mind is more powerful than the conscious mind.
3. The emotions of the unconscious mind determine PR success, not the rational logic of the conscious mind.
4. Metaphors communicated through storytelling tap into the unconscious mind where people make decisions.
5. PR pros need to design and conduct campaigns accordingly.
6. Unfortunately, the 'storytelling zone' of news journalism is shrinking as the traditional print media business plummets.
7. So every company can tell its own stories, like a media company.
8. Digital is now changing narratives; new stories are actually being co-created via conversations with people online.
9. Understanding the 'psychology of persuasion' within networked contexts is a key skill for modern communicators.
10. PR people of the future must think like story writers and media content programmers.

PR is all in the mind...



“We are born into this world unarmed...our mind is our only weapon.”

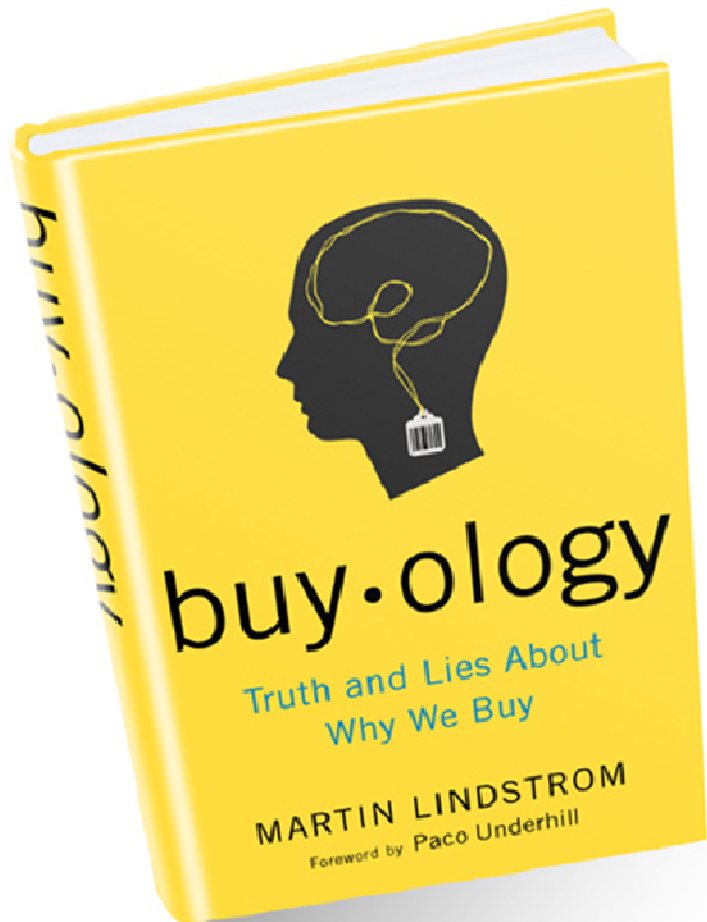
-- Ayn Rand

...and the unconscious mind rules

- “ Our deepest thoughts – the ones that account for our behaviour in the marketplace – are **unconscious**
- “According to most estimates, about 95 percent of thought, emotion, and learning occurs in the unconscious mind — that is, without our awareness.” [Zaltman]
- “ Support for the fact that the **emotions** of the unconscious mind drive human behaviour comes from neuroscience (using advanced new fMRI brain scans), psychology, and is being widely adopted in advertising...but not much in PR

“The essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action while reason leads to conclusions.” -- Donald Calne

Stories tap into the unconscious mind



- “ It is unconscious thoughts, feelings, and desires that drive purchasing decisions we make each and every day of our lives.
- “ **People tend to remember products when they are woven into the narrative of media content.**
- “ They tend not to remember brands that don't play an integral role in the story because people can see them as being ‘just ads.’

PR pros know about storytelling

- “ PR people spend their careers trying to convince executives that they should invest more in **‘earning’ editorial media coverage of their brands in news stories** rather than ‘buying’ paid coverage through advertising.
- “ Because people can readily identify ads when they see them – and **we tend to think that ads are supposed to be present during times and places we expect them to be** – they attach less credibility to their claims.
- “ But **if they see a product featured in a news narrative, people are less likely to be suspicious** and more likely to trust brand messaging that isn’t visibly purchased.

The news is a story product

- “ **The news is a product** which media companies sell, and people have attached a value to it with paid subscriptions a tangible measure.
- “ News product has been produced by a journalism industry that is supposed to be:
 - . motivated by the pursuit of truth
 - . resourceful in the use of research
 - . informed by facts
 - . governed by standards and edited with balance

Decline of news story quality

- “ **The economic basis of the traditional news media business is crumbling**, and so the quality of editorial product is declining fast.
- “ As a result of lower quality, people trust media stories less than they did before:
 - . **there are fewer good reporters around, and not as many exacting editors.**
 - . battles about editorial ethics versus **just going with what a company hands you** for content are less frequent
 - . money is the only thing that seems to matter

Reduction of news story quantity

- “ Media companies have tried to make the news more entertaining and opinionated (rise of spectacle and sensation), and the result of this debasing of journalism is a further reduction of news’ credibility.
- “ Therefore, **there are fewer eyeballs reading a shrinking number of trusted news media stories.**
- “ As print outlets close, the quantity of news story stories falls more...

The shrinking storytelling zone

- “ OK, so if a brand’s involvement in *a story* is still the best way for a product to get noticed...
- “ ...then what do PR people do if there are fewer trusted news sources producing a reduced number of stories that will be credible enough to have commercial impact *even if we ‘earn’ coverage successfully?*
- “ **Where can PR communicate narratives if the storytelling zone is shrinking?**

Embed stories in entertainment media

- “ Historically there have been efforts towards **making advertising seem more like media stories**. The ‘advertorial’ is an old trick for this purpose, but everyone recognizes such a blatant approach (thus its low impact).
- “ Now we see **many more movies and TV shows where the plots are explicitly scripted to sell product surreptitiously**. In other words, to sell unwitting people products embedded within story lines.
- “ Simple product placement has been going on for decades, but this scripting trend takes commercial penetration of the public media mind to a new level.

Is this a good thing?

- “ About stories in the news media that contain a PR-earned product mention, some people might ask: *“Is this really the news?”*”
- “ Nowadays, regarding stories in the entertainment media that contain scripts written to sell products, maybe more people will be asking: *“Is this really entertainment?”*”
- “ People seem increasingly marketing savvy and might see through such insidious technique. Maybe more will want their marketing interaction straight-up, honestly transparent?”

Every company a media company



- “ Richard Edelman has recently emphasized in many speeches that “every company can be a media company.”
- “ IF a declining media business can no longer generate an ample supply of compelling story content...
- “ IF, owing to its resource constraints, **media is becoming an automated and uncritical B2C conveyor of pre-packaged marketing information passed to them by PR people.**
- “ *THEN why can't corporations can fill the void themselves and communicate stories directly to the public...*

Professional 'storyselling'

- “ **Corporations have the money and the talent to create the storytelling content**, aided by a massive, accelerating ‘brain drain’ from journalism.
- “ Journalists know a thing or two about stories...
- “ PR agencies sell their ‘master narrative’ corporate storytelling tools.

Elements of a Company Story

BACKSTORY

How does a company's past play into where it is today?

COMPLICATION & STRUGGLE

What are the obstacles that stand in the way of success?

STAKES

What is at stake for the company, its employees and its industry?

FUTURE PROMISE

What is a company doing to chart to deliver on its strategy?

PAYOFF

What actions are needed for a company to achieve its goals?

Source: Edelman

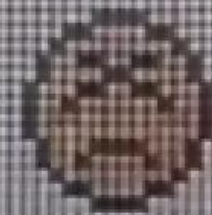
Making people part of the plot

- “ But wait a minute: people might perceive that a company is using such techniques as advertising and so they won't trust it, right?
- “ Increasingly, **it seems people think marketing can be credible if they are involved**, not just reading someone else's story, but feeling like they are part of the plot themselves.
- “ Old-style advertising assumes a passive person just sitting there consuming information. Individuals could follow cues and do what they were told, but they were atomized and felt insignificant alone.
- “ Nowadays, people trust traditional institutional sources of top-down vertical information much less.

PR 101: making folks feel important

- “ Instead, people are creating their own ‘horizontal’ peer-to-peer trusted communications communities, which can now involve:
 - . friends
 - . family
 - . coworkers
- “ PR pros can engage such people in conversations, asking them for ideas or opinions through crowdsourcing.
- “ That way, **people feel personally important as ‘co-creators’ of a brand’s experience.**
- “ Folks will pay more attention to stories they think they had a role in writing...

NHK "Close-Up Gendai"



女性に広がる
睡眠不安

毎日

'I believe their story because they listen to mine'

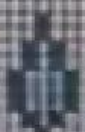
'I think my story will help inform their story'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHy-oKdTIgk>

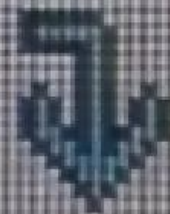
起きるのが憂鬱



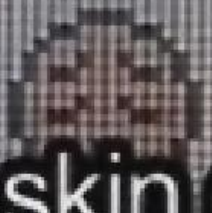
寝ても寝た気がしなくて



肌は荒れて



呼吸

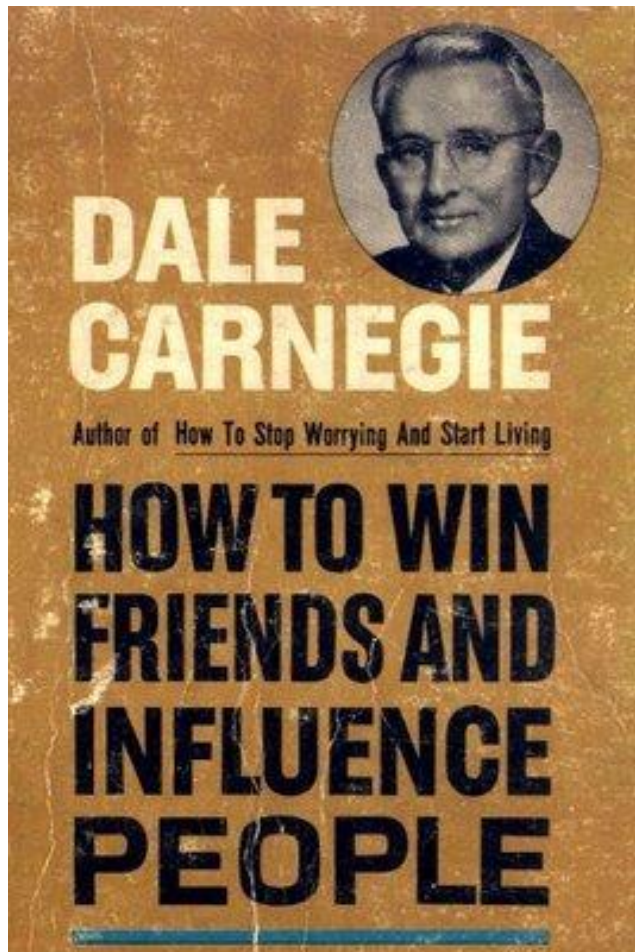


"My skin condition is terrible."

体調は優れない



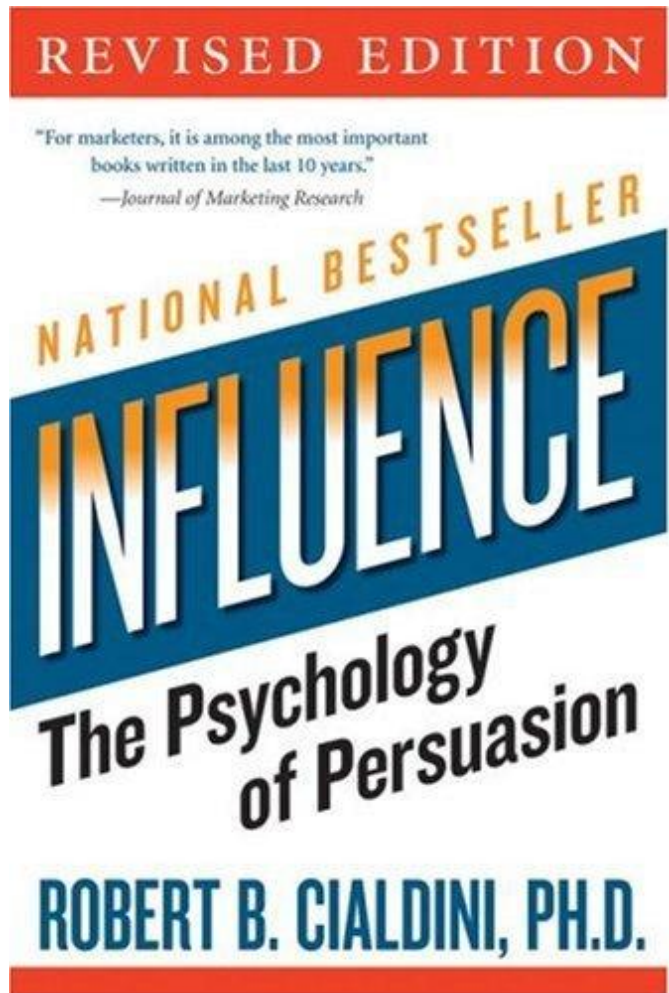
Persuasion 1.0



"Make the other person feel important and do it sincerely."

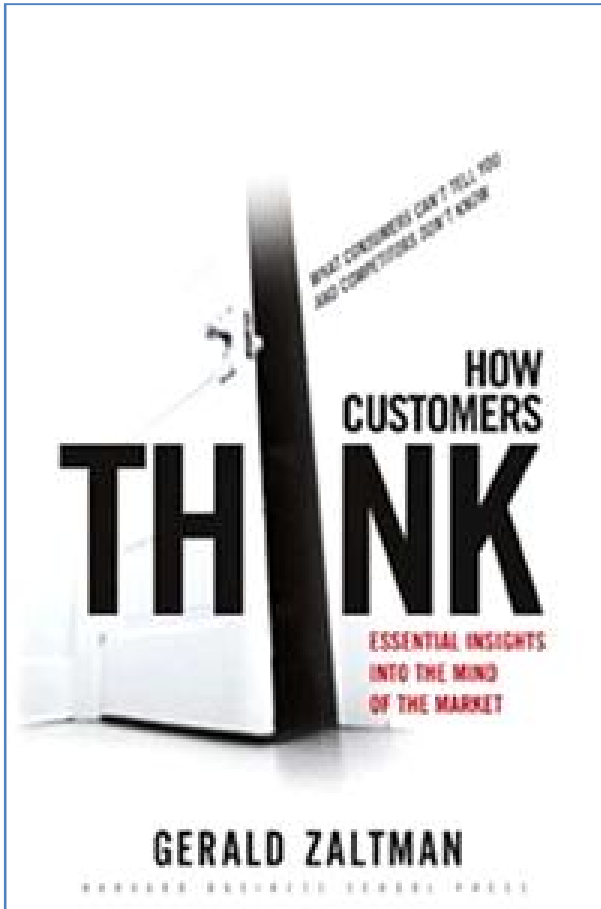
- “ Going back to Dale Carnegie in 1936, we know that **making people feel important is the precursor to persuasion.**
- “ Once PR-driven interactions make people feel important (‘someone is listening to me’), **then stories are sold as conversations.**
- “ Much of this is calculated illusion, with the **objective of getting people to commit themselves in writing to a brand online (i.e. publicly, in front of others).**

Persuasion 2.0



- “ According to Robert Cialdini’s research, we know that **when people commit themselves in public to something, they have created a new ‘image template’ of themselves.**
- “ e.g. ‘as the kind of cutting-edge person who uses this cool product’ – which they will advocate to others within their personal networks of trust – Trojan Horse-like – as a credible peer.
- “ **People will do and say whatever is necessary to conform with their new public image** (including aping a brand’s PR-devised story), and to evidence complete consistency with what they’ve said in ‘conversations’ online.
- “ This is what Cialdini calls “the principle of consistency.”

The power of metaphor



- “ Lots of work is now being done in the area of ‘conversation communication’ and ‘digital storytelling.’
- “ Where the two meet allows persuasion marketers to tap into the massive PR power of metaphor.
- “ **Conversation communication enables the easy application of metaphors used in everyday language for the development of marketing narrative** – e.g. ‘word pictures’ – to convince consumers about a product brand with story ‘frames’ that already exist in their unconscious minds.
- “ “Metaphors force us to form mental pictures that are like glue to our memory and mainline directly to understanding” [Michael Ferrabee].

Concrete words for abstract concepts

“What we’ve discovered in the last 30 years is – surprise, surprise – people think with their brains. And their brains are part of their bodies.”
-- George Lakoff, Berkeley linguistics professor

- “ **Affection is warmth** (“John is a warm person”) ”
- “ **Important is big** (“That’s a huge job you have”) ”
- “ **Difficulties are burdens** (“What a heavy workload”) ”
- “ **Actions are motions** (“He’s a mover and shaker”) ”
- “ **Purposes are destinations** (“Light at the end of the tunnel”) ”
- “ **Life is a journey** (“Marching to the beat of a different drummer”) ”

“The abstract way we think is really grounded in the concrete, bodily world much more than we thought.” -- John Bargh, Yale psychology professor

Metaphor elicitation

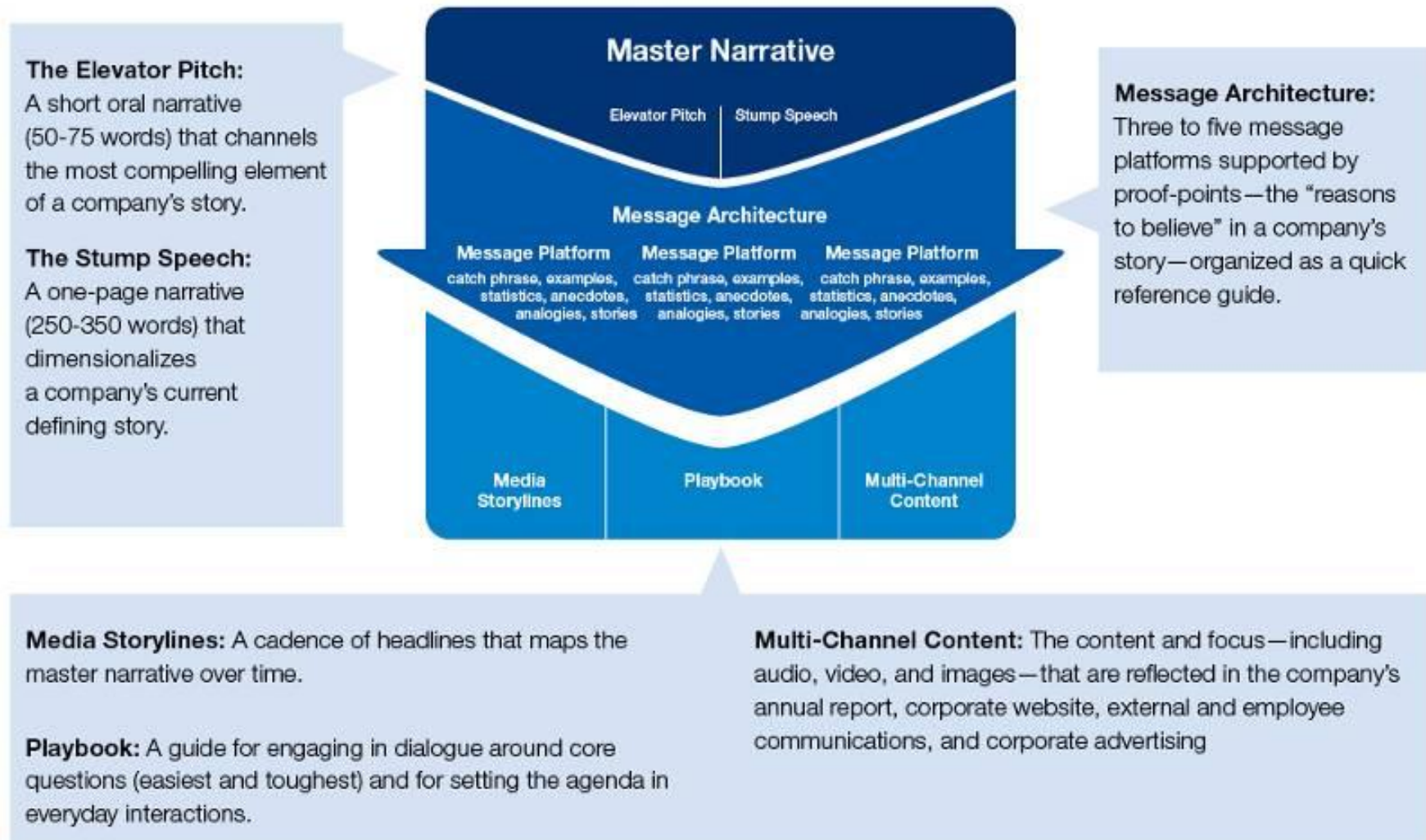
- “ Research is key, asking people before starting a PR campaign things like:
- . *When you think about [company], what is the first thing that comes to mind?*
 - . *What do you feel when you see this [product] image?*
 - . *Can you share some of your past experience in dealing with [area where product offers some benefit]?*

Leveraging search insights

- “ PR people can mine Google search results for key words, and inject compelling metaphors into online content by combining Search Engine Optimization (SEO) tactics with conventional PR approaches
- “ For example, using Google Insights, **the ‘natural language’ words people are using to search can be discovered, the results of which can be used to tailor a narrative’s messaging elements.**
- “ Keywords can be crafted as metaphors, which can be integrated into media relations messaging, news releases, speech content, ‘elevator pitch,’ etc.
- “ Search and social networking are converging, so if a company establishes what Edelman has called ‘embassies’ within the trusted sphere of social networks, then it can build new relationship communities where stories enjoy a higher salience because it is being told within members’ ‘trusted zone’ of social media members.

[Read Edelman’s excellent white paper.](#)

Design of a company's PR story



Slide image from a 2007 Edelman marketing presentation for its 'master narrative' tool.

The modality of storytelling

- “ Zaltman contends that while marketers consciously think in terms of text, real people unconsciously think in terms of images.
- “ As eyeballs migrate to the Internet, even ‘word picture’ text will not be enough as multimedia – videos and pictures and sounds – will need to be programmed by PR people for persuasion.

Will attention spans sustain stories?

TIMES ONLINE

NEWS COMMENT BUSINESS MONEY SPORT LIFE & STYLE TRAVEL DRIVING

LEADING ARTICLES COLUMNISTS LETTERS OBITUARIES BLOGS CARTOON FAITH COMM

Where am I? > Home > Comment > Columnists > Ben Macintyre

From [The Times](#)

November 5, 2009

The internet is killing storytelling

Narratives are a staple of every culture the world over. They are disappearing in an online blizzard of tiny bytes of information

Ben Macintyre

33 COMMENTS | RECOMMEND? (15)

Click, tweet, e-mail, twitter, skim, browse, scan, blog, text: the jargon of the digital age describes how we now read, reflecting the way that the very act of reading, and the nature of literacy itself, is changing.

The information we consume online comes ever faster, punchier and more fleetingly. Our attention rests only briefly on the internet page before moving incontinently on to the next electronic canapé.

Addicted to the BlackBerry, hectorated and heckled by the next blog alert, web link or text message, we are in state of Continual Partial Attention, too bombarded by snippets and gobbets of information to focus on anything for very long. Microsoft researchers have found that someone distracted by an e-mail message alert takes an average of 24 minutes to return to the same level of concentration.

The internet has evolved a new species of magpie reader, gathering bright little buttons of knowledge, before hopping on to the next shiny thing.

BACKGROUND

- > eReaders will open the next chapter
- > Internet piracy hits books sector
- > Is access to the internet now a human right?
- > Linguists all a-muckwash over dialect words

It was inevitable that more than a decade of digital reading would change the way we do it. In a remarkable recent essay in the *Atlantic Monthly* Nicholas Carr admitted that he can no longer immerse himself in substantial books and longer articles in the way he once did. "What the net seems to be doing is chipping

TIMES RECOMMENDS

- > A dose of defeat is just the medicine
- > Protecting ourselves from Eurocreep
- > After the summer of LUV, it'll still hurt

OUR COLUMNISTS

Columnists
David Aaronovitch [VIEW](#)

Blogs
Alpha Mummy [VIEW](#)



Ben Macintyre

Ben Macintyre is Writer at Large for The Times and contributes a regular column. His earlier roles at The Times include being editor of the Weekend Review, parliamentary sketchwriter and bureau chief in Washington and Paris. He has also published a number of historical non-fiction books

“ Continuous partial attention (multitasking) has been debunked, and we now know that people can rapidly switch between mental channels with ‘the executive mind’ deciding what we pay attention to.

“ “The internet is there for snacking, grazing and tasting, not for the full...feast that is nourishing narrative. The consequence is an anorexic form of culture. Plot lies at the heart of great narrative: but today, we are in danger of losing the plot.”

“ -- Ben Macintyre

PR people as media executives

“In the ‘PR 1.0’ era, PR professionals created stories for placement in the mass media. Now in the ‘PR 2.0’ era, PR professionals not only create stories, but also create and manage ‘media,’ such as corporate blogs. Moving forward, if you want to be a successful PR person in the ‘digital storytelling age,’ you should develop strong ‘story writer’ and ‘media publisher’s’ mindsets.”



Hoh Kim

Founder & Head Coach of THE LAB h