

So, what happens to 'once upon a time'?

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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In his excellent book *Blowing the Bloody Doors Off*, Michael Caine tells the story of meeting John Wayne at the Beverly Hills Hotel on his first trip to the United States.



Image © [Damon's Brain](#).

The great actor gives him some advice about what he should and shouldn't do when he becomes famous.

“ He tells him not to wear suede shoes. When Michael Caine asks why, John Wayne tells him that when you are famous, you will be at the urinal and the guy next to you will see you. They will do a double take, turn to you and say, “Hey you are Michael Caine!” And piss all over your shoes. ”

It is no accident that Michael Caine is on many talk shows. He is an excellent storyteller. Storytellers are valued on late-night talk shows because of one simple fact: Stories, unlike almost anything else, emotionally connect with everybody. All the demographics you like.

Yet, storytelling in advertising has become an uncool word. This is something advertising loves to do to itself. Forget what works, let's find something shiny.



For many, it has become associated with what some would call old ways of doing advertising.

Although, if you listen to Les Binet and Peter Field, there is a desperate need to go back to this kind of creativity.

From their evidence at the IPA, trying to build a brand with short-term thinking rather than creating a consistent narrative that connects with consumers emotionally is doomed to failure. Especially, when the economy takes a dive.



If you keep doing that you will go blind

Damon Stapleton 20 Mar 2019



I also think storytelling has become unfashionable because of the obsession to make all content as short as possible. Try telling a joke very quickly and see if people are laughing at the end.

The result of all this is many bits of online content that look like charmless 1950's billboards. Cheap and uncheerful.

Another reason it has become uncool is because our industry has tried to replace it with stupid jargon-words like 'story-making' and the even more ridiculous 'story-doing'.

This is because our business seems to think that telling stories in other ways, be it online or using customer experience, is vastly different.



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The channels might be, but the desired result is very much the same: Feeling and connection. This is something advertising often forgets with new media channels.

While we are doing the very important job of labelling things, Netflix is spending 11-billion dollars on telling stories, and Amazon is about to spend 7-billion dollars to do the same. I would call that a ringing endorsement that gives us a hint of

where things are going.

So, why do stories matter so much in advertising?



Image © [Damon's Brain](#).

Take this photograph. It was taken during the London terror attacks. Apparently an advertising agency strategist (I think named Paula Bloodworth) looked at the picture and noticed the man on the right was still holding his beer while running away. From that came the brilliant line 'Nothing beats a Londoner.'



The Future of Strategy Report 2018 is released by Warc

25 Jul 2018



She saw the story in the picture. She saw something that data would not have seen in a photograph of a London terror attack.

“ *Storytelling is how you get somewhere new. Stories let you connect impossible things. It is how you invent characters and new worlds. Stories make sense of what is but they can make you see what isn't there yet. And most importantly, they make you pay attention. That has enormous value.* ”

As I have said, a great story cuts across all demographics. That is ridiculously valuable. It also makes people want more. It can be episodic. *Game of Thrones* has been going for eight years. Going forward, I think advertising will need think a lot more about how stories can continue.

Stories are also how human beings naturally entertain and talk to each other. And, I think, as we have more and more channels to speak to a consumer, many brands are forgetting this simple fact.



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Tone is one of storytelling's greatest strengths. One of the great dangers for brands going forward is they will be omnipresent, yet perfectly impersonal. All the information at exactly the right time, with none of the charm. Will that be

enough? We will see.

Perhaps you are still unconvinced. OK. Well, let's create a very good product that everybody wants. Let's give it excellent customer service and fantastic distribution. Let's also give it a very good price. So far, so good.

Now, let's give it some competition that has exactly the same attributes, plus a story. The moment this happens, things start getting weird. People start saying imprecise things, like "our product is fine but it's a bit boring. It has no vibe or it's a bit soulless. There is no personality."



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And that is because people are irrational. They make decisions based on emotion, rather than facts.

We make choices based on how we feel. We think we don't, but we do. Take the biggest purchase people make in their lives. A home. What do people normally say when they choose a home? It just felt right.



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That is why storytelling works and matters. Because it is the perfect vehicle to convey emotion. And emotion rather than logic is how we make decisions.

That, and the fact that very few boring people make it onto chat shows.

"There's always a story. It's all stories, really. The sun coming up every day is a story. Everything's got a story in it. Change the story, change the world." – Terry Pratchett

ABOUT DAMON STAPLETON

Damon is regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia. Before that, ECD at Saatchi and Saatchi Australia, before that, group ECD of TBWA Hunt Lascaris and global ECD of Standard Bank. He has won over 500 awards internationally, including a D&AD Black Pencil, Cannes Grand Prix, Grand Clio, ADC Black Cube and most effective ad in the world by Warc 100. Damon is now regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia...

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