

Jan Weir Creative Studio

Creative Marketing

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Scorpions and Drug Runners

Developing Good Relationships through Storytelling

About ten years ago, my husband and I took an eight-day kayaking trip down the Baja on the Sea of Cortez with a group of friends. We carried all our water and food in our kayaks. We slept in tents on deserted beaches, explored hidden caves, discovered burial grounds, swam and bathed in salt water and paddled in swells so big that we couldn't see each other from the dips. We only saw two other people the whole time.

One of the group, Kath love spas. Sometimes when the trip got tiring for her, she would talk about spending a few days at a spa, soaking in hot water and having massages.

On our last night out, I got up in the middle of the night and walking to the water's edge, I heard the quiet hum of a drug-runner's motor boat in the distance making it's way north, lights out, hurrying through the night. The stars were out, the air smelled of the sea, my skin itched from eight days of bathing in salt water, there was a slight tropical breeze and I thought to myself, which would I remember more ten years from now: a kayaking trip like this or a stay at a pristine spa overlooking the ocean? I heard myself snort – was there any comparison? I'd always take the adventure.

Right before leaving for the airport, packing my bags for home, I was stung by a scorpion. It must have crawled into my black purse for safety and when I slipped my hand in to find the camera, he got me. Upon arriving home, we left our luggage out on the porch where it eventually stayed for two weeks. Since I ended up in the emergency room, any more scorpions were just going to have to die tucked into our clothing.

What's the point of this story in relationship to building relationships? The line between who we are in our work world and who we are in our personal lives is blurring. It's smart business to have a few good stories to tell customers. I gave you the short version of the kayaking adventure. The longer version involves more details, bursts of laughter, and a bit of ahhh (on my part) that I got to have such an adventure.

Customers by nature want to know more about you. If you keep the conversation to just work, your relationships will be one dimensional. Adding layers to the conversation will bring the customer (who becomes a friend) back for more.

Growing up, my dad owned a hardware store. Even as a kid, I marveled at the way he gabbed with regulars. Customers came in, found him in the store, hooted and chuckled for a few minutes and then they'd get down to business. As a kid I'm sure I heard the same stories 30 or 40 times but my dad told them so well, I looked forward to them.

Making time for your customers/clients – telling them your stories, listening to their tales – you'll have more business and more fun at your business.

Marketing Pays Off

Another Story about Storytelling

My husband and I lived on a 5-acre plot of land in the Oregon Coast Range for most of our married lives – Jim lived there 30 years. He'd constructed every building on the place, and there were many: main house, guest house, studio, shop, green house, woodshed, carport. Our kids' friends called it "the compound."

After the girls left for college, I decided it was time to move to town and started looking for a house to buy. I'd show Jim (the project guy) great houses and all he'd say is, "But what will I do, everything is done?" Finally, after ten years of looking, I gave up.

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So I'm driving home from the beach one day, and I get a call from Jim on my cell. He's at a friend's house in town, they are going to sell the house and it meets his criteria for a place he could live. Without missing a beat I replied, "buy it today!" And he did!

We now had the task of selling the coast range compound. Friends thought we were crazy when we told them we were going to sell the house ourselves and not use a realtor. "You'll never get traffic out there you'll never get your price; you need a professional!" And on and on. The problem with using a realtor was that they weren't familiar with the place, and they didn't have 30 years of stories that would spark the interest of prospective buyers.

In the next month we just about killed ourselves painting, cleaning out clutter, finishing up projects and staging. When all was pristine, I took photographs, built a website, took out an ad in the local paper as well as putting an ad in Craigslist with a link to the website. I built flyers using the same photos and copy from the website and displayed them in the box attached to the for sale sign.

In the first week, we got 300 hits on our website mainly from our Craigslist ad. For three consecutive Sundays we held an open house and walked approximately 40 different groups of people around the place relating the stories of our lives there; tales of wild animals, snow storms, gatherings, etc. People came from as far away as Idaho to see our compound. Three weeks to the day we first put the ad on Craigslist, we got an offer and sold the place for the price we wanted.

The buyers were so impressed with our marketing efforts, they hired me to market the house they needed to sell in Portland. I was hired to market it – they sold it themselves.

Marketing in conjunction with good storytelling pays off. We had several strikes against us when we began: the price of gas was on the rise; we were 25 miles from town; and the nearest neighbors' property (could not be seen from the house) was practically a junkyard. But having a doable, realistic marketing plan, implementing the elements and then telling good stories about living there helped connect potential buyers to the place – it worked!