

# ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

The power of storytelling can create connection and influence purchasing decisions – and there are five types of stories you need to know about.



BY GABRIELLE DOLAN

Growing up I was never really into dolls, preferring to play football and cricket with my brothers.

Needless to say, I never owned a Barbie and, decades later, when Barbie was being shamed as not being a good role model for girls, I happily went along with this and refused to buy my two daughters a Barbie.

Recently, however, I heard the backstory to Barbie and it completely changed my opinion about the Barbie brand.

The creator of Barbie was Ruth Handler, the wife of Elliot Handler, co-founder of Mattel. She noticed that when her daughter, Barbara, and son, Ken (and yes, Ken and Barbie were named after her children) played, they would pretend to be adults. She also noticed that while Barbara only had dolls that had her playing the role of caregiver, Ken had dolls that encouraged him to imagine himself as a doctor, firefighter or astronaut.

So Ruth set to work to produce a three-dimensional plastic doll with an adult body and a wardrobe of fabric clothing. Her husband and other executives at Mattel did not think it was a good idea, assuming parents would be reluctant to buy their child a doll with a voluptuous figure. However, Ruth persisted and in 1959 Barbie was born.

When you look at the career Barbies created in the 1960s and 1970s they were very progressive. For example, Executive Barbie, Astronaut Barbie and Surgeon Barbie.

Ruth is quoted as saying, "My whole philosophy of Barbie was that through the doll the little girl could be anything she wanted to be. Barbie always represented the fact that a woman has choices."

Hearing this story changed my view of the Barbie brand ... and it will influence my future buying decisions. I never bought my children a Barbie, but I just might buy my future grandchildren one.

That is what a magnetic story can do for your brand. It can create a connection and influence future purchasing decisions.

When it comes to brand storytelling, there are five types of stories companies should focus on.

Creation stories either detail why the



company started or show how a product was created (e.g. the story of Barbie's creation).

Culture stories demonstrate how employees are living the company values or what those values mean to them.

Customer stories can showcase your customers or what your employees are doing for customers.

Community stories show how the company is fulfilling its corporate responsibility and doing good things to help the community.

Challenge stories show how the company has responded to both internal and external challenges ... big or small.

Sometimes a story will fall into multiple categories. For example, during 2020, Sydney-based distillery Archie Rose had to adapt their business, otherwise 15 bar staff would potentially lose their jobs due to COVID-19 restrictions. Combined with the national shortage of hand sanitiser, this resulted in them making an almost immediate decision to switch production from spirits to hand sanitiser.

Within three days they had sourced bottles for the hand sanitiser, reconfigured their production line, created and printed labels, amended their insurance policies, and obtained additional federal production licences. Plus, they were abiding by all the

legal and health requirements for the hand sanitiser and COVID-19 work restrictions, to produce 7500 units... in just three days. They went on to employ another 15 local hospitality workers who had lost their jobs.

The story had an instant connection with people and immediately received local and worldwide attention. You could easily classify this story as a community story, a challenge story or a culture story. The switch to producing hand sanitiser could even demonstrate a creation story.

When it comes to brand storytelling, the most important thing is not to focus on one story but to consider all the different types of stories you can share. What's more, you should regularly add new examples to your collection. These magnetic stories can create an instant connection with your customers that create long-lasting brand loyalty. ■

**GABRIELLE DOLAN** is a global expert on business storytelling and real communication. Her latest book *Magnetic Stories: Connect with customers and engage employees with brand storytelling* is available now. Find out more about Gabrielle's services at [gabrielledolan.com](http://gabrielledolan.com).