



VITAL STEPS

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DEVELOPING YOUR STORY





VITAL STEPS TO DEVELOPING YOUR STORY

You can't activate your brand without a compelling and authentic story.

But, first: What is that story? At this point, read our first two guides: **Bring Your Brand Experience to Life** and **Identifying Your Target Audience**. These two guides are important next steps to know what your goal is and who you are trying to reach.

Now on to the next step: **Developing the story** that will resonate with the people you are aiming to reach.

Get ready!

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Step One: Identify the Why

As business strategist and inspirational speaker Simon Sinek says: “People don’t buy what you do; they buy why you do it.”

It all begins with the **WHY**.

Your core motivation for what you do is the most important thing you need to communicate, for both yourself and your customer. **Why are you reading this guide?** Because of your motivation to develop your story. Now, we need to identify what your motivation is and put into words.

The challenge is that our **WHY** is so ingrained within us, that it is hard to identify.

Finding your why is both really simple and complex. Ask yourself this question: “Why do I do what I do?” And then no matter what the answer is, ask yourself “Why?” again. Keep going until you’ve asked yourself “Why?” between 5 and 7 times. You’ll know when you hit upon the real, core reason. It feels like hitting a nerve, or when cold ice cream hits your sensitive tooth. This exercise is easier if you have someone else ask you the questions. They can push you to keep going when you get frustrated that they keeping asking you the same stupid question.

It can take time to find your WHY, and maybe it will change over time. Keep in mind, the WHY is different for an organization than it is for a person. But, we all have one - and we all must find it.



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Step Two: What is Important To Your Target Audience?

While you're working on your WHY, we need to also think a bit more about your target audience.

Re-read your notes from following our previous guide about identifying your target audience and get a clear visual of who they are. Once you do that, then ask: What do they care about?

To start, take a few minutes to think about the answer to these questions:

- What is important to my target audience?
- What will bring value to their lives?
- What do they need help with?
- What problem do they have that I can help them solve?

Dig into these questions and gain a clear picture of their needs. Next, we can start to think about the words we will use to communicate with them.



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Step Three: Brainstorm

Equipped with your WHY, and the answers you generated in following Step 2, now is the fun part: Brainstorming!

The Brainstorming Essentials:

1. Gather your team together
2. Grab the following materials:
 - a white board
 - some colored markers
3. Get ready to write!

Chime out ideas that describe yourself and your work. Throw as many words as you can on the board. Think about key words and phrases that describe your work well. In essence, these are the puzzle pieces of your story.

Ask yourself some leading questions:

- What do we do?
- What are the people and places that are important to mention?
- Why are you doing this and what will your impact be?
- What do we want people to know about us?

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A good brainstorming exercise should allow you to get deep into your responses. So, for a while, just throw all ideas on the board - even the bad ones. Keep this going for at least 20 minutes.

Next: Share your answers!

Review all your words on the board as a group. This group effort is key for diverse feedback and an engaged discussion to find the words that are the best fit. Using a different colored marker, circle the collective favorites that stand out to everyone. Go around the room and make sure everyone has provided their feedback on the words they connect with the best. Put stars next to the words that come up most often. Discuss any words or phrases people are in disagreement over.

It's important to take enough time to summarize the stand-out words and phrases. The goal is to turn these words into potential slogans, messages and descriptions about you/your organization and the value you bring to your target audience. You may need extra time to play around with your favorite sequences and combinations to get the perfect word pairing.

To understand what it is producing, identify what you need from these words and what you're trying to create. It may be a simple slogan or a full story about your organization. It may be specific and it may be general. Short or long. These varying needs will impact the kinds of things you have brainstormed.

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Step Four: Test

At the end of Step Three, you should have a key phrase, slogan or message with the top words from your exercise. This may take some additional time, even a few weeks, to get the right message. With your short list of message and story ideas, we now test them to see which will work best.

The #1 mistake we see groups make when they are developing their story is not testing the story with their target audience.

Instead of testing the story, people gather their leadership team, a group of friends or just themselves and decide if the message sounds good to them. Often they'll say, "Well, what is convincing to me is..." or "I really like this particular organization because of the words they use."

Here's the thing: **If you are a part of these conversations, then you are inherently not representative of the target audience. Instead, you are already in the know.**

Your target audience either doesn't know about you or doesn't know everything they need to know. This is because if you are targeting them, you want them to take some action. You need to persuade *them*, not your friends. Generally speaking, your friends and your leadership team do not need to be convinced that you have something to offer.



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Try this instead: Find a subset of your target audience and run your ideas past them to get feedback. This can be as informal or formal as you like, and can cost you a lot or nothing. It depends on your budget and the depth of your curiosity.

Here are some ideas for how you can test your messaging:

- Pay a polling or market research firm to commission official and scientifically constructed research, such as a phone poll or focus groups (this is expensive but very informative)
- Find a stranger or friend-of-a-friend who fits your target audience profile and ask them what they think
- Form your own focus group and recruit people using paid Facebook ads or a recruitment service like Respondent
- Put together an online survey using a tool like Survey Monkey and send it to people representative of your target audience (not just your friends)

Here's the amazing thing about research: It doesn't have to be scientific. If you're testing messaging and want to know what a few people think - just ask them. You'll find it can be incredibly helpful. The key here is to ask people representative of your target audience and not just your friends, who will simply tell you what you want to hear.



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Step 5: Document

Now that you have the essence of what your message is, you need to write it down for all your communications and materials moving forward. The ways you document your message will depend on your needs, but here are some ideas:

- Talking points
- An elevator pitch (should take no more than 2 minutes to say)
- A messaging triangle

What's a messaging triangle?

A message triangle summarizes your message in a short, medium and long versions. The common core of the message threads all the way through the different versions. The point of this is to make sure your message is consistent, whether you're writing a tweet or a twenty minute speech.

Consistent messaging is vital to the success of your story. We'll be writing more blog posts about message discipline soon.

Once your message is documented, you should use these materials to write every other thing you say or write about your organization or mission. Whether you're writing a press release, designing a logo or putting a flier together, start with this documented message. It will keep you on message, consistent and true to your core motivation.



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A Messaging Triangle:

Slogan: Connecting every child to a loving home

Short:

Every child deserves a loving home. Our organization removes barriers in the foster care systems to reduce the number of children growing up in state care.

Medium: Every child deserves a loving home. Our organization removes barriers in the foster care systems to reduce the number of children growing up in state care. We do this by providing resources, education and support for would-be parents, as well as advocating for policies and procedures that help to create equitable foster and adoption systems.

Long: Every child deserves a loving home. Our organization removes barriers in the foster care systems to reduce the number of children growing up in state care. We do this by providing resources, education and support for would-be parents, as well as advocating for policies and procedures that help to create equitable foster and adoption systems. Every child deserves a loving home, and no qualified would-be parent should be prevented from giving them one. Our organization fights to make this ideal a reality.



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Now you're ready to launch your meaningful engagement! You know who your audience is and you have your message.

So let's take your authentic story to your audience.

Email launch@javelina.co to receive your exclusive 5-step guide to launching your meaningful engagement!