

What's The Story?

New Ways to Talk About Brands and Service



VM STAFF REPORT

Everyone has a story. And, more often than not in today's retail marketplace, every brand, product and company has a story, or at a minimum is searching for a story, that is designed to connect and resonate with customers on a deeper level.

As a result, the concept of storytelling—and its impact on building customer loyalty or increasing sales—is one of the most-talked about trends in marketing and business today.

“Storytelling is simply a way in which to deliver a brand's messages; one of several techniques for doing so,” Bob Hogan, who heads up the consumer services group for the advertising agency Triple Threat Communications, told *Vision Monday*. “If you can develop a brand story that is interesting and relevant to your audience, it can be valuable. However, it won't make up for a product or service that isn't relevant. It's not a magic bullet for everything.”

Storytelling is not a new or revolutionary idea. Indeed, the concept of telling a meaningful story has been around since cavemen painted images on rock walls to communicate their ideas. More recently, the “slice of life” TV commercial—which Hogan calls the “most enduring” TV technique among an array of options—is essentially storytelling at its basic level. “It begins with the situation/protagonist setup, intro-

duces conflict (often a problem), introduces the product as hero to solve the problem and winds up with a conflict resolution,” he explained.

The edge that eyecare and other marketers in health care have is that the topic of health lends itself naturally to storytelling because it tracks patients and other stakeholders through a familiar and linear plot: symptoms, diagnosis, treatment and outcome, according to Hogan. The mistake that some marketers make, Hogan said, is that they get impatient to “tell you about the products and don't spend a lot of time on the story elements, settling for predictable vignettes and trite resolutions.”

Other experts agree that eyecare should be a natural backdrop for storytellers to excel.

“It should be easier for vision specialists to develop stories, since all story elements are there naturally,” content marketing consultant Bethany Johnson told *Vision Monday*. “However, a few bad experiences can put [customers] on edge, so trust needs to be rebuilt before a brand can swoop in and heroically save the day.”

One marketer in the optical space that has been recognized for its storytelling approach is Warby Parker. The optical retailer has developed storytelling content that is fun while also “painting the brand as trendy and chic yet socially conscious,” according to content marketing firm Oz Content Technologies. In addition to featuring some of its own employees in

video spots, the retailer also crowdsources content from its customer base to find real-life examples of customers trying on glasses.

For an ECP who wants to try storytelling, this might mean developing a story around the practice's long-running effort to address children's vision issues by providing eye exams in elementary schools. The story would highlight the achievements of some of these “children” after they went on to bigger and better things either in the community or on a larger stage, in part because their vision issues were successfully addressed early in life. This kind of story goes a long way to demonstrate a core belief of the practice and why the ECPs do what they do.

Although there is some doubt about the quantifiable aspect of storytelling on a brand's sales, Johnson said there are other measures to gauge whether the storytelling approach has achieved success. “One of my clients said it best when she said that the purchase is not the holy grail anymore, it's the share,” said Johnson, who has worked on campaigns for such brands as Build-a-Bear, Tom's of Maine and MasterCard.

“It's the thumbs-up on social media. It's the ‘so-and-so checked in at this location today.’ It's the storytelling of friends that a brand should set their sights on. Not a buy. So does storytelling trigger purchase intent? No. But it triggers comments, shares and likes, which are often much more valuable.”

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STATE Optical Co. Weaves 'Made in America' Story Through Its Brand

CHICAGO—When it comes to companies who embody the Made in America spirit, STATE Optical Co. is top of mind. STATE is a collaboration among husband and wife team, Scott and Amanda Shapiro, eyewear executive Jerry Wolowicz, entrepreneurial cousins Marc Franchi and Jason Stanley, and award-winning designer Blake Kuwahara.

The company's luxury eyewear collection is one of a few eyewear brands designed and manufactured exclusively in North America, with an office and factory headquartered just outside of Chicago.

"The brand is all about storytelling, as it offers us the chance to communicate intimately about craftsmanship that takes place right here in our hometown," said Scott Shapiro, CEO and co-founder of STATE Optical Co. "It's a unique story that few others can tell. The story started with Marc Franchi and Jason Stanley, two first cousins who set out to do what many told them was impossible—craft high-quality luxury eyewear in the U.S. To do so, they had to travel the world and literally teach themselves the entire manufacturing process."

According to Shapiro, Marc and Jason doubled-

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(Clockwise from top left) The STATE logo, intricately drilled into each temple tip, contains a pyramid of 21 dots because Illinois is the 21st state in The Union and the frames are produced in Illinois; Seeing the Addison frame on celebrated trumpeter Marquis Hill, provides STATE with more opportunity for storytelling and connecting with a customer than if the frames were on a model; STATE is all about craftsmanship and communicating every personal and intimate stories about how the frames are made.



New Ways to Talk About Optical Brands

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Storytelling, like a lot of good ideas, can be ineffective "when applied too broadly and without thoughtful intent," the retail technology consulting firm Retail-Next noted. This can lead to increasing "the noise of a lot stories being told, but precious few being heard."

Another challenge for marketers who embrace storytelling is to focus their efforts on the message and not get caught up in the shiny new elements of the medium, according to PR firm Edelman.

"In a race to embrace shiny new platforms—which would supposedly create deeper connections—[marketers have] lost sight of what really matters," Edelman's Darragh Rea explained in a blog post. "The

results in many cases [are] not deeper connections but instead temporary interactions, fleeting in nature and almost certainly not memorable."

As a primer for building a strong storytelling approach, Edelman recommends brands "get back to their core story" and focus on three simple questions:

1. Why do you do what you do?
2. How are you different?
3. Why do you matter?

"By answering these questions, brands can begin to refocus on their story and most importantly how it relates to their core audience," Rea added. "In a

world where technology has unlocked so many opportunities, it seems incomprehensible that instead of communicating what really matters, some brands are focusing on bland product messages."

Another source that leads to genuine stories is the employee base, said Dorothy Wetzel, a former Pfizer marketing director and founder of the New Jersey-based agency Extrovertic. "Companies often overlook this very powerful source of stories. Executives or employees are the most trusted storytellers when it comes to business practices, crisis mitigation or industry issues."

Read on for a sampling of how some eyewear companies and optical retailers have made "storytelling" a consistent part of their messaging to consumers. ■

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down on their commitment to this dream when the two lifetime Californians agreed to uproot their lives and move their families to Chicago so they could partner with the team at Europa eyewear. In 2014, the newly formed team began to build its first-of-its kind factory from the ground up.

More than anything, STATE is about craftsmanship. Shapiro said, "Never before in the optical industry has there been a better opportunity for a company to communicate to patients and customers the craft and detail that goes into the eyeglasses they wear. STATE is an attempt to bridge the very large gap that has for years separated eyewear craftsmen and eyewear consumers by communicating very personal and intimate stories about how the frames are made, where they're made, and by whom they're made."

Like many companies, STATE offers point-of-purchase materials that include logo blocks, hanging banners, photos of their craftsmen, and a video highlighting the manufacturing process. The company also has a "storytelling" display that shows a brief glimpse into the three stages of the frames' production.

There are also great storytelling moments within the design of the frames, Shapiro noted. The STATE logo contains a pyramid of 21 dots because Illinois is the 21st state in The Union and the frames are produced in Illinois. Those 21 dots are also intricately drilled into each temple tip. The custom hinge is designed as a pyramid to match the logo and temple tip, and each style is named after a street in Chicago.

Shapiro travels the country personally to meet with the staffs of STATE locations in order to train them on the details that make the product, and the story behind it so unique.

"More importantly, we offer a story-telling opportunity that very few companies have offered in decades—tours of our domestic manufacturing facility. Everyone is invited to come visit our factory and see the 75 steps that go into crafting each frame, particularly eyecare professionals.

"Too many of them have devoted their careers to working with eyewear and becoming experts in the field, and yet so few of them have ever seen a pair of

eyeglass frames being made. That's a real problem in our industry," he said.

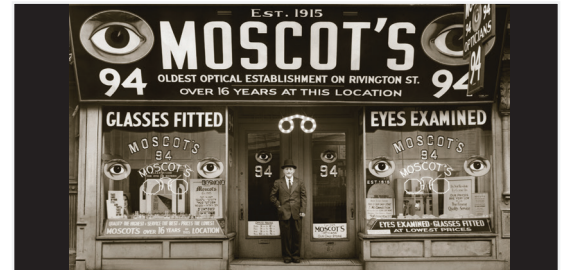
Consumers are also invited to tour the facility. When a patient buys a pair of STATE frames, on the inside of the case it says, "Come see how your frames are made." Customers can go to STATEOpticalCo.com and make an appointment to tour the factory.

"We've found that this story resonates with consumers from every demographic. Even more than in

the past, I think consumers of all ages really care about the way their products are made, and the story that goes along with them.

"They expect a deeper connection with the brands and products they invest in. Particularly in the eyewear space, consumers are thirsty for an authentic brand, and what's more authentic than crafting the frames with our own hands, in our own backyard," Shapiro concluded. ■

For 5 Generations and over 100 years, The Moscot Heritage Story Endures



(Clockwise from top left) Zack and Harvey Moscot; family patriarch, Hyman Moscot in front of the first store on 94 Rivington Street; the view outside of Moscot's on 94 Rivington on the Lower East Side of New York City; Harvey and Zack in front of Moscot's on Orchard Street.

NEW YORK—Moscot's optical roots were first planted in America when family patriarch, Hyman Moscot arrived here at Ellis Island from Eastern Europe in 1899. Hyman began selling ready-made eyeglasses from a pushcart on Orchard Street in Manhattan's Lower East Side neighborhood. By 1915, Hyman opened the family's first retail shop,

Moscot's at 94 Rivington Street.

Fast forward 102 years, and the company has now had five generations of Moscot's behind the counter. This living history and heritage is inextricably linked to the brand's personality and is present in everything they do.

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“It simply cannot be replicated by other brands, and we do not rest on our laurels. Moscot is living history and the company continues marking new milestones,” the company said.

While Moscot boasts over a century of business, they have long attracted free-spirited creatives and independent thinkers seeking classic, timeless eyewear. “We strongly believe in the value of quality craftsmanship and unparalleled customer service. Our brand messaging, including our storytelling, transcends and connects with fans and customers of all ages, backgrounds and cultures. Moscot is ‘classic-ionic,’ the conflation of classic and iconic, a term we coined and trademarked last year,” the company stated.

The company continues to communicate its rich history to customers through their frame collections such as The Moscot Originals Collection. This collection is based on styles from the Moscot family archives from the 1930s through the 1970s and celebrates the timeless design from past decades.

The eyewear retains the authenticity of the original frame styles including period details, traditional hardware and real glass sunglass lenses that duplicate the old school colors first fabricated by the company in the 1940s. Additionally, many of The Moscot Originals Collection frame names pay tribute to Moscot family members and friends.

Moscot history can also be found on packaging, marketing materials and in the historical family photos on display in their shops. Customer service and brand ambassadors often relay the brand story to customers visiting Moscot shops as well.

This year, Moscot’s marketing initiatives will integrate the brand’s traditional, grassroots approach with a digital-driven plan that is both business and consumer-oriented. The company’s efforts to grow Moscot’s wholesale business in the U.S. and abroad, offers stockists and retail partners a differentiating factor given the brand’s heritage, quality product and New York City roots, promoting independent eyewear at the highest level, the company said. ■

Zeiss’ Namesake and Founder Continues To Inspire and Inform Its Customers

STUTTGART, Germany—In 2016, the Zeiss Group celebrated the 200th birthday of its founder, Carl Zeiss, and the 170th anniversary of its founding.

Carl Zeiss strived to understand customer needs. In doing so, he challenged limits in technology and manufacturing, collaborated closely with academia to bring innovation to optics and brought an entrepreneurial spirit to the company—all of which are essential to its identity today. The company’s heritage as a leading optical firm that shaped progress in optics for generations plays a vital role in its sales and marketing activities as well as in its media relations.

“Many consumers remember a ‘Zeiss moment,’ whether it’s a binocular bought by grandparents and still in use, the moment they benefited from Zeiss technology—cataract surgery, for example—or in daily business,” a Zeiss spokesperson noted. “This is the starting point we use to talk with them about Zeiss, its heritage and what it means today.”

Every year customers from all over the world visit Zeiss headquarters in Oberkochen, Germany. They tour the Zeiss optical museum, where long-time Zeissians discuss the history of optics, what role Zeiss played in it and how the company’s contributions



(Clockwise from top) Visitors to Jena, Germany, the birthplace of Carl Zeiss, walking through an exhibit about his life and times during a celebration of his 200th birthday last year; inside the Zeiss museum in Oberkochen, Germany; a girl tries out a Zeiss microscope on display at the Jena event.

Reinventing 'Retail' With Each New STORY Experience

NEW YORK—STORY is an award-winning approach to conventional retailing. At STORY, “experience” is the currency of a successful operation and concept.

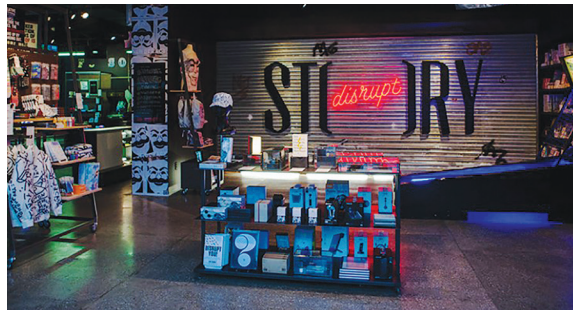
Rachel Shechtman, CEO and founder of STORY, the groundbreaking New York-based concept store known for its ever-changing, editorial approach to retail, shared her unique perspectives on the shopping experience during Vision Monday's Global Leadership Summit last March.

A fourth-generation retailer, Shechtman called STORY, “a living lab” that is constantly changing, a “community center” where she and her team are “creating unexpected opportunities” for customers. “The process of access and discovery in the physical world is so important,” she noted.

Shechtman explained that “STORY takes the viewpoint of a magazine, changes like a gallery by updating its themes, design and products every three to eight weeks, and sells things like a store.” STORY has created dozens of unique retail installations in partnership with companies such as Intel, American Express, GE, Target, Lexus and Cigna, who serve as sponsors for the experience.

STORY is a 2,000-square-foot shop that gets a complete makeover—with a new design, range of products and marketing message—every four to eight weeks.

Shechtman stressed that “experience per square foot is more important than sales per square foot.” She added that the key to a successful partnership with her clients is combining “a contextually relevant brand telling stories through a retailer for a con-



(Clockwise from top) STORY changes like a gallery by updating its themes, design and products every three to eight weeks, like the Home for the Holidays shop; Rachel Shechtman, CEO and founder of STORY, shared her unique perspectives on the shopping experience during Vision Monday's Global Leadership Summit last March; Shechtman and her team are constantly “creating unexpected opportunities” for customers.

textually relevant product.”

Shechtman's retail philosophy is about “content, commerce and community.” She agreed that retailing “is not just about selling things, it's about experience.

Experience sells things, not the place. If you're not actively trying to open their pocketbook and you give them an experience you will have mind-blowing results.” ■

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Zeiss Inspires and Informs Its Customers

lead to the future.

Zeiss also takes its history and museum to events and optical stores around the world. People see and hear how Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin used Zeiss lenses to take photos on the moon. They learn how a piece of technology produced with Zeiss comes into

their pocket (e.g. an iPhone microchip), or how Zeiss microscopes helped Nobel Prize laureates make their breakthrough discoveries. To get close to “the moon camera” from 1969 or to see the technology used to manufacture microchips today helps people to get a bigger, colorful and memorable impression of Zeiss.

Zeiss tells its story online and offline, on social media and at events, in marketing materials and at presentations and lectures. “While we adapt the storytelling to different target groups in style and information density, it always remains the one story about one Zeiss,” the company spokesperson said. ■

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Cohen's Adheres to Its Fashion Philosophy for Over 90 Years

NEW YORK—Cohen's Fashion Optical's story is based on 90 years of history. Founded by Jack Cohen in 1927, the store started as a small pushcart business, selling ready-made glasses to New York City's Orchard street merchants.

As the demand for eyeglasses grew, the family outgrew the pushcart business and went on to open their first retail optical shop on the corner of Orchard and Delancey streets, on the Lower East Side. After Jack Cohen decided that eyewear should also be fashionable, the company began hand-dyeing the eyeglass frames in different colors and according to the company, Cohen's then became the first optical retailer to sell fashion eyewear in New York City.

Ninety years and over 100 stores later, Cohen's has remained true to its philosophy while also catering to all generations of eyeglass wearers. "Different age groups respond to marketing messages differently," stated the company's chief marketing officer, Sheila Haile. "We tailor the message and the medium to the audience. Everyone brings a different set of expectations to their interaction with the brand, so we focus on meeting the expectations of each audience first, then focus on where and how a particular audience prefers their messaging."

In keeping up with the Millennial generation of buyers, Cohen's remodeled its original Lower East Side store in May of 2016. Adding a new façade, custom fixtures, lighting, tables, displays and furnishings, the Orchard and Delancey location created an environment that encouraged interaction with product.

To mark the event, the reopening of the store was accompanied by an in-house collection—The Collective—inspired by Cohen's very first frame and designed for young adults, college students and emerging professionals in need of prescription eyewear.



(Clockwise from top left) Cohen's remodeled their original store, replicating the original exterior Cohen's Fashion Optical sign; the company's booth at iHeart Radio's social activation event was the perfect mock subway station; nothing says Empire State more than your own street sign—Statue of Liberty and all.

Cohen's Fashion Optical has also made charity a part of their story. In December of 2016, the company worked with iHeart Radio on a social activation campaign that included a booth at the iHeart Radio Gift Giving event at One World Trade Center. The campaign

included a custom snapchat filter, blog posts social media ads, as well as custom radio spots. The company also donated gifts to the Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Jersey. ■