

Tell me a story



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How we market communities



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“We have superb highways and a world-class airport”



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“We have remarkable schools,
wonderful teachers and
high-achieving students”



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“We have incredibly low taxes”



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“We have unbeatable tax incentives”



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“We have wonderful
neighborhoods”



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“We have world-class shopping”



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“We have xx,xxx population”



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“We have exceptional quality of life”



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“We have small-town charm with
big-city access”



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“This is a great place
to raise a family”



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“We’re not as high-fallutin’
as Carmel”



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Common problems

- List facts instead of illustrating them
- Talk features instead of benefits
- Use hyperbole that's not credible
- Use words when people prefer images
- Employ interchangeable logos and slogans
- Use “we,” “our,” and “us” instead of a name



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In other words, communities ...

- Write in platitudes
- Spout statistics
- Tell you how great they are
- Use lots of glowing adjectives about themselves



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Result:

We blend in rather than standing out



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What we say to dogs

“Sit, Spot.

Roll over, Spot.

Fetch, Spot.”



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What dogs hear

“Blah, blah, blah, Spot.

Blah, blah, blah, Spot

Blah, blah, blah, Spot.”

~ Gary Larson, The Far Side



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Hard truth

- Target audiences don't wake up in the morning thinking about Johnson County (or Franklin, or Greenwood, etc.)
- You have to find a way to stand out among all the other communities that want residents, visitors and businesses



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The best way to stand out
is to show and tell stories

(and to get Johnson County
residents, friends and workers to tell
their own stories)



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Facts

The king died.

The queen died.



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Story

The king died,
and the queen died of a broken heart.



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Good stories ...

- Have a beginning, a middle and an end
- Make an emotional connection
- Include real pictures or paint mental pictures
- Make you want to know what happens next
- Have a moral and/or a call to action



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Example 1

The annual report



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Example 2

An economic development story:
Lemonade from lemons



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Example 3

If you don't like a law,
stories can help change it



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Seven tips



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1. Write tight

Readers and viewers
are pressed for time



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2. Write the way people talk

Stilted prose, jargon, abbreviations,
and acronyms lose people



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3. Don't tell lots of stories

Show or tell one story at a time.

Show or tell it well.



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4. Think in pictures (and moving pictures)

We live in a visual society



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5. Provide crutches and cheats

- Headlines
- Subheads
- Bullets
- Photo captions



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6. Don't tell people how to feel

Make them feel that way



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7. Talk benefits, not features

Say “You get” instead of
“We’re great”



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Questions?



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