



STORY SEASON - THE TIGHTROPE OF AUTHENTICITY

THE NEW RULES OF SALES PRESENTATIONS (& WHY YOU MUST CHANGE)

Those who have been following [Eyeful's Story Season](#) over the last few weeks will have spotted a theme.

Yep, we truly love the power of story in presentations. We love the heightened levels of engagement they bring, the spark they create in audiences and the unforgettable images they create. In the right hands, they are a very powerful tool.

Yet we're also consistently cynical about those that claim that 'story' is a presentation panacea. Stories fall flat on their faces when used inappropriately, out of context or as a short cut to a properly thought out proposition. They are also bound to fail if they are inauthentic.

Outside of all the science, the scenarios and hype, there is one simple truth – powerful stories rely on authenticity. They work because they connect, forming a bridge

between the storyteller and the audience, sharing emotions, experience and ideas. In short, you have to 'feel it' to effectively share it.

Inauthentic = Ineffective (To The Point of Being Pointless)

We see inauthenticity everywhere, from the singer who mimes their way through an old standard to the stand-up who 'phones in' a performance. It just doesn't work – the connection is lost.

It's this authenticity issue that is one of the flaws that those with blind faith in 'business storytelling' seem to conveniently overlook. Marketing folk beware! Foisting a pre-canned, generic and inauthentic story upon a business presenter is bound to fail for the simple reason that they don't 'feel it'.

TOO AUTHENTIC?

The power of authenticity can, of course, go the other way – some stories are simply too emotional, too heartfelt to work effectively in a business presentation.

By way of example, allow me to share a personal presentation flaw. Shortly after the publication of [The Presentation Lab](#), I shared a story to illustrate the power of visuals. I talked about how I felt as a spotty teenager seeing the extraordinary and shocking pictures of the Ethiopian famine for the first time. I recalled the emotional rollercoaster of Band Aid, from singing along to Spandau Ballet one minute and then sobbing with millions of other viewers as we watched the harrowing CBC news report of a skeletal child, near death, struggling but determined to stand (to a devastating soundtrack of 'Drive' by The Cars). And then, 20 years later, that incredible moment when she was introduced, fit and healthy, to the audience at the Live 8 concert.

The story was powerful and helped audiences understand the point I was making...but was frankly too personal and emotional for me to deliver. I choked up each and every time I shared it – the story simply proved too raw for me to tell without going to pieces so in the end I dropped it. It was too authentic.

So where to draw the line? In the world of business presentations, the power of stories come from the connection they make with an audience. Authenticity is a key element in ensuring that connection is made so treat it with respect.

Oh, and as ever, put yourself in the shoes of your audience – what would help you engage better? When traversing the tightrope of authenticity, I'd take a heartfelt but shoddily told story over a slick but inauthentic one every time. Or, like [Don Draper](#), you can strive to get the mix just right.