Story-led positioning & messaging for B2B.

Your step-by-step guide to narrative that sells.

Contents

Why bother?

Watch this 10 min video

Strategy→ strategic story → positioning →messaging → copy
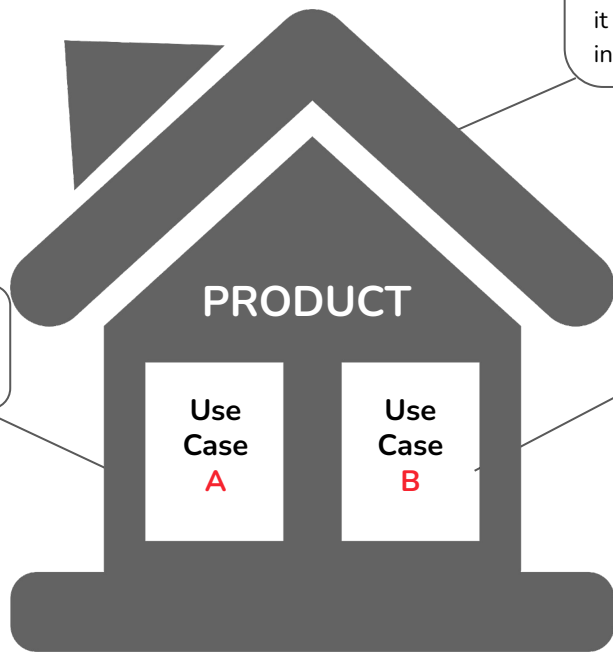
Strategic story is the big picture that explains why your product is relevant now and how it will help your audience to win. It bridges your messaging across products and use cases and it is the same for your buying committee, investors and employees.

Copy is how you communicate it all to the rest of the world.

PRODUCT

Messaging is key points you want to say to buyers about the product.

Messaging is key points you want to say to buyers about the product.

Use Case A

Use Case B

FOR SALE

Dope yellow house is looking for its next owner.

Positioning is the foundation your product, sales and marketing is built on. It is about which problems are you solving for your target audience & how.
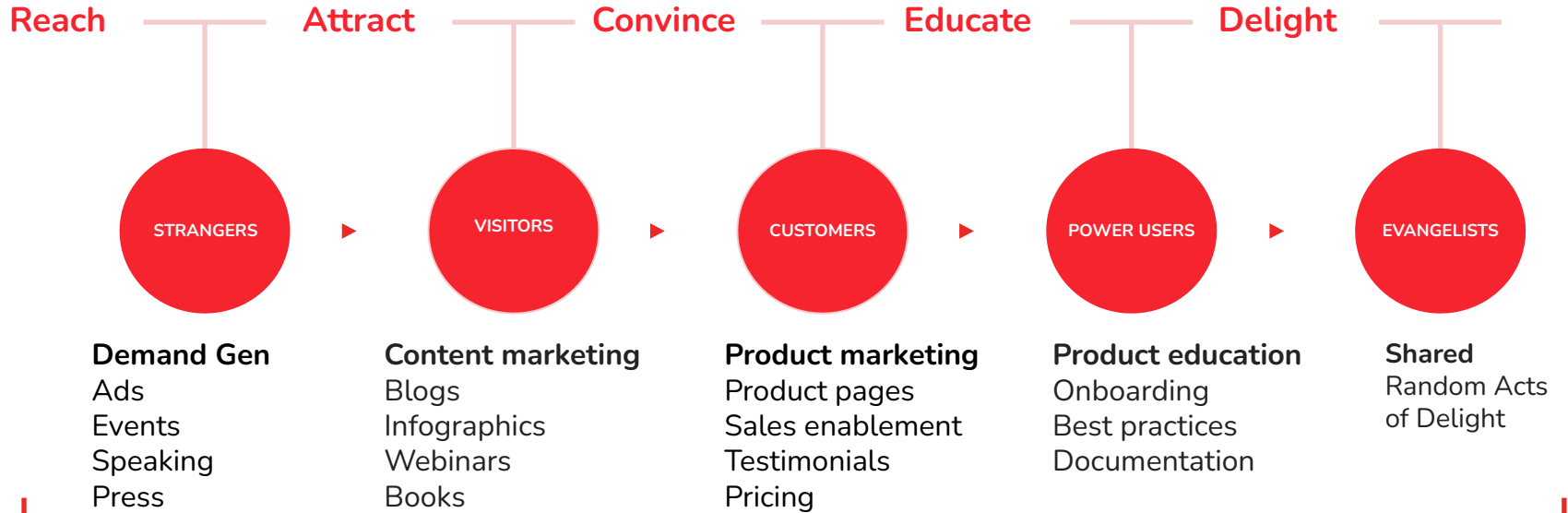
B2B **SaaS Reality**

This is a martech map. But each B2B category is nearly as crowded. 100s of competitors pitching similar features to same demo-fatigued prospects.
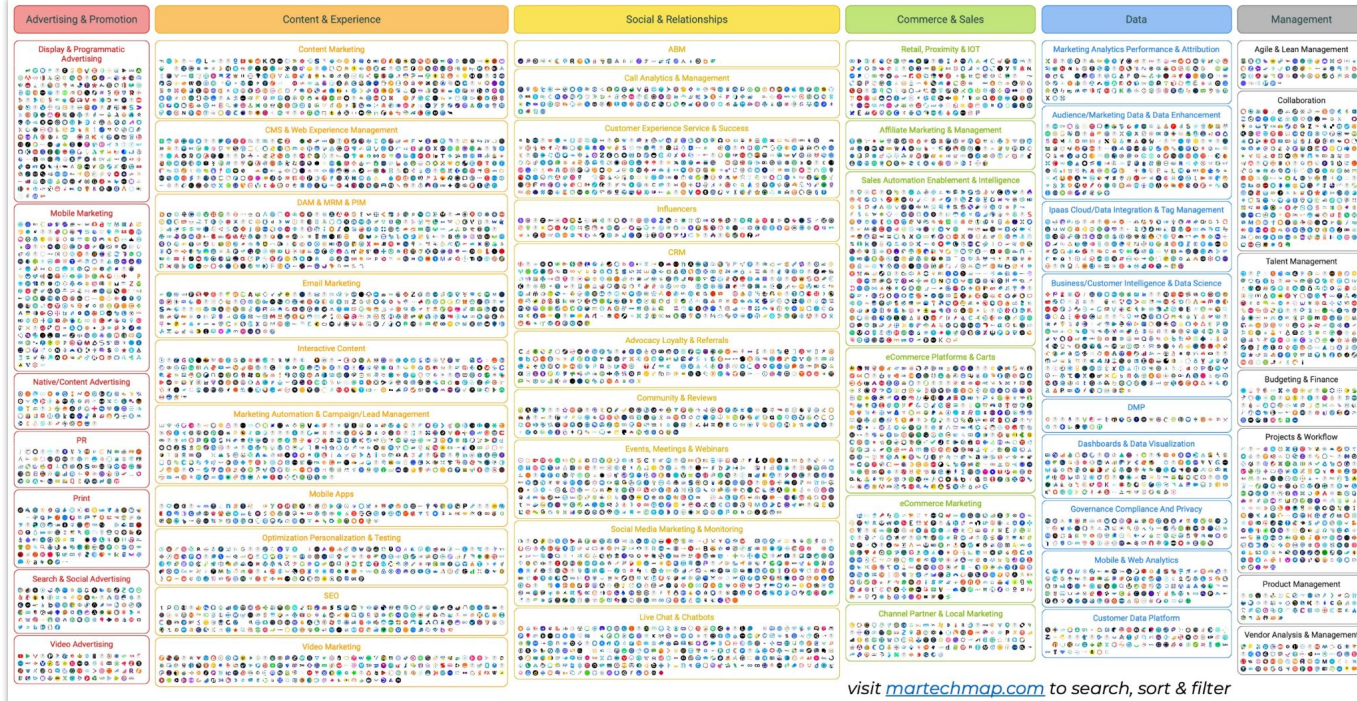
visit *martechmap.com* to search, sort & filter

This was sufficient a few decades ago. But not anymore.

Positioning Statement

For <u>Target Customer</u> that <u>Needs / Cares about</u> ,
<u>Company / Product / Service</u> is a <u>Category / Solution </u> that <u>Benefit.</u>

Unlike competitor, <u>Company / Product / Service</u> is

<u>Unique Differentiator</u>

The way the winners do it

Jerome Bruner

Cognitive Psychologist, Harvard

"Information is 22x more memorable when delivered in a story"

Bill Gurley

Partner, Benchmark

"The Great storytellers have an unfair advantage. They are going to recruit better, they will be darlings in the press, they are going to raise more money more easily and at higher prices.. And, they are going to have a strong and cohesive corporate culture. Perhaps more to the point, they are more likely to deliver a positive investment return."

Ben Horowitz

Partner, Andreessen Horowitz

"If you don't have a clearly articulated story, you don't have a clear and well thought-out strategy.
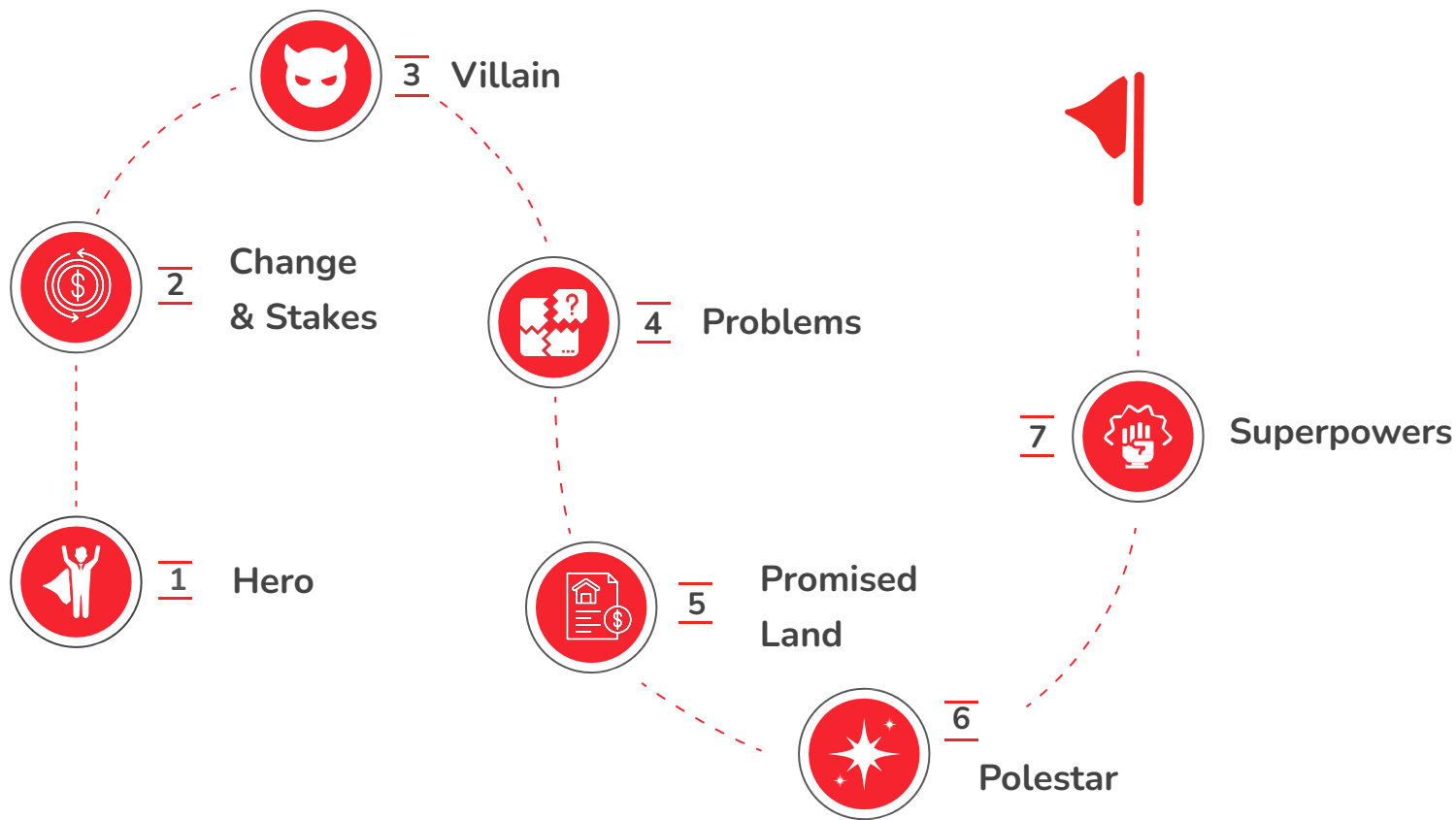
The story is the strategy."

David Cancel

C.E.O, Drift.com

"Product based differentiation is going away. Act accordingly."

Story is not something fanciful, it's a step by step process:

The B2B Storyline Framework

3 Villain

2 Change & Stakes

4 Problems

7 Superpowers

1 Hero

5 Promised Land

6 Polestar

Before we get to work: **Research**

Your audience research questions are **here**

Instructions:

1   **Try to interview at least 6 people**

2   **If you have existing customers, try to focus on them**

3   **If you don't have customers yet, try your best customer profile**

1. Hero

Watch this 2 min video

Hero

Your positioning story will play out around three characters: the hero, the polestar and the villain. The hero is the main character in your narrative. They overcomes obstacles and are transformed by their experiences.

The **hero** of your story is your **audience** - it's not you. **You** are the **Polestar** who helps them to get from A to B.

Luke Skywalker

Hero

Obe wan Kenobe

Polestar

Darth Vader

Villain

● Hero

Whether it's B2B or B2C, the concept of the strategic story is the same as in Star Wars: In the Tesla's example, Tesla is guiding us, its hero, into the Promised Land - the sustainable carbon free future.

Tesla's products are the superpowers that will help us to get there while defeating the villain (the CO2) and eliminating multiple problems the villain is causing (droughts, pollution, extreme weather conditions etc.)

Hero

Polestar

Villain

Hero

Here's what makes someone your narrative's hero:

1. **Spends the most**

2. **Most frequently**

3. **Most quickly**

4. **Has the most to gain/lose**

Define your hero and build their profile by thinking about the following things:

- What are their goals?

- What are their frustrations?

- What keeps them awake at night?

- What are their aspirations? (getting a bigger bonus at the end of the year/promotion/achieving high status among peers etc.)

- Whom are their trying to impress? (their CEO/their boss etc.)

2. Change & Stakes

Watch this 5 min video

Your Change & Stakes

Your hero – your audience – does not exist in isolation. They exist in a world, in a market, that is prone to change. And your audience needs to adapt to the change if they are to survive and thrive.

Because those who don't adapt are left behind. They simply don't make it.

Change allows us to shift the conversation altogether – away from features and benefits. It frames the conversation so that your best customers understand why what they are doing today is not enough. When customers encounter the change narrative, **they believe that something has already shifted and they feel left behind.**

Now, change goes hand in hand with stakes.

When we think about stakes we think:

- "What is the worst-case scenario if I don't adapt to the change?"

- "Who is going to win and who is going to lose?"

These are the questions you plant in your audience's mind when you introduce change into the equation.

Finally, introducing change into your narrative is important because your job is to position yourself as an agent of change - **someone who sees a problem in your community and does something to take action.**

Your Change & Stakes

You are the one who will help your audience navigate the change.

Introducing change into your positioning narrative allows you to do 4 things:

1. Get your audience's attention

2. Shift the conversation away from features

3. Define winners and losers

4. Position yourself as an agent of change

Change & Stakes

a) Define change that is affecting your hero's market. Remember, it has to be **real, relevant** and **risky** to resonate.

Think about the following when defining the change:

- How were things different a few years ago?

- How has their industry changed?

- What business results are diminishing and why?

- What processes are becoming obsolete?

- How is technology or innovation disrupting the status quo?

- How has society or culture changed?
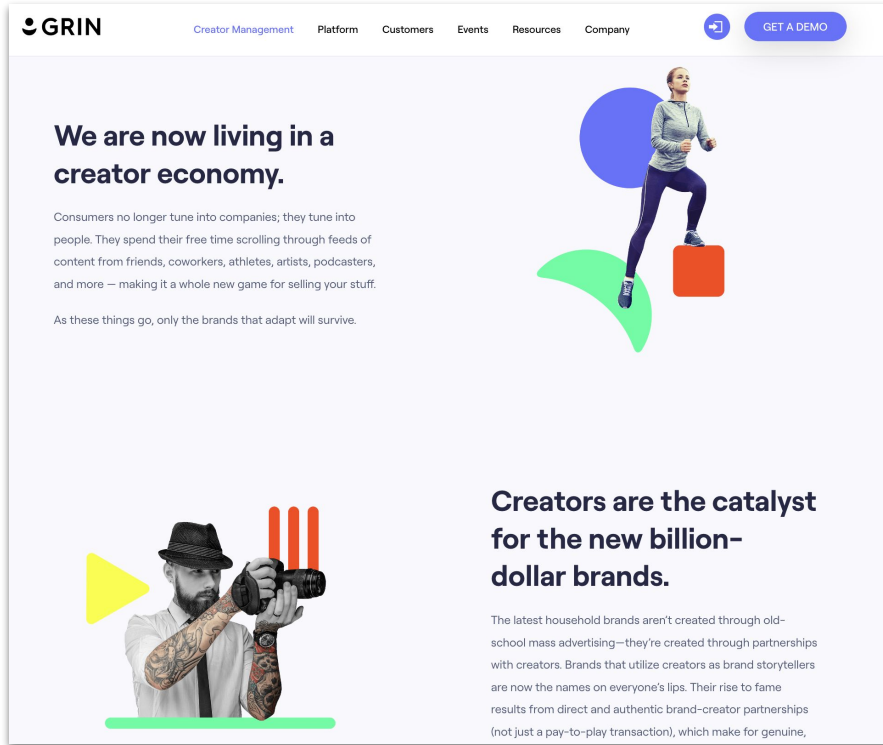
b) Define the stakes by thinking of

- What is your hero's worst-case scenario if he don't adapt to change?

- Who is going to win and who is going to lose in the changing world and why?
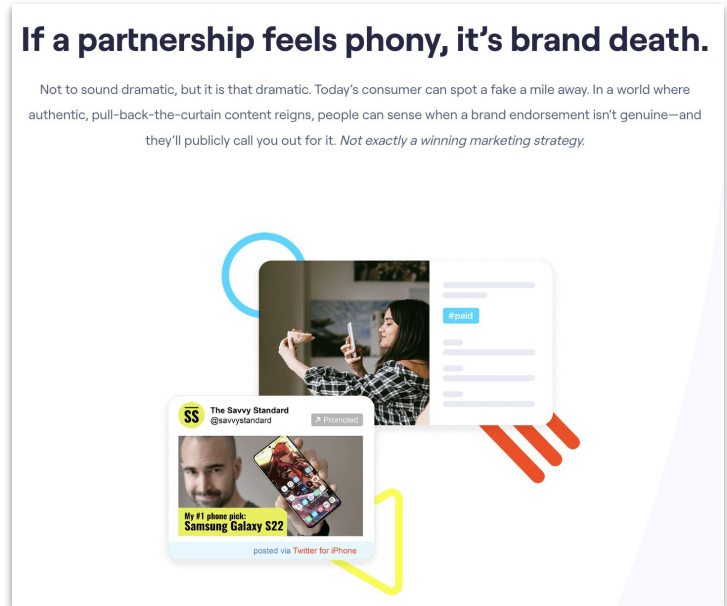
Your Change & Stakes - **Examples**
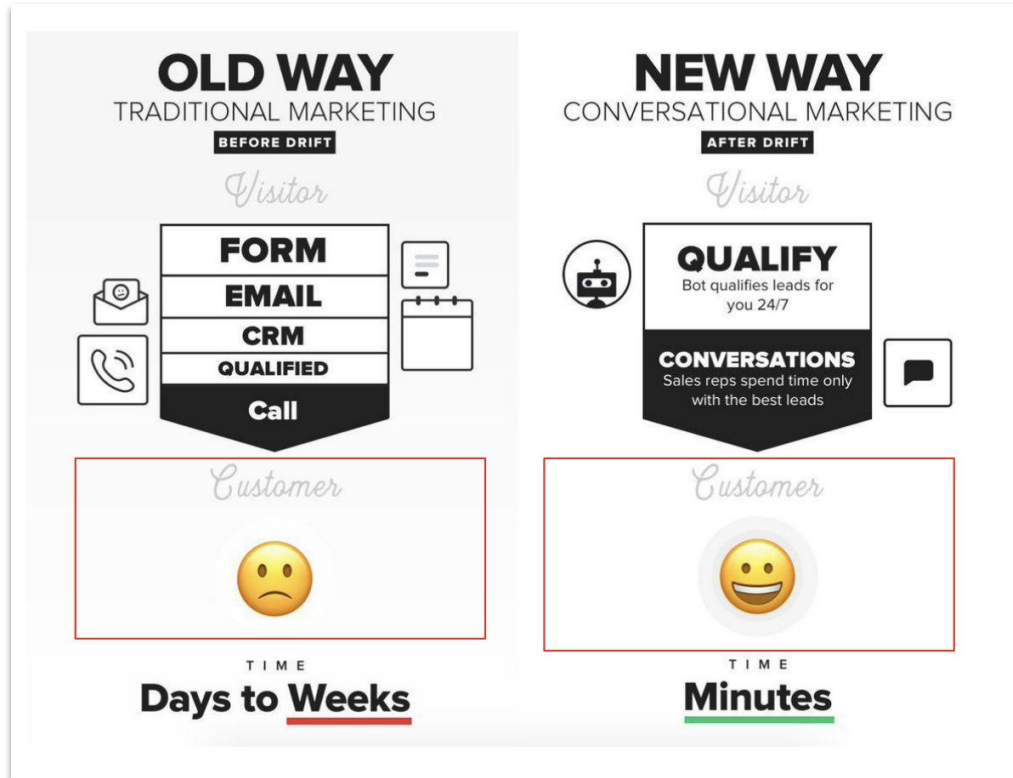
Drift positioned their chat bot as 'conversational marketing' because, they said, 'The way B2B customers want to buy has changed. They don't want to be waiting for days or weeks to be contacted. They want to be spoken with now. And, if businesses want to win in this new era, they have to adapt to their customers' wishes. And of course, Drift has the tool that will help businesses do exactly that.

Your Change & Stakes - **Examples**

Grin.co has given a name to a trend that is happening in their customers' market - 'creator economy'. And, the stakes are high for the businesses that won't play by the new rules.

GRIN

Creator Management   Platform   Customers   Events   Resources   Company

GET A DEMO

We are now living in a creator economy.

Consumers no longer tune into companies; they tune into people. They spend their free time scrolling through feeds of content from friends, coworkers, athletes, artists, podcasters, and more — making it a whole new game for selling your stuff.

As these things go, only the brands that adapt will survive.

Creators are the catalyst for the new billion-dollar brands.

The latest household brands aren't created through old-school mass advertising—they're created through partnerships with creators. Brands that utilize creators as brand storytellers are now the names on everyone's lips. Their rise to fame results from direct and authentic brand-creator partnerships (not just a pay-to-play transaction), which make for genuine,

If a partnership feels phony, it's brand death.

Not to sound dramatic, but it is that dramatic. Today's consumer can spot a fake a mile away. In a world where authentic, pull-back-the-curtain content reigns, people can sense when a brand endorsement isn't genuine—and they'll publicly call you out for it. *Not exactly a winning marketing strategy.*

3. Villain

Watch this 3 min video

Villain

In order to grow and overcome a challenge, the hero, your audience, needs an adversary.

The villain is the internal or external challenge that a hero must overcome.

Star Wars wouldn't be watchable without Darth Vader. And Harry Potter, without Lord Voldemort, is just a kid in magic school.

Equally, the business narrative will not be effective without a proper villain.

The villain is the device storytellers use to give conflict **a clear point of focus.**

Typically, it's something standing in the way of change. If we look back at the Tesla example - the villain is CO2 emissions.
The CO2 stands in our way of having a sustainable, carbon-free future. That's what our hero is trying to defeat.

The villain exacerbates pain. Because of CO2 the world is heating up, we are experiencing heat waves, hurricanes and storms.

The more evil the villain, the more sympathy we have for the hero's cause. **We want the hero to win.**
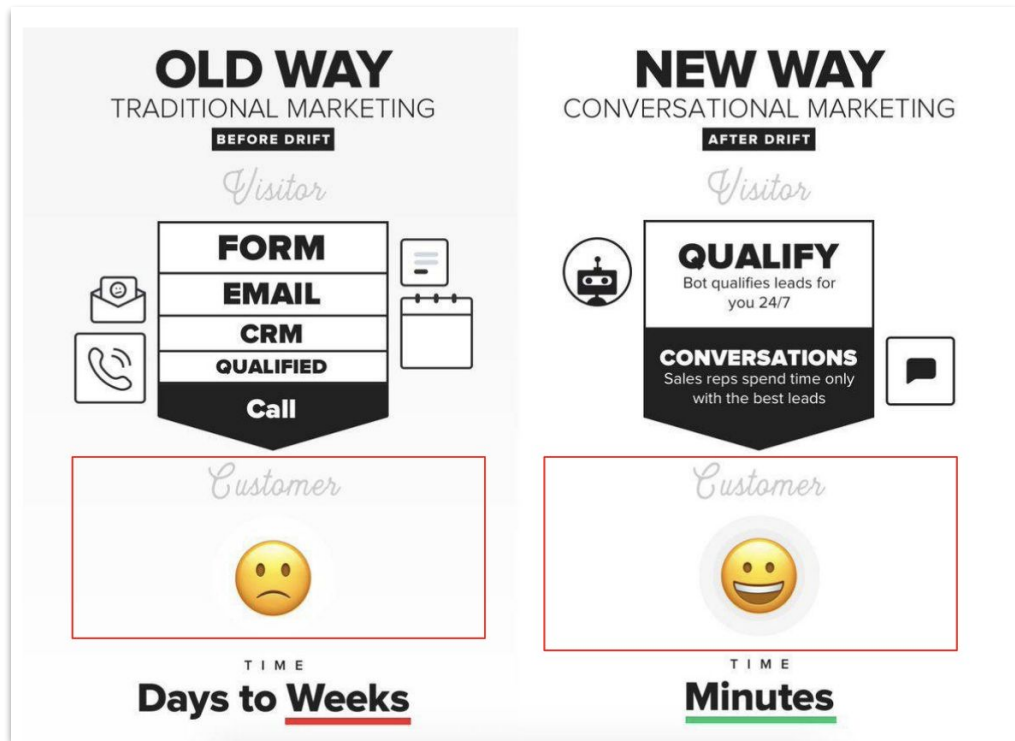People pay attention when the villain is relatable, because they want to get rid of it.

And the more you talk about the villain, the more people will want a tool to help them defeat the villain.

This brings us to another very important point: having a villain helps us to **position our products as 'weapons' that customers can use to defeat it.**

Villain

OLD WAY
TRADITIONAL MARKETING
BEFORE DRIFT

Visitor

FORM
EMAIL
CRM
QUALIFIED
Call

Customer

🙁

TIME
Days to Weeks

NEW WAY
CONVERSATIONAL MARKETING
AFTER DRIFT

Visitor

QUALIFY
Bot qualifies leads for you 24/7

CONVERSATIONS
Sales reps spend time only with the best leads

Customer

😃

TIME
Minutes

Drift fought against forms because they were the ultimate evil that caused delays in the sales process, unhappy customers and lost deals.

FORMS™

Drift

Villain

https://digital.hbs.edu › Home › Submissions

How is Slack killing email? - HBS Digital Initiative

How is **Slack killing email**? Slack is an enterprise productivity software startup that is frequently talked about in tech circles as a potential email killer ...

https://www.inc.com › jason-aten › slack-is-never-going-t...

Slack Is Never Going to Kill Email and That's OK | Inc.com

8 May 2019 — **Slack's** biggest benefit isn't replacing your **email**, it's something else all together that you might not expect.

https://dispatch.m.io › slack-vs-email

Slack vs Email - Talking To Your Customers

Slack itself requires an **email** address to first sign into a **Slack** workspace. So **killing email** would require **Slack** to replace the entire "login with **email**" ...

https://uk.news.yahoo.com › will-salesforce-buying-slack-...

Will Salesforce buying Slack kill email in 5 years? - Yahoo ...

To Butterfield, singularly answering **emails** (usually on **Slack's** most heated rival, Microsoft Outlook) without being able to collaborate with co- ...
2 Dec 2020

https://www.theladders.com › career-advice › this-new-...

This new Slack feature may have just killed email (and your ...

25 Mar 2021 — **Slack** was already **killing** your work-life balance by being an instrument to constant communication with your coworkers and boss every single ...

Slack took on email because of it is exclusive, slow and makes its users feel overwhelmed.

Villain

Grin.co says that the middleman is the ultimate reason why brands can not form authentic relationships with creators. And, it is their goal to eliminate this villain once and for all.

Villain

"I definitely am afraid of **needles.** *It's the only thing that actually scares me."*

-   *Elizabeth Holmes*

The infamous Elizabeth Holmes is a great storyteller, whether you like her or not. She picked on a relatable villain that everyone disliked and rallied the crowds of admirers around her mission to defeat it.

Villain

The concept of villain doesn't just work in movies or tech businesses. This is one of my favourites: Trump has made China his villain and built a successful campaign around it.

Villain

Please define your villain. Remember that (ideally) villain should be:

1. **A root source of a problem**

2. **Relatable**

3. **Singular**

4. **Real**

4. Problems

Watch this 4 min video

Problems

Identifying and understanding your audience's problems is the **foundation for your positioning, messaging and copy:**

a) You position your product in the context of solving a problem.

b) You enable positive outcomes with the help of your product.

Let's see how this works as part of your strategic narrative.

Problems

The villain causes your hero serious problems.

If we go back to Tesla's case - CO2 is not an issue by itself. But the problems CO2 is causing are really bad: heat waves, floods, hurricanes and other extreme weather conditions, and pollution.

Your job is to eliminate these problems for your audience one by one.

It's crucial to understand the problems of your audience as a basis for developing positioning and messaging that resonates.

There are **two levels of problems** that your hero experiences. They are:

- **External problems**
- **The consequences: what will happen if the problem is not solved**

External problem is usually easy to detect. Understanding the negative consequence is harder - that's why you conduct the research.

And it's the negative consequence of a problem that motivates us to make the purchasing decision if we feel uncomfortable enough.

Problems - Examples

Let's look at some examples:

Hubspot

External problem: My client records are a mess, I can't track my business activity
Consequence: I won't be able to grow my business and make it successful

Slack

External problem: Communication among my team is slow
Consequence: It hold up decision making process and growth

Gong

External problem: My sales team is below their targets
Consequence: We'll be out of business if we don't sell enough

Problems

Define Your Hero's:

1   **External problems: what are the most obvious things that bother them**

2   **Consequences: what negative effects do they cause**

NOTE: If you sell a complex B2B product, your customers most likely will have a set of problems.
Please take a note of them all in the table below.

External Problem	Consequences
What is the obvious problem your audience experiences?	*How does the external problem negatively affect them?*
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

5. Promised Land

Watch this 2 min video

Promised Land

Your hero knows that if he doesn't adapt to the change that's happening in his market, the consequences might be grim.

He knows he needs to defeat the villain that is causing him multiple problems.

But there is that little voice inside his head that keeps saying: "You're doing just fine. Yes, your life is not perfect, but it's kind of OK. You'll manage. All this villain fighting business is not worth the effort".

You see, his brain is trying to save calories.

That's why a lot of B2B purchases end up not going anywhere. Up to 30% of all purchasing decisions are lost to 'no decision' because the buyers were not convinced that their life is bad enough.

Most of your prospecting customers are 'satisficing' - they are satisfied enough with their status quo not to be bothered to do anything about it.

And that's exactly why you need to paint the picture of a promised land in order to motivate your hero to act.

Promised Land

Let's borrow this Super Mario example to better understand what the Promised Land is. Most companies would typically focus on the flower, or their product, when talking about their business.

They would describe the flower by listing all its features and capabilities it is 5 cm long, has a bright green stem, a red centre, and it smells like a combination of a daffodil and rose.

But the truth is - no one really cares. The thing your audience cares about is what happens to them *after* they consume this magic flower.
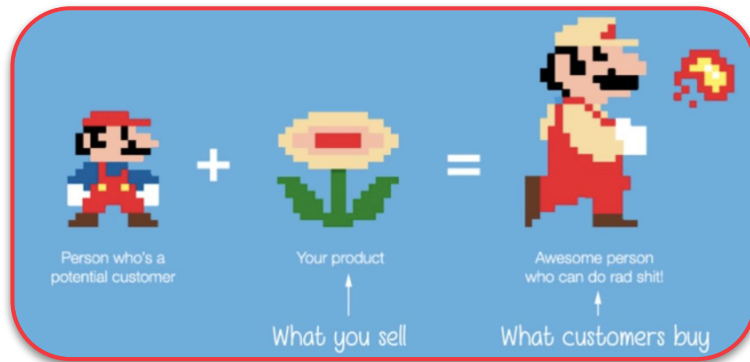
The questions running through their minds are:

- How is this going to make me more efficient?
- How is this going to help me get a promotion?
- How is this going to help me grow my accounting practice faster?

And so on...

So. this bigger, better version of Super Mario after he consumes your flower
is your Promised Land.

Promised Land - Examples

GONG

Product   Solutions   Customers   Resources   Company   Pricing

Enter email   Book

ADD SCIENCE TO THE ART OF SELLING TO WIN MORE DEALS

Gong analyzes your customer-facing interactions across phone, email, and web conferencing to deliver your team the insights they need to close more deals. Move your teams to reality-based performance today, with autonomous insights that guide your people. So they are better aligned across the enterprise.

JUST LOOK AT THE RESULTS

27%
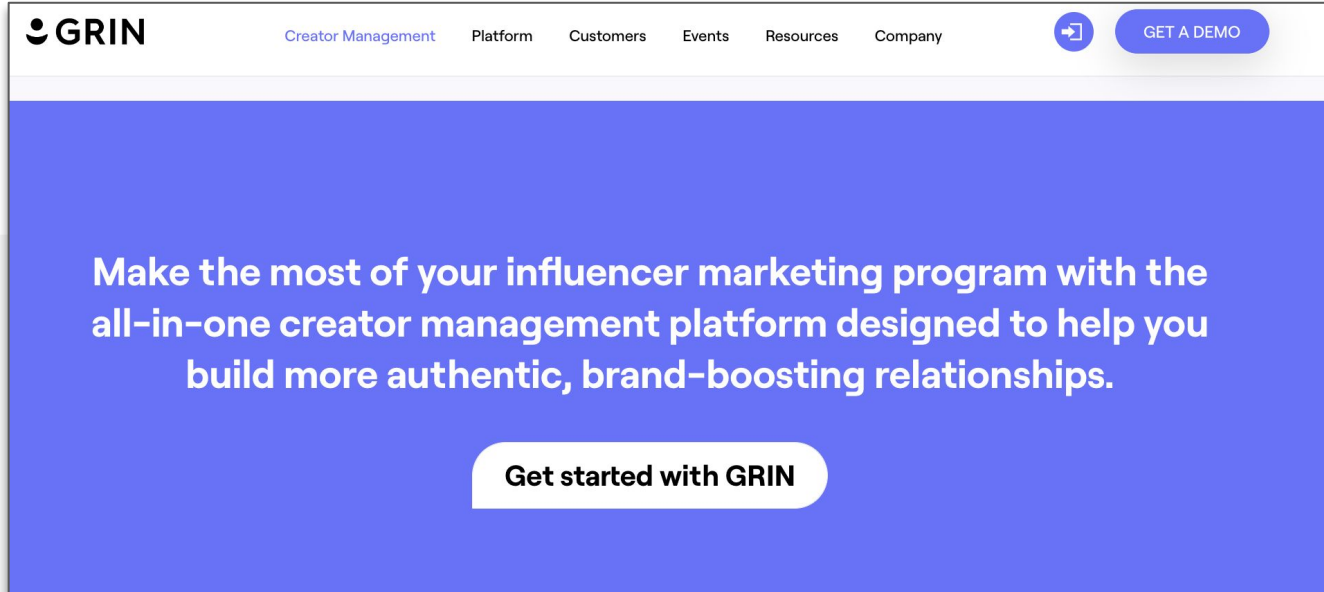Increase in revenue per rep

20%
Additional time saved*

53%
Reduction in onboarding time*

Read customer stories here ›

Gong promises its users to win more deals.

Promised Land - Examples

GRIN

Creator Management   Platform   Customers   Events   Resources   Company

GET A DEMO

Make the most of your influencer marketing program with the all-in-one creator management platform designed to help you build more authentic, brand-boosting relationships.

Get started with GRIN

A bit too wordy, but the essence is there - Grin promises stronger relationships with creators to its customers.

Tesla is taking us to a carbon-free future.

Promised Land - Examples

Promised Land - Examples

We all know that Trump promised to take America to greatness. And we have no idea where Hillary was going.

VS.

Promised Land - key criteria

Define your promised land. Remember, the key criteria:

1. Your hero thrives in the new world

2. It's difficult to reach (without your help)

3. Defeated villain

4. The hero is a better version of themselves (self-actualising, belonging)

5. It's what the hero gets or becomes thanks to your platform

6. Polestar

Pole Star

The third character of your narrative is Polestar, and it is your business.

You **position** yourself as your hero's Obe wan Kenobi, who helps them get from the subpar status quo into the promised land.

Essentially, **positioning** as Polestar means that **you are the best option to solve the hero's problem.**

It means:

1. You have a **clear understanding of the problems** your hero is facing (you've done your research)
2. You have the **superpowers** to address the problems (you have superior **features**)
3. You have the **credibility** because you've been there and done that already (your **social proof**)

We'll get to your superpowers in section 7. When it come to credibility, there are proven ways to demonstrate it - see next slide.

NOTE: Your positioning is internal. You do not need to manifest it on your website or collateral. But, together with your strategic story, it drives your product development, creates alignment across teams and defines why you're the best option for your customers within your category.

Pole Star

Case studies

These are data-driven, in-depth stories about the product or service you provided to a current client. They are must-haves for B2B software, agency services, etc. Typically 1-2 pages long, they tell the story of your client's problem, how your solution helped and finish with a happy ending (the result).

Testimonials

Testimonials give potential customers the gift of going second. They know others have worked with you already and have attained success. A testimonial can be as simple as a short-form recommendation from a happy current customer. You can place them almost anywhere on your website or sales collateral. To make them legit and believable, always use the name of a person, their photo (this does not have to be anything perfect), job title and company name.

Reviews

Think of reviews as the testimonials' more objective cousin. They are most suitable for products that are overly technical or in industries that are crowded and/or highly competitive. How do you obtain a review? Using popups on your website is one option. Otherwise, head over to forums and review sites (G2/Capterra) to see what's being said about you.

Data & numbers

- How many satisfied customers have you helped?
- How much money have you helped them save?
- By what percentage has their business or revenue grown since they started working with you?

7. Superpowers:

your messaging framework

Watch this 2 min video

Superpowers: your messaging framework

You help your audience, your hero, to get from their subpar status quo into the Promised Land.
And you do that by giving them the ultimate Superpowers - your product's features.

Superpowers eliminate the hero's problems and defeat the villain.

Hence, it is important to talk about your superpowers in context of those problems, and never in isolation.

We don't just describe the feature, we explain the outcome that the feature enables.

And that's how you build your **messaging framework:** you map each problem to your claim, and the ultimate gain and explain how your feature enables the result.

Superpowers: your messaging framework

For every external problem and internal frustration you've identified, think about your claim:
How does your product address this particular problem and frustration?

Now, back it up with a gain.

Gain is usually expressed with a specific number to help your prospect understand the ROI on
the product they'll be purchasing. When you present the gain on your product, you help answer questions like:

- "How much time exactly will this software save me?"

- "How much cheaper is it than my current solution?"

- "How quickly will we start seeing the results?"

Finally, we link the gain to the feature that enables this result.

External Problem	Consequence	Claim	Gain	Supporting Feature
What is the obvious problem your audience experiences?	*How does the external problem negatively affect them?*	*How does your product enables better outcome?*	*What/how much will they gain by adopting your solution?*	*What feature enables this result*

How does this come together (Examples)

Watch this 7 min video

Gong.io

Hero: Revenue teams

Change: Sales is no longer an individual sport, it's a team activity. The process has also become more complex, involving multiple buyers, multiple steps and taking weeks or months to close.

Stakes: Losing deals to competition that could have been closed

Villain: Opinions

ACCELERATE YOUR REVENUE TEAM'S PRODUCTIVITY

Get complete visibility into deals, team performance, and market changes. Know what's happening in customer conversations and get the insights you need to grow revenue more efficiently.

GONG FOR SALES

STOP LOSING WINNABLE DEALS

With powerful tools to understand every customer interaction, collaborate, and build relationships, your sales team produces predictable revenue — no matter where they work.

GOODBYE OPINIONS. HELLO, REALITY.

Gong.io GONG

Problems:

1. Sales people too much time spent on taking notes and making inaccurate CRM entries/too much manual work at the expense of time with the buyers
2. Omittance of important facts
3. Poor human judgement; subjectivity; hearsay
4. Lack of transparency into the sales process
5. Poor predictability around the pipeline

Promised Land: Closing more deals

Superpowers: The Revenue Intelligence platform

FIND THE TRUTH IN YOUR PIPELINE

Get insights into your pipeline, deals, and customer interactions — from contact to close — so you can address risks before deals go south. You'll have a healthy pipeline with more won deals.

DEMANDBASE **25%** Increase in annual contract value (ACV)

MAKE FORECASTS REALITY

No more guessing. No more switching between platforms. Use data-based guardrails to keep deals on track and teams aligned on critical numbers. Make it easier to manage your pipeline and call an accurate forecast. Every quarter.

Diligent **3 Week** Reduction in time to hit quota

TRANSFORM REPS INTO STARS

An intuitive, guided workflow means you can replicate what works by turning objective data into coachable moments, no drama attached. You always have the stats you need to back up your approach.

GENESYS **50%** Increase in win rate

Grin.co   GRIN

Grin tells their story & **Grin Video**

Hero: Consumer brands

Change: Shift to a creator economy: people tune into influencers when considering products

Stakes: If a brand does not have a solid partnership with an influencer, it is brand's death

Villain: The middleman

Problems: The relationships brokered by a middleman are weak and not authentic

Promised Land: Building a winning brand by fostering authentic relationships with creators

Superpowers: The Creator Management Platform

Your
G2M Strategy

Next-Steps: Your Go-to-Market Strategy

Targeting

Based on best customer

Website

CRO with story

Position against change | BOFU | Intent based

Paid

Assets

TOFU

Retargeting

Drive back to the story

Story

Assets

TOFU — How Change

MOFU — Villain

BOFU — Superpowers

Sales

Deck matches story

Social

Snippetize your story

Your G2M to do list

1. Update your website

2. Create your ToFu, MoFu & BoFu (Top/Middle & Bottom of the Funnel) Assets:

   - ToFu: blog posts/white papers about how change is affecting your Hero's market

   - MoFu: blog posts talking about the Villain and how it is negatively impacts your Hero's environment

   - BoFu: collateral talking about features, competitor comparison decks and anything showcasing your Superpowers

3. Snippetise your story across your social media channels

4. Update your sales deck

5. Your organic social

6. Your paid social

About the Author

Lena Andican is a positioning and messaging expert specialising in working with complex technical products.

In addition to crafting compelling business narratives, her key skill is turning geek speak into a clear and concise value proposition.

Lena is a Partner at **Kurve**, where she leads Positioning & Messaging practice that services venture-backed businesses.

She is also Founder of **wellpositioned.co**, a coaching program for early-stage startups that helps entrepreneurs to develop their strategic narratives and messaging.

She has worked in-house and as a consultant with leading European and US B2B SaaS startups and scaleups, including PitchBook, Dealroom.co, ScreenCloud etc. and has helped to position dozens of businesses.

Need help?

Book your free 30 min consultation.

Message me via LinkedIn: **Lena Andican** or send an email: **lena.andican@kurve.co.uk**