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Chapter 4 Guides & Tools

The Primary Backstory Picker

In Chapter 4, we learned about the different types of backstories that companies can use, and how they can do it effectively in order to offer a credible heritage that their customers can believe in. The guide below offers some more detail on how to pick the story that would serve best as the primary story for your business. This backstory is not meant to serve as the complete description of your business, but to offer you a starting point. The other story models can work as secondary narratives backing up the primary one.

Backstory Type	Common Industries	Use It as Your Primary Story If …
The Passionate Enthusiast	• Niche retail • Social networks • Family businesses	Your business could be described as a labor of love, your founders are experts in your industry, and your business has grown mainly through word of mouth.

Backstory Type	Common Industries	Use It as Your Primary Story If …
The Inspired Inventor	• Technology/ electronics • Pharmaceutical • Fashion	Your business is based on a new invention different enough from the rest of the world to be considered "inspired" (and is most likely patented).
The Smart Listener	• Food and CPG • Travel • Consulting	Your business was founded as the result of listening to customers, partners, or others and continues to rely on customer opinions to evolve.
The Likeable Hero	• Nonprofits/ advocacy • Health care • Green/ environmental	Your business was started by an individual with a big idea to do something to change the world and could reasonably be called a "hero."

 *Personality not included

Backstory Type	Common Industries	Use It as Your Primary Story If …
The Little Guy vs. Big Guy	• Food/dining • Travel • Retail • Any industry with dominant players	Your business has a product or service that is designed to take on the dominant competitor (preferably faceless) in an industry and succeed in part based on its role as an "underdog.

Creating the "Passionate Enthusiast" Backstory

To learn about this story model and examples of brands that use it, turn to page 114.

To see when it may be the right story model for your brand, use the backstory picker on page 113.

THE PASSIONATE ENTHUSIAST BACKSTORY: A driven individual takes a personal passion and builds it into a successful business.

Characters	Establish the expertise and passion of the founders for the business by sharing stories of their credentials and stories of how and why they are enthusiasts.

Challenge	Describe how other enthusiasts need what your company offers and why no other enthusiasts have been able to do it in the same way that your organization has.
Vision	Outline the bold idea and vision of your business and how it offers a product or service for other enthusiasts that they have wanted, but not had until now.
Conflict	Share the arguments of the naysayers who did not believe in the idea and why they felt that way.
Triumph	Return your focus to today, and demonstrate how your business connects with other enthusiasts and succeeds based on word of mouth.

Elements of the "Inspired Inventor" Backstory

To learn about this story model and examples of brands that use it, turn to page 117.

To see when it may be the right story model for your brand, use the backstory picker on page 113.

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THE INSPIRED INVENTOR BACKSTORY: A tireless inventor creates something new and different by not giving up on his or her vision.

Characters	Associate the common qualities of inventors (perseverance, passion, creativity) with the individuals working at your business and the original founders.
Challenge	Talk about the industry you are in and the barriers that have existed before now in relation to smart invention, and how true inspiration has been difficult to achieve in the past.
Vision	In this story, the vision is crucial because it describes what was "inspired" about the inventors' process.
Conflict	With every great invention, something always stands in the way. Whether it is people or the process of getting it to market, the conflict is the story of the struggle to overcome the mishaps and barriers that almost killed the invention.

Triumph	The triumph, of course, is the invention itself and how it becomes successful as others discover it and the inventors realize their dreams.

Note: Though this story uses the term "inventor," you should not think of it solely as describing product inventions. An inspired inventor can be a designer, an artist, a writer, or an architect. The point is that not every inspired inventor gets her start coding software in a garage or blowing off his eyebrows in a lab.

Elements of the "Smart Listener" Backstory

To learn about this story model and examples of brands that use it, turn to page 121.

To see when it may be the right story model for your brand, use the backstory picker on page 113.

THE SMART LISTENER BACKSTORY: A new company is created as a result of listening to customers, partners, or others.

Characters	Smart listening and innovation based on it can come from anyone. Because of this, setting up the characters for this type of backstory means also establishing that your corporate culture is one that values listening and acts on it.

Challenge	The key challenge that smart listening companies face is that there can be many barriers to acting on knowledge gained from smart listening, particularly at a time when many businesses demand analytics, or feasibility analysis, or other scientific methods of confirming what is learned through listening.
Vision	The vision in your story comes from a select group of individuals who believe in doing what they hear your customers asking for and having a way to do it that they know can satisfy people who want it.
Conflict	Overcoming the more analytical minds and taking a risk on an idea that is largely based on what some people may consider "a hunch" is a big step and is usually the central conflict to be navigated in a Smart Listener backstory.
Triumph	The triumph is when the listening pays off and the product or service that was launched turns out to be exactly what the customers were asking for. The added benefit is that this triumph usually makes naysayers and other companies look foolish for not doing it themselves or supporting it.

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Elements of the "Likeable Hero" Backstory

To learn about this story model and examples of brands that use it, turn to page 123.

To see when it may be the right story model for your brand, use the backstory picker on page 113.

THE LIKEABLE HERO BACKSTORY: A dedicated individual overcomes all odds to make his or her idea work.

Characters	The character behind the Likeable Hero backstory is the most crucial element as the story is usually based on the vision of that person. It needs to be someone who has motives beyond profit and who could reasonably be considered a "hero."
Challenge	A hero usually has a big challenge to face, and it is not related to competition. The challenge in this type of story is some sort of crisis or issue that needs to be solved. It could be something as big as global poverty, or something as personal as a rebirth of individual faith.
Vision	The vision of the likeable hero is to transform people and lives in some way through what their organization does.

Conflict	The most common obstacles of this type of story are people who do not believe in the mission or doubt that it can succeed.
Triumph	The triumph is in the likeable hero persevering and building a successful business that people can get passionate about. The idea discussed earlier in the "Techniques" section of this book about karmic marketing can also factor into this type of backstory.

Elements of the "Little Guy vs. Big Guy" Backstory

To learn about this story model and examples of brands that use it, turn to page 125.

To see when it may be the right story model for your brand, use the backstory picker on page 113.

THE LITTLE GUY VS. BIG GUY BACKSTORY: An underdog company takes on a seemingly unbeatable big adversary.

Characters	The main character in this story is a founder with courage and the drive to take on a big competitor that has dominated a field and seems unbeatable.

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Challenge	This element is relatively obvious, a large competitor that virtually owns an industry or type of product is the adversary in your story and presents the most significant challenge.
Vision	Ultimately, it is the vision that your business can succeed despite going against the big guys that makes this story work. The vision should define what makes your business different and better than the big guys you are taking on and why your business deserves to grow.
Conflict	Having a big established industry player against the new little guy is one of the oldest storytelling conflicts. In your backstory, this conflict usually leads to the increase in popularity of your business.
Triumph	Triumph does not mean overtaking the big guys. In most cases, that doesn't happen. Instead, the triumph of the little guy is to be able to capture enough market share from the big guys to cause them to worry, and to create a niche for your business that your bigger rivals are unable to contest.