

THE FIRST LANGUAGE

WORKBOOK FOR MARKETERS

Storytellers

And we're all Storytellers.

01

YOUR CORE MESSAGE

Before crafting marketing campaigns, social media posts, or donor appeals, you need to be clear about what you stand for and why it matters. Your core message is the foundation of all your communication. Without it, your messaging will feel scattered and ineffective. A strong core message keeps your audience focused and engaged.

WORKSHEET: DEFINING YOUR CORE MESSAGE

Answer the following to uncover the foundation of your story:

1. What change do you exist to make? Every compelling message starts with a problem or opportunity. What shift do you want to create in the world, your industry, or your community? What problems do you aspire to solve?

2. Who benefits from that change? Who is directly impacted by what you do? How does their life or work improve because of it?

3. What makes your approach different? This is your unique angle. What sets you apart from others doing similar work? How do you prove your impact? What stories, data, or real-world examples back up your claims?

EXERCISE: CRAFTING YOUR CORE MESSAGE

Take what you wrote above and shape it into a clear, compelling statement that defines what you do and why it matters.

EXAMPLE FOR BRANDS

Instead of: “Precision tools for over 50 years.”

Try this: “The right tools make all the difference. Our precision engineering solutions help businesses build faster, safer, and more efficiently.”

EXAMPLE FOR CAUSES

Instead of: “We offer financial assistance and educational support to eligible students.”

Try this: “Education shouldn’t be a privilege. Our foundation provides scholarships and mentorship to remove financial barriers for students who deserve a fair shot.”

Your core message should come from the customer’s perspective, not yours.

Bonus Challenge: Make It Memorable. Refine your core message into a single sentence that’s easy to remember and repeat. Great messaging is simple—make sure yours sticks.

Try it!

02

IDENTIFYING YOUR AUDIENCE'S STORY

A message is only powerful if it resonates with the right people. Too many brands focus on what they want to say instead of what their audience needs to hear. If you don't understand your audience's desires, struggles, and motivations, your message will miss the mark.

WORKSHEET: UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

Answer the following to get clear on who you're speaking to:

1. Who is your primary audience? Are they customers, donors, investors, or another group?

2. What do they care about most? What problem are they trying to solve? What challenges do they face in their daily lives or work? How does your product, service, or message address that challenge?

3. What emotions drive their decisions? Fear? Hope? Frustration? Ambition? How can your messaging connect with these emotions?

4. What language do they use? What phrases or terminology naturally resonate with them? Are you speaking their language or forcing them to translate corporate jargon?

EXERCISE: SHIFTING THE FOCUS TO THEM

Take a marketing message or sales pitch you've used before. Rewrite it so that it:

- Speaks directly to your audience's needs.
- Reflects their challenges and emotions.
- Uses words and phrases they'd naturally say.

EXAMPLE FOR BRANDS

Instead of: "We sell high-quality coffee made with beans from all over the world."

Try this: "Customers don't just want coffee—they want to know where it comes from. Our ethically sourced beans support farmers directly—so every cup makes a difference."

EXAMPLE FOR CAUSES

Instead of: "We provide critical community services."

Try this: "Hunger isn't just a statistic—it's a daily struggle for families in our community. Your support helps fill empty plates and provide hope. Every meal makes a difference."

Now, rewrite one of your messages with your audience at the center.

Bonus Challenge: Find a marketing message from a competitor or another brand in your industry. How could it be rewritten to better connect with the audience?

Try it!

03

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION & MEMORY

People may forget what you said, but they won't forget how you made them feel. Emotion is the key to making your message stick. If your audience doesn't feel something, they won't remember it—and they definitely won't act on it.

WORKSHEET: CREATING AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

1. What emotions do you want your audience to feel? Inspired? Urgent? Understood? Hopeful? Identify the core feeling that should drive their decision-making.

2. What stories or experiences reinforce this emotion? Do you have a real example, testimonial, or narrative that embodies this emotion?

3. How can you show rather than tell? Are you using vivid storytelling instead of just stating facts? Could visuals, sounds, or personal stories help make it more powerful?

4. How do your visuals and tone support this emotion? Does your imagery, voice, and pacing align with the feeling you want to evoke?

EXERCISE: BRINGING EMOTION INTO YOUR MESSAGING

Take a factual, neutral message and rewrite it to evoke an emotional response.

EXAMPLE FOR BRANDS

Instead of: “We provide financial planning services to help clients manage their money.”

Try this: “Retirement shouldn’t be a question mark. We help families turn financial uncertainty into confidence—so they can stop worrying about money and start living their lives.”

EXAMPLE FOR CAUSES

Instead of: “Our organization provides housing assistance to families in need.”

Try this: “Every child deserves a place to sleep. Last night, Maria and her two kids spent the night in their car. Today, they have a home—because of donors like you.”

Now, take one of your messages and add an emotional hook.

Bonus Challenge: Test Your Messaging. Does it make you feel anything? If not, rewrite it until it does. Share it with a colleague or friend—what emotion do they feel? If their answer doesn’t match your intent, refine it further.

Try it!

04

STRUCTURING YOUR MESSAGE LIKE A STORY

The most effective messages follow a story structure. Stories give meaning to facts and create an emotional bridge between you and your audience. Whether you're crafting a marketing campaign, a donor appeal, or a brand message, using a storytelling framework makes your message more engaging and memorable.

WORKSHEET: APPLYING STORY STRUCTURE

1. Who is the central character (hero) in your story? Is it your customer, donor, or community?

2. What do they want? What problem are they facing? What obstacle is standing in their way? What happens if they don't overcome it?

3. How do you guide them to a solution? How does your product, service, or organization help? What action must they take?

4. What is the transformation? What does success look like? How does their life or situation improve?

EXERCISE: TURNING YOUR MESSAGE INTO A STORY

Take a factual, neutral message and rewrite it to evoke an emotional response.

EXAMPLE FOR BRANDS

Instead of: “We sell high-quality construction tools that help businesses improve efficiency.”

Try this: “John’s small construction firm struggled with outdated equipment. Deadlines slipped, and frustration grew. Then he found our precision tools—designed to work faster, safer, and smarter. Now, he’s landing bigger contracts and delivering projects ahead of schedule.”

EXAMPLE FOR CAUSES

Instead of: “We provide professional development courses for teachers.”

Try this: “Ms. Patel loved teaching but felt overwhelmed. New challenges, changing standards, and a lack of resources made every day harder. Then she found our professional development program. Now, she has the tools, confidence, and support to transform her classroom—and her students’ futures.”

Now, take one of your messages and rewrite it as a story.

Bonus Challenge: Find a Message That Lacks Story. Look at a marketing message, either from your organization or another brand, that feels flat or uninspiring. Rewrite it using the storytelling framework:

Identify the hero | Define the problem

Show how they overcome it with your help | Highlight the transformation

A good story doesn’t just inform—it makes your audience care.

Try it!

05

MAKING YOUR MESSAGE STICK

A great message isn't just compelling—it's memorable. If your audience doesn't remember it, they won't act on it. Simplicity, contrast, and repetition help your message stick in their minds long after they've seen or heard it.

WORKSHEET: STRENGTHENING MESSAGE RETENTION

1. Can your message be simplified? Is it clear and concise? Can it be said in fewer words?

2. Does it use contrast or surprise? Does it challenge assumptions? Does it grab attention with an unexpected twist?

3. Is it repeatable? Is it easy for your audience to repeat and share? Does it sound natural in conversation?

EXERCISE: REFINING YOUR CORE MESSAGE

Take a message you're currently using and apply these principles:

- Simplify it
- Add contrast or an element of surprise
- Make it repeatable

EXAMPLE FOR CAUSES

Instead of: “Our organization provides job training programs for people experiencing homelessness.”

Try this:

- **Simplified:** “We help people rebuild their lives through job training.”
- **Contrast/Surprise:** “A stable job changes everything—we give people a second chance to thrive.”
- **Repeatable:** “From homeless to hired—our program changes lives.”

Now, take one of your messages and refine it using these principles.

Bonus Challenge: Test It in Conversation. Say your refined message out loud to someone unfamiliar with your organization.

- *Can they remember it an hour later?*
- *Can they repeat it back to you?*
- *If not, refine it further until it's unforgettable.*

Try it!

06

ADAPTING YOUR MESSAGE FOR DIFFERENT PLATFORMS

A strong message should stay consistent, but it needs to be adapted for different platforms. What works in a long-form blog post won't work in a social post. Understanding how to tailor your story without losing its essence is key to reaching your audience wherever they are.

WORKSHEET: TAILORING YOUR MESSAGE

1. What is your core message? Write it in a single, clear sentence.

2. How does your audience interact with different platforms? Do they skim emails but engage deeply with blogs? Are they active on LinkedIn but less responsive to social media ads?

3. How can you modify your message for different platforms? Long-form storytelling (website, blogs, newsletters); Short, engaging content (social media posts, ads); Conversational formats (videos, podcasts, live Q&As).

EXERCISE: ADAPTING YOUR MESSAGE

Take a core message and rewrite it for three different platforms:

EXAMPLE

Original message:

“Our nonprofit helps students access higher education through scholarships and mentorship.”

Website headline:

“Every student deserves a chance to thrive. We provide scholarships and mentorship to remove barriers to higher education.”

Social media post:

“Education shouldn’t depend on wealth. Your support helps students achieve their dreams. Donate today. #ScholarshipsMatter”

Email subject line:

“A scholarship changed Maya’s life—will you help the next student?”

Now, take one of your messages and adapt it for different platforms.

Try it!

07

CREATING A CALL TO ACTION THAT WORKS

A great story is meaningless if it doesn't inspire action. Whether you want someone to donate, subscribe, purchase, or share, your call to action (CTA) needs to be clear, compelling, and easy to follow.

WORKSHEET: CRAFTING AN EFFECTIVE CTA

1. What do you want your audience to do? Be specific. Do you want them to donate, sign up, make a purchase, or share your message?

2. Why should they act now? What makes this urgent or relevant in this moment?

3. Is it easy to follow through? Does your CTA provide a clear next step?

EXERCISE: REFINING YOUR CALL TO ACTION

Take a CTA you're currently using and apply these principles:

- Make it specific.
- Create a sense of urgency.
- Ensure it's simple to act on.

EXAMPLE FOR BRANDS

Instead of: “We sell winter coats in the styles and colors you love. Order yours today.”

Try this: “Limited stock available—get your ethically made winter coat before they're gone.”

EXAMPLE FOR CAUSES

Instead of: “Support our important Mission today.”

Try this: “Your \$25 donation feeds a family for a week—give now to make an immediate impact.”

Now, take one of your CTAs and refine it using these principles.

Try it!

08

MAINTAINING CONSISTENCY ACROSS ALL MESSAGING

Inconsistent messaging confuses audiences and weakens trust. Whether someone encounters your brand on social media, your website, or a fundraising appeal, they should immediately recognize your voice and values.

WORKSHEET: ENSURING CONSISTENCY

1. Does your core message stay the same across platforms? Review recent messaging—are you telling a consistent story?

2. Is your tone and style uniform? Does your brand sound the same in emails, social media, and press releases?

3. Do visuals support the message? Does your imagery, design, and video content align with your brand's story?

EXERCISE: REFINING YOUR CALL TO ACTION

Take a look at your last five marketing materials (social posts, emails, ads, etc.) and answer:

- Are they telling the same core story?
- Do they feel like they belong to the same brand?
- Is there a disconnect in tone, style, or visual identity?

EXAMPLE FOR BRANDS

A financial services firm:

- **Social Post:** “Retirement shouldn’t be a guessing game. Start planning today for the future you deserve.”
- **Email Subject:** “A secure retirement starts now—here’s your next step.”
- **Website Header:** “Financial confidence for every stage of life.”

EXAMPLE FOR CAUSES

A nonprofit advocating for clean water:

- **Social Post:** “Every child deserves clean water. Donate today.”
- **Email Subject:** “You can bring safe water to families—here’s how.”
- **Website Header:** “Clean water changes everything.”

Now, review your own messaging for consistency.

Try it!

09

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF YOUR MESSAGING

Messaging isn't just about creativity—it needs to drive results. Tracking engagement, audience response, and conversions helps refine and strengthen your approach over time.

WORKSHEET: EVALUATING YOUR MESSAGING EFFECTIVENESS

1. Are people engaging with your message? Are they clicking, sharing, or commenting?

2. Is your message driving action? Are donations, sign-ups, or sales increasing?

3. What feedback are you receiving? Are people saying they resonate with your message? Is there confusion or misinterpretation?

EXERCISE: REVIEWING YOUR MESSAGE PERFORMANCE

Review a recent marketing effort (email, campaign, ad, etc.) and answer:

- What was the primary goal?
- Did your audience take the desired action?
- What could be improved in clarity, tone, or call to action?

EXAMPLE FOR BRANDS

A brand promoting an eco-friendly product:

- **Original message:** “Buy our sustainable coffee.”
- **Refined message:** “Your morning coffee can change the world. Try our ethically sourced beans and support fair wages for farmers.”
- **Results:** Higher engagement, more shares, better connection with audience values.

EXAMPLE FOR CAUSES

A food security organization:

- **Original message:** “Donate to help fight hunger.”
- **Refined message:** “One meal can change a life. Your \$10 donation provides a week of meals for a family in need—give today.”
- **Results:** Increased donations, more engagement on social media, stronger emotional connection with donors.

Now, analyze one of your recent messages using these principles.

Try it!

10

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EXERCISE: DEVELOPING YOUR MESSAGING FRAMEWORK

Using what you've learned, outline a simple messaging framework:

- **Core Message:** A clear statement that makes your mission emotionally compelling.
- **Audience Needs:** Who you are speaking to and what matters to them.
- **Emotional Hook:** What will make your audience care?
- **Story Structure:** How can you frame your message like a compelling story?
- **Call to Action:** What do you want your audience to do?
- **Metrics for Success:** How will you measure the impact of your messaging?

EXAMPLE FOR BRANDS

An Engineering Firm:

- **Core Message:** “Innovative engineering solves real-world problems.”
- **Audience Needs:** Municipalities, developers, and businesses looking for sustainable, cost-effective infrastructure solutions.
- **Emotional Hook:** “Infrastructure failures cost money and lives—smart engineering prevents disaster and builds a better future.”
- **Story Structure:** Highlight a city that upgraded aging infrastructure with innovative engineering solutions, saving millions and improving safety.
- **Call to Action:** “Partner with us to design resilient, cost-effective infrastructure that lasts for generations.”
- **Metrics for Success:** Track project success rates, client testimonials, and long-term cost savings for municipalities and businesses.

EXAMPLE FOR CAUSES

A Nonprofit Literacy Program:

- **Core Message:** “Every child deserves the ability to read.”
- **Audience Needs:** Parents, educators, and donors who care about literacy.
- **Emotional Hook:** Struggling readers can fall behind for life—early intervention changes everything.
- **Story Structure:** Share a real-life success story of a child who learned to read.
- **Call to Action:** “Donate \$20 to provide a book and tutoring to a child in need.”
- **Metrics for Success:** Track donations, engagement, and student success stories.

Now, create your own messaging framework
and ensure it aligns across all platforms.

Try it!

CONCLUSION: THE MOST ENGAGING STORYTELLING TOOL

You've built a strong messaging strategy—one that connects with the right audience, triggers emotion, and drives action. But how you deliver that message matters just as much as the message itself.

Video marketing is the most powerful tool for engagement across every platform. Whether it's a brand film, donor appeal, or social media clip, video captures attention and conveys emotion faster than any other medium.

And we happen to be really good at it.

If you're ready to take your message to the next level with high-quality, story-driven video, let's talk.