

BRAVO GROUP

The building blocks of progress: Marketing in ways that matter

Strategies for understanding audiences deeply, the science behind storytelling and what success looks like.

— . . . Introduction

The world has changed. And, yes, we realize this ground has been trod again and again. Yet somehow, in the marketing sector, there's been a stubborn clinging to what's been done before. Maybe that still works if you're selling soda pop or denim, but as we're looking to help people make progress in their lives on the issues that affect them most, read on.

Here, we're presenting up-to-date information on how to understand your audiences, tell better stories and ultimately find success while powering progress.

**“ It's not what you want to tell people.
It's what they want to hear. ”**

CHRIS BRAVACOS,
PRESIDENT AND CEO

— . . . Understanding audiences deeply

If there's one thing organizations can invest in that will make the most difference in their work, it's understanding their audiences. And yet so many opt not to know, whether that's due to a fear of "bothering" their audience or a reluctance to invest in meaningful research or even not knowing where to start.

THINK BEYOND DEMOGRAPHICS

The general public is not an audience. It's also insufficient to evaluate your audiences based solely on demographic criteria. [Psychographic segmentation, as defined by Qualtrics](#), breaks down the audience into groups based on beliefs, values, lifestyle, social status, opinions and activities. While demographics are quantitative, psychographic data is qualitative. While demographics tell you who, behavioral data tells you how they act, and psychographics tell you why.

The difference between demographics and psychographics

Demographic profile	Psychographic profile
Female	Enjoys healthy living
Age 25-45	Lacks time to herself
Married	Enjoys Netflix box sets
2 children	Buys quality rather than economy
Household income \$75K+	Is career-oriented
City dweller	Loves going out with girlfriends

[Graphic source](#)

The benefits of enhancing your understanding of audiences are clear – you understand their needs and wants, you are better positioned to message them in a way that will connect, and you'll identify growth opportunities so you can build audiences who are likely to act on your behalf.

DEPLOY RESEARCH STRATEGIES

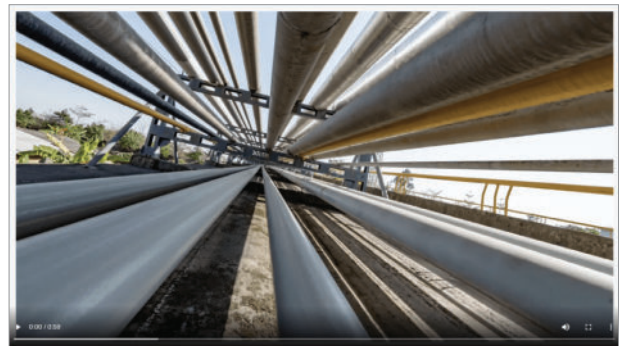
So how do you find this out? It's not all that different from strategies that have been deployed for years. Think short surveys with open-ended questions. Interviews with current audiences. Focus groups. Pair this with social listening tools and website analytics to round out your picture.

We use a customer data platform to evaluate behavior, and then our proprietary survey tool, Beag.ly, and social listening tool, [Paraqeeet](#), to create a full picture of who we're dealing with, so that we can ultimately deploy the right strategies to make progress.

Paraqeeet search



Beag.ly survey question



TREAT PEOPLE LIKE PEOPLE

People aren't bots. So of course we shouldn't treat them this way. As we have discussed here, they have thoughts and ideas and values and preferences. In [The Science of What Makes People Care](#), authors Ann Christiano and Annie Neimand write, "People seek information that makes them feel good about themselves and allows them to be a better version of themselves. If you start with this understanding of the human mind and behavior, you can design campaigns that help people see where your values intersect and how the issues you are working on matter to them." And, to do this, you need to know them.



WE FACE A HOPEFUL BUT SKEPTICAL PUBLIC

A [survey](#) of more than 395,000 people worldwide found:

- **73%** of consumers say brands must act now for the good of society and the planet, but 71% don't believe brands will deliver on their promises.
- **47%** of brands are seen as untrustworthy.
- **64%** of people prefer to buy from companies with a reputation for purpose as well as profit, and 53% say they'd even pay more for brands that take stands.

SCIENCE OF STORYTELLING

Storytelling is a bit of a cliché in marketing right now. But there's a legitimate reason: Science has shown it is an effective way to move hearts and minds. [As journalist Benedict Carey wrote in the New York Times Magazine](#), "Researchers have found that the human brain has a natural affinity for narrative construction. People tend to remember facts more accurately if they encounter them in a story rather than in a list."

And yet, while everyone knows storytelling is important, why are so few marketing agencies pulling it off successfully?

Understand storytelling

"The Science of What Makes People Care" defines it for us: "Stories have characters; a beginning, middle, and end; plot, conflict, and resolution. If you do not include these elements, you are not telling a story." So that means those message grids and vignettes that comms and marketing departments are pulling together are not quite meeting the definition of what a story is. Which brings us to our next point ...

Remember it's not about you

So often organizations want to control the narrative about their companies so much that they take the humanity out of it. But these organizations need to come to terms with the fact that what they want to say isn't necessarily what their audiences want to hear.

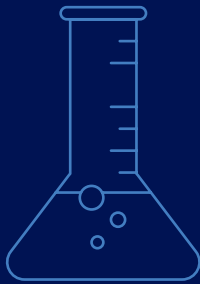
So how do you reframe your [approach to storytelling](#)? It starts with knowing your audience (see previous section). And then transferring to their mindset to think of what stories would resonate with them. Are there opportunities for them to tell their own stories in a way that you can highlight and amplify? Even better.



DIGITAL AGE TRANSFORMS AMERICANS' BEHAVIOR

[Phone surveys](#) are yesterday's tools. America's digital age demands the flexibility and visual offerings of digital surveys that reach respondents where they are and when they want to be.

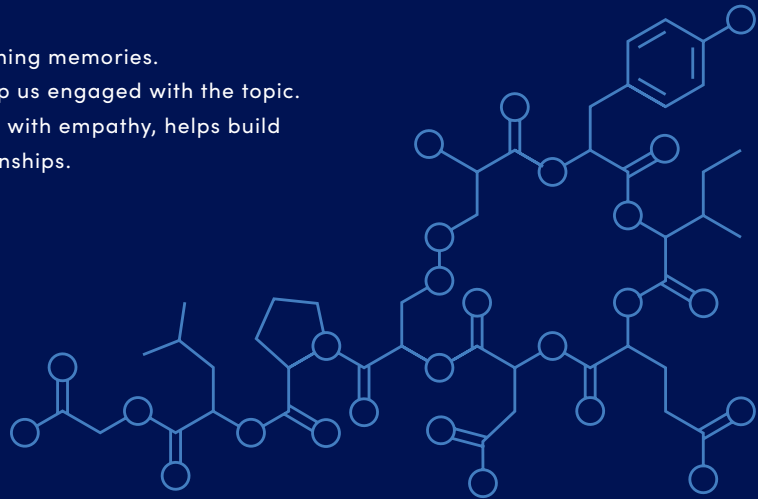
- [8 in 10 Americans](#) won't answer their cellphone if they don't recognize the number.
- The average attention span has shrunk to eight seconds, or one second shorter than that of a goldfish.
- Almost a quarter of American adults [say](#) they didn't read a book in whole or in part in any format during all of 2020.
- The average [user](#) picks up their cellphone 1,500 times a week.
- Image-based apps continue to grow in popularity. [Instagram](#) has 2 billion monthly active users, [TikTok](#) has 1 billion, and [Snapchat](#) has 293 million.



FUN FACTS: A LITTLE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORYTELLING

Scientists have found that chemicals such as cortisol, dopamine and oxytocin are released in the brain when we're told a story.

- Cortisol helps in forming memories.
- Dopamine helps keep us engaged with the topic.
- Oxytocin, associated with empathy, helps build and maintain relationships.



SEVEN TIPS FOR TOP STORYTELLING

1

BE AUTHENTIC. It's too easy to jump on a marketing fad and come off tone deaf instead of aligned with your audience.

2

FIND THE HOOK. What's different from yesterday? What's the conflict? How did this jar your expectations? Audiences need a reason to engage with your story.

3

KEEP IT SIMPLE. Stories have a beginning, middle and end. Don't lose sight that you're weaving a tale.

4

WALK IN THEIR SHOES. Context and timing are key. What's your audience going through right now? What tone do you need to convey to be one of them?

5

MAKE AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION. Disney movies and the Hallmark Channel have this down. Who's the hero in the story? What are their struggles? What will grab your audience's heart authentically?

6

SAY IT WITH PICTURES. That's worth a thousand words right there. Visual language is often the best communicator of complex issues.

7

ASK FOR MEANINGFUL ACTION. Your CTA has to resonate with your audience and bring value to their lives. They won't do it just because you've asked.

Creating success

Success never looks like just one thing. It's not the same for every organization or challenge you're looking to solve. This work would be a lot easier if there were a template we could use. Rather, it's a crafted strategy with clear outcomes that you can measure — a road map that can point you in a direction but may require shortcuts and redirects as you learn more as you go.

Skip quick wins (or at least remember the bigger picture)

We all want instant gratification. So, while you want to see results right away, true progress takes time. That's why, as you develop measurable goals, it's important to map them, including the micro steps that you'll take along the way — that lead to the progress you are looking to implement.

Remember that it's quality, not quantity

Getting one right person to act may be more influential than bringing thousands of people along (especially if those thousands of people never take action on your behalf). Build custom strategies that get to the progress you need to see, rather than relying on what's been done before.

Go beyond measuring awareness.

Awareness is not as important as you think it is. In [Stop Raising Awareness Already](#), Christiano and Neimand write, "If the goal is solely to increase knowledge of an issue, then an awareness campaign can work just fine. But is it ever enough for people to simply know more about something?" They go on to ask whether awareness is enough when it comes to seat belt wearing or hurricane preparedness. The answer is a resounding no.

Connect [strategy](#) to goals that are meaningful. Awareness may be the start, but it's certainly not the endpoint for the kind of progress we can achieve. For that, we need an action.

Be transparent

We have the tools to be upfront about progress we are making. And, when we are clear about what's happening, we make smarter decisions about what to do next. See clearly, act decisively. That's when progress gets made.

When it comes to making progress on the most meaningful issues in people's lives, there's not one way to get there. But if we start with audience understanding and then develop the ways we'll reach them in the ways that matter to them, progress is within reach.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A MARKETING PARTNER

FOCUS ON ACTION, NOT JUST

AWARENESS. It's pretty easy to measure awareness. It's also pretty easy to move the needle on awareness. So, when marketing agencies overemphasize that as their sole metric, it's a red flag. Awareness that's not paired with action isn't going to generate the progress you're looking for.

TRANSPARENCY. With the data we have at our fingertips, ask for a 24/7 dashboard that showcases progress to goals and what your investment is doing. There's no excuse not to know where your dollars are going.

BALANCE SHORT - AND LONG-

TERM WINS. Moving people to action doesn't typically happen in a moment. It's a journey. Still, your agency should be able to demonstrate quick progress while setting expectations for what it will deliver over time.

MEANINGFUL APPROACH TO

AUDIENCES. All marketing agencies say they are audience-centric, but are they really? What technology are they using to understand who you need to reach? What are they going to do to identify their wants and needs and create strategies just for them? Audience strategy should be more than lip service.

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS.

By using modern research strategies to answer tough questions, you start your work with knowledge, not guesswork.

WHAT STORYTELLING SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Bravo Group engages people on issues where making progress matters – education, health care, life sciences, energy and infrastructure, nonprofits. This atmosphere makes it imperative to understand an audience, draw personal connections, build relationships and truly live in its space to effect change.

After exhaustive qualitative and quantitative research, social media analysis and persona building, our comprehensive marketing offerings contain a compelling, strategic storytelling component, engaging hearts and minds to achieve a client's goal.

A BRIEF LOOK AT SOME SUCCESSES:



PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST – Today's education system needs to work for the whole family, and that's why public cyberschools such as CCA are the answer for so many across Pennsylvania. Using an integrated approach and robust media strategy to increase enrollment, our campaigns featured from-the-heart stories from students, teachers, administrators and community members of struggles with brick-and-mortar schools and the many doors a cyber education opened. With an initial goal of 10,000 students, we saw enrollment swell to 18,000+. [Learn more.](#)



TACKLING THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS – Despite an ongoing global mental health crisis, mental health research doesn't get the same financial support as other health issues. MQ is a U.K.-based charity fundraising for the cause. Our multiprong digital fundraising program included tailored audience experiences, a membership program and shared stories from researchers and people's personal battles and victories. MQ's online marketing revenue grew 45% over the previous year, and its donors increased by 30%. [Learn more.](#)



EMBRACING HEALTH INSURANCE – The uninsured and underinsured can feel wronged, excluded or at odds with providers. We were charged with motivating these audiences in Pennsylvania to reconsider and sign up through Pennie, the state's new health insurance exchange. Our creative bilingual storytelling across channels put us in their shoes and in 2022 netted an 11% increase over the previous year. [Learn more.](#)

RESOURCES:

[Science of What Makes People Care](#)

[Stop Raising Awareness Already](#)

[What is psychographic segmentation?](#)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/22/health/psychology/22narr.html>

<https://www.harvardbusiness.org/the-science-behind-the-art-of-storytelling/>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/estherchoy/2021/04/11/7-techniques-to-take-your-business-storytelling-to-the-next-level-now/?sh=909f6692596b>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2020/12/21/how-to-boost-storytelling-skills-16-tips-from-communications-pros/?sh=729522ab575b>

THANK YOU

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LET'S GET STARTED

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