



# Healthcare Storytelling Delivery: IN THE DIGITAL AGE

*If you represent a brand, you must tell a story about the features and benefits of your project, so that your target user can make sense of it.*

**Y**esterday, a woman named Sharon dragged herself out of bed and shuffled to the shower. She turned on the water and massaged shampoo into her hair. And as the foamy water swirled down the drain, she felt a small, deep lump in her breast.

Brand storytelling is a method of building an appropriately meaningful relationship with your target users. In certain cases, brand stories are short and to the point. In others, stories unfold through a cross-linked narrative.

Great storytelling considers the wants, needs, and desires of the target audience. The best storytellers craft a narrative that resonates with their audience. They position the brand story so that it fits the needs of the user, and know that those needs evolve quickly.

A woman who feels a lump needs clear, actionable, contextually relevant information. If that information comes from a brand, it might include guidance about scheduling an appointment with a healthcare professional.

*At lunch, Sharon found a quiet spot away from her coworkers and Googled “lump” on her smartphone. Then “breast lump” and then reluctantly “breast cancer lump.” She hated what she was reading. The day dragged, and all Sharon could think about was going home to research this properly. Privately.*

A healthcare journey is intensely personal. Your company may play a role in this process, but only if your digital story matches the user’s journey. Patients need the answers to questions, not just “messaging.”

## Content Strategy to Guide Digital Storytelling

Traditional storytelling is primarily linear. Digital storytelling is significantly more complex, since users control the story in a variety of ways. Linking strategy is both art and science.

*At home, Sharon hunched over her desktop searching for information. She visited mainstream health websites, patient forums, support groups, unbranded pharmaceutical brand websites, YouTube, and any place that would give her hope. Again and again, the answer was the same...this lump needed to be checked by a healthcare professional. Soon.*

An experienced content strategy team can identify the kinds of information that your user needs at each stage of their journey. Users find their own pathways through content, adjusting their time according to the amount of information they need. You can create a narrative that serves as stepping stones through this health journey.

*Last night, Sharon didn’t sleep. In bed, her face was illuminated by the glow of her iPad. The Google searches were more complex; her exploration deeper and more focused. She read posts from patients, caregivers, and healthcare professionals. She read every survivor story.*

## Storytelling Is Defined by the User

Your users will have many questions, and they may not be read exactly the way you’ve planned. Users don’t always go to your homepage, and they certainly don’t care about your sitemap. Hence, nobody will navigate your website by clicking on 1.0 then 1.1 then 1.2 and so on. They zero in on the content that addresses their questions.

Despite the mind-blowing vastness of the Internet, persistent patients find the information that applies to their own personal needs. As marketers, we apply content structures according to a user journey, but journeys are defined by past experience and current needs. Don’t expect them to follow your user journey every time.

Patients like Sharon may not even know it, but they are collecting content from branded and unbranded websites. If you represent a

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brand, you must tell a story about the features and benefits of your project, so that your target user can make sense of it.

*Today, Sharon woke up, called her doctor, and scheduled an appointment. Based on the deep concern and detail that she expressed on the phone, the office manager immediately made time with the doctor.*

The office will take her today, and although they don’t know it yet, the early diagnosis will be one of the things that saves her life.

And one day, after all of the cancer treatments are done, she will write her own survivor story and share it in an online forum. It will be read by a woman just like her who wakes up one morning, feels a lump, and begins her own user journey. **PV**

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