



EPISODE 236

How to Clarify Your Message With Donald Miller of StoryBrand

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AMY PORTERFIELD: Hey there, welcome back to another episode of The Online Marketing Made Easy Podcast. I'm your host, Amy Porterfield, and I am thrilled that you are tuning in today.

Give me a raise of hands. Just raise them up on the treadmill if you're at the gym or if you're in the car driving to your kids to school one hand is enough. Raise your hand if you've ever put the time, effort, blood, sweat, and tears into a piece of content whether it be an online course or something simpler like a blog post and you were really proud of that content.

You put it out into the world and it's crickets. Nobody's paying attention. I know how devastating that can feel. I know how frustrating it is when you worked so hard and you feel as though you're just not getting the traction you want.

What if there was just a tweak or two in how you're communicating to your ideal customer avatar that would actually catch all the right attention and literally transform your message?

You're going to be one happy listener today because my guest today, Donald Miller, is going to be sharing a communication framework with you that will literally not only help you clarify your message but it will help you clarify who you are to your customers inside of your business.

It will clarify who you are to them and who they are to you. I know, I know. That might sound a little bit weird right now but once you hear Donald, or as he goes by, Don. He said, "The only time someone calls me Donald is when I'm getting in trouble."

When you hear from Don all of that will really make sense so I'm not going to make you wait much longer but just know this is one of my favorite podcast episodes. I



don't say that with every episode and I really, really mean it. I can't wait to actually go back and take notes.

That's how much I love this. He dropped so many gems in this interview that I thought, "Holy cow! This is exactly what I needed to hear and this is exactly what my listeners need to hear as well."

You're going to love it. Believe me, I just know it.

Before we get to the interview, this episode is sponsored by my free masterclass, The Ultimate List-Building Catch-Up Plan, my proven three-stack system for leveraging the most powerful what's-working-now list-building strategies without the stress and tech confusion or crazy overwhelm that usually comes with building your email list.

If you take what you learn today about clarifying your message and you apply that to your list-building efforts that you can learn about in my free masterclass then you, my friend, are golden.

To sign up for my free masterclass go to <http://www.amyporterfield.com/listbuilding>.

Because our guest today is a big deal he needs a proper introduction. Donald Miller, author of Building a StoryBrand (a must-read book, for the record), has created a communication framework based on a story structure that is successfully used in the movies and commercials all the time.

He teaches this framework to big-time businesses like The Economist, Pantene, Cade's favorite Chick-Fil-A, and also online marketers like you and me.

I can tell you this, he is all about helping his clients turn their marketing message into a storyline. You know when someone's in a great story they are all ears. They are paying attention. They want more. That's exactly what you can do in your brand as well.

I won't make you wait any longer. Let's do this.

AMY: Don, welcome to the show. Thanks so much for being here.

DONALD MILLER: Thanks for having me, Amy.



AMY: This is so much fun. Before we got on you all didn't get to hear this, but Don was telling me about his place in Tennessee. You guys know that Hobie wants to build in Tennessee and Don I'm pretty sure you are building my husband's dream place so that must be a lot of fun.

DONALD: It's a blast. I can't wait to meet your husband and show him around but we'll save him a ton of money on all sorts of mistakes we've made. But he should come. It's a beautiful place. The people here are wonderful. They're just wonderful.

AMY: I guess I should have said we're walking Tennessee.

DONALD: Yeah, Tennessee, that's right.

AMY: I kind of forgot that but my audience knows Hobie's obsessed with that area so they get it.

For those who don't know you yet, there aren't many, but just in case, tell my audience a little bit about yourself and what you do for a living.

DONALD: I help companies clarify their message and I got into that line of work completely by accident. I spent ten years writing books. Of course, when you write books you know you have to keep the audience interested and you have to keep them turning the pages and those kinds of things.

When I started a company I used the same framework, which is a storytelling framework, that I use to write books. I used it to clarify my own company's message. After I did that the company kind of exploded.

I realized, wait a second, this seven-part framework that I created is actually more valuable than the business I was using it to grow. So we pivoted a little bit and started teaching the seven-part framework to mostly small business owners.

I watched businesses double in revenue. I watched businesses increase by 20, 30, 40% just by clarifying a message that people could respond to and it really all broke down to seven soundbites.

If you can just get seven soundbites down and repeat them over and over in your marketing collateral people respond in the same way they respond to movies that they love. They respond to brands in the same way.



We've taught that to probably about 5,000 businesses now and have had a blast doing it.

AMY: So many of my peers have gone through your training with this framework. I know Stu McLaren talks about it a lot, Jasmine Star went to one of your trainings. I feel like I need to go there and really immerse myself in it but I am also excited that you are here to walk us through it.

Before you do so, I was hoping that you could talk to my audience (my audience is about 99% online entrepreneurs) and I want them to hear why this framework is so valuable, before we get into all of the details, why it's so valuable.

Most importantly, what happens if you don't use something like this?

DONALD: I'm convinced if you don't actually captivate your audience's attention very quickly you're not going to be in business very long. The unique thing about those of us who do business online is you have seconds if not milliseconds to capture somebody's attention.

Story teaches us to do that. The average brain really daydreams about 30% of the time unless you walk into a movie theater. If you walk into a movie theater your brain will not daydream for the whole hour and a half or two hours or three hours; or, if you're watching Netflix, the eight days that it's going to take to watch whatever you're bingeing on.

That happens because of some things that have been passed down for 2,000 years, best practices and storytelling. For instance, you would want to very quickly have a character come on the screen, identify something they want, and really immediately get them into some kind of trouble.

That posits a story question in the brain of whoever is watching that movie to say, "Wait a second, is Jason Bourne going to get out of trouble?" Or, "Is Bridget Jones going to find the love of her life?" Or, "Is Benji going to make it home?" Or, "Is Luke Skywalker going to be able to defeat the evil empire?"

When that story question gets posited in your brain you pay attention to the answer. How does that translate into online entrepreneurs? The second I go to your website you need to posit a story question in my brain that gets me to scroll down further on your page and ultimately gets me to believe that if I click the "Buy Now" button the story loop will be closed in my brain.



All human motivation is the opening and closing of story loops. If I'm hungry that's an open story loop. A meal is the closing of that story loop. If I'm thirsty that's the opening of a story loop. If I drink water that's the closing of that story loop.

You have to open and close story loops. That's really how the entire process works. We have seven ways you more or less open or close story loops. There are only seven. There are only seven in every story you ever see and they aren't new. I didn't invent them.

I have helped translate what's worked for thousands of years to captivate people's attention in listening to stories and to listening to your brand.

AMY: I love this because I'm dying for you to get into the seven. What I will say before you do so, a lot of my students (and I've been guilty of this as well) want to throw everything, including the kitchen sink, into our messaging because we don't want to miss a thing.

We want to make sure we cover it all but I know that is diluting our message and confusing people so you've got to just walk us through it. Will you break down the framework?

DONALD: Sure. I'll speak to your desire to throw everything and the kitchen sink at the customer. The human brain actually has to burn calories in order to process information. When I got to your website I have to burn calories, literally. It takes about 600 to 800 calories a day that the brain burns.

It is burning more calories than any organ in your body and you are processing information. The problem is if you ask me to process information that has nothing to do with my survival I'm going to tune you out very quickly.

That's a survival mechanism, to not process information that I can't figure out if there is something in it for me.

When you actually throw too much information at your client right away you are basically saying, "Hey, would you burn 300 calories with no promise there is anything in it for you?"

The brain is going to say, "Well, I can do that but if barbarians come over the hill behind my cul-de-sac tonight I'm not going to have any energy to fight them so I'm not going to burn those calories on you."



That's why you wouldn't throw too much information at a customer. The way relationships work, they work in three phrases. This with romantic relationships, professional relationships, and relationships with your brand when somebody goes to your website.

The three phases are: Curiosity, enlightenment, and commitment. What I need for you to do for me to be willing to burn more calories processing whatever you're offer is, is to first make me curious, then enlighten me, and then I'll commit.

When you actually throw commitment at a customer first they say, "Wait a second, we don't know each other and I don't know if this is going to help me survive so I'm out."

Really, when you think of a sales funnel, Amy, that you understand and teach so well, you're actually guiding people through the natural progression of a relationship. You're making them curious.

They will give you their email address and then you enlighten them with whatever that lead generator is. Then you ask them to commit by buying something and that's the natural phases of a relationship.

That's why the sales funnels that you teach work so incredibly well. The question is what do we say inside of those sales funnels that will actually captivate people's attention. That's where we get to the framework.

First let's all just turn off our business hat and have a little bit of fun. Let's pretend we're writing a screenplay. The first thing you would want, there are seven things you need to make this screenplay work, you need a character.

We have to identify very, very quickly what that character wants. We have to identify that Jason Bourne wants to know who he really is. There are stakes. It's very important that he find out who he really is.

If I throw too many things at the audience and say that Jason Bourne wants to know who he really is but he also wants to lose 30 pounds and he's thinking about marrying a girl and he wants to run a marathon and he's researching whether or not to adopt a cat I will lose the audience.

The reason the audience is going to start daydreaming and walk out of that movie theater unsatisfied is because I asked them to burn too many calories processing the story.



The very first thing you have to understand in order for a story to work is that it has to be clean. It has to be about one thing. There could be a bunch of sub plots but that's more complicated. It really just has to be about one thing: Who is Jason Bourne.

Why doesn't he know who he is? How is he going to find out? What are the stakes? There is a burning story question in the brain of whoever is watching that movie.

When we actually look at really good brands like Ramsey Solutions, Dave Ramsey has institutionalized the StoryBrand framework in every level of his company, there is really only one thing that Dave Ramsey sells. He sells financial peace.

It's amazing that he sells financial peace to entrepreneurs, he sells financial peace to soccer moms, he sells financial peace to pastors and religious leaders, he sells social peace through buying real estate, he sells financial peace.

He is able to have all of that complication under the house of one thing, financial peace. That's what the overall plot of an interaction with Dave Ramsey is about.

Because he's kept it that simple and sort of couched all of the complication of his offering under such a simple narrative there are hundreds of thousands of financial advisors in the country, thousands of them have written books, hundreds of them have podcasts or radio shows, but we all know about one.

We know about the one who kept it simple. They kept the narrative very simple. What that means for you and your audience, we need to identify the one thing that we offer that we can differentiate ourselves and say, "If you want this one thing you have to come from us."

That takes a little bit of work. You burn a little bit of calories processing the one thing you want to offer but if you actually burn calories clarifying your message that means your customer doesn't have to burn any calories to understand it and that is how you're going to win, when you make it very easy for them to understand your offer.

The first thing is to have a character that wants something. We've got to define something the character wants. Then, the second thing is there has to be a problem. Every story is really about a problem.

It's about somebody trying to resolve a problem and have a happy ending. That teaches us that as soon as you resolve the problem in a story the story is over. If Liam Neeson is on an airplane and he's flying to London to rescue his daughter and gets a



call and the police station says, “Your daughter was kidnapped but, Liam, you wouldn’t believe it. It was a college prank. She’s actually fine. There’s nothing wrong and she’s really looking forward to seeing you.”

Then it’s 90 minutes of Liam Neeson taking his daughter shopping and talking about pranks. The audience is going, “Wait a second, this movie doesn’t make any sense and it should be over.”

Shouldn’t you be rolling the credits because you resolved the problem? The story is over. The big paradigm shift for us in business is that when you stop talking about your customer’s problem they stop doing business with you.

The only reason they are going to your website or calling your sales rep or answering your email is because you can help them resolve a problem.

I’ve given a lot of speeches in my day and I realize that if I give a much better speech the audience is much more involved in what I’m saying. I don’t go to the middle of the stage and say, “I’m Donald Miller and I live in Nashville, Tennessee, and I have a beautiful wife named Betsy and I have a dog named Lucy.”

If I actually walk to the middle of the stage, don’t even say my name, and just say, “I’m here because we have a serious problem. Our marketing isn’t working. It’s a waste of money. How do we fix it?”

Everybody leans in.

AMY: That’s so good.

DONALD: Until you get to the problem who cares? We need to understand when we write email copy. I had some people do an exercise recently. I asked them to print out their website on paper, take a red pen, and circle every the customer’s problem is mentioned on the website.

You wouldn’t believe how many people just didn’t talk about the problem. They talk all about themselves and how their grandpa started the company and how great the company is and blah, blah, blah. That’s not a hook. That’s not a story hook.

You have to talk about a problem. Amy as you know, this is the biggest paradigm shift in the whole narrative and StoryBrand framework, you identify what the character



wants, you identify the problem they are trying to resolve, and then you can enter their story.

You want to enter their story as the guide. The guide is a character that has been entering stories for thousands of years. It is the character that exists only to help the hero win the day.

Yoda was Luke Skywalker's guide. Lionel was King George's guide in *The King's Speech*. Jonah Hill's character was Billy Beane's guide in *Moneyball*. Haymitch was Katniss's guide.

You always want to play the guide in your customer's story but you never want to play the hero. It's super important. The two reasons you never want to play the hero are 1) If you play the hero you are removing yourself from your customer's story.

If I position myself as a hero and I'm talking all the time about how great StoryBrand is then people think Don's a hero and I'm a hero too. That means we're in different stories.

If I didn't enter into their story I may have gotten them very interested in my story but I didn't enter into their story. They aren't going to do business with me.

The next reason you don't want to play the hero is because the hero is the weakest character in the story. The hero is ill equipped, afraid, unwilling to take action, in need of help, and desperately looking for a guide. Why would you ever want to position your brand as such a weak character?

The guide, on the other hand, is strong. They have already conquered the hero's demon, they know how to help the hero win, they have a plan. The guide is the leader in the story and you want to be the leader.

Never play the hero. Always play the guide. The stakes are enormous. Think about Hilary Clinton losing this campaign, the biggest political upset maybe in American history, certainly in modern American history. What was her tagline? I'm with Her. She's the hero and she loses the election.

John McCain, war hero, lost the election. Bob Dole, war hero, lost the election. Do you see the parallels there?

AMY: I definitely do.



DONALD: People honor heroes and love heroes but it's the heroes in their own story, they are not in my story.

AMY: So I know you have more on the framework but this is a big one that my students really need to understand. Give me an example of a classic mistake they might not realize they are doing where they are actually playing the hero when they need to be playing the guide.

DONALD: I'll just pick on a giant brand. Chevy runs ads all the time saying, "We've won the J.D. Power and Associates award. We've all seen those commercials. That's basically Chevy getting up and saying, "We're the hero, we're the hero, we're the hero."

What if Chevy ran a very similar ad and instead said, "We care about safety so much and we care about your family so much and we care about you pulling into your driveway safe that we've made such incredible safety modifications on our cars that J.D. Power actually gave us an award for serving you"?

AMY: Okay.

DONALD: Do you see the difference? One is bragging about myself and the other is actually saying that the story is really about you getting home safe and that's what our whole thing is about, "We just want to help you win."

AMY: That's a great example.

DONALD: It is. We just worked with Toms shoes, a fantastic brand. Toms does such great stuff and they are actually considering changing their whole company motto to "We give you a way to fight inequality."

If you think about the history of Toms shoes, they have been giving people a way to fight inequality for years. In fact, in meeting with their team, they make amazing shoes and they are really, really just insanely burdened by inequality in the world.

If Toms came out and said, "We fight inequality. We're so amazing," people would think they are really great and awesome.

But, if they come out and say, "We give you an amazing way to fight inequality that's helpful and easy," they are inviting you to be the hero of the story. That's the difference. It's actually a very subtle difference but it's a difference between a



customer engaging your story and feeling invited into it and a customer saying, “That’s a neat story but it’s your story. It’s not mine.”

AMY: I’m glad you talked about the hero/guide relationship. I know there’s more to the framework but that is definitely one that really gets people stuck. I feel that social media doesn’t make it easy.

Here we are posting pictures of ourselves all over our Instagram and Facebook feeds, maybe not you, but I definitely know if I post a picture of a stock photo it really doesn’t get much but if I post a picture of me it gets a lot more likes.

It’s hard to be the guide when you’re like, “Look at me, look at me.”

DONALD: It’s okay though, Amy. A lot of people get confused about that. They think they shouldn’t have pictures of themselves on the page because they don’t want to play the hero but that’s actually not the case.

As long as when people look at you they see their guide. Then they are fine. Dave Ramsey’s picture is on billboards. His picture is on the front cover of books. But when they look at him they see, “That’s my guide.”

That’s okay. In fact, there are many movies that are really just about the guide. In the movie “Mary Poppins”, Mary Poppins is the guide. It’s the father who is the hero but he’s not on screen very much.

Don’t think this means you can’t bring attention to yourself. That’s actually not true at all. It’s just that when you bring attention to yourself you need to be talking about your customer.

One way I would always use social media if I were in the shoes of your customers I would use social media to celebrate my customers. I would say, “Here I am with so and so. I’m so proud of them. They were able to accomplish this amazing thing.”

The guide is always positioning himself in two ways: Empathetic toward their customer’s concerns and as authoritative and competent in solving their customer’s problem.

When you ask Dave Ramsey what is his story he will say, “Well, 30 years ago I went bankrupt because I just used stupid financial practices. Then I actually got smart and



created a really simple framework I could live by. Now I'm rich and I can help you get rich too."

Everybody thinks Dave's story is really amazing. But Dave didn't tell you who he was married to. He didn't tell you how many kids he has. He didn't tell you where he went to school. He didn't tell you his story at all.

What he told you was he really cares about you, identifies with you, has had troubles too but doesn't have those troubles anymore because he got smart, and he can get you out of your troubles if you trust him.

That's guide positioning. That's what Dave does.

AMY: These examples are so good. You must have done this a few times before. That's so good. I wanted you to dive deep into that hero/guide relationship so I'm glad you did. But keep going on the framework.

DONALD: After we position ourselves as the guide it's important to give customers a plan. This is what you'll see a guide in a movie do. Obie Wan or Yoda will say, "You've got to get in an x-wing fighter. You've got to ride through the trench in the Death Star. Then, you've got to fire the photon torpedo through the hole in the Death Star."

I know that it's a photon torpedo because I got letters from people explaining.

AMY: I have never even heard of that but, okay.

DONALD: They get a plan. It's usually three or four steps, something easy. It gives a sense of clarity about what the movie is about. I've noticed that when a financial advisor says they can really help you navigate the ball to market, "Let's get together Thursday," they don't do very much business.

When the financial advisor says, "I could really help you navigate this ball to market. I do that in three steps: 1) I meet with you and analyze your dreams and goals, 2) I give you a custom strategy report you can use to navigate this stuff, and 3) If you like, I can hold your hand and we can execute it together."

Whenever there's a three-step plan about how to do business with us the engagement increases. The reason is that human beings are designed to walk down paths.



If you and I come to the edge of a field, Amy, and we're going to for a walk and we're having great conversation and there's no sidewalk across that field we will literally walk around the field to stay on the sidewalk.

If there's a sidewalk going through the field, even if it's an S-curve sidewalk, you and I will walk on that sidewalk. The reality is we could just walk across the field but there is a mental resistance to doing that.

A lot of us say, "Hey, do business with us," and people are looking around asking where the path is, "Where's the sidewalk?"

What they are looking for is three steps. If you walk into a Carmax you will see the three steps to selling your car to Carmax, the three steps to buying a car from Carmax, the three steps to getting financing through Carmax. Why do you think they are using so many three-step plans?

It's because it works. It's a sidewalk that people will walk down. Let's go back to the framework. You want to identify something your customer wants, identify the problem you help them solve, position yourself as a guide, and give them a three-step or four-step path.

Five steps don't tend to work. Studies show that three and four works best. But you give them the three-step path and then the fifth part of the framework is to call them to action.

It's just amazing how many people mess this up on their website. You need a direct call to action that says, "Buy now." It could say "Schedule an appointment," or it can say something that is direct. It needs to be something they can accept or reject.

That call to action needs to be crystal clear. It should even be a different color on your website. It should not say, "Get Started" or "Learn More." That is very passive language. When we don't have a direct call to action we are saying, "I invite you to do business with me but I really don't believe in my product very much so I'm going to use some passive language here. But I really could use the money so if you feel like buying that would be okay with me."

Who is going to do business with that person? If you can actually solve my problem have confidence and say, "Hey listen, you don't need to struggle with this. Buy this right now and you won't have to struggle with it."



It's that kind of confidence. We need a direct call to action.

Finally, the sixth and seventh part of the framework are the stakes. You need to tell me what I'm not going to get, what I'm going to lose, what I'm going to miss out on, how terrible my life will be if I don't buy your product, and you need to tell me how great my life will be and what my life will look like if I do buy your product.

We call that success and failure. That puts stakes in the game. If you remove the stakes from a story the story is actually over. If Liam Neeson is flying over to rescue his daughter and she's strapped to a bomb and 50 minutes into the movie the police go to Liam and say, "Your daughter is strapped to a bomb but we know for a fact that this bomb is a dud and it's not going to blow up," and then he spends the next 45 minutes trying to disarm the bomb we ruin the movie.

There are no stakes. There is nothing that can be lost so we've got to explain to people, "Here's what can be won and here's what can be lost if you do or do not buy my product."

These are not equal parts. If you overdo the failure part you will turn customers off but if it's not there they aren't going to be interested in the story. If you overdo it you're going to turn customers off. However, a vision of their success or what life will look like if they buy your product...you can overdo that all day long.

You can keep talking about it and you're going to be fine. You kind of have to read the book to understand the nuances of the framework but that's the basic gist of the framework itself.

AMY: I recommend this book to everybody listening right now and I'm going to link to it in the show notes. This is a must for every online marketer, every marketer out there but I've got the online marketers so, for sure, you've got to read the book.

I'm going to give you something very specific to the people that are listening right now. As you likely know, I help people create digital course businesses. They are building businesses where the main source of their revenue is selling digital courses.

One thing that my students struggle with, especially when they are in the throes of creating their online course, is clarifying their course promise (If you buy my course this is what you will get from it. This is my promise, these are the results that you will get).



I recently did a two-day live workshop literally days ago. People came and they were supposed to come with their course idea solidified, their outline solidified, and their course promise solidified. We were going from there.

We really got hung up with a lot of people because they just couldn't solidify that course promise. They felt confused and overwhelmed by it. They couldn't get clarity.

I was wondering if you could offer some words of advice. Why do you think people would get stuck in that area?

DONALD: I think because they are so close to it. Lee LeFever in his book, The Art of Explanation, which is a wonderful book, he talks about the curse of knowledge. You are so close to what you offer that you are projecting your understanding of it to other people.

They don't understand. We have a mantra at StoryBrand: If you confuse you lose. The answer to confusion is always "no". When people are so close to what they offer they tend to be either really vague or they speak inside language.

I'm amazed. I'll actually say to somebody, "Do you think on a scale of 1-10 that your message is really clear, from 1-10 with ten being clear?"

They will say they are a 10. I will tell them to come up in front of the group. I have no idea what they offer but ask them to tell me what they offer. They will say, "Nutritional packages that allow equestrian products to flourish."

AMY: Exactly! Yes.

DONALD: I'll say, "Hold on. Back up. You offer what?" Equestrian products? I will ask them what they are talking about and they will tell me it's a supplement that you sprinkle on horse food that lets a horse live another year longer than normal.

I'm like, just say that! That's exactly what you need to say. But you know, Amy, you and I know from writing books that it's usually the second or third pass where you actually get to the clear part and I would hate for your readers to feel like they just aren't good at this.

Every writer has to write and rewrite and rewrite. That's why we go to somebody like you. You're helping us figure it out so don't be discouraged. That's just the writing life. But the beautiful thing is every calorie that you burn clarifying your message is a



calorie your customer doesn't have to burn to understand it, that process of actually having a unique offer.

You're going to have a unique offer that everybody can understand. What that does and the reason it's so important is it invites everybody into a story. I can live this story that the person is inviting me into and I say to stop selling things and start inviting people into the very clear stories.

It starts with one clear offer and don't use inside language. Here's the thing, test it at a Starbucks. You're standing in line at Starbucks. There are strangers all around. Say, "I'm so sorry to bother you but I'm actually starting a business. Can I tell you what I offer and then ask you if you understand?"

Then tell them you offer supplemental equestrian packages...At the point where somebody says, "Wow, that's actually very interesting. My uncle owns a horse. Can I get your card?" Now you're onto it.

AMY: So true. I love this example. It's so funny. But I also get my students to say something like, "I help middle-aged women become happier."

DONALD: Think about it. You could be a gym. You could be an executive coach. You could be a nanny. You could be an at-home chef. It doesn't work. Let's say I meet an at-home chef at a party. There are two at-home chefs at the same party.

I say to the person, "What do you do?" They say they are an at-home chef. That's interesting. Then I meet the second at-home chef and ask them what they do.

They say, "You know how most families don't have the time to cook healthy meals? I'm an at-home chef."

AMY: Oh my gosh. This is so good you guys. I hope you heard that. It's so clear.

DONALD: It's so clear. That's the key. Everybody's mind has to click and say, "Oh my gosh, I need that."

AMY: Yes. That's a really good test. The next time you're at Starbucks and you tell somebody what you do if that person...This is another thing, let's say you get lucky enough to stand next to someone who is your ideal customer avatar and if that is your ideal customer avatar and they say, "Oh I need that," then you know they get it.



If they are your avatar and they do not say, “I need that,” we’ve got to clean up that promise. I love that you give permission to people to have a few iterations of that because that is very normal.

DONALD: You just want to test it, test it, test it. Until you go through ten or 12 of them you’re probably not there. The real key, when you’re really good, is when somebody says, “Wow, I don’t even need that but I want it.”

AMY: Yes, that’s when you’ve hit the jackpot.

DONALD: That’s when you’ve hit the jackpot.

AMY: That’s so very true. I’m going to switch gears just a little bit but we’re still on the framework. I love that your framework makes talking to our ideal customer avatar so much easier. My listeners are constantly creating content if they are following my framework of creating content every single week on their blog or podcast or on their video show.

Sometimes they sit down and are ready to write their weekly blog and it’s blank. Their mind is literally blank. They need help. This comes up a lot. I know you have three magical, yet simple, questions based on this framework that can help them. Can you walk us through them?

DONALD: Sure. If you want to I have a piece of software that’s call a brand script. If you go to <http://mystorybrand.com> it’s a free piece of software and you literally type in the seven categories and you can actually use it to create a blog post.

Let’s actually get much more simple than that.

AMY: Tell everyone real fast, where do they go again?

DONALD: They just go to <http://mystorybrand.com>. It’s a beautiful piece of software and it has helped I don’t know how many thousands of businesses clarify their message. I actually use it to write books. I use it to give keynote speeches. I use it to outline blog posts.

It will do most of the work for you. You literally just fill it out. In the note section you put it all together and that’s your blog post. It’s super, super simple.



AMY: So good.

DONALD: There's that tool. But then let's say we want to make something even shorter. Really, what you want to do to sort of condense your company offering into a short story there are three parts to it. One is problem. The next is product or solution. Then results.

If I wanted to explain my company I want to follow that order. If somebody says, "Don, what do you do?" I say most business leaders are so close to their products they don't know how to talk about them to get customers to listen.

I have a framework that helps them clarify their message so when they use the new message their company starts growing again. If I say that to people on an airplane I've got to do two hours of consulting because they are interested.

Why? The problem hooks you. The product is the solution to the problem. The result is the happy life that I get to live because I used your product. So you really want to put those three things together and that's a very short, cohesive narrative that hooks an audience.

It's the same formula that screenwriters often use to explain their screenplay. When you are actually flipping through your iPhone wonder what movie to go see at the theater tonight you look for something familiar.

You know that actor and then you read about it. That's usually a one-liner. It is usually that so-and-so struggled with "this" but then he met somebody who helped him with "this" and then hopefully it worked out for the best. It is a problem, product, solution.

That narrative formula is a well-worn path in the human brain and when you use that to describe your products you're speaking a language that the brain already understands.

AMY: That's so good. So how does this translate into an Instagram post?

DONALD: You really kind of want to do the same thing. Just try this, variations of this. The next time you post on Instagram make yourself start the Instagram post with these words, "We all struggle with..." or, "Such and such can sometimes be a challenge," or, "Nobody likes it when this happens," or, "Like you, I often get frustrated with this."



In other words, start with a problem. Then actually talk about something that happened that helped you realize the solution to that problem. Then at the end just say, “I hope that helps you too. It certainly helped me.” Just do that, that simple formula.

The other thing I would do with Instagram posts as a brand and in your shoes, I would celebrate customer’s victories. Let’s actually reverse engineer the power of Dave Ramsey’s \$200 million financial advice firm here in Nashville.

What does Dave do? Every day on the air he has multiple people on the air who do what is called a Debt-Free Scream. They come on the air and say, “We’re debt free.” Dave says, “Nancy and Joe have paid off \$58,000 in debt in 24 months. Amazing. Nancy and Joe, tell me, how hard was it? What sacrifices did you create?”

Then he has them do the Debt-Free Scream. What Dave is doing everyday on the show is put a climactic scene in the mind of three million radio listeners. There is a climactic scene they can experience where their troubles went away in one moment and the guide, Dave Ramsey, actually affirms them and says, “You have transformed.”

He always says, “Very smart. Smart couple. Smart couple.” He is saying the story you went through and have just ended with the Debt-Free Scream has changed you and made you a better person.

What is the lesson we can all learn? Celebrate your customer’s successes on your social media because everybody else will say, “I want that to happen to me too.” They are being invited into a story where they can follow that other customer who has seen the success and experience a success through whatever it is that you offer.

AMY: This is so freaking good. Do you know Stu McLaren?

DONALD: I do. I actually flew to Toronto and spent some time with him. He’s a wonderful human being.

AMY: Did you spend time with him about membership sites or just for something else?

DONALD: We just went up and did a day’s worth of consulting with Stu and he changed our lives. It was wonderful.



AMY: Okay, so did we and he changed our lives. We did that not too long ago. He gave me an idea that was worth half a million dollars. It was amazing so the guy is incredible. And he's a dear friend of mine.

It's so funny you were there as well, but while I was there he taught me the difference (and this is the first time I really understood this) between a testimonial, which I look like the hero, and the story of my students where they become the hero.

DONALD: That's right.

AMY: I just realized, I'm sure he got this idea from you or there was something there because it's such a subtle shift that has made all the difference for us.

DONALD: It is an amazing thing. Instead of customers talking about how great you are customers talk about the success they have had because they used your product and what life looks like now. It's a mini case study rather than a testimonial.

AMY: Yes. That's what we're doing. We're getting ready for a big launch in January and we keep saying we need more stories instead of finding all of the testimonials. It's really fun for me to tell people's stories.

DONALD: It is so much more fun. Everybody thinks they have to talk about themselves. They don't. They actually don't want to talk about themselves. It gets old. I get bored with myself. I am excited about you. I get excited about what you're doing and what you're accomplishing.

You will love this. We always have a couple of themes for every year at StoryBrand, we all have to do a lot of work but there's one thing we want to keep in the back of our mind the whole year. One of the themes we're considering for 2019 is, "Stories of transformation."

We want to talk about who our customers were and who they are now and how they have transformed to become better versions of themselves and their businesses become better versions of their own business and those kinds of things.

It's those stories of transformation. The reason we want to do that, Bridget Jones is desperate at the beginning of the movie and she wants to be in a relationship with her boss but her boss is a jerk. At the end of the movie she realizes she is worth way more than that guy. She can do way better than that guy. She transforms.



Luke Skywalker wonders if he has what it takes to be a Jedi. At the end he is getting a medal and he's confident that he has what it takes to be a Jedi.

Daniel, in the Karate Kid, doesn't know if he has what it takes to beat the bully. At the end he's very confident. Everybody is looking for transformation. It's beautiful for us as brands to participate in our customer's transformation to become better versions of themselves.

Then when we turn around and tell the story of their transformation, not our greatness as a company, other people want to experience that same transformation and they begin to engage our brand.

AMY: So good! This is so good. And you know how to wrap up a podcast because you ended on the perfect note. I thought I loved this whole idea of StoryBrand before you got on this podcast. Now I might be a little bit obsessed so thank you for this.

I really want all of my listeners to, if you haven't already, read Donald Miller's book, Building a StoryBrand. I will link to it in the show notes and I just can't thank you enough. Thank you so much for coming on the show and being so generous with your examples and stories and insights.

DONALD: Amy, you have transformed our company and I'm so grateful. As much fun as this has been I want to make it very clear I feel like the hero and you are my guide and I am so grateful for you.

AMY: That is the nicest thing. You just made my whole day! Thanks so much for coming and thanks so much for that.

DONALD: God bless. Bye now.

AMY: There you have it. Did you love this interview as much as I did? Come on, the guy is just brilliant. I love listening to him. I want to reread the book. I want to go to his StoryBrand trainings. He has them all over the U.S. and probably outside of the U.S. as well.

You've got to check out Donald Miller and StoryBrand. I'll make sure to link to his book and to his website in the show notes.

Coming up next week, to continue in the vein of creating compelling content that our ideal customer avatars will pay attention to don't miss next week's episode with my



guest Melissa Cassera. Like Donald, Melissa is a huge fan of using storytelling to create compelling content.

Her website actually tells her visitors that she'll teach them how to create content and offers that send their fans into a complete and total frenzy. Who wouldn't want that, right?

I know that she delivers on this promise. You're going to love next week's episode as well. I'll see you here same time, same place.

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Alright guys, I'll see you soon. Bye for now.