

Utilizing Storytelling in Promoting Your Ministry Brand

The most effective mass media is the stories we tell and conversations we have with each other. If you don't believe me, let me prove it to you.

We've all seen an endless number of ads for cars, car dealerships, and the like. If I think really hard, I may be able to remember a few of them. Let's see... I remember the [Volkswagen ad with Kid Vader](#) (but mostly because it was so talked-about, not because I thought it was so effective). I remember the [Toyota Celica ads](#) in which the senior citizen sees a parked Celica and yells, "Slow down. This is a neighborhood!" If you gave me 10 more minutes, I could probably think of another three to five, but not much more. Considering how many car ads I've seen in my lifetime, that's a pretty low recall rate, and I can assure you that none of them influenced my purchase decisions.

Recently I watched a six-minute video in which a young man, who happens to be too young to drive, tells a story that takes place in a [Honda CR-V](#). His story nearly brought me to tears, then [spoiler alert] had me rejoicing at the end. I was smiling ear to ear, and immediately shared on every social network I could. If you haven't heard Noah St. John's story, you should now.

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THE POWER OF STORY

I own a Ford Escape now and love it. Though I had searched for an SUV, a Honda CR-V never entered my consideration set. It just didn't seem to be a fit for me.

But I find myself thinking of Noah and his family's CR-V lately. My mileage is about to exceed 50,000, and I wonder where I'll be at 100,000, and I think of Noah's story. When my wife and I were at Babies"R"Us this past weekend to register for her shower, we looked at car seats, and I thought of it again. I wondered what kinds of practices I'd bring my child to. I wondered if my Escape would be as cherished as his CR-V. Granted, the video is fresh in my mind, but I watched a lot of TV yesterday and I couldn't tell you five commercials I saw.

[Stories are so powerful because they move us emotionally](#) (which ads also can but rarely do). We may not remember the story forever, but we certainly remember it longer than we do [that \\$4 million Times Square Billboard or Super Bowl ad](#).

THE BEST ADS AREN'T ADS

At the end of last year, our company put together a list of the best ads of 2012, and go figure, the best ads of 2012 weren't ads. I'll argue that Noah's story is going to be Honda's best CR-V ad of 2013—one the company didn't pay a single dime for, and one that isn't even an ad. It's a story.

If the non-ad does come out on top, it will be no surprise. The most shareable media is most often owned or earned, and that's because effective advertising isn't about exposure. **It's about conversations.** Since 99.99 percent of the time, the conversations people have with one another are not about your ad (or anyone else's), only the most relevant, entertaining and informative content will be remembered and shared.

HONDA'S REACTION

I'm actually surprised by Honda's reaction. If I were Honda, I'd be embracing Noah's performance in a bear hug. But other than earning [a passing mention on Honda's Facebook page](#), Noah's story (which has received nearly half a million views) was practically ignored by the brand. Granted, it's still early. Honda may have larger plans. Maybe it'll record his performance in a real studio and use it as a long-form ad. Or maybe it's distancing itself from the story because it features a two-mother (and no-father) household. I don't know.

Unfortunately, there's not much a brand can do to create stories like this one. That's what makes them so effective—their authenticity. But brands have to implement ways to find customer stories like Noah's and embrace them in a way that will amplify the message and [allow it to be more searchable and shareable](#). It also requires a certain commitment to quality. If the CR-V constantly broke down and was unreliable, they may have never it might never have made it to 100K.

LEAN FORWARD

Whatever the case may be, Noah's story is 100 percent authentic. It's from Noah, not from a brand. That allows audiences to uncross their arms and lean forward, accepting the story into their lives even if it contains a brand, because the story isn't from the brand.

Most people don't have 30-seconds to be interrupted by a commercial or held hostage by a pre-roll ad, but nearly a half-million people had six minutes to hear Noah's story. Heck, I had 90-minutes to blog about it.

The greatest brand stories are the ones told by the brand's fans.

Read more from Jon [here](#).