

Kathy Klotz-Guest

[Keeping it Human™](#)

A Touch of

HUMOR



to Humanize

(and **POW!** Kick Your Competition's Butt!)

Jan 2014, Vol. 3

'An Executive's Bedtime Guide to Customer Storytelling' Series

About This Book: *Lighten Up Your B2B Content Marketing in 2014*



Your audience is deluged every day with ‘me-too’ messaging. It’s a content crap-ocalypse out there.

This is why humor matters: it’s a pattern disruption device that humanizes, cuts clutter, and shows that you are *different*.

B2B doesn’t mean ‘blah to boring’ and it’s no longer an excuse for not being human! All business is between people.

So let go, lighten up, and get results. I hope you enjoy the examples here, and that they inspire your own creativity. Hey, humor is human. And 92.3% of people are, in fact, human!

-Kathy Klotz-Guest (Kathy@keepingithuman.com)

Humor *Is* Human

Enough said. We know emotions and logic both matter in the buyer’s journey. The very first few touches are about creating conversation, not selling.

As content marketing explodes, so too, does the volume of noise. About 90% of content has been created in the last 2 years alone (source: IBM). Most of this content lacks context and meaning, and the amount of ‘stuff’ being created isn’t slowing down. And as content proliferates, trust in organizations has steadily declined over the years (Edelman Trust Barometer). So, too, has the average attention span. Consider this: you have about 7 seconds to grab attention. That’s it.

To date, there haven’t been many great examples of humor in B2B. I believe that will change, as the importance of great branded content grows. And, according to a global Nielsen Survey of Trust in Advertising conducted in September 2013 (58 countries), almost half (47%) of respondents said that humor resonates more than any content approach.

Humor is about the connection. Laughter lowers the intellectual shield your busy prospects have up all day just to survive the messaging onslaught. *Humor opens up a space for connecting because it disrupts the expected pattern.* As a marketer, storyteller, and improviser, I know humor is a powerful way to connect.

Show Empathy: The Truth is Funny

Humor (funny + truth + empathy) = attention that starts conversations.

To grab attention, you need to connect on an emotional level by tying your company and offering to a real human challenge your prospect has. When you parody a real challenge by taking it to extremes – the height of exaggeration—you show customers you get it. Hey, the truth is funny, so start there.

In improvisation, we call this “slice of life” because it’s the relatable, universal everyday stuff. Start with the pain points of your industry, audience, and of your ideal customers. What drives customers in your industry crazy? Relationships can be a great way to explore the comical truth. [In 2012, I wrote about a supply-chain management software company called Kinaxis.](#) It has a very funny video that parodies the ‘awkward’ relationship between a vendor and customer by comparing it to a romantic one! We may date; yet, *that* doesn’t mean we’re loyal.

Another one of my favorite videos that focuses on truth is [Adobe’s BS detector](#). Each of these videos celebrates a truth that your audience recognizes.



Source: [Kinaxis.com](#)

A Touch of Levity – Wit and Personality Work

Comedy is great, yet even wit makes a difference. A great starting point, then, can be to think witty, not comedy.

One of the things that LinkedIn did recently was to render its top influencers as holiday snowmen! Jason Miller and the gang at LinkedIn created an [ebook for download featuring top marketing influencers](#) in all their snowperson (to be fair!) avatar glory. It shows a lighthearted personality and it’s a great contrast to an otherwise “serious” business-driven networking site. Even making your audience smile is enough to make them remember you. So if you’re a bit unsure where to start and the thought of comedy is intimidating (and it can be), think ‘witty’ first. Have fun and be playful.



Source: LinkedIn

Burn the Script!

Forget features, because they are forgettable. [Your story is always bigger than your products and services](#). Drop the product and talking points. Instead, put your product in different and funny situations. In its [Valentine's Day](#) video, Cisco comically depicted its router as yet another way to tell your lady you love her.

Serena Software's debut ["Mash It"](#) video is an oldie, yet goodie. Serena was new to the world and it needed to generate conversation about its new software that allowed users to create "mash ups." The video features a bleep every time 'mash up' is said – *implying* 'dirty talk' in the course of otherwise pretty innocent, boring conversation. It's all about the power of intentional suggestion. This video generated traffic, business, and awards for the company. It's still one of my favorites. A video focused on features and benefits would never have generated the same amount of conversation!

Celebrate Your Audience

Intel's ['Geek' humor](#) video is a great example of speaking directly to – and celebrating – your audience. Intel knows it has a smart following of geeks who are proud of their geekdom! Intel also knows that it makes the stuff that makes geeks superheroes to the world. [Your products and services are the weapon – or maybe the sidekick – that enables the hero to do amazing things](#).

Besides video, visual storytelling with images is becoming increasingly important. Intel has also done some fun stuff here too as the images and headlines below illustrate.



Source: Intel



With great power comes great responsibility. #Spiderman
pic.twitter.com/6VXJhrj9rw

Reply Retweet Favorite More



Source: Intel

Tackle Your Customer's Problem and Go Way Over the Top

Scofield Edit has [a great video from 2009 parodying the client-vendor relationship](#) much like the Kinaxis video. I first wrote about this video back in 2009 when it was fresh. It still works!

The company took a universal issue its customers can relate to – not being valued by some customers who want more for less – and took it to a humorous extreme. What if you went to your hair stylist and asked for a free haircut to “test drive?” That’s exactly what I – and many others – love about this video which received over 1 million views within weeks of its launch.

Fish out of Water

Another way to have some fun is to use incongruity: I call this the ‘fish out of water’ concept. Imagine a portable GPS with an identity crisis in the wake of mobile apps that render it obsolete! What would your product or service say in completely absurd situations? A great demonstration of comical contrasts is the Sprint commercial featuring actors Malcolm McDowell and James Earl Jones reading texts written by teens. Here are two award-winning actors doing dramatic readings of texts sent by teenage girls with a penchant for well, teen-isms: “OMG. Adorbs...Totally Hottie McHotterson...”

Historical Can be Hysterical

Or, put your product or service into a past or future historical period. What would your product be in the future and how would it be used? What would it have looked like in the past, for example, the Renaissance, or the Paleolithic era? The incongruity changes the context and discussion for your products and services. What would a caveman or a medieval knight do with your app, for example? Explore that relationship and have some fun with it. Comedy is heightened by extreme contrasts.

Put the Fun in Funnel



Consider a comic book or coloring book. Marketo did this successfully with its [Big Activity Coloring Book](#): “Introducing the Big Marketing Activity Coloring Book!...30 pages of pure, unadulterated marketing activity fun!” And Kapost, a content marketing platform, has created a several great comic books making the user the hero of the marketing story.

Source: Marketo

Real Stories with a Fun Twist

Real stories told in a fun way by real people get noticed, too. The most important thing is to show a personality and focus on what the product or service allows the client to do. Leave the jargon-monoxide poisoning and ‘feature-speak’ at home, however.

In a series of 3 videos that just launched in December 2013, called [Fast Innovation and The Slow Waiter](#), Cisco video funnyman Tim Washer (and the Cisco Voice of the Customer team) has fun conversations (no jargon!) with real CIOs, including those from Safeway, Western Union, and from Grupo Modelo.

Tim plays the slow and funny waiter who asks questions of the CIO over dinner about what they do and how Cisco technology helps them. By creating a fun, casual atmosphere for a real conversation, Tim and company allow the CIOs to shine. The fun will come; concentrate on having a human conversation that allows your customer to talk about how they make their clients look good. By doing so, you make *your* clients look good.



Tim also peppers in the funny: “Spray cheese – that’s innovation that matters” and “I have an idea – square beer cans! Can you hook me up with the R&D team? Let’s make that happen.” These conversations are something every B2B company can do. So stop causing audience Jargonstipation and lighten up with conversational stories.

[Listen to my recent podcast with Tim about adding Humor to B2B!](#)

Stories are the starting point for any great humor. If you are considering video, stories matter more than production values every time. When was the last time someone forwarded a video, adding, “Hey check out the production values!?” Never.

Surprise and Parody



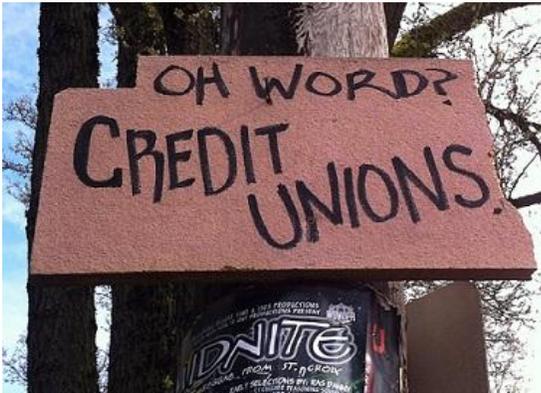
Turn expectations upside down. That’s how IBM approached the new \$100K mainframe market back in 2006 with its successful video series, the “Art of the Sale.”

IBM used the element of surprise to change market perceptions as well as to attract press. One of the reasons the video series from IBM was so well-received was that it shattered the company’s previous image as being stodgy and out of touch.

Source: IBM. Pictured above is Tim Washer from the “Art of the Sale” (Tim is now at Cisco).

No one expected self-parody from IBM – it was the preemptive element of surprise that changed the conversation. That difference in perception creates value; it is a precursor to financial ROI because it generates traffic and earned media coverage. Parody shows that you can lighten up and that you believe in your product enough to acknowledge where you’ve been. Here’s an important note: to use parody, you have to have credibility. In this case, IBM

had created a lower-priced, better product and it had already begun to change its reputation from hardware to a people-oriented company focused on software, solutions and services.



Recently, I had a credit union client. It had to attract Millennials to grow its customer base. The challenge: many Millennials don't know about credit unions, or have negative opinions of them. They are into convenience and technology, not old-school, in-person customer service. So we created a campaign "When Millennials Rule the World" (notice when *not* if)! We put twenty-somethings in bank VP roles and in customer service VP roles, and let them improvise how *they* would run a bank.

The results were hysterical. Then, we asked Millennials to submit their ideas online on how they would run the bank. This audience loves humor and the campaign successfully up-ended perceptions about credit unions (particularly this one) being uncool and low-tech.

What would be unexpected from your company? Find that and go 'there.' Surprise is a tremendous weapon precisely because it can change perceptions in a powerful way.

Embrace Imperfection



Imperfect is great – it's human. For a client that sold kids' gifts, we created a campaign to make moms laugh. Moms have enough to worry about. They shouldn't have to worry about last minute gifts for birthday parties, although they do. So what happens when a busy, harried mom orders a kid's gift (a personalized book for son's friend) and also buys "Fifty Shades of Grey" for *her* friend? She mixes up the gift tags, leaving one 9-yr-old birthday boy a little more than just confused.

Perfect is boring. Busy moms have enough pressure to do everything 'right', so your story doesn't need a contrived perfect ending; it needs a *real* one. Reality is funny because crap happens. Imagine having some fun with your B2B product this way? Hey, we can get you that great product; however, it's up to *you* to make sure it's used correctly!

Moving Forward

Vet Internally

Marketing is a lot of art. Fail fast, cheaply, and internally first. Creativity by committee will kill humor quickly. However, you can test content internally first. Sales conferences and

organizations are great places to start. You'll know pretty quickly whether your material works or not before you invest more time and money. Humor is a visceral feeling, not a 'rational' justification. If people don't laugh, it's back to the drawing board.

Get Thee to a Great 'Writery'

Humor is a craft. Hire someone who understands storytelling and joke writing. Just because marketing agencies understand marketing doesn't mean they will understand how to write with humor. Screenwriting departments at universities can be a great place to start looking.

Measure the 'Right' Things

Unlike with consumer products, B2B organizations sell products and services that have a longer, more complex buying cycle involving more risk. Humor isn't going to drive sales directly. However, it can have a tremendous indirect effect. Humor gains the attention of press and influencers to generate PR and traffic. And, of course, it can be a great conversation starter for salespeople, who need to grab attention from uber-busy prospects.

Start Somewhere, Even if it's Small

"Safe" is the new risky. B2B marketing needs a human touch if it is to stand out. There is risk in any campaign. Get over it. Most B2B companies are still struggling with ways to humanize their messages. So, rather than begin with a large video campaign, start with smaller content for internal consumption, vet it, and then re-purpose externally. Being in B2B is not an excuse to not be human. In age of increasing amounts and complexity of information, your audience is hungry for connection. So give it to them and show that you are a different kind of company.

Be playful, and start with 'fun.' After all, you can't spell funny without it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



An improviser, storyteller, and marketer, Kathy Klotz-Guest MA, MBA, is the Founder of San Jose, CA-based marketing and communications firm, *Keeping it Human*. Kathy helps executive teams tell their best stories to the world in human-speak, a language that customers trust. When not kicking jargon's ass, she runs the *Jargonorrhea Live* marketing podcast. Her clients have included Yahoo!, Autodesk, Cisco, and United Way. Her favorite audience is still her little dude, Evan, who laughs himself silly every day. Trained at ComedySportz and at BATS, she still plays weekly with her stage partners in crime.

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