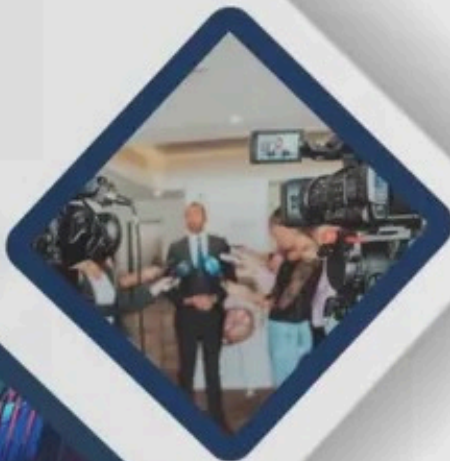




# Strategic Storytelling

Defined



**Bill Mellander**  
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Managing Strategist and Chief Storyteller

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*Strategic Storytelling is more than just a communication framework. It is a thought process that establishes a foundation for how an organization thinks about itself.*

Strategic storytelling is the purposeful identification and alignment of stories around a common objective. The objective can be anything, ranging from the holistic, like an organization's mission and vision, to the specific goals of individual projects.

The sum of the stories you tell creates your organizational narrative. The narrative is the overarching theme that ties all your stories together - it is defined by the stories you tell and defines your storytelling. In many ways, the narrative is your organizational mission and values.

The term *strategic storytelling* came to prominence in the business world around 2015. The architecture behind it has been around much longer, seen in ideas like data mining to showcase market knowledge. Many early adopters of strategic storytelling trace their communication roots back to the recognition of data mining as a way to illustrate institutionally specific knowledge that could resonate with stakeholders.

Strategic storytelling amplifies these concepts of resonate messaging. It is an evolution, heightening the importance of message consistency. Storytelling incorporates the broader themes of who you are and why you do what you do, into every communication and action. Strategic storytelling doesn't just ensure what we're saying is consistent; it combines consistency with purpose.

A narrative must be real. This is what separates your narrative from mission and values. They can and should be interchangeable, but that is not always the case. Consultants often craft an organization's mission statement. Or, it is the product of a lengthy, off-site team meeting with bad deli sandwiches. The statements end up not being attached to anything real. They reflect what those assembled believe your mission should be, as opposed to what it is. Your narrative comes to life through the stories you tell about the real things that define your work.

So, **how do we know that our narrative is true?** By asking the right questions. You don't write your narrative; your stories do. The questions you ask to identify your stories shape what the narrative becomes: **What** do you do, **why** do you do it, and **how** do you do what you do?

These three questions combine with three criteria for determining the motivation or reason to tell your story. This forms the foundation of strategic storytelling architecture.

Resonance matters in strategic storytelling. Your three criteria for stakeholder resonance are:

**Timely** - relates to something current, happening now.

**Actionable** - motivates your stakeholders to care or take action.

**Meaningful** - transforms your knowledge into emotional experiences that foster empathy, connection, and understanding.



*What, why, and how* are the three key questions that drive strategic storytelling. Asking these three questions of your team and building your stories around them gives you a tangible base on which to build stories that illustrate your reason and purpose.

# 3 questions

**W**hat  
Go deeper than the physically apparent. Identify the experiential vision of what someone sees you doing.

**H**ow  
In what ways are your techniques different or better than others?

**W**hy  
Understand the different levels of your motivation. There is a why behind everything you do.

Ensure your reason and purpose resonate by applying the three criteria to determine when and how you tell your story. This is the structure phase of the strategic storytelling process.

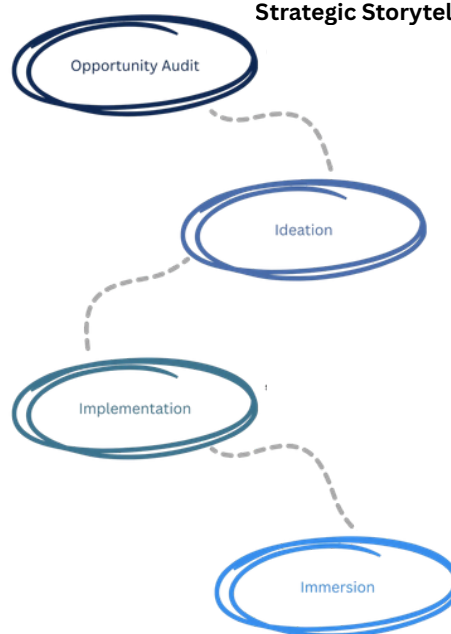
Storytellers like Pinnacle Communications Group create their own variations on strategic storytelling steps to exemplify their own approach. The essentials of the strategic storytelling process are comprised of three pillars.

The process begins with strategy development. Before telling your story, it is necessary to **establish the foundation**. This is what differentiates strategic storytelling from one-off communications. This is where you ask *what, why, and how*. Consider your stakeholders. Identify the target audience. Determine what action you want stakeholders to take. Frame the core message.

The second pillar is **structuring the story/narrative**. This phase includes a range of things, from identifying themes within your organization that correlate to your desired objectives and the three criteria to writing compelling content. Map out an editorial calendar to present the stories that build your narrative. .

The third pillar is **telling the story**. This is about more than just getting your message across through the appropriate vehicles. It includes measuring the reaction related to the desired outcomes and evolving the message to optimize impact.

The Pinnacle Pathway for Strategic Storytelling



Your narrative comes from within and should live, ongoing, within the organization. Your narrative is a guiding principle. Your narrative can become a decision-making filter. In this sense, you see the similarity to mission and vision.

This is a piece of the **consistency** component of strategic storytelling. Everything that your organization says and does should reflect your narrative. This should be an easy step. The behaviors that were living in your organization were what shaped the narrative, but it is not always simple. Immersion of your realized narrative requires focus and commitment to living into what made you who you are.

Ways to immerse your narrative internally include:

- Decision-making guide - risk management filter
- Reinforce team behaviors that reflect the narrative
- Procedural and workflow alignment



Strategic storytelling is the intentional use of narrative internally and externally to align, engage, and influence stakeholders, moving them from awareness to action. It bridges internal culture and external brand by creating a shared vision.

*Tell your story, live your story.*

# Strategic Storytelling Defined

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## **Bill Mellander, Pinnacle Communications Group Managing Strategist and Chief Storyteller**

Bill is an innovative leader and adept strategic storyteller. For twenty-five years, he has helped organizations identify and leverage their narratives. His strategic storytelling architecture identifies meaningful, actionable, and timely opportunities that are the foundation for powerful calls to action.

Bill's background is diverse. A Fortune 50 communications leader working with public and private sector partners. He began his career as a television journalist. Bill left television and became a hurricane chaser as the National Catastrophe Media Relations Manager for Allstate Insurance Company, recognized nationally as an expert in catastrophe communication management. He has since worked with organizations in eleven countries to implement frameworks for strategic storytelling.

# Notes