

Storytelling 301: Site Content as Story

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Written by: [Isla McKetta](#)

Feel like you're already over the term "storytelling" without ever really having understood how you can successfully apply it to your writing? You aren't alone. Like so much jargon, this amazingly powerful and useful word is in serious danger of being consigned to LinkedIn profiles and marketing parody.

Even storytelling guru [Annette Simmons is over the way we're teaching storytelling as a content cure-all](#).

"We need to stop 'telling stories' that oxytocin or the magic of a 'narrative arc' explain storytelling. It's much bigger than science can explain. Storytelling is an art – subjective, emotional, and as variable as humanity is diverse." - Annette Simmons

We can do better. Instead of yet another "stories=good" post, today we're going to apply the logic of storytelling to site content. After you've read the last word, you should have the tools you need to draw a concrete map of how to tell your brand "story" with site content.

Note: I'm not knocking storytelling here. I'm a novelist. That's illegal. I am knocking throwing the latest buzzword at our marketing and pretending like using the word makes us better at our jobs.

Why storytelling

I promised not to flog you with the "stories are engaging so be engaging by telling stories" line, but if we dig just a little deeper we can understand one of the concrete arguments for storytelling: **persuasion**.

In her compelling book, *The Story Factor*, Annette Simmons reminds us that we can throw facts and figures at people all day long, but stories hold the real power to change someone's mind.

"Your story needs to take [potential customers] on a tour of the aspects that step by step convinced you to believe so they can step by step come to believe the same things" - Annette Simmons

Take a moment to check this against your own experience. When was the last time someone truly shifted your perspective? If they did so using anything other than a story, it's okay to stop reading here and find a tactic that you think will work better. But my guess is that some sort of story was involved.

The six types of story

Simmons outlines [six types of stories](#) we can use as humans and marketers to overcome objections:



"Who I am" stories and **"why I am here"** stories establish the groundwork you need to build trust with your audience. They naturally assume you're in it for yourself and these stories allow you to share your motivations. If you get human enough, your audience might find common ground on which to connect with you.

Vision stories tell how things could be. This type of story shows your audience what's in it for them. If you're holding an all-hands meeting, your vision story might include a tale about how the company has triumphed over obstacles in the past. If you're marketing a product, your vision story might speak to a future state where a problem (that your product solves) no longer has to exist.

Teaching stories give your audience an opportunity to learn from a mistake without ever having to make it. They also help you shape that audience's understanding of the potential solutions available to them. For example, if I were to tell you that a site audit can help you understand all the content resources you have available to you and use Moz Content as my auditing tool, I'd be pointing you in the direction of a solution for you and also making it easy for you to choose our solution.

Values-in-action stories are similar to vision stories and teaching stories, but they focus on the core values you want to reinforce and provide examples. Simmons suggests focusing on positive value stories rather than "war stories." One way to do this would be if a wedding dress company that prided itself on proper etiquette wrote a blog post about a bridal consultant who hand-wrote a thank-you card to every bride who purchased a dress from her.

The final type of story, the **"I know what you are thinking"** story, allows you to neutralize concern without that concern ever being raised. It's relatively easy to anticipate an objection from your audience and to use this kind of story to get ahead of it.

Applying storytelling to site content

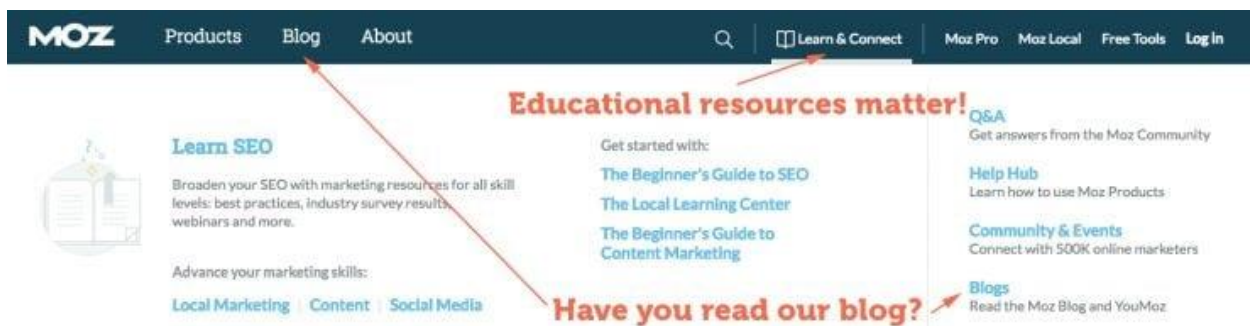
This is where I wish I had a gorgeous illustration of the marketing funnel and that I could neatly fit these six story types in and *presto change-o*, poof! Your site content is perfectly optimized for storytelling and conversion.

Alas, life is a little harder than that. But we can get a good sense of which types of content are best for telling which types of stories. I'll use Moz as an example because that's close to my heart.

Who we are and why we're here

Moz is about three things: helping people be better marketers, building a strong community, and being TAGFEE. Free educational content has been a huge part of who we are since the very beginning when Rand was blogging about everything from the Google Link Command to Sandbox. That strong community is here because all of you make it happen, and because we work to make TAGFEE happen every day.

You can see our desire to help people be better marketers and to connect with the community right up at the top of our site. Click on "Learn & Connect" to bring down a bucket of resources like our beginner's guides to SEO, Content Marketing, and Social Media, as well as our webinars, blog, and Q&A.



We also share who we are on our [about](#), [TAGFEE](#), and [team](#) pages.

You'll note that all of this content is front and center because it helps our audience get to know us. Our audience becomes acquainted with our slightly quirky personality through

our voice and the style of our imagery. We put our values out in the open for all to see so we can hold ourselves accountable and so our audience can know what to expect. And you can tell a lot about Moz by the fact that everyone who wants to be is listed on our team page (not just a selection of the top execs) and that each individual Mozzer's page has their own voice.

Uniform styling, customizable content

Felicia Crawford
Content Specialist - Blog Manager - Marketing Team

Classified Information

I spent my earliest years crawling under barbed wire fences to catch tadpoles and salamanders in the gloriously stinky pastures of Elmstead, living under the subtle yet pervasive threat of Mr. Farmer's wrath. In time, my family moved to Bellingham, nestled northward in a sweet valley by the sea. I wandered southward again to become a Husky, sold comfort shoes for a bit (see you wearing your tech supports today?), became an agent, and then landed happily at Moz! I have a strange knack for finding lost pets and rescuing wild animals. It's my hope that this will translate to a heap of good karma when it comes to my own personal zoo.



Felicia's playful, local, and loves animals

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Isla McKetta
Content Crafter - Marketing Team

What Isla does at Moz

A recovering content strategist, Isla is now a Content Crafter with the content team at Moz where she uses her interests in information hierarchy and user experience to research and write about the latest developments in inbound marketing. Having lived on three continents, she's a sucker for big ideas about how linguistics and culture shape online experiences.

What else does Isla do?

With an MFA in creative writing, Isla is the author of *Poible, 1384* and co-author of *Clear Out the Static in Your Aps: A Writer's Guide for Transforming Artifacts into Art*. She's also written for the LA Review of Books, Maple, and Architect Magazine.

When she's not writing, Isla can be found curled up with a book (fiction or poetry, please) or working in the garden with her husband while their dog supervises.

Isla wants you to know writing isn't just her day job



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Help your potential customers get to know you by sharing "who you are" and "why you're here" stories in the content and form of your home, about, and team pages.

Our vision

The homepage is a perfect place to introduce an audience to your vision story:




Products to Power Your Online Visibility.

Online marketing is complicated. Moz software makes it easy.

[See Moz Products](#)

The vision: Good marketing made easy

But to really shape their expectations about what life could be like if only they'd use your products, you'll want to flesh out that vision story in content such as product descriptions and white papers.



The vision story:
What you can accomplish

Determine which tactics work best.

Moz Content audits your website and uncovers top-performing topics, authors, and page types like videos, articles, or lists.

Let's say you're creating content about marketing. Should you focus on SEO videos or crank out pay-per-click guides? With Moz Content you can compare the historical performance of each strategy, understand the preferences of your audience, and plan accordingly.



Citation Cleanup: Assessing the Damage, Estimating Your Project Timeline

The vision story:
Results of better marketing

Summary:

Citation consistency, or the presence of correct Name, Address, Phone + Website (NAP+W) everywhere the business is referenced across the web, is the foundation for local search engine optimization. It enables businesses to rank higher for their core search terms and leads to more customer traffic — both online and off.

In the early days of Local SEO, all citation building and cleanup was managed manually. It was incredibly time consuming. Today, new tools make the process of assessing the damage of citation inconsistency and estimating the timeline for corrections much faster.

This white paper shows you:

- How to quickly perform a citation audit and the free tool that helps you do it.
- How to identify the extent of your or your clients' citation inconsistencies.
- How to estimate the length of time it will take to achieve citation consistency.
- Why citation cleanup is imperative to Local SEO efforts — and the risk of doing nothing.

First Name

Last Name

Company

Job Title

Email address

Notice that all the vision stories, no matter where they are on the site, elaborate on and reinforce the same vision. Some pieces will speak to a greater ecosystem and others will pinpoint how your products bring that vision to life. Which role they play depends largely on where that piece of content sits in your funnel.

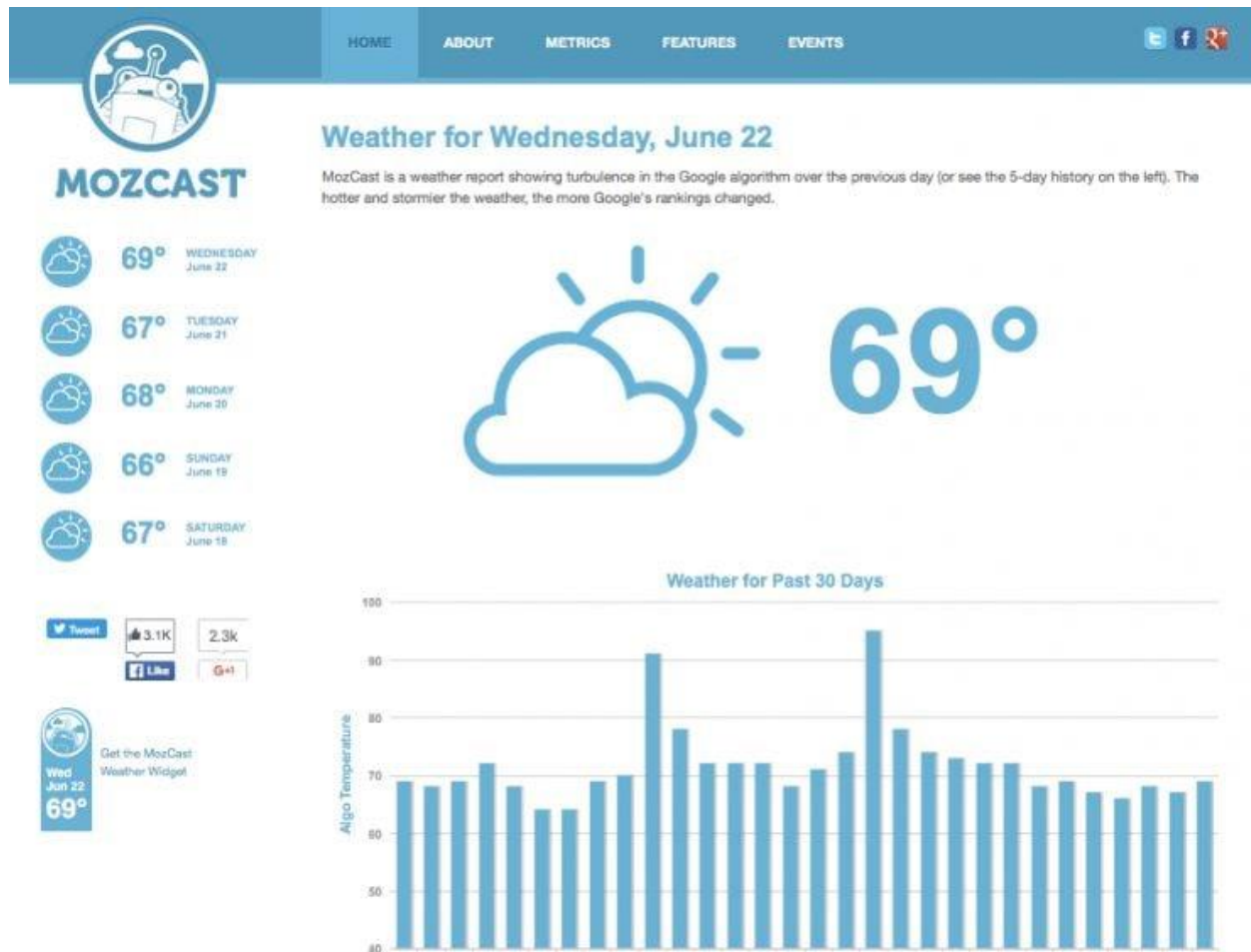
Teaching

You're reading teaching story content right now. I'm not trying to sell you anything at all, but I am trying to give you a new way of thinking about the work you do — to help you make better marketing. I'm also, on a meta level, teaching you about how Moz thinks about marketing, including how we see value in going beyond superficial monikers like "storytelling" and "keywords" to provide actual applied insight.

Although I mentioned our beginner's guides as "who we are"-type stories, they are also teaching stories. You may have noticed that we don't have a beginner's guide to pay-per-click advertising. That's not because PPC isn't important, but it is because our story is about the difference you can make with SEO, content marketing, and influencer marketing.

Big content can also be part of your teaching story. We use our [Search Ranking Factors](#) and [Local Search Ranking Factors](#) surveys to explore and share the changing nature of search, which helps focus our potential customers on asking the right questions about ranking better (instead of "where can I buy links?").

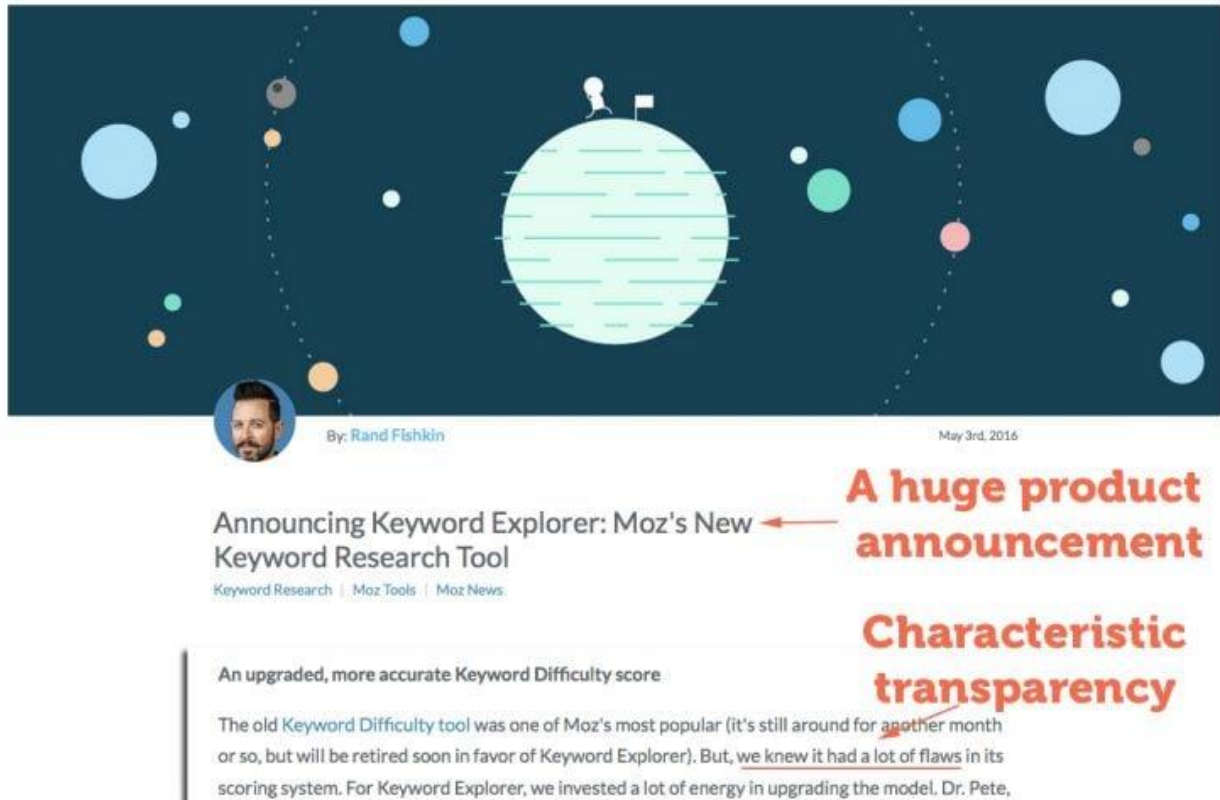
[Mozcast](#) plays a similar role by pointing people's attention to potential signs of shifts in Google's search algorithm. It is a useful tool, yes, for monitoring and predicting the search climate. It's also a story that teaches how much the algorithm changes and that SEO is not a one-and-done project.



Depending on who you are, your teaching stories might help your audience see fashion from the lens of accessories, understand that the value of your products is in sending matching items to the developing world, or see how essential connection speed is to saving money. Shape that conversation on your blog and in your big content.

Values in action

Our blog also tells values in action stories. We do this both through the teaching that is so core to who we are but also through the tone of content on the blog. This goes back to TAGFEE. Rarely (if ever) will you see a brand or competitor called to the carpet on our site. And our product and company updates are just as likely to tell you the ugly side of why we made the improvement as they are to celebrate the update, like [this announcement of Keyword Explorer](#):



You'll also find values in action stories in our [help documentation](#) as we try to provide straightforward but fun information to help you be the best marketer you can be.

Demonstrate your values in action by telling the story of efficient project management with a datasheet that doubles as a purchasing checklist to help your buyer overcome internal objections. Or teach your customers how to use the spices you sell by turning help documentation into recipes.

[We know what you are thinking](#)

Wow, that's a lot of talk about us. Most of our audience would be wondering right now if we can really live up to that hype. That makes this the perfect moment to share a "we know what you are thinking" story. Some of the best site content forms for putting the proof in your pudding are social proof (in the form of testimonials) and case studies.

Unique data you can trust.

Powered by our industry-leading SEO metrics – including Page Authority and Domain Authority – Moz Pro gives you the highest quality data to do your job.



Moz is the only data source that gives us real insights into link equity. There is nothing like the MozRank and Domain Authority metrics on the market. We refer to them constantly.

Distilled

Will Critchlow | Founder and CEO

Your turn

Ready to put storytelling into your site content? The framework is universal, but the application of it will be very individual to your experience. I'd love to hear how you've incorporated these six types of stories into your site, along with what's working for you and what isn't.

The author's views are entirely their own (excluding the unlikely event of hypnosis) and may not always reflect the views of Moz.



Written by

[Isla McKetta](#)

Isla uses her MFA in creative writing to organize words into forms that resonate with an audience and incite action. She co-authored [Clear Out the Static in Your Attic: A Writer's Guide for Turning Artifacts into Art](#). Connect with her on [Twitter](#).