

turn your story into something bigger—something that matters.

TELLING YOUR STORY TO THE WORLD

Once you figure out your story and begin your project—be it a business, a philanthropic organization, or even a job search—how do you spread it? The most important thing is that you *commit* to telling that story at every opportunity. It's not an incidental part of your business; it has to be a major area of focus—otherwise, you won't spend the time you need to promote and share it.

At TOMS, our story is very simple: We make great shoes and give away a pair to a child in need for every pair we sell. And we recently began using our One for One model to help save and restore sight through the launch of TOMS Eyewear. For every pair of sunglasses or eyewear we sell, TOMS helps give sight to a person in need through medical treatment, prescription glasses, or eye surgeries administered by our amazing eye care partner Seva.

We spend every day thinking about new ways to spread our story. We've done everything from a seventy-day cross-country tour in an Airstream trailer to hosting events at Nordstrom stores to inviting fans and customers to join us on Shoe Drops around the world, and from creating a thirty-five-minute documentary we premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival to developing a TOMS campus department to sup-

port high school and college students who want to join the movement.

We are also quick to use ideas that come from our supporters, rather than our own brainstorming. For example, in 2008, students at the TOMS campus club at Pepperdine University organized a barefoot walk on campus to raise awareness of what it feels like not to have shoes. We thought it was a terrific idea, and soon TOMS launched an official company program called One Day Without Shoes (ODWS), which takes place every April. We ask our customers and fans to go barefoot for one day—just as the students at Pepperdine did. ODWS walks have been organized at elementary schools, high schools, college campuses, companies big and small, and hundreds of other places. In 2010, more than 250,000 people around the world participated in ODWS, 1,600 of which were organized through our website. (Please come join us at www.onedaywithoutshoes.com.)

Don't ever think that good ideas will come only from within your organization—sometimes your supporters will think up ideas as good as anything your employees could ever invent.

TOMS never stops thinking of new ways to tell our story, because we believe in it. People outside an organization can sense the difference between a story that is authentic and a story that was fabricated just to make money—but so can people within an organization. So can you, as the leader of your project, whatever it is, and if you doubt your own authenticity, it will sap your passion. But if you genuinely love your story, you will love to share it with others.

Here are some other tips for spreading your story:

SHARE YOUR STORY WITH EVERYONE YOU CAN

Make a list of every group to which you have a connection and that could help get it out there. This list might include your social network online (e.g., Facebook friends, Twitter followers), an alumni organization, a weekend sports team, yoga class members, a church congregation, and so on. These are your communities, and they already have a vested interest (even if loosely) in what you are doing with your life.

But don't stop there. Talk up your story anywhere someone is likely to ask you, "So what do you do?" Some of my favorite places to engage in this kind of story-sharing are ski lifts, subways, planes, holiday parties, business networking events, and trade shows. Take the opportunity to let your passion run wild. Again, you'll quickly see if your story is resonating or falling flat—not only are you spreading your story, but you're also finding new ways to refine it.

FIND STORY PARTNERS

Stories don't have to stand alone. If your story resonates with someone else's, find a way to merge the stories, as AT&T did with TOMS.

When you have a story that's larger and more interesting than your product or service—or you—other people and companies will want to incorporate your story into theirs to share in the halo effect. For TOMS, those people and companies included the publisher of *Vogue*, who gave TOMS as a holiday gift to his extraordinary list of contacts (most of whom had not heard of TOMS at the time); Ralph Lauren, who created a line of limited-edition TOMS featuring special prints and patches and sold them in Rugby by Ralph Lauren retail stores across the country; and the high-end clothing store Theory, which featured TOMS on its sixty-foot “Icon Wall” at its flagship Manhattan store and on smaller walls at other locations. Each wall featured the word “GIVE” spelled out in giant capital letters, along with text retelling the TOMS story. Theory did all this with a simple objective: sharing a story they liked with their customers.

CAREFULLY MANAGE YOUR ONLINE STORY

If someone is interested in hiring you, or consulting with you, or joining your business, or even dating you, he or she will go online and Google you. Your Facebook page or your Tumblr or your Flickr feed will appear, and if they're not compelling, if they don't offer opportunities for others to feel a connection to your story, it will be very hard to stand out.

The solution is not to try to scrub the Internet clean



As part of One Day Without Shoes, the TOMS staff and local fans walk barefoot along the Santa Monica Pier. In 2010, more than 250,000 people went barefoot on ODWS.

of your presence. Quite the opposite: You want prospective partners, employers, colleagues (and dates) to find you—your online presence gives you a wonderful way to affirm the impression you make in person. But the key is to make sure that the online persona represents who you really are and is consistent with the themes of your story—and take care that you don't put anything out there that you don't want someone to find. Google doesn't care if your search results embarrass you.

**FIND THE INFLUENCE MAKERS
WHO WILL LOVE YOUR STORY**

In every niche there are the people Malcolm Gladwell famously labeled “connectors” in his book *The Tipping Point*, the bigmouths who are at the hub of their networks. Make sure to get your story in front of people who are in a position to tell it to others. Sharing your story with a hermit may earn you one new convert; sharing it with someone at the center of a social network will have an exponential effect.

THE SHEEX FACTOR

For many years, Susan Walvius was one of women’s college basketball’s most successful coaches, working at several schools before taking a job at the University of South Carolina, where in 2002 her team made it to the Elite Eight in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) tournament. Michelle Marciniak is a former basketball star who competed in two national championships during her career at the University of Tennessee (and was named Most Valuable Player in the 1996 NCAA Final Four). After a stint with the Women’s National Basketball Association, she went on to work with Susan at South Carolina.

Involved in sports for more than two decades, the two women had developed an expertise in sportswear fabrics. One day Michelle found a new one that she loved and brought it for Susan to examine. Susan thought it was terrific and said, “I’d love to have bedsheets made of this stuff.”

Michelle replied, “Let’s do it.”

So they did. Well, it wasn’t that simple: Before starting the company, they worked on the concept with South Carolina’s business school, did their market research, and raised money, experimenting until they had created sheets with better breathability, temperature control, moisture-wicking, and stretch than traditional ones.

BE SPECIFIC

It's important to know your audience. At its center, your story is about a specific idea or product or expertise that you're offering. You can't be all things to all people and still maintain your credibility and integrity. Make sure your story is crafted to appeal to the people you really want to become your supporters and that it draws from your core strength.

They called their product, and their company, SHEEX.

By August 2007, Susan and Michelle were ready to start selling. To do that, they used their story. After all, many people were selling sheets, but how many of them were former athletes and coaches selling ones that not only felt great but improved athletic performance by enhancing sleep?

The two women let their story pave their way. "We aren't people who just talk about athletics—we've *been* athletes. The retailers love it," Susan says. "It's also been the way we've made relationships with advisers. It opens doors—because of our sports background, we can find people we might not have been able to get to. And people ask Michelle all

the time what it's like to play for Pat Summitt or ask me what Lou Holtz, Steve Spurrier, or Ray Tanner are like to work with."

SHEEX is off to a quick start: In June of 2009, the two women started selling online and in a few select retail stores in Houston. In 2010, they began national distribution through Brookstone catalogs and stores such as Bed Bath & Beyond and Sports Authority. In 2011, they'll hit the Home Shopping Network. "It's unusual to sell bedding through sporting-goods channels, but we've done extremely well, as this is where the customers, already sold on performance-fabric technology, are now sold on our story," says Michelle.