Chapter 10: How to use Storytelling as a tool for regional food promotion

Björn Ylipää

Human beings have always told stories and fascinated by stories - anything from stories about fishing, hunting and life-and-death struggles, to fairy tales with ghosts and goblins. The narrator has an important role in the communication knowledge and craft passed on to future generations. The stories have been conveyed in different ways orally, in writing, figuratively, but also creative, and often in combination. The narrator has an important role in communication and are an important part of the narrative weight, and entertainment. They had to lay off the story and based on a dramaturgy and rhetoric to capture the audience’s attention. The storyteller often had a high status and even today bloggers in social media become one of today’s storytellers.

Storytelling in Literature and Linguistics

The most common concepts of storytelling is rhetoric, narratology and the theory of meaning. Rhetoric is the art of convincing and the word comes from the Greek verb Reho and means, "I speak fluently." Eloquence is an important part in rhetoric and rhetoric can be used in various ways to convince and how it’s used. (Mossberg 2006) In the rhetoric is often spoken about, it is about the narrator's body language gestures and posture. (Juhlin, 2002)

Narratology is described as the nature, function and structure of storytelling. Already in ancient Greece, Aristotle described narrative construction as a series of actions or events that form a unit, distinguishing the beginning, middle and end from one another. (Bergsten 2002)

This is still the basic narrative structure, for which the basic elements are:

- Message – the moral of the story
  An ideological or moral claim that the story is said to make into a fact. The message is to convey the moral of the story. The message is to be understood and embraced by the audience.

- Conflict – good versus evil
  A good story requires something to drive it forward. The audience strives for harmony and balance in their daily lives – we try to maintain that balance and avoid situations that create stress and anxiety. We want to find harmony and balance that push to resolve the conflict and take us from there. This is often were you will find the conflict between good and evil. The greater the conflict, the more dramatic the story can be. However, there are limits beyond which it will turn into chaos.

- Division of roles – identification
A prerequisite for being able to identify with the story is that we recognise ourselves in the characters. Through our need to feel balanced in our lives we can have compassion for the characters in the story who are in conflict. Experiencing the sorrow, joy and fear of the characters or persons in question is necessary for us to be able to resolve the conflict.

- **Plot – sequence of events**
  Once the other building blocks are in place it is time to start working on the actual plot. There are various ways to go about this. One way is to take it one step at a time. This requires a tight structure that always leads the audience forward. Another way is to build the story on a beginning, a climax, and an ending – the conflict occurs, the conflict is evaluated, and the conflict is solved. First, a change creates a conflict and shows the direction of the story, which is sharpened at the end and leads to the conclusion. A good story starts by catching our attention and showing us where we are headed. The hero is presented, then the conflict and the villain. The conflict escalates over time, and when it reaches its climax the helper comes in and helps solve the conflict. The moment the conflict is potentially solved is often the same moment as the hero reaches his/her goal and the donor fulfils his/her role. The story slows down which marks the end. One can break the pattern in this chronology through anachrony where, for instance, the story begins in the middle of the plot – “in medias res” – to later include flashbacks and flash-forwards.

It is important to work on these components in detail, ensuring a solid basis for a successful story (Mossberg 2006).

The needs of human beings have evolved like a staircase. The first step involves the most basic physiological survival components of food, water and air. The second step has more to do with security, shelter and stability. Once these needs have been fulfilled, we move to the third step which is about our more social needs of friendship and love. The fourth step is about self-esteem and power, and the fifth and final step is about self-realisation – becoming whatever you want to be. This is based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Grönros 1984). Pine and Gilmore developed this line of argument and incorporated pricing based on this evolution of needs into what is called Experience Economy, by using coffee to describe value based on experience (1999).
Furthermore, the different ways to create experiences instead of selling products and one of the pillars in creating a memorable experience is to stimulate all the senses in the experience. (Pine 1999)

**Storytelling in Marketing**

It has probably been using storytelling for marketing for all times but today has a more developed and produced more efficient ways to use it. Many businesses have the story, so to speak in the trunk and then deliberately started to use it for marketing. This promotion can be internal to all employees in the company, organization or institution or external to the customer. (Mossberg 2006). There are several different types of storytelling in marketing, here are some examples of these

- **Label story**

  This type of story is about the consumer wanting to show their identity, and belong to a group that represents a particular message or lifestyle, for instance. It can be about a brand that sells clothing but trying to create an identity with the brand. In the radio program Conflict in Swedish radio says founder Greger Hagelin of the clothing company WESC.

  "WE do not sell as much product as an emotion. WE produce a feeling and the customer buys the feeling in the first place." (Mossberg 2006)
Another well-known brand that markets its products to the customer enters brand identity is motorcycle brand Harley Davidson.

"Harley-Davidson is our inspiration. But it's just part of our identity."
"One big happy (very cool) family."

Here are two quotes from the Harley Davidson Financial Service Identity Manual. (2015) By purchasing and using the product, the customer joins a particular identity. Some live in this identity all the time while others may come from entirely different demographic classes but come together when using the product.

• Advertising story
  We are constantly fed ads through mass media and social media, so capturing people's attention through advertising is becoming more difficult. Advertising stories are therefore increasingly used by companies as tools to get their messages across. In television commercials (such as the ones by the Swedish food chain ICA where you get to follow the staff of a store in their daily lives), the characters are important and the different products are highlighted in such a way that they become extras in the commercial (Mossberg 2006). This particular advertising story has continued for fourteen years and it is still popular. Journalist, Swedish language consultant, and editor at the Centre for Business History Eva Häggmark calls it “a nod to popular culture” (2015).

• Organization story
  This type of story is essentially about creating a culture within a company, and it is mainly directed internally at its employees. Matts Heijbel from the company Storytellers, which works with corporate storytelling and the storytelling in and about organisations in Sweden, says:

  "The stories will offer strategic value carrying emotional events that shows the point of a business even exists. Stories that fits the employee, customer, client, patient, etc. survive quite easily and spread if they carry a true cultural capital.” (2015)

A good internal story spreads externally as well, and adds value for the end consumer. The Swedish company IKEA has been truly successful in this regard when telling the story about Ingvar Kamprad, which has then permeated IKEA internally, but also reached the end consumer (Mossberg (2006).

• The story of the story
  This could be a business manager or innovator writing a book about themselves, and how the company or product came to be. The history of
the company, brand or product, can be deepened by telling the story about the person behind it (Mossberg 2006).

- Concept history
  Creating a concept based on a story is a common method used in tourism, for example. In Sweden we have several examples of tourist destinations that have been created through literature. The following three novels have in various ways demonstrated how this can happen. The most successful is probably Henning Mankell’s books about the fictional character Wallander that made people want to walk in his footsteps in Ystad, and eat a herring sandwich at a café, just as he did. (Ystad 2015) Another was Jan Guillou’s novels about Arn that created an interest in experiencing the places in the Västra Götaland region that were described in one of the books, and thus, a travel concept was formed. (Præsto 2007) Finally, the novel Popular Music from Vittula by Mikael Niemi resulted in the hospitality industry in Pajala – 100 km north of the Arctic Circle – arranging guided tours to places in the village that are described in the book. A multi-arts performance, based on this story, was also held at various locations in the village (Rantatalo 2004) Theme restaurants and hotels have also been created based on stories. Stylt Trampoli AB has been working with this for 20 years. Internationally, the Hard Rock Café was among the first to create a restaurant based on a theme. (Mossberg 2006)

**Storytelling in food promotion**

The combination of creating experiences that stimulate all the senses are used in different ways in marketing. The sensory analysis is an instrument to measure and describe the sensory experience of various food products. There are several different types of tests are used as contrast test, profile test and preference test used primarily for product development and quality of a food product. (Gustafsson 2014) In an essay in Kristianstad University examined how to describe the taste of wild game. Wild game meat is often a positive image in terms of choice of meat but how do you describe the taste? Student came to the following results through a qualitative research by interviewing chefs and others who have a special interest in the game and food. The overall taste of wild game meat that came up in the survey was the acidity, characterful taste of blood, characteristic metallic taste, full-bodied flavor with the character of forest, sulfur odor. (Floengård 2012) These descriptive terms can be very static. Another slant on the sensory research based on the finding descriptive words with which to communicate food product characteristics, thereby approaching the experience to promote their products.

"Crispy salad with peppery, slightly nutty tone. Ideal as seasoning in salad blends, particularly good for Mediterranean cuisine and tasty dishes."

Taste description on the bag of rocket salad. (Gustafsson 2014)
Anders Herdenstam (2011) discusses this in his thesis “Den arbetande gommen – vinprovarens dubbla grepp från analys till upplevelse” (The working palate – the wine-taster’s dual approach from analysis to experience). He believes that sensory analysis allows us to measure certain aspects, but to find out how the product is perceived, it must be placed in its context. Another approach within sensory research is based on finding descriptive words to communicate the properties of the food product, thereby promoting the product by describing the experience (Herdenstam 2011). Herdenstam’s thesis also explains how the representation of a product creates an understanding of the experience. He shows how a wine-tester, aiming for sensory representation, captures the experience beyond what is described in words.

Anders Herdenstam shows in his dissertation on how the design creates an understanding of what they are experiencing the research is focused on how winetaster with creative approaches in their expression captures the experience beyond the word being described. He complains also how the sensory analysis is often done in engineered standardized environment and experience can be wildly different from each product is perceived for the end consumer. The sensory analysis laboratory has its limitations you have to put the product in its context and how it is perceived in which it is consumed. This is where the scientific methods of measurability and the artistic expression of the dual grip.

Can you measure a dining experience?
Illustrating two approaches to knowledge

Figure 2: The dual grip (Herdenstam 2011)

Storytelling by food
How do you combine food and drink with storytelling? Is there a practical way of using these knowledge perspectives? Most commonly, they are used to provide
sensory descriptions of for example food products, where the story explains why it is perceived in a certain way: it could be the produce from which the product originates, the processing procedure, but also the person behind creating the product. Within tourism, a common way to promote a destination is to use specific produce, processed products or local dishes, to convey a flavour of the place. The last few years have seen still other marketing methods, used to capture the feeling of a region or destination with food and drink. Using food and drink to communicate is primarily concerned with the purpose and what you want to say and to whom. What are you promoting? And who is behind the product – a region, city, country, farm or other specific place, product or person? It is also important to know the context in which the marketing will take place, for instance at corporate events or trade fairs. It could also be in the actual place where the food product is produced or at local markets, shops, etc. Nowadays, there is also research within sensory marketing.

“Sensory marketing is about how companies can use different sensory strategies to build and establish a brand image that is linked to the customer’s identity, lifestyle and personality. A company should therefore consciously and strategically base their marketing on the five human senses.” (Hultén 2008)

In recent years, companies have emerged in the Nordic region which have applied the dual approach of science and artistic representation into their practices. The Swedish company Måltidsvision was one of the first to develop the storytelling by food approach.

"Storytelling by food adds the senses that research shows are most strongly linked to our memories: taste and odor. And through the whole experience of the meal, we tell your story."

Figure 3: Sensory Marketing - a model. Hultén (2008)
"Our mission is to in a unique way and through an artistic presentation using food and drink to communicate messages and create commitment."
Black (2015)

Måltidsvision have not deliberately worked according to Herdenstam’s model “Det dubbla greppet” (The dual approach). Based on the academic background of a scientific approach using sensory analysis, an experience-theoretical perspective, experiences and artistic practices, they use food, drink and entire meals as communicative tools. Pine, Gilmore and Hulten argue that if all your senses are stimulated, you will have a broader and more extensive set of tools to communicate messages and create extraordinary experiences. Måltidsvision’s clients range from the Swedish government to hospitality companies that want to market Sweden and places to visit. What distinguishes Måltidsvision from other players is their overall perspective and storytelling approach. Through their work, they try to capture the feeling of what the client wants to convey.

"We looked up from the plate and started creating" (Ylipää Abrahamsson 2015).

Based on the academic background of the scientific approach to the sensory analysis, experience-theoretical perspective, experiences and artistic practices using the food, drink and meal as tools for communication. So both Pine, Gilmore and Hulten complain about that all the senses are stimulated to get a broader and larger toolbox for communication and create extraordinary experiences. Their clients range from the Swedish Government and the destination companies that want to market Sweden and the destination as a destination. What distinguishes Meal Vision from other players is the overall perspective and storytelling. The works in this type of mission to try to capture the feeling of what the client wants to convey.

"We lifted his eyes from the plate and began creating."
Ylipää Abrahamsson (2015)

Often when their assignment is to promote Sweden as a tourist destination in Europe, they try to convey its uniqueness by highlighting Sweden’s seasons and traditions. The Swedish city of Umeå became the European Capital of Culture in 2014, and to prepare for such a title and to create awareness, the project ‘Caught by Umeå’ was launched on behalf of VisitSweden and the tourist office of Umeå, which welcomed all of Europe to take part in the design of Umeå2014. In addition to the core team of Umeå2014/Umeå municipality, VisitSweden, H+K Strategies and Baluba, the project also included Umeå University, Samelandsresor, ICEHOTEL, Sámi Duodji and Måltidsvision.
Måltidsvision created a dining experience based on the eight Sami seasons. This did not only involve food, but was about capturing the feeling of the different seasons. Their unique distinctions were highlighted by stimulating the senses throughout the meal. Early spring: going to a mountain lake, drilling holes and fishing through a one metre thick layer of ice. Two people dressed in white entered carrying two trays with spoons. They proceeded to the two seven-feet high and two feet wide ice pillars with drilled holes in the sides. They placed the spoons in the holes, leaving only the handles sticking out. One of them gave a brief introduction and greeted the guests to the Northern Room of Umeå2014, and welcomed guests to come up and have a spoonful of char that had been caught in a mountain lake, been carefully prepared, and finally returned to its water.

![Image of a dining experience](image)

Early spring – the season of awakening

*Light is returning and icicles drip tears of joy. Through holes in the frozen mountain lake the first fish of the year are caught. Tartar of char on ice pillar. Melt ice water.*

(Måltidsvision 2013)

How to use storytelling by food as a tool for promotion. There are many paths to choose to use storytelling with food and drink in marketing. It is important to who and where will the marketing take place, what would you tell them? If the story can be found, or do you have to create it. The figure below shows how to funnel it down to the level that you want to promote. From one region to an individual perspective.
You can also tell the story about how the product was created, or if the food culture of the region, or about the people behind the product or the specific location of the product. You can also add flavor to an existing story and thereby use storytelling by food. Food, drinks and the meal is the only marketing tool that stimulates all the senses. You have an opportunity to communicate "between the lines".

### Questions and Tips

- What do I tell them?
- For whom should I tell?
- How can I use the story in marketing?
- Should I create a story based on the sensory analyzes?
- Should I try to capture the feeling in my narrative?
- Is there an existing history that I can use?
- Develop a "five-word-pitch"
- Implement the story in the activities of staff decor, ads, etc.
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