

From Niche to Unique

Estonia as a Story

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Fellow Estonians,

Story is an ancient Greek word that originally means *learning by inquiry*. In other words, asking questions alongside your audience. Unlike rhetoric, which is the art of persuasion – *teaching by example* – story does not need to answer. People have enough answers, enough destinations. What they need to re-discover is the wanderlust, the longing to experience the new. When you switch from a rhetorical point of view (selling Estonia as a great destination) to a dramatic perspective (experiencing Estonia from the traveller's POV) you open up enormous possibilities.

Estonia is Europe's secret garden.

Let Paris and Venice attract the masses. And let that office in Paris, that counsels disappointed Japanese tourists after they have visited the overused city, thrive. Open a door in the wall of your secret garden through a new story.

Story means communicating in a way that connects. Communicating beyond the Forgetfulness Curve of Herman Ebbinghaus. Because you have connected on a hormonal level. When the Greeks first built a new city, they always started with the theatre, because they knew tribes run on shared emotions, not rational arguments. People are not economic equations, people are hormonal equations.

Oxytocin is without question the most significant hormone at work in story, because oxytocin is the bonding agent. Without it, you do not care. Without oxytocin, you zap the channel. In a world where travel destinations are all equally accessible and comparatively comfortable, emotions are the difference.

The question is not how does Estonia make you feel? The question is how does Estonia make *them* feel?

Oxytocin, cortisol and dopamine are the three great signals of story, the experiential moments that connect us to a narrative and make it unforgettable. Empathy, suspense, surprise. How is Estonia just like them? What's mysterious about Estonia, and what needs to be discovered? Finally, what is delightfully surprising about Estonia?

Answer those questions and you have the basic ingredients of great story. Now prepare the recipe by arranging the content in a story flow – beginning, middle, end, the three-act structure of Gustav Freytag’s famous pyramid. This source code can be fed into everything from slide decks to websites to direct mails, films, events and even merchandise (through narrative labelling as we hinted).

Estonia is a great story waiting to happen because A) they never heard about it, B) it’s a lot more interesting than they might expect and C) they can have a much more personal travel experience than the factory-line experience of touring Paris, Venice & Co. Estonia is a unique story recipe in the making.

It is already a niche travel product, a Baltic or Nordic space that people may have heard of, but yet know not a whole lot about. It can become unique through the power of individual stories. Don’t tell those stories about yourselves or your country. Tell them about your travellers and their lives. Tell Estonia through the customer’s Point of View, and you can’t lose.

What strategic dilemma in the customers’ lives does Estonia exist to resolve?

In a word, *Boredom*.

We’ve been there, done that, and quite frankly we’re blue in the face. The *Mona Lisa* may be famous but queueing up like a can of beans on a production line to pass it - surrounded by Japanese tourists with smartphone sticks - isn’t exactly memorable. I’m sure that’s not what Leonardo quite had in mind for you...

The Hero’s Journey is not Estonia’s quest for evolution. It is the traveller’s personal quest for special meaning in a life increasingly same-y and clichéd.

You are the Obi-Wan Kenobi to their Luke Skywalker, and you can unlock the secret garden where they are free to explore and return to the private adventure.

Apple got inspired by the Hollywood movie *DEAD POETS SOCIETY* and dreamt up *Think Different*, a corporate campaign that literally saved their life.

Estonia can leverage the same timeless story code and move beyond geography and history to become the new alternative space to venture the Hero’s Journey.

Aitäh!

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