

Archetype Analysis:

Understanding the Myths behind the Brand

Sal Randazzo

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Story, Myth & Archetypes

Advertising and marketing people have become increasingly interested in story, myth and archetypes to help them build and maintain strong enduring brands. At the same time, there also seems to be some confusion about how and why story, myth and archetypes can be used. Part of the confusion stems from the fact that story, myth and archetypes are often intertwined.

Myths are essentially stories – some are true and some are not. Some of the myths are enduring stories that are handed down and become part of the folklore and mythology. In mythology, myths are often heroic stories that are larger than life, legendary stories that are handed down through generations.

Jung says that myths represent humanity's primordial desires and fears – "the inner whisperings of our souls." And Joseph Campbell described myths as "the world's dreams." Madison Avenue has long been said to be in the business of "selling dreams." Advertisers have learned they can make their sales pitch more effective if they wrap their products in our dreams and fantasies - not our individual dreams, but our collective dreams, America's dreams, humanity's dreams. And this is the realm of mythology.

In pre-technological cultures, mythmaking was the purview of the shaman, witch doctor or medicine man, which Campbell describes as: "...making visible and public the systems of symbolic fantasy that are present in the psyche of every adult member of society."

In the contemporary world of mass communications, this is the role of the artist. And because advertising has become a dominant art form - the role of the adman. Like Hollywood, Madison Avenue has come to play an

important role in creating and sustaining the myths that reflect and sustain the ethos or guiding beliefs of our society.

Mythical stories about ancient gods and warriors are more than engaging little stories. Projected in those ancient tales are humankind's instinctual fears and longings. In a mass consumer culture, brands have in a very real sense come to serve a similar function as the ancient gods and heroes: brands are projection holders into which we project our dreams and fantasies.

Archetypes: Universal Images

The concept of archetypes can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, specifically to the dialogues of Plato and his Doctrine of Forms. The ancient Greeks perceived the world in terms of universal forms - essences or Archetypes - that underlay the world of day-to-day reality, and gave their "Kosmos" order and meaning. The ancient Greeks perceived not only the immediate reality of a thing, a specific sword, but also its "sword-ness," the universal or archetypal form that defines all swords.

Carl Jung

Archetypes were further explored by the psychoanalyst/scholar Carl Jung. Jung's concept of archetypes was similar to that of the early Greeks, with one important difference. Jung maintained that the archetypal forms or images exist not *out there* in the kosmos, but *inside the human psyche - in the unconscious mind*.

Jung says that we cannot see the archetypes directly, but they function somewhat like instincts to shape our behavior. However, we can see the different archetypal behaviors that are all around us in the instinctual behavior of everyday people: the hard-charging businessperson, the nurturer, the joker, the lover, the tough guy/warrior, etc.

Early man perceived the world mytho-logically...by forming archetypal images that he projects on to it. The child for example, experiences in his mother the archetype of the Great Mother, that is, the reality of an all-powerful numinous woman on whom he is dependent in all things... In other words, an infant nursing at its mother's breast does not yet know its personal mother. What the infant experiences is "motherness" – the Great Mother archetype, a big warm, nurturing Great Mother – the eternal nurturer and provider.

Archetypal imagery goes to the heart of mythology. Humanity's universal drama is captured and played out in a series of archetypal images and mythical moments. **Erich Neumann, a disciple of Jung, says that, in the course of life, everyone must pass through "the same archetypal stages which determine the evolution of consciousness in the life of humanity"** (Neumann, 1970, p. xvi)

Life is an archetypal journey. We begin life as an 'innocent,' the archetype that represents the child - pure, full of hope and becoming. But soon we must leave the world of innocence and the protective sphere of our parents and enter the adult world where we become seekers, travelers along the uncertain road of life. And as we journey through life we embrace different archetypes - warrior, caretaker, lover, mother/father etc. Each archetype brings with a different worldview and values. There are times when we must be warriors like Odysseus and Sundial - when we must be willing to fight, perhaps even die, for what we believe.

Archetypal characters often play important roles in story and myth. For example, we might have a **story** that involves an **ancient myth** (story), along with an (**archetypal hero**) like Odysseus, a mythological Greek warrior king who leaves his wife and newborn son to go off and fight a war. On his voyage home, a journey that lasts ten years, Odysseus has a series of adventures, encounters with sirens, god's etc.

The power of story

Storytelling, alone, or with myth and archetypes, plays a critical and powerful role in mythology. The power of story lies not only in its ability to engage, entertain and inform, but also in its *power to persuade*.

In his book, How to Argue and win Every Time, Gerry Spence reveals how the persuasive power of storytelling has been the secret to his phenomenal success as a trial lawyer. Instead of "simply stating the facts," he presents them in the context of a story. Spence says that using story as a vehicle for his legalistic arguments allows him to speak "...easily, openly, powerfully from the heart zone." Continuing, he points to the persuasive power of story, its ability "...to touch us in those soft, unprotected places where our decisions are made."

Using story to connect emotionally with our audience, not only makes our communication more persuasive, it also makes it more memorable.

Numerous studies, including "advertising recall tests" have found that using the story format increases the likelihood that the message and the commercial will be remembered. Learning theorists concur. They have found that stories, especially those rich in detail, are more memorable because they allow for "multiple indexing," e.g., more places to connect in our brain.

But there is something even more fundamentally compelling about story. We simply cannot resist a good story. The narrative impulse is deeply embedded in the human psyche. We tell and listen to stories all the time. It comes natural to us - like breathing. When we meet someone we haven't seen for a while we ask: "what have you been up to." We want to hear the latest chapter in the continuing story of their life.

Indeed, our life is a story, a story unfolding even as we live it - an uncertain, continually re-worked narrative shaped by the stories we hear and tell. As we travel through life, we try to piece together a coherent story that we can live with - our own personal myth. I have a sign hanging in my office:

THIS IS ONLY A TEST
IF THIS HAD BEEN A REAL LIFE
YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN TOLD WHERE
TO GO AND WHAT TO DO

Perhaps we seek in the stories of others some insights, some clue that can lend meaning and purpose to our own life story - a story that, sadly, can never be given full utterance.

Myths: Universal stories that endure

Hollywood storywriters like to say "there are really only a dozen or so stories, but we keep coming up with new ways of telling them." There is some truth to this old chestnut. **The "dozen or so stories" they allude to are drawn from a mix of universal, enduring stories that transcend culture and time – a mix of story, myth and archetypes.**

For example, like **The Story of Odysseus**, the mythological Greek warrior king who leaves his wife and newborn son to go off and fight a war – and has a series of incredible adventures - we find a remarkably similar story in Irish mythology, *The Voyage of Bran*, a story about an Irish warrior-prince who has an incredible series of adventures while sailing home to Ireland - a voyage that lasts 100 years.

And in African mythology, we find another similar story, the story of *Maghan Sundiata; an Epic of Old Mali*, a warrior who, like Odysseus and Bran the Irish Prince, has a series of incredible adventures and battles, often against supernatural beings.

Closer To Home We Have The Marlboro Man

Like the aforementioned ancient mythical warriors *Odysseus* and *Maghan Sundiata*, the Marlboro Man is a terrific, albeit controversial, example of a mythical advertising character based on the warrior archetype - a uniquely American articulation of the cowboy.

The cowboy is a symbol of *America's pioneering spirit and rugged individualism*. It doesn't matter that there are very few real cowboys. The cowboy is a mythic image that lives in our psyche and the mytho-symbolic world of the **Wild West**: the world of the pioneer, the hard-working cowboy and the **Gunfighter-Warrior** that has become an American icon. We can still see and feel the power of the mytho-symbolic worlds of the Wild West through movies, books, and TV re-runs that continue to haunt the American psyche.

With his unfeeling, unflinching, steely-eyed squint, the **Marlboro Man** is reminiscent of the **Gunfighter** - the wild-west **warrior** who haunts our dreams and shapes our sensibilities. Like all warriors, the gunfighter is committed to "slaying dragons." But who is this guy - really?

He is a loner, a saddle tramp, armed and dangerous, with no home, no sense of community, and no long-term commitments. He will never grow old and paunchy or have to listen to his wife nag him about taking out the garbage. No, the gunfighter is wedded to his Colt .45. He will go out in a blaze of glory, with his boots on, and his six-shooter still smoking in his hand.

Marlboro has leveraged the incredible **archetypal power of the Gunfighter-Wild West Warrior-Hero, a killer image**, to create one of the most powerful and recognizable brands in the world.

And at the core of all of these stories we find universal archetypal images. The warrior archetype represents strength, courage and independence. As we have seen, this image may find many expressions - Odysseus, Sundiata, Bran, The Marlboro Man etc. There are numerous archetypal images: trickster, fool, warrior, magician, shaman etc.

Using Archetypes To Help Build, Maintain & Understand Brands

Recently, there has been an increased interest in using archetypes to help build, maintain, optimize and understand brands. Archetypes reflect the human condition – they emerge from our soul. And as we journey through life we embrace different archetypes - warrior, caretaker, lover, mother/father etc.

Each archetype brings with it different worldview and values. And there seems to be an endless array of different archetypes – as many as the human spirit can come up with.

Most of the time we can work initially with about 12 to 20 different key archetypes. The archetypes we choose are, to a large extent, dependent on the brands and/or personalities that we are exploring. .

I generally begin with a brainstorming session before I get into the archetypes. I begin with a brand exploratory that allows my clients to talk openly about how they see their brand right now – the good, the bad and the ugly.

I ask them to write short stories about their brand. How do they see their brand right now? Do they want to change their brand? Why? How? I ask them to describe their brand and how they see it now - the positives and negatives.

I often use focus groups to get a better understanding of how the consumers see the brand. I'm a digger; I like to go as deeply as I can in understanding how consumers see their brand vis-à-vis their key competitors. I often come away with 90 slides or more of consumer information about the brand.

One of the more critical questions is what would their brand be like if were a person? Is the brand male/female? Is it more of a hard-charging CEO who flies by the seat of (his, her) pants? Or is the brand a more thoughtful, intellectual who carefully considers all possibilities before making a decision.

Questions like this begin to force the group to really consider the kind of archetypal image they want their brand to represent. How do they feel about this person? What do they like best about this person? Least? What would this person be if it was a car, movie, beverage, vacation, ?, etc.

How does their brand compare to competitor brands? Etc. How do consumers see their brand? Are they content with how their brand compares to their competitors? Why? Why not? What does your competitor have that you do not? What would you do to make your brand stronger, more appealing? Why, how?

- The point is, there is a lot of important information that needs to be considered and discussed before we begin exploring the various archetypal images. This initial in depth brand analysis sets the stage for the archetype exploratory.

Archetype Exploratory

After the brand discussion and in-depth exploratory, a place to begin the Archetype Exploratory is to have the group look at the various archetypes.

I generally begin working with the 20 or so more commonly used archetypes found in Tarot cards: Magician; Lover, Creator, Jester, Hero, Rebel Innocent, Caregiver, explorer, fool, moon, hanged man, Justice, Empress, High Priestess, Emperor, Hermit, Nurturer, Devil etc. In the course of the exploratory we often uncover or consider other archetypes that might provide a different worldview and or a more effective way to position the brand. We also confront the archetypes that most closely represent ourselves.

Archetypes can be positive or negative. And they often exhibit both positive and negative aspects – a bright side and a dark side. For example, ‘The Lover archetype’ is about attraction, love, and beauty. But on the dark side we find marriage-frustration, failure, anger etc.

Working as a group, clients need to carefully sort through and consider the various archetypes and what they represent in order to understand which archetypes might work best for their brand. We need to be careful that archetypes makes sense for both the brand and consumer. Again, this requires a group effort, working together – an in-depth discussion and analysis of the archetypes that they are considering for their brand. The group needs to work through the archetypes they are considering to represent their brand, and try to narrow them down to the least number of possibilities.

Key Questions

The key questions are:

1. What are the top three or so archetypes they are considering for their brand – and why are they considering those archetypes?
2. What can those archetypes do to improve their brand? What do they see as the benefits of using those archetypes? Will those archetypes give current consumers a more positive feeling about the brand? Why?
3. Are they trying to appeal to new or different audiences? Do the archetypes give the brand a more youthful appeal? Does the archetype give the brand a more elegant feel? Etc?

Also people and the archetypes they represent, can sometime change over time. The hard charger may become more mellow as he ages. People can also have a change of life that makes them see the world and themselves differently. They may embrace a different archetype and a different lifestyle as they journey through life.

This can also happen to brands. Brands need to connect with their users. If the people who use the brand begin to change and have different values and lifestyles, they may switch to brands that are more in line with their changing values and lifestyles. This can even happen to long-standing brands that have been around for a long time.

Brands must be ever vigilant and constantly watching to make sure that their brand is still viable in a changing world. Strong enduring brands understand their consumers and give them what they want. Strong enduring brands build an appealing mythology around their brand that helps to create an emotional connection with the consumer. Highly successful brands get the consumer to love their brand!