

Client Success Story

Communicating Vision



**The Adventure Travel Trade
Association Taps Member Stories to
Shape their Future**

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In order to get our members to act, we must engage them emotionally.

Facts & Figures

The Adventure Travel Trade Association was established in 1990 and is a global membership organization dedicated to unifying, networking, professionalizing, promoting and responsibly growing the adventure travel market. ATTA members include tour operators, destination marketing organizations, tourism boards, specialty travel agents, guides, accommodations, media and service providers. The ATTA hosts the Adventure Travel World Summit, an annual gathering of approximately 500 members representing more than 50 countries.

Challenge Facing the Organization

As Shannon Stowell, the President of ATTA, and his leadership team began organizing for the 2009 Adventure Travel World Summit, they felt that it was time for a bigger picture to be discussed. At past summits the president's keynote presentation had been primarily focused on the direction of the industry. Drawing on the latest research, Stowell typically presented demographic, behavioral and business trends to the association's members.

This year, Stowell felt that the role of the ATTA had matured and adventure travel in general should play a larger and more important role in addressing the bigger and critical environmental, cultural and economic issues facing the world. As a cross industry catalyst, tourism pours money into the baseline of a myriad of businesses in multiple sectors. To ignore tourism is to arguably ignore the world's largest contributor to GDP.

Stowell felt it was time to get the ATTA, its members and the adventure travel industry to step up to the challenge and be a bigger part of the solution. But were the members ready and how best to communicate the new vision?

Developing a persuasive message begins with understanding your audience — not merely what they want, but what they feel and why.

The Solution

Developing a persuasive message begins with understanding your audience—not merely what they want, but what they feel and why. To confidently understand the desires and motivations of their membership at this critical juncture, the ATTA partnered with StoryTellings™ Consulting to discover how to emotionally engage their members in this bigger challenge and responsibility for the organization.

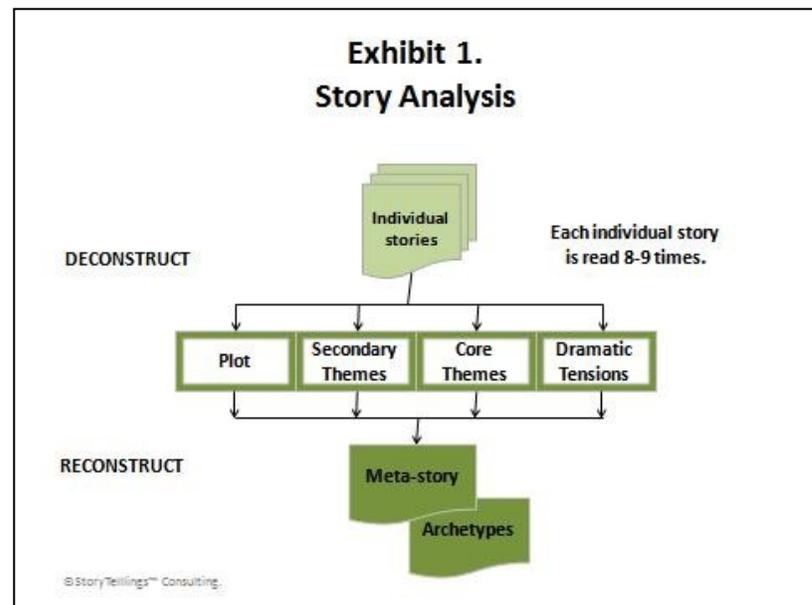
The project began by collecting stories from ATTA members through an on-line data collection methodology platform. One senior representative from every ATTA member organization was invited to visit the project website and write their personal stories about “adventure travel...why it matters now....why it matters more in the future.”

Firmly rooted in three distinct disciplines, the StoryTellings™ analysis and interpretation process is much more comprehensive than traditional qualitative research.

Eighty members completed the three StoryTellings™ exercises. The completions mirrored the membership demographics in both industry representation (operators, industry partners, agents, accommodations, destination marketing organizations and tourism boards) and geographic representation (North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Pacific, Middle East, Far East and Central America).

Firmly rooted in three distinct disciplines: mythology, depth or archetypal psychology, and symbology (the study of symbols and images), the StoryTellings™ analysis and interpretation process is much more comprehensive than traditional qualitative research. Examining stories from these three perspectives provides insights we needed to connect consumer or employee stories with a brand or company story at the deepest and most emotionally powerful levels.

For the story analysis, each story is read at least 8-9 times. The stories are first deconstructed into plot, themes and tensions. This provides the information needed to then reconstruct and create the meta-story and identify the archetypes and the mythic structure (see Exhibit 1).



The Findings

The members' personal stories about "adventure travel...why it matters now...why it matters more in the future" were extraordinarily rich and emotional. While the stories told of expected themes like 'excitement' and 'escape', it was 'people' and 'cultures' that touched the hearts, as in these quotes from some of the stories:

"...it's the human encounters we remember, that are balm to our souls. If travel teaches us nothing else, it teaches us that humans are lovely creatures."

"...adventure travel is as much about the human interaction, the sharing of an experience with not only with family, friends, fellow travellers, local communities as it is about the activity itself."

The deeper story analysis revealed seven core themes which speak to the deep emotional, mythic and archetypal essence of the adventure travel story.

“Adventure travel is engagement with our world – its cultures and wildlife. Adventure travel makes our world smaller and our perspectives larger.”

“One of the highlights ...was interacting with people along the way, meeting adobe brick makers, women sheep herders, children and the schoolteachers in remote villages of the Sacred Valley. “

“I can see a hundred infomercials about feeding children, but those can’t touch the heart like spending three hours in an Ecuadorian orphanage, where simple needs like soap and shampoo are often overlooked.”

“They were as authentic as the worn and sweat stained hat on their head and conveyed a simpler, more sensible way of looking at life.”

“The life of the sweet little boy who grabbed your index finger and led you around Angkor is no longer an abstraction. And you’re no longer an abstraction to him...”

The deeper story analysis revealed seven core themes which speak to the deep emotional, mythic and archetypal essence of the adventure travel story. These are what motivate the ATTA members to do what they do and make the choices they make in both their personal and their business lives:

- **Transformation:** Transformation is seen as a discovery of the ‘real me’, the authentic me, the person I need to be in order to be fulfilled. Transformation is also about a fundamental change in how we live in the world. It is a deeper understanding of what matters most. Adventure travel is a catalyst for this personal transformation. It provides the experiences that awakens us to the potential each of us has to live our lives fully and purposefully.
- **Discovery:** Discovery is the end result of our exploration; it is our prize for stepping out of our comfort zone and taking a risk. Discovery allows us to see first hand, the differences and similarities between the peoples of the world; it helps us appreciate that we share many common elements of life: family, friends, love of children, etc. And through this we have a deeper understanding, a deeper appreciation of our world. Adventure travel is a primary vehicle for self discovery, for finding our authentic selves. Perhaps the greatest emotional power of discovery is the transformation that arises from within. Discovery is the awakening that heralds transformation.
- **Deep Appreciation:** Deep appreciation is about the transcendent experiences of adventure travel. This core theme deals with ‘going beyond our limits’ and appreciating something bigger, something timeless, something so much more than our normal day-to-day encounters. Adventure travel matters because it allows us to experience the vastness of our planet, the stillness and silence of remote places, the timeless mysteries and certainties of migrations. Deep appreciation is about the wonder and awe of life in all of its raw beauty. At its most heightened, deep appreciation leads us to the realm of the spirit.
- **Engagement:** Engagement is a critical part of adventure travel. It may be the defining difference between being an adventure traveler or being merely a tourist. Adventure



The meta-story is the fundamental belief system that is illustrated by the story.



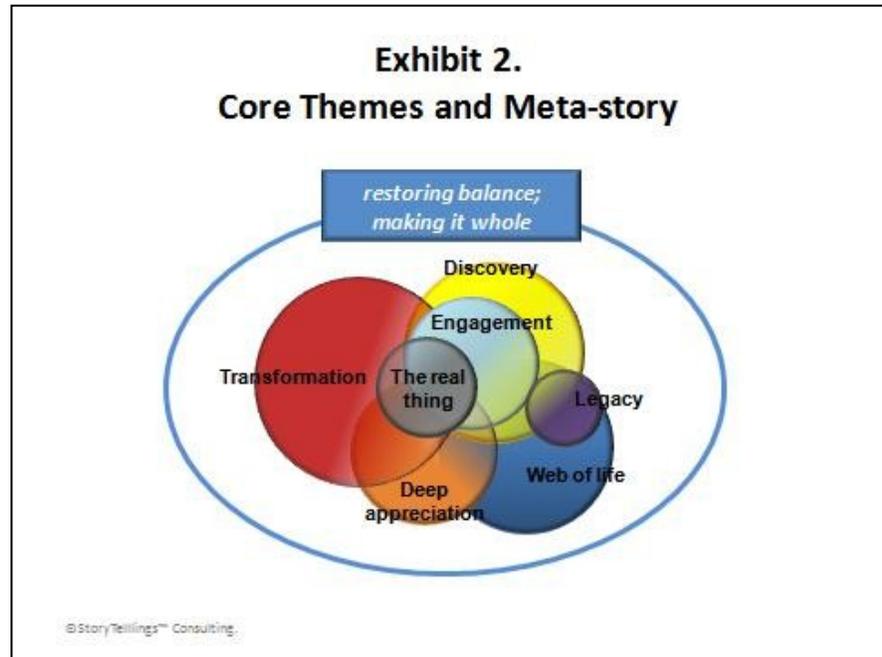
travel is not a passive activity; it is about interacting—engaging—with people, people from different backgrounds, cultures, and world views. Participating in their lives, bearing witness to the significance of their cultures and traditions. It is only through the time and effort required by active engagement, that we can make those discoveries that can change our personal lives and make a positive difference to our world. There is another aspect of engagement that the stories reveal. It is being present in the moment...being totally aware. Adventure travel puts us in places and situations where we can not help but be in the moment....fully present, fully alive.

- **Web of Life:** Everything is interconnected. There is a web of life, a chain of being that links all that came before with all that comes after. Similarly, all life depends on other life. We are not somehow separate or isolated entities, we live in a constant state of symbiosis. That is why when we respect the earth and everything that lives on it, we are respecting ourselves; conversely when we disrespect other life we are disrespecting ourselves. If adventure travel matters for anything it is to reinforce this important fact ; we are one world, one human family, sharing common bonds that transcend time and place.
- **The Real Thing:** Authentic, genuine, natural....we can only experience it by being there. High definition TV, Imax theatres, even the BBC special Planet Earth can give us a glimmer of what something is like. It can whet our appetite, make us want more; but it is adventure travel that takes us from the image to the reality. We can feel the heat. Experience the adrenalin rush. Hear the roar of the river. This is what we remember. Adventure travel matters because in a world of artificial delights, it takes us to the real thing. It connects to real emotions and it leads us to discovery our real selves.
- **Legacy:** Legacy is about passing it on...traditions, values, hopes, dreams, opportunities. In a sense our legacy is our immortality. It is what lives on after we are gone. We can't talk of legacy, without talking of children and grandchildren. They are iconic symbols of hope. Hope that the world we've grown to know and love through adventure travel will be there for them . Hope that their lives will be as rich or richer than ours. Children are the reason we do the some of the best things in our lives. They are an emotional motivator with out equal. The notion of legacy is one of the reasons why adventure travel matters now...and why it will matter more and more in the future. We want those who come after us to experience first hand, the wonders that we've experienced. If a hundred years from now, our grandchildren's ' grandchildren can hear the cry of a wolf in the wild, watch a grey whale breach off the Baja peninsula, and clearly see the countless stars in the southern sky, then our legacy and the legacy of adventure travel will be fondly remembered.

Each of these core themes as discovered in the ATTA member stories, are extremely powerful. Taken in combination, the core themes along with other elements discovered from the research such as plot line, secondary themes and dramatic tensions, revealed the Adventure Travel meta-story. A meta-story is an umbrella encompassing all the elements of what the core themes and the plot-structure are really all about. The meta-story is the fundamental belief system that is illustrated by the story. It completes the statement: Adventure travel why it matters....is really about_____.

The meta-story for adventure travel ‘why it matters now...why it matters more in the future’ is: restoring balance; making it whole (see Exhibit 2). This meta-story represents what is uniquely important to the ATTA members about adventure travel. ‘Restoring balance; making it whole’ is the meta-story that engages them emotionally and gets them to act.

This meta-story represents what is uniquely important to the ATTA members about adventure travel.



There is no doubt about the impact our species has had on our planet. Few in the industry would argue that the world is out of balance. Despite much progress, many millions of people continue to live in abject poverty and countless species have become extinct or are in dire danger of disappearing forever. Climate change is threatening some of the last great wilderness areas. Our world is out of balance. What was whole is now broken. Earth needs our protection, our voice speaking in advocacy for it and all the creatures that inhabit it.

On a smaller scale, many of us as individuals are also out of balance. Our lives are torn between work, family, and play. We feel pulled in many different directions, by too many responsibilities. We are too easily distracted from doing the things that matter the most: spending time with family and friends, finding time for ourselves...time to reflect and ponder. One of the reasons why adventure travel matters is it provides the means (different people, places, situations) that draw attention to this cultural malady. It helps us appreciate the cost of being out of balance, both personally and collectively.

In the quiet of a star filled night, or the vastness of a becalmed sea it becomes very apparent that we must fix what is broken, bring together that which is torn and scattered to help make ourselves and the world whole again.

Value Delivered

By listening to the ATTA members and discovering through their stories what adventure travel really means to them, Stowell was confident that his bigger vision for the ATTA would be enthusiastically accepted. And he knew how to persuasively communicate his message at the Adventure Travel World Summit.



From the core themes of the stories, he knew what emotions personally motivated the members – what would call them to action. And the meta-story of adventure travel—restoring balance; making it whole – supported the big hairy audacious goal of calling upon the ATTA global community to establish a set of principles that every member would agree to uphold. Principles that would measure success not only from a business perspective, but also by how much wildlife and environment are saved, how local economies are pulling out of poverty, and how resources are protected.

Beyond solving the immediate communication challenge of the new vision, the StoryTellings™ research and the guidance of Solaia Consulting provided the ATTA's leadership team with many strategic and tactical insights to continue to strengthen the organization. Some of the questions the ATTA is continuing to explore include:

- What must the ATTA do to ensure it continues to attract only the best-in-class organizations as members and has sufficient representation of members from every continent?
- Is the ATTA ready to become an even more powerful catalyst for positive change, even if it means taking a stand on important issues that will encounter entrenched opposition?
- How can we the ATTA passionately and purposefully communicate the many benefits of an 'adventure driven life' locally, nationally and globally?
- How can the ATTA help its members be more creative and strategic in leveraging the power of the core themes in their own marketing and sales efforts?

Every day we face the daunting challenges of finding a competitive edge, discovering new ways of reaching people, capturing their attention, and most importantly persuading them to take action. In order to get people to act, we must engage them emotionally. A highly effective way to do this is through the persuasive power of stories. Discovering what makes a story persuasive begins with first understanding our audience at a deeply emotional level.