

# @BRIDGECONFERENCE 2010

## Why Should I Believe You?

BY MICHAEL MARGOLIS



If you're a direct marketer or fundraiser, odds are you're a pretty good storyteller. You know when to use evocative words and emotional triggers. You've learned what grabs people's attention and how to motivate them to take action. You've even got a dashboard of tools to help you benchmark and rationalize your every step.

Between the tried-and-true and new technologies, you'd think everything was sunflowers and lollipops. Except we all know things are not measuring up how we'd like them to. What if the cause is more than just a tired economy? Membership rolls are on the decline. Giving patterns are dramatically shifting. And our audience—the donors, members, and customers—are increasingly savvy about spotting a sales pitch when they see one. We have to stop using the "Great Recession" as our excuse for why our numbers are down.

### What's the new storyline?

The field of direct marketing and fundraising needs a bigger mindset that reflects the new age of communications. Audiences aren't passive consumers who accept our message hook, line, and sinker. While we're selling *transactions*, they're increasingly seeking *relationships* and *experiences*. While we're saying, "Trust me"; they're asking back, "Why should I?" At face value, our audience has good reason to be cynical and discerning. We've all lost a little faith and confidence in the system. We're questioning assumptions and moving beyond just "good intentions." We're starting to ask a lot more questions. Especially around what's being sold to us. Our expectations have grown. We've become a more sophisticated and conscious culture. Thank you social media.

In an age of information overload and attention deficit, audiences expect something real and genuine. They want a fresh point of view. Something that's alive and generative. If you want to cut through the noise, give people something to believe in. This means your appeal needs to speak to identity, not morals or social obligation. We need to stop guilt-tripping, shaming, and coercing people into the impulse buy. The short-term high is followed by a sense of remorse that rubs off on our clients' reputations. Instead of the perfect pitch, we need to tell the story our audience will self-identify with. When you do that, there's nothing to sell.

### What's the Bigger Story?

People don't really buy a product, a membership, or a solution. They equally don't just donate to a cause. They buy the story that's attached to it. Which means it has to mean something to them, or their dollars will go somewhere they do. So if the meaning doesn't live beyond the transaction, the donor/member/customer relationship isn't going to be a lasting one.

Perception matters. Your client's brand is only as strong as the stories people tell about it. Which is why we have a professional responsibility to ensure our campaigns are more than just an opportunity shill and close the deal. These times demand that we approach our work from a more enlightened perspective.

This is not an easy issue to address. It begins by fundamentally re-examining the nature of our work. What's the story we're asking people to buy into? And is that a story that's worth believing?

Join us for Bridge Conference, where Michael Margolis will expand on these concepts, and discuss new strategies for turning our clients' supporters into true believers.

Michael Margolis advises businesses, nonprofits, and entrepreneurs on how to get others to believe in their story. As the president of Get Storied, Michael addresses the branding, strategic, and cultural dimensions of large-scale change. Michael is the author of several resources including his recent book, "Believe Me: a Storytelling Manifesto for Change-Makers and Innovators." Visit [www.getstoried.com](http://www.getstoried.com) or reach him at [Michael@getstoried.com](mailto:Michael@getstoried.com).



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