

Miller, DonaldBuilding a StoryBrand 2.0

11. Has a Problem (StoryBrand Principle Two)

This chapter explains why brands must talk about their customers' problems. In storytelling, the problem is the 'hook' that opens a story gap and holds attention. The author shows how to name a villain and then work three levels of conflict—external, internal, and philosophical—so customers feel understood and want the product.

Key takeaways

- Companies sell solutions to external problems, but customers buy solutions to internal problems. Talking about the problem deepens interest.
- Name a villain—the root cause of the conflict. A good villain is a root source, relatable, singular, and real (never fear-mongering).
- External problem: the tangible thing you fix (hunger, a leaky pipe, needing a car).
- Internal problem: the frustration or self-doubt the external problem creates. Ask, 'What does this problem make my customer feel?' This is what actually motivates the purchase and lets you charge more.

- Philosophical problem: why it's just plain wrong for the customer to suffer this—framed with 'ought' and 'should.' It gives the brand a larger meaning.
- The best brands resolve all three levels at once, then frame 'Buy Now' as the action that closes the story gap. Keep it simple: one villain, one main external, internal, and philosophical problem.
- Examples: Apple sold relief from feeling intimidated by tech; CarMax sold escape from the dreaded used-car salesman; Starbucks sold a comfortable place to feel good.

Passages worth keeping

“Companies tend to sell solutions to external problems, but people buy solutions to internal problems.”

The core principle of the chapter—addressing feelings, not just tasks, drives sales.

“When you solve somebody's internal problem, you can charge more for your products.”

Ties emotional resolution directly to perceived and real value.