

White paper

# Storytelling in Advertising: Mad Men's Legacy and Modern Marketing's Future



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# Abstract

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Storytelling in advertising is as relevant today as it was during the early years of marketing. In the golden age of advertising, the fictional world of *Mad Men* gave us a glimpse into the sophisticated, charismatic, and often cutthroat industry of the 1960s. Don Draper, the creative head of the firm Sterling Cooper, strayed away from discussing the technical aspects of a product and often relied on emotional storytelling and narrative building to attract its consumers. Don Draper's ability to craft compelling narratives that resonated with consumers on an emotional level was the secret sauce behind many successful ad campaigns.

Fast Forward to the modern age of today, although the mediums of marketing have changed drastically, the strategies to win over your audience remain very much the same. Storytelling is still the heart of effective marketing. The tools and platforms have evolved—from print ads and television commercials to social media, influencer partnerships, and programmatic advertising—but the core principle of storytelling remains timeless. Storytelling in advertising is about more than just selling a product; it's about creating an emotional bond, an experience that consumers remember and cherish. This whitepaper discusses the power and impact of storytelling in advertising. By discussing *Mad Men* and Don Draper's legacy, we draw comparisons on how modern marketers must weave narratives into their efforts to captivate and connect with their audience.



# Introduction

**Picture this:** There is a dimly lit room with brown wooden walls. One can observe the clinking of glasses and a haze of cigarette smoke lingering in the air. In the middle of this room sits Don Draper, the young, enigmatic creative head of Sterling Cooper, all ready to deliver one of the most iconic pitches.

The brand at hand is **Kodak**, and the product is a simple slide projector. As Draper begins his presentation, everyone assumes that he is going to discuss the technical specifications of the product and bombard his audience with a lot of high-tech jargon; instead, he adopts a completely different approach this time. He starts by weaving a heartfelt narrative about nostalgia and memory.

*He flips through family photos, painting a picture of precious moments frozen in time. The room is silent, captivated by the emotional journey Draper orchestrates. His story transforms the mundane into the magical, connecting the product to universal human experiences. This is the power of storytelling in advertising, and it is as relevant today as it was in the time of Don Draper.*





Storytelling in advertising is important because it taps into fundamental aspects of human psychology. It not only helps engage the emotions of humans, but also significantly influences their decision-making process. Neuroscience research shows that human brains release oxytocin, a hormone associated with bonding, every time they hear a powerful story. This helps make the marketing message appear more persuasive and worth remembering.

In 2024, storytelling marketing saw a growth of around **46%**, with search volume increasing by **6.6k** over the past five years. This significant rise highlights the growing interest and trend in utilizing storytelling within marketing strategies.

According to Semrush, as of 2024, the monthly search volume for "**storytelling marketing**" in the United States reached **720**. Brazil and Mexico followed closely, each with **480** searches per month. The competitive landscape is further evidenced by advertisers bidding **\$4.17 per click**, underscoring the high interest and perceived value of this marketing approach. Despite the growing numbers, the potential for storytelling in advertising is still not fully reached.

## Storytelling in Advertising– Its Impact on the Human Brain

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Don Draper's iconic narrative building of the Kodak product demonstrates the importance of framing in advertising. When you create an emotionally rich narrative to sell products, it creates a deep personal connection and instills nostalgia within your user. But how does storytelling impact the human brain?

### What does science say about it?

Storytelling helps activate multiple brain areas and provides human beings with diverse sensory experiences, thus helping create stronger memories in their brains. The neural engagement also leads to much better retention and helps consumers easily recall the advertised messages.



| Way                              | Description  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Engages Emotions                 | Storytelling stimulates the amygdala, which processes emotions, creating a deeper emotional connection and making the story more memorable.                                |
| Boosts Memory Retention          | Neural coupling occurs when listening to a story, helping to understand and relate to the characters and events, enhancing comprehension.                                  |
| Activates Multiple Brain Regions | The hippocampus, responsible for memory formation, is activated, helping listeners retain information better when presented in a story format.                             |
| Encourages Empathy               | Stories engage various parts of the brain, including those responsible for language, sensory experiences, and motor responses, creating a vivid, multi-sensory experience. |
| Boosts Memory Retention          | Activating the brain's mirror neurons, storytelling helps listeners empathize with characters and their experiences, fostering a deeper understanding and connection.      |

When you hear or see a story, the neurons in your brain fire up during a process called **'neural coupling'** or **'mirroring.'** They create the same patterns as the ones created in the brain of the speaker. Rather than being concentrated on a specific side of the brain, these patterns occur in different parts of your brain and can induce a shared contextual model of the situation at hand.

Additionally, during storytelling, the motor and sensory cortices of your brain also get involved. As the story evolves, these patterns evolve, get nurtured, and are solidified. Moreover, your brain releases the hormone dopamine, which instills feelings of anticipation in you. This dopamine also helps with memory and makes it easier for you to remember parts of the advertising story.

It is worth mentioning that neuroscientists are still not fully clear on which parts of your brain get activated when you hear a story. However, multiple studies have been conducted to show the power of effective storytelling in instilling deep emotions in the human brain.



## Mad Men and its portrayal of advertising: How was it so powerful?

Mad Men– the critically acclaimed television series– was much more than a piece of entertainment. It showed how powerful storytelling is when it comes to advertising. By transporting the viewers to the 1960s, Mad Men offers a captivating glimpse into the world of advertising through the eyes of Don Draper and other marketers at Sterling Cooper.

Set against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving society, the show masterfully captures the essence of the advertising industry during its golden age. Draper, with his suave demeanor and exceptional storytelling abilities, embodies the archetypal ad man, weaving intricate narratives that resonate deeply with consumers.

*Each episode of "Mad Men" is a testament to the power of creativity, highlighting how ad campaigns were meticulously crafted to evoke emotions and influence public perception. The series not only entertains but also provides valuable insights into the foundational principles of advertising that remain relevant today. But how were Don Draper and the other 'Mad Men' able to create such compelling stories even for the driest of products? Let's find out in the next sections.*

## The Advertising Landscape during the "Mad Men" era – Why was it so Impactful?

The 1960s transformed the advertising industry. The era of Mad Men saw the rise of consumer culture. After World War II, most countries experienced an economic boom and witnessed the proliferation of television as a dominant medium. Agencies like Sterling Cooper were at the forefront, leveraging emerging media to craft persuasive narratives. **Advertising during this time was characterized by bold creativity, with an emphasis on the art of persuasion and the allure of the American Dream.**



## Key Storytelling Techniques Used by Characters in "Mad Men"

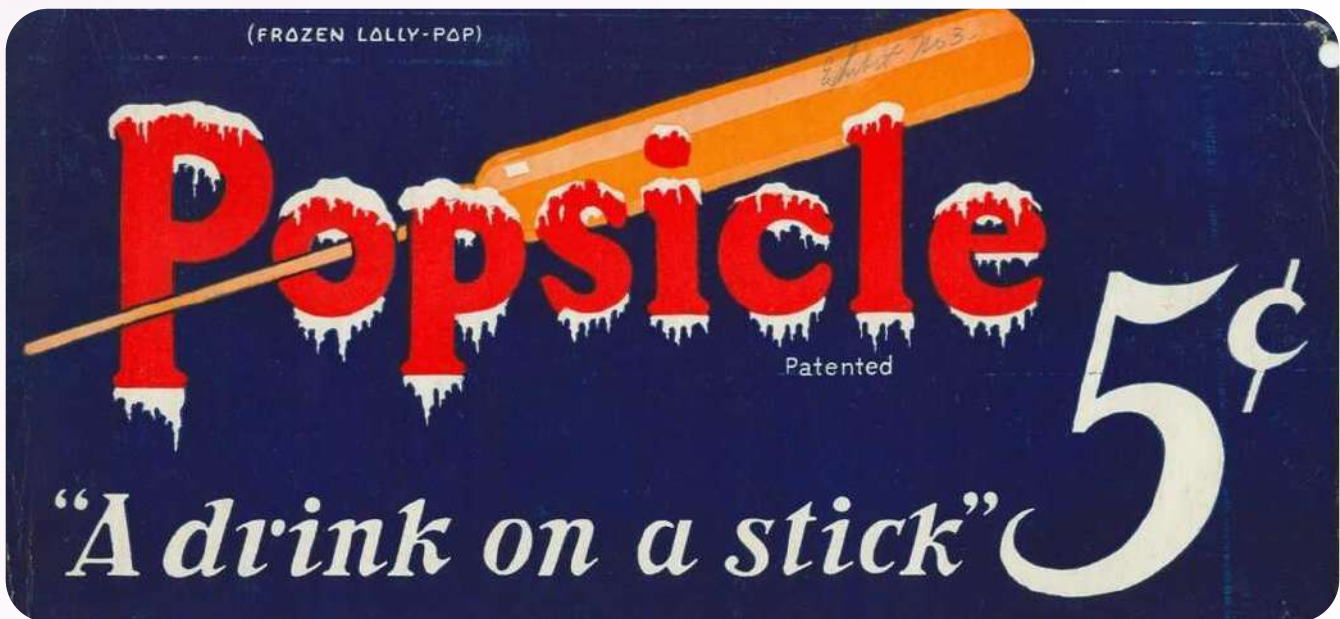
Characters in "Mad Men," particularly Don Draper, employed several key storytelling techniques that made their campaigns memorable and effective. For each product or service, regardless of how technical it was, the characters in Mad Men always found a way to make their product stand out. If you are wondering how they did it, here are some techniques they used.

**1. Emphasis on Emotional Appeal:** A recent study published on ResearchGate emphasizes that the use of emotional appeal can massively help promote impulsive and irrational buying behavior in a consumer. The **Kodak Carousel pitch** in Mad Men used emotional appeal where Don Draper tried to link a projector to the feelings of nostalgia, thus making people rethink their old cherished memories and helping create the mundane product into a sentimental journey through time.



**2. Use of Relatable Narratives:** Narratives and storytelling is crucial to the success of a brand. Almost **15%** of consumers make an instant purchase if they genuinely like or love the story of a brand. Take the example of Peggy Olsen, Don Draper's assistant in Mad Men, who uses a simple yet relatable story of a mother sharing a moment with her children for a **popsicle ad**. By doing this, she highlighted the importance of a popsicle in the day-to-day life of children.





**3. Innovation and Creativity:** with so many brands struggling to find their place in a crowded market, one thing is clear: brands are not prioritizing innovation and creativity- an essential component of a successful marketing campaign. An iconic example from "Mad Men" is the **"It's Toasted" campaign for Lucky Strike cigarettes**. Facing increasing health concerns, Don Draper shifts focus from health risks to a unique product feature: the toasting process of the tobacco leaves. The slogan "It's Toasted" highlights this, creating a memorable brand identity that evokes warmth and craftsmanship. This innovative ad turns negative connotations into a positive, simple, and appealing message, showcasing the creativity and strategic thinking that defined successful advertising in the competitive market of the 1960s.





**5. Staying Culturally Relevant:** According to a 2022 survey by the Cultural Insights Impact Measure (CIIM) involving 10,000 individuals across various demographic groups, culturally relevant ads are **2.7 times more effective** than other ads. These ads are also **3.8 times** more likely to improve brand perception. Furthermore, consumers exposed to culturally relevant ads are 2.8 times more likely to make their first purchase from a brand. In *Mad Men*, Sterling Cooper led a campaign for **Belle Jolie lipsticks** where the focus was on women's empowerment and the importance of self-expression. This did wonders for the brand because it reflected the changing social dynamics and the growth of feminist movements in the 1960s.



**6. Focus on Visual Storytelling:** Another thing worth noticing in all of *Mad Men*'s ads is their emphasis on visual appeal. Their ad campaign for **Hilton Hotels** stands out because Don Draper conceptualizes an ad that features a classic suitcase with the slogan: 'Hilton: It's the same in every language'. The campaign uses striking, cosmopolitan imagery to emphasize Hilton's global presence and consistent quality. This visually rich and culturally resonant approach aimed to attract international travelers and reinforce Hilton's brand as a reliable and prestigious choice worldwide. According to a study by Yale University, Visual ads are extremely powerful and help attract consumers and create an emotional bond between the brand and the consumer.





## How to Use storytelling- The Mad Men way

Did you know that stories are 22 times more likely to be remembered by your consumers than facts? A professor at Stanford Graduate School of Business, Jennifer Aaker, explained that storytelling can make a lasting impression where facts can not. Additionally, according to **92% of consumers** prefer that brands make ads that feel like a story. Despite storytelling in advertising being a need of the hour, why are so many brands failing at it? The answer lies in stagnancy. Not many brands are thinking out of the box. Here is how Mad Men used storytelling to attract leads.

The show features several iconic campaigns that not only highlight the era's advertising strategies but also their lasting impact on consumer culture. Here are two examples for you to learn from.



## 1. Heinz Beans: The power of Subtle and confident Storytelling

In "Mad Men," the Heinz Beans campaign is a prime example of clever and impactful advertising. The campaign's tagline, "Pass the Heinz," emphasized the product's integral role in American meals without even showing the product itself. This bold strategy was designed by Don Draper and his team, who pitched the idea that Heinz is so well-known and loved that it doesn't need to be pictured to be recognized.

### Heinz Beans Campaign Design

The campaign featured images of delicious, everyday foods that pair perfectly with Heinz Beans. This included foods like juicy hamburgers, crispy fries, and a succulent steak. Each image was captioned simply with "Pass the Heinz." The creative genius of this approach lay in its confidence; it suggested that Heinz Beans were so iconic and integral to American dining that consumers would instantly associate these foods with the product.



### Impact of Heinz Beans Campaign

This visually striking and minimalistic design aimed to evoke a sense of familiarity and indispensability. By not showing the beans themselves, the ads created intrigue and a subtle reminder of the brand's ubiquitous presence at the dinner table. The tagline "Pass the Heinz" became more than just a slogan; it turned into a cultural phrase, reinforcing the product's place in everyday American life.



### What can you learn from the Heinz Beans Campaign?

The campaign demonstrated how powerful, simple messaging could become ingrained in popular culture. It showcased the ability of smart advertising to build brand identity and consumer loyalty without overt product placement. The "Pass the Heinz" campaign effectively boosted brand recognition and solidified Heinz Beans' status as a staple in American cuisine, ultimately driving sales and enhancing the brand's market position.

## 2. Jaguar: Learn the power of Aspirational Advertising

In "Mad Men," the Jaguar E-Type campaign is a standout example of aspirational advertising. In the 1960s, selling luxurious cars was very difficult—came Don Draper—the master of aspirational advertising campaigns. The approach taken by Don Draper and his team involved selling the Jaguar E-Type not just as a car but as a symbol of freedom and luxury. This strategy was designed to tap into the deep-seated desires and dreams of consumers, presenting the car as an embodiment of status, elegance, and personal liberation rather than a mere commodity.

### Jaguar Campaign Design

The campaign emphasized the sleek design, powerful performance, and exclusivity of the Jaguar E-Type. Advertisements featured the car in glamorous settings, accompanied by taglines that suggested owning a Jaguar was a mark of sophistication and success. The imagery and messaging were crafted to evoke emotions of desire and aspiration, making potential buyers associate the car with a luxurious lifestyle.





## Impact of Jaguar Campaign

This approach was groundbreaking in the way it marketed luxury products. By focusing on the emotional and aspirational aspects of owning a Jaguar E-Type, rather than just its technical specifications or practical benefits, the campaign spoke directly to consumers' dreams and ambitions. This strategy resonated strongly with the target audience, who saw the car as a gateway to a higher social status and a more exciting life.

## What can you learn from the Jaguar Campaign?

This campaign was extremely important because it changed how advertisers marketed luxurious products. They stopped relying on technical aspects of the products; rather, they emphasized on creating an emotional appeal for the consumers. The campaign not only boosted sales and enhanced Jaguar's brand image but also reshaped the marketing landscape. It further demonstrated that selling a dream could be as powerful as selling a product.

# The Evolution of Storytelling in Advertising: Modern Marketing Techniques

*Since the Mad Men era, how much has the advertising landscape changed? Do brands still focus on strong storytelling and emotional appeal, or are data-driven insights more relevant today? The answer lies in the complex interweb of both of these phenomena. Here is how storytelling advertising evolved over the years.*

## 1. User Participation in Digital Storytelling on Social Media and Online Platforms

Did you know that Instagram had around **1.35 billion** users in 2023, and in 2024, this number increased to around **1.4 billion**? Similarly, TikTok also saw a sharp rise to 2051 million users from **1922 million users** between 2023 and 2024. As for Facebook, it reached the **2 billion** users mark in 2017, thus becoming the most widely used social media platform in the world.

However, these social media platforms have grown not just in numbers but also in influence. Digital storytelling that incorporates user participation has become a cornerstone in modern marketing. Brands are using social media and online platforms to craft compelling narratives.

With the rise of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, brands can now engage with audiences on a more personal level. Technologies like Instagram Stories, Snapchat Lenses, and TikTok's video creation tools allow brands to create immersive content that resonates with their audience.

| Platform  | 2020 (Millions) | 2024 (Millions) |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Facebook  | 2,410           | 2,810           |
| YouTube   | 2,000           | 2,510           |
| WhatsApp  | 2,000           | 2,410           |
| Instagram | 1,000           | 1,478           |
| TikTok    | 600             | 1,100           |
| Snapchat  | 350             | 414             |
| Pinterest | 300             | 498             |

Take the example of **Nike's Dream Crazy** campaign that featured Colin Kaepernick or the ALS association's Ice Bucket Challenge. Where the former campaign was able to build a powerful narrative for the brand, the latter was able to raise a donation sum of around **\$115 million** thus showcasing the immense power of digital storytelling.

Moreover, brands are also employing tools like Adobe Spark and Canva to create visually stunning stories that captivate viewers. These platforms enable the creation of professional-grade content without the need for extensive technical expertise. Apart from allowing brands to create much more personalized stories, this process has also helped democratize the storytelling process, thus helping smaller brands compete with some of the giants of the industry.



## 2. The Role of Video Content and Live Streaming

Did you know that Instagram had around **1.35 billion** users in 2023, and in 2024, this number increased to around **1.4 billion**? Similarly, TikTok also saw a sharp rise to 2051 million users from **1922 million users** between 2023 and 2024. As for Facebook, it reached the **2 billion** users mark in 2017, thus becoming the most widely used social media platform in the world.

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### 3. Influencer Marketing and User-Generated Content

During the Mad Men era, popular actors were cast in ads to appeal to the audience. Fast forward to today, brands are collaborating with macro and micro-influencers for their product launches or announcements. By partnering with influencers, brands can tap into established audiences and gain credibility. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are hotspots for influencer collaborations.

Huda Kata, Zach King are two of the biggest names when it comes to influencer marketing. These individuals create valuable content that helps generate massive sales for their brands and others. Additionally, another prime example of influencer marketing involves the brand **Glossier**. The brand focuses on user-generated content and encourages its customers to share their experience of using the beauty products on social media.

Through its influencer marketing, Glossier has been able to build a loyal community of like-minded people. Additionally, brands like Coca-Cola have utilized UGC in their campaigns, such as the "**Share a Coke**" campaign, which invited customers to share photos with personalized Coke bottles. This campaign significantly boosted sales and brand engagement, demonstrating the power of UGC in modern marketing strategies.

#### SHARE A COKE





#### 4. Interactive Content such as AR/VR and Gamification

Many brands such as **Ikea** are using interactive content through AR/VR experience to sell their furniture and generate repeat customers. IKEA place helps users visualize the furniture in their own homes by using smartphones. Through this, users can see which piece of furniture will look best in different parts of their houses and their offices. According to a report by Statista, the AR market is projected to grow to **\$198 billion** by 2025, highlighting the increasing importance of this technology in marketing.

Gamification is another very powerful interactive content strategy and its market is projected to increase by almost **42 billion** between 2023 and 2028. Gamification involves the use of gaming strategies involving levels, leaderboards, rewards and points. By tapping into human psychology, gamification gurus are able to increase brand engagement and website retention. For example, Nike uses gamification in its Nike+ Run Club app to offer rewards to users who finish a running challenge.

By integrating these modern techniques, brands can create more engaging, personalized, and memorable experiences for their audiences, ultimately driving better results and building stronger relationships with consumers.

## Brands That Curate The Perfect Advertising Stories: How Do They Do It?

### 1. Dove's Real Beauty Brand Campaign promoting Diversity

Dove is one of the most powerful beauty brands, and it was able to use the perfect advertising story to generate a new narrative about its brand. In its recent brand campaign: 'Real Beauty', Dove used visuals and stories from real women with diverse backgrounds and body types, therefore challenging conventional beauty standards. The campaign was not only celebrated for its groundbreaking impact, but it was also able to increase Dove's sales by \$1.5 billion over the first ten years.





## 2. Apple highlights raw lives by using UGC content

Apple is yet another brand that was able to curate amazing stories to increase brand engagement. During its campaign, it encouraged users to use their iPhone cameras to capture moments of their lives and share their stories. By using user-generated content in their advertisements, Apple was able to create a loyal and dedicated community around its brand. This approach not only showcased the product's capabilities but also built a community around the brand, leading to record-breaking iPhone sales and strengthening customer loyalty.





### 3. Airbnb's attempt at humanizing its brand through storytelling

Airbnb highlighted the unique experiences of travelers and hosts, focusing on personal stories that showcased the platform's ability to connect people and cultures. By using its campaign, We are Here, Airbnb was able to humanize its brand, thereby increasing the number of sales. Additionally, it increased trust among users, and contributed to a 13% rise in bookings, positioning Airbnb as more than just a booking platform but as a community-builder.





# Challenges To Creating An Effective Storyline

| Challenge                                       | Follower Count   | Example   |
|---|--|---|
| Unclear Target Audience                         | Story doesn't resonate with the intended audience.               | Brand X's heartwarming family commercial targets young professionals in fast-paced cities (misaligned values).    |
| Lack of Conflict or Stakes                      | Story lacks tension or reason to care about the outcome.         | Brand Y's social media posts showcase product features without a compelling narrative or problem solved.          |
| Unrealistic or Inconsistent Characters          | Characters feel unbelievable or their behavior changes abruptly. | Brand Z features a shy introvert who becomes a fearless adventurer after using their product (unrealistic shift). |
| Predictable Plot or Clichés                     | Story feels stale or unoriginal due to overuse of tropes.        | Brand A's commercial follows the "underdog overcomes challenge" cliché (overused formula).                        |
| Poor Execution<br>(Writing, Acting, Production) | Bad execution weakens the impact of a strong story.              | Brand B's visually stunning commercial has generic dialogue and awkward acting (distracting from the concept).    |



## Conclusion

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In the ever-evolving landscape of advertising, the art of storytelling offers engagement and authenticity. As brands navigate the digital age, the ability to craft compelling narratives has become more critical than ever. By integrating data-driven insights with creative prowess, and leveraging modern technologies such as AR, VR, and social media platforms, brands can create powerful, resonant stories that captivate and convert audiences.

**The inspirational Mad Men era and the success stories of brands like Nike, Dove, and Apple illustrate the immense potential of well-executed storytelling in building trust, fostering loyalty, and driving sales.** As we move forward, the challenge will be to maintain ethical standards, adapt to rapid media changes, and ensure consistency across diverse platforms.

Embrace the power of storytelling in your advertising strategy, and watch your brand transform from a mere name into a captivating narrative that resonates deeply with your audience, inspiring action and loyalty.



# Market Pro's Targeted Triumph: Craft Campaigns That Speak to Your Audience

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Consumers are bombarded with so many options these days; it is almost impossible not to be affected by the sheer noise. If you want to stand out with your product, you need to delve deeper into the minds of your target audience, create compelling stories and tailor your campaigns to their needs. Market Pro helps brands build an innovative, sustainable, and creative campaign that enhances customer engagement, increases ROI, and generates long-term leads.

- Market Pro offers a plethora of marketing services that help target the right customers and **generate sustainable leads**. It combines elements of content writing, branding, PPC and marketing to get the perfect result.
- By using **targeted advertising platforms** like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Google ads, Marketpro can help create a community around your brand thus helping you increase your outreach.
- It also helps brands create **favorable and long-term partnerships and PR relations** to target diverse consumers. Additionally, Marketpro helps create the buzz for your brand.
- Neuromarketing campaigns are specific and precise. Marketpro focuses on understanding the **unique selling points** of brands in order to create brand awareness and customer engagement.





## Are you ready to create the most invigorating storyline for your brand's campaign?

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Contact us today and get in touch with Marketpro's industry leading marketeers who will help you develop the most exciting campaigns for your next launch.