



# 8 storytelling frameworks for utilities

Hailey Gish

# Contents

**03**

Introduction

---

**04**

Hero's journey

---

**05**

Future pacing

---

**06**

Watch out

---

**07**

Wake-up call

---

**08**

Before and after

---

**09**

Problem, agitate, and solve

**10**

Holy grail

**11**

Golden circle



Many utilities struggle to engage customers with their content across various platforms, and they underestimate the power of storytelling.

Storytelling is a powerful tool to help your utility connect with your residential and business customers' values, senses, and emotions. Use stories to influence how people feel about your utility's brand and highlight your unique value.

And you can use a variety of storytelling frameworks. By presenting your utility and its offerings using a story narrative, you can entertain your customers and help them better remember your offerings. While each framework might have a different structure or problem to be solved, they all will capture your customers' attention, influence their decisions, and solve their problems.

You can use storytelling in emails, ads, and social media posts.

Your stories need to:

**Entertain and describe**

You want to be descriptive and help your audience imagine the sound, taste, texture, and visual elements of your story. A good story evokes all your senses. Storytelling is most effective when the reader can picture the story fully and see themselves in it.

**Be relatable and believable**

Being relatable is key to believability. You can do this by introducing a relatable obstacle—whether that is emotional or physical. If you don't create tension, no matter how big or small, then you run the risk of losing your customers' interest because they cannot relate to it. Customers must believe that your product or program will help them before they commit to it.

# Hero's journey

The hero's journey storytelling framework typically features a main character who sets out on a journey to make a change, runs into a problem, and (with some help) ultimately triumphs.

This is an effective storytelling approach for your utility because it can show the ways you help customers overcome obstacles with your programs, products, or assistance.

## Use the following framework to write your story:

- **Departure.** What's the main character's current situation or belief about themselves or the world? Set the scene and describe their normal life.
- **Problem.** What problem do they encounter? What's driving them to change? This disrupts the status quo.
- **Triumph.** How did the hero overcome the challenge or resolve the problem? This is where you discuss your utility's solution.

SDG&E uses this framework well in its video [Stranded](#) for its #LOVELECTRIC campaign.

- **Departure.** A woman is on the phone, and she tells her boss that she'll be late. A car is on the side of the road, and the woman is standing next to it.
- **Problem.** The camera pans out, and you see that there are two cars. One is an EV and one isn't. We assume the second car is helping the stranded woman.
- **Triumph.** But it's the woman who's the hero. She's helping a stranded family because they've run out of gas. The narrator introduces the solution—EVs have an average range of over 200 miles.

Get inspiration from movies like the Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and the Matrix.



**Consider using this framework when promoting EV adoption, paperless billing, or your utility's brand. It's also a great way to highlight employee activities and achievements.**

## Future pacing

The future pacing framework helps the customer imagine their ideal future. Descriptive language is the key for this storytelling approach because you want your customer to think about the future as if it's happening now.

This approach lets utilities market their products or programs as a way to make their customers' dreams become reality.

### Use the following framework to write your story:

- **Imagine.** Use the present tense to describe the result, outcome, or scenario your customer wants to achieve. You can start the story with “picture this,” “imagine,” or “what if” statements.
- **Relate.** Describe your customer's emotions after achieving this goal or desire. How do they feel? How is their life better now?
- **Reality.** Talk about how your product or program helps make the customer's dream a reality.

FortisBC uses this framework in its [Renewable Natural Gas Awareness Campaign](#) commercial.

- **Imagine.** The commercial begins and asks the audience to picture what our future holds.
- **Relate.** The narrator talks about how they want to make choices they can feel good about.
- **Reality.** Then the narrator describes how renewable natural gas is a way to make that ideal future a reality.

Get inspiration from travel blogs, vacation advertisements, and lottery commercials.



**Consider using this framework to promote EV adoption, electrification products, sustainability, or job openings at your utility.**



## Watch out

This storytelling framework tells a story about conflict or negative consequences and shows how this could happen to customers. The watch out storytelling framework uses fear to engage customers.

Utilities can use this framework to encourage customers to be prepared and use their programs, products, or services.

### Use the following framework to write your story:

- **Environment.** Describe the main character and their life. What's their normal day like? What could change it?
- **Conflict.** Build up to the conflict. What's causing (or could cause) problems for the main character?
- **Truth.** Talk about what will happen if the main character doesn't fix the problem. This is where you give a solution and answer the question, "How can you help your main character escape the conflict?"

Tennessee Valley Authority uses this framework in its video campaign [EnergyRight Scary Good](#).

- **Environment.** A couple talks about how their house makes noise. One says it's because the house is old. The other says it's because the house is haunted.
- **Conflict.** The camera cuts to a creepy doll, and one of the characters is clearly freaked out by the doll and noises.
- **Truth.** An energy adviser visits the house. The adviser tells the homeowners the noises are coming from unsecured duct work. The video ends with the tagline "your home doesn't scare us."

Get inspiration from horror movies, like Jaws.



**Consider using this framework when you discuss outage preparedness or late payments.**

## Wake-up call

The wake-up call storytelling framework starts the scene in the middle of the conflict. Your customer is pulled into the drama, investigates the origin of the problem and determines how they could solve the problem.

Utilities can present their product or program as the solution. This should be a wake-up call moment for the customer.

### Use the following framework to write your story:

- **Conflict.** Describe the problem your customer is facing.
- **Reflect.** Educate your customer about how they got to this point, what they might be missing, and how the problem is stopping them from achieving their goals and desires.
- **Resolution.** Present your utility's solution and describe how it will help the customer overcome the conflict.

SoCalGas uses this framework in its video campaign [A Little Easier—CARE Program](#).

- **Conflict.** A woman talks about how life can be challenging. We see her in several stressful scenarios.
- **Reflect.** She uses humor to show how she could make her life easier.
- **Resolution.** She introduces the financial assistance program from SoCalGas. She talks about how easy it is to apply, and the ad ends with her in a calm situation.



**Consider using this framework when promoting extreme weather preparedness, outage preparedness, financial assistance, or e-billing.**

# Before and after

The before-and-after storytelling framework shows your customer in their current reality and their ideal reality.

This approach lets utilities market their products or programs as a way to make their customers' dreams become reality.

## Use the following framework to write your story:

- **Before.** Show your customer's normal day or world. You should show the audience what the problem is.
- **After.** Show your customer's ideal world. Highlight the gap between the before and after.
- **Bridge.** Show how your product or program helps the customer achieve their ideal reality easier, faster, simpler, and cheaper than other options.

Cleco uses this framework in its Facebook post about budget billing.

- **Before.** The post talks about the struggle of unpredictable electricity bills.
- **After.** The post details how a customer could pay the same amount each month.
- **Bridge.** Cleco gives its [Budget Billing Program](#) as a solution.

Cleco  
Jul. 15, 2022 3:30 PM MDT ⓘ

Do you struggle with unpredictable electricity bills? Enroll in our Budget Billing Program to eliminate the uncertainty that comes with the highs and lows of energy usage throughout the year!

Budget Billing spreads the billing for energy usage over a 12-month period, so a customer can pay approximately the same amount each month.

To enroll, call us at 1-800-622-6537 or visit one of our customer service offices.

Watt Matters - Budget For It - 30 Seconds  
<https://fal.cn/3qhii> ⓘ

Watt Matters is an energy-savings campaign that provides Cleco customers with sustainable, daily actions to reduce energy usage and ultimately, reduce monthl...



View on Facebook



**Consider using this framework when promoting extreme weather preparedness, outage preparedness, financial assistance, or e-billing.**



# Problem, agitate, and solve

This storytelling framework uses your customer's pain points to motivate them to act. When you use this framework, it's important to be empathetic and build trust with your customers.

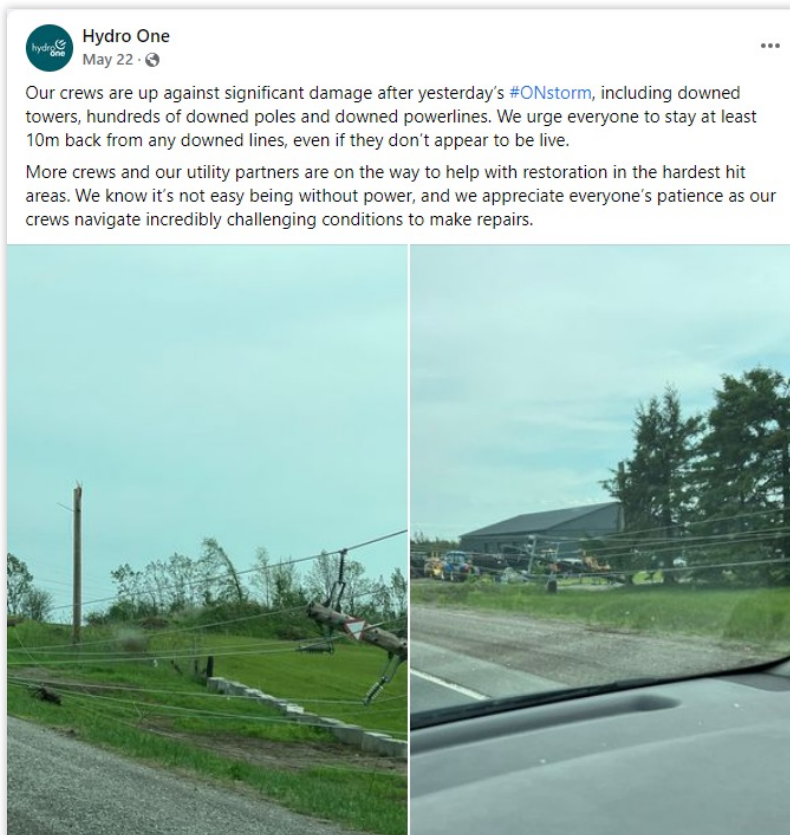
This approach lets utilities market their products or programs as a way to help customers overcome their problems.

## Use the following framework to write your story:

- **Pain.** What's your customer's main pain point? Use empathy as you call this out.
- **Agitate.** How is it already hurting your customer? How can this problem get worse if nothing is done to address it? Be direct without being overly dramatic.
- **Solve.** How can your product or program help rectify the pain point? How can it provide relief for your customer?

Hydro One uses this framework in its Facebook post about damaged lines.

- **Problem.** Hydro One posts about the damage from a recent storm.
- **Agitate.** The utility acknowledges that this damage is making customers' lives harder because of outages.
- **Solve.** Hydro One commits to repairing the damages and provides safety tips for the meantime.



**Consider using this framework when promoting energy efficiency programs and electrification products.**

# Holy grail

The holy grail storytelling framework uses mythology, folklore, and historical references to capture a customer's attention. This framework should present something as the holy grail—the thing your audience needs—and use imagination, mystery, and even romance to engage your customer.

Utilities can use popular references or legends from their regions as inspiration. And your program, tool, or solution should be the holy grail in your story.

## Use the following framework to write your story:

- **Legend has it.** Introduce the mystery, legend, or historical reference to set the scene and capture attention.
- **What if?** Make your customer wonder if the legend you're discussing is possible. Apply this legend to the current world, connecting it to a problem your customer faces or something they desire.
- **What does this mean?** Show how your solution was inspired by the legend, how it resolves your customer's problem, and how it provides benefits. Your solution is the holy grail.

Hawaiian Electric Co. uses this framework in its [Instagram post](#).

- **Legend has it.** Hawaiian Electric introduces a historical fact, describes the 1970s energy crisis, and shows empathy for consumers.
- **What if?** It describes how a law in the past addressed high gas prices, but the law was repealed.
- **What does this mean?** The utility presents ways to conserve energy. And Hawaiian Electric can give customers the holy grail—energy-savings tips and rebates for appliances.



**Consider using this framework when promoting EV adoption, electrification products, and cost-savings programs.**

# Golden circle

The golden circle storytelling framework doesn't focus on your products or programs. Instead, it talks about the story (or stories) behind your utility and its offerings.

Utilities can use this when writing about their histories or when they're changing current processes to make a better life in the future.

## Use the following framework to write your story:

- **Why?** Why is your utility in this business? What problem are you solving? What motivates you and your employees?
- **How?** How are you solving a problem? How are you helping your customers?
- **What?** What are you doing now to get there? What are you changing? What are you introducing? What products or services are you offering?

Tucson Electric Power (TEP) uses this framework in its Instagram post about retiring a coal-fired station.

- **Why?** TEP wants to combat climate change and use clean-energy goals.
- **How?** The utility is closing a coal-fired power station.
- **What?** TEP highlights its plan for reducing carbon emissions by 80% by 2035. It encourages its customers to read more about the plan.



**tucsonelectricpower** The retirement of Unit 1 at the coal-fired San Juan Generating Station Thursday moved us a step closer to our clean energy goals. We've replaced its output with cleaner natural gas-fired units and renewable resources. Learn more about our plans to reduce carbon emissions 80 percent by 2035 by clicking on the link in our bio and reading the latest news.

7w



**Consider using this framework when promoting sustainability goals, introducing a new product or service, or highlighting your utility's brand voice.**

Check out [E Source Energy Advision](#), our database of more than 6,000 examples of utility marketing and advertising campaigns.

Further reading:

- [11 Storytelling Frameworks to Supercharge Your Social Media Marketing](#) discusses common marketing storytelling formulas and gives examples of these formulas in action.
- [The #1 Secret of Highly Persuasive People: Future Pacing—Magnetic Speaking](#) offers tips for telling stories that engages customers and makes them visualize the future your company can help them achieve.
- [Storytelling Techniques: The Art of Storytelling in a Digital Age](#) gives storytelling advice on how to write for businesses with data.
- [Back to the Story Spine](#) gives tips on how to identify a story's structure and then build your own.
- [Simon Sinek: How great leaders inspire action](#) explores how great leaders (and great brands) engage others because they “start with why.”





E Source, the data authority for the utility industry, blends industry-leading research, predictive data science, and solution services to help utilities make better decisions to support their customers, their bottom line, and our planet. With a commitment to practical innovation, we use more than three decades of utility-focused experience and our unique solution set to help clients achieve their goal of becoming The Sustainable Utility.



**Contact us**

[www.esource.com](http://www.esource.com) | [esource@esource.com](mailto:esource@esource.com) | 1-800-ESOURCE

