

Craig English, Ingo Money



Craig English is Vice President of Business Solutions at Ingo Money, a software company specializing in digital money movement. He and his colleagues participated in a Narativ storytelling workshop in March 2018.

We sat down with Craig to learn how storytelling has impacted his experiences with his primary clientele, decision-makers at major banks. Craig emphasized the value of several key learnings from our workshops:

- knowing your audience and when to use stories
- personalizing and using relatable stories
- storytelling as a competitive advantage for smaller or newer businesses
- using stories to build support in a long sales cycle

Q

Prior to working with Narativ, had you put much thought into storytelling?

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I had not used storytelling in my daily sales life. I'd heard that salespeople should focus on storytelling, but I'd fallen into that "business facts and data" mindset. For me, there was no interpersonal or human component; sales was just business. But now, I've learned that storytelling is a much better way to go. If nothing else, you're making it easier for people to hear the message you're ultimately trying to get across.

How do you decide when to use storytelling?

Every salesperson has to read their audience. I learned from the workshop that listeners need to be ready to listen. So you need to know when to use the storytelling tool or not based on who your audience is. When you're with a bunch of tech guys and they just want to talk zeros and ones, it's probably not the best time to break out the story. But when you're building a relationship, the story is the best tool.

Q *As you move a prospect along the sales funnel, are there times when a story is especially needed?*

A When you tell a story, you break down barriers: You move the group beyond the “us-versus-them,” analytical, two-sided conversation dynamic. Storytelling creates a more relaxed environment, building a foundation while also setting the context for the interaction. That makes the group more receptive to what you’re saying.

So I do like to use stories earlier on, both in a sales cycle and in an individual presentation, but you have to consider your audience. I can tell a story in the middle of a pitch with the right audience. For example, I might tell a story about another company that was in a similar situation as my target, explaining what their problem was and how they approached it. It has more to do with the people than the timing.

What types of stories are best to soften those barriers and bring everyone together?

The more relatable the story is, the more impactful it is. Throughout training, Jerome was good about redirecting by asking, “So what does that mean?” And that draws out that relatable component. So personalizing something to make it relatable makes a much more compelling story.

What’s an example of a relatable story you’ve used? And what kind of impact has that story had?

Jerome helped me create a story about my brother. I was working with a bank, selling a solution to get the money from your check instantly instead of waiting for a check to clear for funds to become available. And I used my brother as an example (without identifying who he was): In Chris’s small

business, what happens if he can’t pay his guys? At the end of the story, I showed a picture of him and said, “By the way, does anyone know who Chris is?” And one guy said, “He’s your brother!” That personal element lightened the whole atmosphere. And the fact that everything in the story is true makes it so impactful. This is a real person. This really happened. It’s not some fabricated marketing scenario. It’s a real need that our company can fill.

It can be hard to measure the impact of an individual story in an 18-month sales cycle. But for that meeting, there’s no question that the story had an impact. In this particular scenario, it put to rest a common objection that had been raised by two executives. So there was no question it had an impact.

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When you say it could take 18 months to make a sale, how many meetings does that mean for you? And in that long period of time, would you use the same story more than once? Or do you just read the audience and decide if the story would help?

The number of meetings is directly proportional to the size of the bank. The bigger the bank, the more meetings. It’s nothing for me to have a dozen meetings with a big bank. I’m always trying to build support, bringing in new stakeholders to increase awareness and raise the prioritization. And so that means meeting with a lot of different people, whether they’re from strategy, product, business, risk, or wherever. There’s a lot of repetition in those meetings.

If I have a key stakeholder with me regularly, I don’t want that person hearing the story over and over; I don’t want it to sound like a pre-recorded schtick. I may do variations. And if the person is like, “Hey, talk about that time you guys did this one thing; these people are going to care about that,” then I

do, of course. So you have to measure it: If this guy or gal's a real supporter, your coach, and they want to see you succeed, they'll probably be okay with you telling the same story again so a new stakeholder can hear it. But at a certain point, if you are with someone who is not completely in your camp, you don't want them to feel like you're a one-trick pony and this is all you've got.

A good story has a lot of room for you to massage it. You can still get your point across with a slightly different approach. But I want to be careful to not sound like that stereotypical sales guy who walks in and tells the same story. You have to be able to weigh when it's the right tool for the job. You might cringe at the word "tool." Sorry.

Q *I think "tool" is a perfect word. Stories are tools you can add to other tools you use. You can't say that five-minute story or the 30-second pitch will make or break a sale in a long cycle. It's all about building relationships and getting stakeholders in, and slowly but surely convincing one person after the next.*

A That's a good summary of the evolution of using a story in a long sales cycle. I recently told a story to a product person. The story was about me talking to a salesperson about our solution. The salesperson said to me, "Can I take this to my accounts? You know, we really need this." So I told this story to a product person to illustrate a need. Their salesperson sees that need because they work with the customer all day, every day. But the product person is a bit removed from the customer. So I used that story.

In the beginning, a story is a bit more generic, a bit more solution-oriented. But as I go through the cycle, I start to use stories that are specific, like using the conversation I had with the salesperson

in a story to that same company's product person. At that stage, we've evolved past that generic solution to a specific issue I learned from that company's salesperson. So the way you use the tool evolves in that long sales cycle.

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Now that you've used your story for different audiences over the last few months, have you found that there's a competitive advantage to using storytelling?

Ingo Money is in a David-and-Goliath situation when it comes to selling our service. When I'm working with banks, I'm competing against huge payment processors that have been around forever. Everybody knows them; they have instant credibility. But Ingo's not a household name; we are not a known entity. We lack credibility and understanding of who we are and what we do.

The banks are used to the usual sales spiel from our competitors who just stand up there and throw slides out. The big guys may not need to tell a story because everyone knows them; they're used in nine out of ten banks. So our competitive edge comes from using the storytelling tool to make us relatable, to help show we know what we're doing. We can show we've been here before, we've seen this, and we have the experience to handle it. And just because you don't know our name doesn't mean we're not a viable solution.

Do you feel Narativ's training offered something different than other corporate training you've experienced?

In the sales profession, people pay lip service to storytelling. They say, "Oh yeah, storytelling is a good sales tool." But most salespeople don't un-

derstand how to craft a story, how to architect and tell a story to make it impactful and meaningful. It's easy to think you're using storytelling, but then in the heat of the moment, you don't have the technical know-how and you use all the wrong elements. To actually craft and tell an effective story is a different animal; it's not easy to do properly.

The formula Narativ teaches is what really makes the difference. The coaching, the approach, the understanding of the mechanics of a good story – that's the value. Storytelling is a skill you get better at it. It gets easier with practice. That's where I am: using my training from Narativ to be a bit more polished at writing stories.

Another thing I learned in the training is how to make a strong short story. I love that quote from Mark Twain: "I didn't have time to write you a short note." It's true. I didn't realize it until I took a five-minute story and tried to cut it to 30 seconds for a recent sales meeting. I thought, "Oh my gosh, how do I condense this? How do I distill this and not lose the meaning behind the story?" And I remembered my training from Narativ.

Q

Did our training change the way you sell?

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I use stories to differentiate myself from the "typical sales guy" who is just there to close the deal, get the money, and move on. With a story, I can change the perception of Craig English, the salesperson, versus the typical sales guy giving a dog-and-pony show. Storytelling adds that human component.

That brings up the other component of storytelling: listening. Have you noticed a change in the way people listen to you? And have you noticed anything different in the way you listen to other people?

There have been instances where I could clearly see a strong attention level because of my stories. There were no phones or "crack berries" brought out; they were following the presentation and wanted to know, "Where's this going; what's the point?"

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The training definitely changed how I listen to others. In our workshop, I listened critically: "Did they follow the formula? Oh, that's wrong; that's right," you know. When somebody's telling a story, I still notice when they're displaying a bad storytell-

ing habit. But my listening is a little more nuanced now: I analyze a story's elements. I also notice that customers tell stories back to me; sometimes they'll tell a story to explain why they have some absolutely stupid rule or something.

Do you find yourself thinking through the editorial tools you learned when you're writing new stories?

The reality is, I only have so many hours in the day. So I find a happy medium between the perfect, well-thought-out story and no story at all, which is what I've got time for. It's directly proportional to the importance of the opportunity. I had to do a toast at a show the week before Thanksgiving in Hilton Head. I knew what I wanted to say in terms of bullet points, and while I was talking, I improvised a story. And it went well, so that's what counts.

I try to use the "what happened" tools as a checkpoint to see if I'm on the right path. It doesn't come naturally to me to say, "Okay, so what happened?" and then go into details. I would naturally be more likely to say something like, "Everyone was really frustrated." Well, that doesn't tell me anything. So I try to use those tools to expand the story and make connections.



Book a 15 minute consultation with Jerome Deroy, CEO, to discuss how storytelling can invigorate your sales team.