

**GURU
GUIDE**
with
Vidusha and Anton

in conversation with
Mike Wittenstein

16

**THE POWER OF
STORYTELLING IN
BUSINESS SETTINGS**

A QUICK INTRODUCTION TO THE GURU GUIDE

The 'Guru Guide' is an attempt to refine decades of hard-earned expertise into succinct, simple and practical advice.

It is NOT meant to be an exhaustive exploration of a topic: rather, pointed areas of focus which can only be discerned by a practitioner. It is not meant to be a generic set of advice: it is advice from battle-hardened professionals who have had a lifetime of experience and proven track records.

The Guru Guide has a pre determined format:

- ✓ It aims to understand a topic/ area of focus
- ✓ It aims to give tools to help you navigate the area
- ✓ It also gives contexts and examples: so that you can customize it to suit YOU

Exploratory, intimate and insightful, the Guru Guide aims to bring to you a wealth of expertise which can only be possible through veterans whose varied and in-depth experiences offer unparalleled insights.

The brevity and simplicity is by choice, and design. Focused on Executives and Managers who want to get quick tips and techniques, who are eager to improve their craft

and trade : the Guru Guide aims to offer 'little nuggets' of advice and importantly, simple tools, which will enable practitioners to up their game and benefit from expertise which may be hard to find in a hurry.

INTRODUCING



**VIDUSHA
NATHAVITHARANA**

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Luminary Learning and the organization's founder. His areas of expertise are with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



**ANTON
THAYALAN**

Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands-on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management, and currently works as the Chief Evangelist of Luminary Learning and the Transformation Therapist of High5 Consultancy. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there: and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional clients.

INTRODUCING MIKE WITTENSTEIN



We first 'noticed' Mike through LinkedIn, and unknown to him, we were super inspired by the work he did and the novel approach he took, which resonated deeply with the work we do. Seeing him take the approach he takes with storytelling gave us immense confidence in our approach, and truth be told, we were itching to have him on our little 'In Conversation' segment !

Mike is, and we think always has been an iconoclast, a rebel, and a person who challenged conventional paradigms and looked at things with a fresh perspective.

A storyteller, strategist, digital agency lead, IBM eVisionary, consultant, and coach, Mike has worked with some of the best-of-class organizations to help them find clarity in their strategy, gain impetus in their plans and gain support for their change programs. His ability to make things simple and cut through the clutter makes him one of those sought after individuals; and his ability to relate to the C-level makes him a consultant and coach par excellence.

- » Helps leaders move ideas to first revenue
- » Storyminers have been in business since 2002
- » US \$ 2b in value creation for clients

As you read on, you'll see how Mike takes storytelling to a whole new level. With him story becomes a company's strategy and the primary language for painting a company's vision for its future state.

Mike is also a husband, dad, hiker, woodworker, traveler and civic volunteer, and says with a wide grin on his face: 'always' curious, sometimes funny and polite in all cultures'.

STORYTELLING ? AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL ?

Storytelling is something as old as time and is probably ingrained in all of humanity. It is how we passed down tacit knowledge, taught our children values, recaptured 'glory days' and inspired the next generations. Storytelling is not a new phenomenon at all – it's just that 'management' is never looked upon with a storytelling angle.

Possibly the first REAL focus on it was down to a series of case studies and articles that the Ivy League Universities showcased, demonstrating how 'storytelling' was something leaders ought to do in order to simplify, capture the 'hearts' of their teams, and also, above all, bind towards the future the leader wants to paint. More than ever before, organisations needed to find ways to truly engage people; and simply pouring out statistics, charts and laborious presentations just wasn't cutting it – people were 'getting it', but not really 'getting excited' about it.

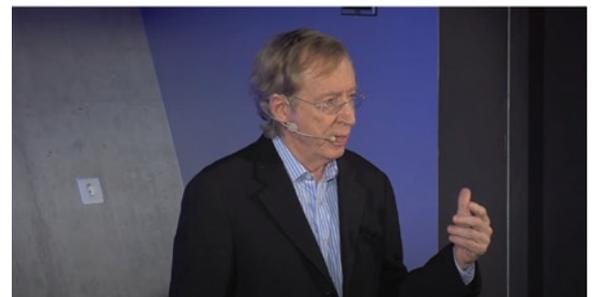
To be a good leader, it is essential to be a good storyteller; and though 'storytelling' is possibly not the kind of 'theory' management schools teach, even academia today is warming up to the notion that storytelling truly is an essential skill all leaders need to have.



HEAR MIKE DESCRIBE HOW A FUTURE STORY CAN CHANGE YOUR GAME AND SET YOU ON A NEW GROWTH STRATEGY.



CLICK HERE TO READ AN ARTICLE BY JEFF GOTHELFF ON THE HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW ON STORY TELLING AND LEADERSHIP



WATCH STEVE DENNING TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY TELLING ON TEDX



Let's hear what
Mike has to say
about story...



Vidusha & Anton

BUT.... HOW CAN YOU GET 'SENIOR' LEADERS TO TAKE STORYTELLING SERIOUSLY ?

“ Well, you don't really need to look too deeply into the impact of storytelling. You can find illustrations of many a leader who has made storytelling a powerful tool to inspire and galvanize organizations. Elon Musk, the late Steve Jobs, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi – all of them used storytelling fabulously well to paint the vision they had in their mind to those they worked with.

See, business is, above all, a human endeavor. Businesses are run by PEOPLE, and people LOVE stories – it's as simple as that. If you know how to tell a good story, you will have a rapt audience. However, here is the thing – a good story isn't just a good story. It needs to be rooted in honesty, genuineness, and also, something that resonates with others. Good storytelling isn't simply cooking up a fantastic tall story. You need to be able to get people to connect with it, and also, help them connect the dots.

Senior leaders often make the mistake of making a 'story' something you tell as a 'filler' to 'color' the otherwise fact-based presentations they make. This is NOT the storytelling we are referring to. Storytelling, as a technique, is making 'the story' something that is integral to the presentation you are making, enabling those listening to become co-investors. Better still, you need to make the audience PART OF THE STORY and, using the techniques that we generally use in consulting, be co-authors of that story.

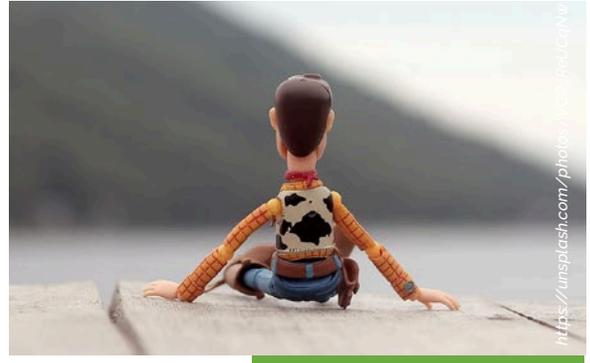
Story in its highest and most valuable form for a business paints a clear picture of what the business is to become. In short, “Make the business like the story” becomes the company's strategy.

The INVOLVEMENT you get when you make those whom you want (to execute strategy, plans and change) become co-authors of the story is far, far greater than when you 'talk down' to them as mere employees; and this makes all the difference between galvanizing support and making plans happen. The level of support you get, as well as how deeply people get involved in the execution process, increase tremendously when you make the team PART OF THE authoring of the story you want to tell.

So, IF you are a leader who REALLY wants to make a massive impact by garnering support and executing strategies (rather than strategies becoming things no one really bites into), storytelling is a skill you really need to invest into learning.

CREATING SOMETHING LIKE A VISION WITH STORYTELLING IS AT LEAST THINKABLE – BUT MANAGING AND DRIVING CHANGE ?

See, any Vision you want to achieve requires some level of change. The more ambitious the Vision, chances are, the bigger the changes required. Even though we segregate these things for academic purposes, in reality, all of management is interlinked, as is all aspects of leadership. You can't really segregate Visioning Processes from that of Engagement, from that of Change, from that of Motivation, from that of Planning from that of Execution. EVERYTHING is interlinked.



So, change is something that is omnipresent and intrinsically linked with all aspects of leadership and management. In fact, change is possibly the toughest undertaking a leader has and changing culture is possibly the hardest change to be attempted. However, unless you make change a central theme, chances are all other things of strategy will falter and the quote: 'Culture eats strategy for breakfast' will not be something to merely pay lip service to. Given how central and important change IS to all other aspects of leadership, this is one of the places storytelling becomes critically important.

Storytelling enables simple visualization of the kind of future a leader is trying to create; and involving the key stakeholders in the storytelling process enables them to be invested in the endeavor at a logical, intellectual, and equally importantly, emotional level. Getting everyone to be able to see the same future, and also, for them to be able to grasp how to get there, and visualizing this together as a collective is an extremely powerful way of getting that all important buy in toward it.

Listen in on our chat with Mike. In his practice at Storyminers he explains how sharing the responsibility for making the story real is what builds followership and keeps everyone aligned.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj4GWHw-y7Q>

Mike, that's really interesting!



CONCEPT 1: STORIES ARE ONLY AS AWESOME AS THOSE TELLING THEM

One of the things you need to know about storytelling is that its central pivot is the storyteller. If the storyteller is not effective, worse still, not someone who has credibility, chances are your story will be stillborn!

However, any storyteller knows that listening is an active experience, so it's their job to create an experience that draws people in and allows them to discover a new truth for themselves.

So, one of the biggest challenges is to find great storytellers from within the team. Those 'telling the story' can't be just great speakers. They must be those within a team that have truly won the trust, confidence, and love of the team. The ancient Greeks identified three attributes: Ethos, Logos, and Pathos (Credibility, Logic and Reason, and Emotional Connect) as the three pillars of persuasion; and this holds specially true for Leaders who want to tell 'credible' stories. Ultimately, whatever you weave as a story needs to be credible, logical, and have emotional appeal; and all this is about the 'person' telling the story.

The very same story told by two different people can have two very different impacts. So, be absolutely critical of WHO is telling the story, and try and build 'heroes' who have actually built that credibility to tell the stories you want told.



TOOL 1 - USING 'HEROES'

Many stories have heroes in them. In Star Wars, Luke Skywalker defeated Darth Vader. In the Harry Potter book series, Harry defeated Voldemort. In classical literature, Hercules completed his ordeal. Steve Jobs, Anne Sullivan, Marie Curie, Jeff Bezos, Jane Goodall, J. K. Rowling, Coco Chanel and Elon Musk transformed themselves and the demanding situations around them to succeed. Everybody likes a story in the hero's journey format because they get to be the hero.

Vicariously, they can feel what the hero feels, long for what the hero wants, and celebrate the hero's victory. The more the hero appears to be like them, the more enjoyment they find in the story – and the more impact there is on the individual reader. You already knew this anyway. It's imperative for leaders using stories not to make themselves, their companies, their brands, their services, or their products the hero in the story. Only the person who needs to change should become the hero. Not making someone from the front-line the hero can only make the effort seem insincere in the eyes of those you hope to have the most significant impact.

Mike's Rule: Never make yourself the hero, make only a front-line team member or the customer the hero in your story. After all, everything you do in your business is to create value for them. Focusing on your employees and customers first yields a powerful alignment that increases agility, speeds response, improves reputation, and increases profitability through natural efficiencies.



NO ONE POSSIBLY DOES A BETTER JOB OF CREATING HEROES THAN HOLLYWOOD. THE POWER OF THE STORIES THEY TELL CAN BE UNDERSTOOD IN THE DEEP IMPACT IT CREATES ABOUT AMERICANS, AND THE COUNTRY ITSELF, WHERE, FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, THE REST OF THE WORLD ASSOCIATES THE ENTIRE COUNTRY AND THEIR ETHOS THROUGH THE STORIES THEY TELL AND THE HEROES THEY CELEBRATE.



FOR A LONG TIME, BOLLYWOOD STARS HAVE BEEN USED TO PROMOTE PRODUCTS WHICH ARE CONSIDERED DEEPLY RACIALLY DIVISIVE AND EXPLOITATIVE. WHETHER OR NOT WE AGREE WITH THE ADVERTISEMENT OR PRODUCT IS NOT THE POINT WE WANT TO MAKE; IT IS TO HIGHLIGHT THE IMPACT OF A POWERFUL ICON IN SETTING A MINDSET AND THE ABILITY THEY HAVE TO 'CHANGE PERCEPTIONS' (EITHER WAY)

CONCEPT 2 : STORYTELLING IN DRIVING CHANGE



<https://unsplash.com/photos/AGJJYyxw54>

It's a misconception to believe that stories can drive change or make it happen. The root of that belief is that leaders can 'make' people change to do new things in new ways. The fact is that nothing is farther from the truth. If your leadership style is punitive, consider changing it. It's rapidly going out of fashion in the 2020s. Use a story to draw people toward your ideas in a way that allows them to make important discoveries about themselves and see their role in creating a better future. At Storyminers, we believe that leaders should take on the extra burden of defining the future with greater clarity. That makes it easier for employees to imagine themselves in a future that fits them, serves them, and where they can make their most valuable contributions. Think of a story more like a magnet and less like a whip.

As a leader, consider that the change you are looking for has already happened. Imagine yourself in that future timeframe, then look back over your shoulder toward today. Your story should paint a clearer picture for your team members about how they can identify with the future you envision (albeit metaphorically). Your story should give them clarity and a reason to believe. It should anticipate their questions and help them understand what the changes they are about to experience will mean to them. Suppose you craft your story to be an experience about discovering something more powerful about themselves, then in that case, you will win the followership you seek.



Vidusha & Anton

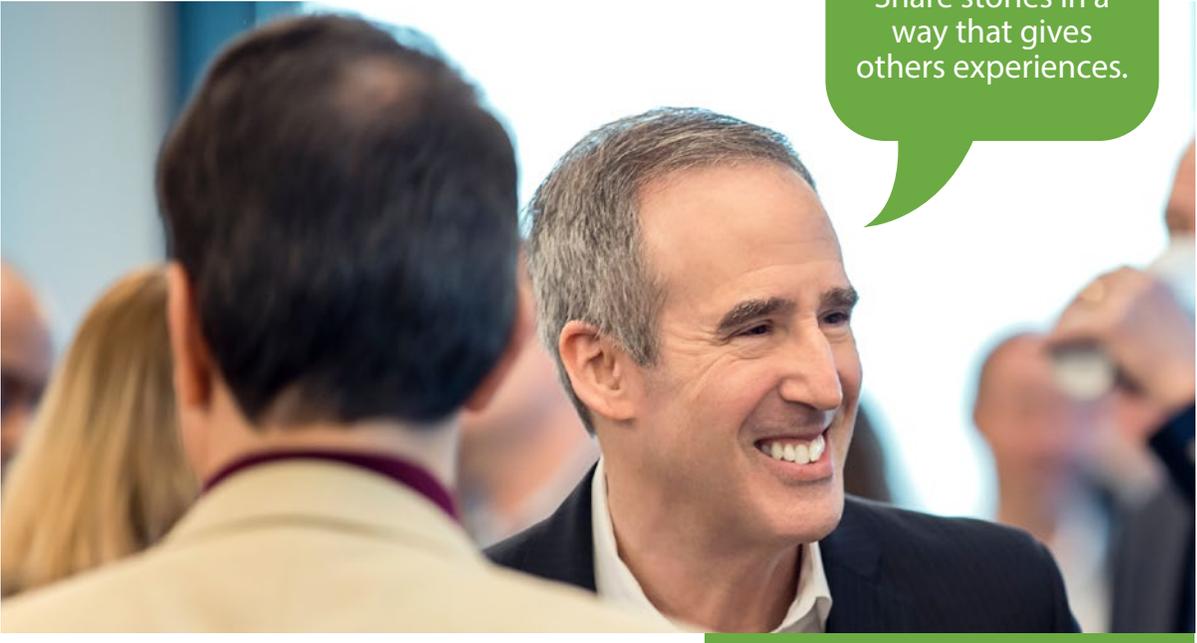
Mike, we couldn't agree more!

Remember, you are not the hero. Your people are. Your story is a way for them to see that, understand, and believe. Once they do, there will be almost nothing you can't achieve.

MIKE
WITTENSTEIN



TOOL 2 – JOURNEY MAP



Share stories in a way that gives others experiences.

Takeaway: Map your experience before you write your story.

A journey map is a representation of how customers flow through your business. You can use it to understand current-state issues and create future-state solutions. Journey maps get everyone on the same page (literally). With a journey map, you can see where customers are, what they're trying to do, how the business supports them (or not). Journey maps also provide valuable insight into how others feel. That's important because it becomes the basis for your story.

As customers' demands rise, they expect higher levels of personalization. That's hard for most businesses to achieve because coordinating all of the inside elements is difficult. Using a journey map can make that process much more manageable. You can show each step in a customer's journey with your business. That makes it easy for different departments to align their processes, metrics, expectations, and hand-offs. When you create a story to accompany your journey map, it can help everyone tune their portion of the business to meet customer needs. That story can inform everyone about how individuals make decisions, trade-offs and give insights into their emotions. When everyone shares the same understanding of the customer, it's easy to deliver a better experience while reducing costs. The combination of journey maps with a story is potent.

CONCEPT 3 : STORYTELLING FOR INNOVATION



If your strategy includes a new service, one of the best ways to get started is not with a story at all! Instead, it's with a well-designed experience that adds value to your customers, engages your employees, then benefits the bottom line. It's essential to focus on profit-making last in the design process so that you stay focused on what your customers want most and will genuinely adopt.

Once you design your customer experience in a way that your employees will want to deliver it, you can tell its story. Some of the most successful business stories in the world are about what will happen to you as a client when you experience a particular brand. These kinds of stories are imaginative, detailed, and make promises with the brand that the business must keep. It's essential to include more detail and for those details to appear in the experience when customers have it.

This idea works!

About half of Storyminer's business uses storytelling for innovation and new concept development : think stores, services, platforms and franchises.

Mike's Tip – Start with your imagination set in the future, and then work back from there.

TOOL 3 – FUTURE STORY



Here's the cool part: When you tell a story about the future, before spending money on contracts, construction, or software development, keep your development costs as low as possible and your timeline as short as possible. You also reduce your risks. It turns out that storytelling is the fastest, most efficient, and least expensive prototyping tool in anyone's business toolkit. By only using your mouth and adding a few pictures, you can quickly develop version after version of feasible futures. Then using standard agile, software development, and project management tools, you can fine-tune your design until it's ready for primetime.

Case Studies, for an optical glass manufacturer, the Storyminer's team prototyped their Store of the Future concept totally on paper. Within months, the clients could walk through a full-size store prototype and make critical design and scale decisions. This physical story happened before funding expensive leases, construction, or software development. The entire project started with the stories of a customer and an optician. Subsequent sharing of that story and the interactions between them got everyone on the same page.

See their story here:
https://storyminers.com/success_story/renee-himel-director-of-brand-experience-transitions-optical/

That's a great case study, Mike!



ARE THERE CULTURAL NUANCES YOU NEED TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN USING STORYTELLING AS A TOOL ?

Each organizational and national culture is unique; so yes, you do need to be sensitive to them. Here are some general guidelines:

- » Be conscious of the role hierarchy plays. In certain cultures there is a deep hierarchical bent; and if so, unless the 'story' comes from a 'senior', it may not really have the impact you want.
- » There is also a gender bias in certain cultures, more prominently than in others. So, be mindful of WHAT story either gender tells. Or else, this may result in being counter productive (unless you are actually making a point with it).
- » Be mindful in the use of humor: some cultures are not so forgiving of tongue-in-cheek humor; so, be conscious.
- » The medium of storytelling is also culturally sensitive, especially based on the demographics of the members. As a general rule of thumb, in-person is always best; but, there ARE cultures which actually 'prefer' to 'watch on video' at 'their convenience' rather than being 'herded into a room' to listen.
- » Participating in storytelling and co-creating stories may not work in rigidly hierarchical cultures. As such, you will need additional skills, etc., and facilitation to get full participation.

However, there are some universal truths too:

- » People resonate with stories that have relevance to them, and their own life.
- » People generally prefer optimistic stories rather than pessimistic stories.
- » People generally like stories that are not too distant in the past, because otherwise, they tend to be 'fables' from a 'time which is irrelevant'.
- » People generally prefer audio visual means rather than purely auditory; and people generally like the option to ask questions afterwards. (Even if they don't ask any, they like to know they have the OPTION to do so.)

Culture IS central to almost everything we do. So, be mindful of it when trying out the tools and techniques around storytelling.



**HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF
STORYTELLING DONE RIGHT**

DIRECTOR OF BRAND EXPERIENCE TRANSITION OPTICALS – USA



» SITUATION

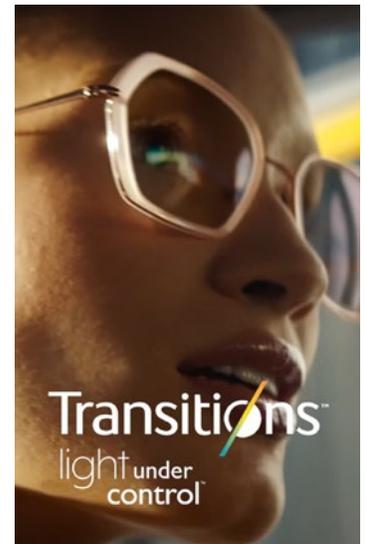
This company with the light-sensitive lenses that darken in sunlight wanted to add retail to its marketing mix to connect with its customers directly.

» APPROACH

Transitions Optical wanted a clear picture of the future experience, so we blended some services and brought in partners (retail design and construction, UI/UX, app and simulation developers, and AI/machine learning pioneers) to deliver a new offering for them called TREx (Transitions Retail Experience). It outlined how Transitions Optical could use one space to create three concepts in one: shopping, training, and research, including many details on construction, design, technology, training, and branding. Working closely with the client, it became an integrated view of Transitions lenses Smart Store concept which they used to win support internally, with real estate and optical partners, and to communicate with multiple contractors. Transitions Optical got a clear view of their future experience before even one dollar was spent on construction, leasing, or technology. Storyminers also provided support to keep the design in-line with Transitions Optical commercial objectives.

» RESULTS

Transitions Optical was acquired sooner than expected.



This highlight video (2:45) will let you peek into Transitions Optical's future...

www.transitionsoptical.com



PRESIDENT CUSTOMER STRATEGY LLC – USA



- » I came up through Corporate America, working in market research for The Coca-Cola Company, The Home Depot and Kraft Foods. I was fortunate to work with some of the best marketers in the world. And, since starting my own business in 2009, I've worked with hundreds of companies in dozens of industries to help them bring products and services to market.
- » My father was a rabbi, so I have a very high EQ—emotional quotient. Storyminers helped me find and share the emotional benefit of what I do. I'm more comfortable revealing what makes me tick and clearly communicating my company's value, as well as our values.
- » Mike has helped me to be more relevant to a broader audience and set up the nuts and bolts of reaching out to people. I've taken what I've learned and am now offering it to a larger network, especially in the areas of financial services, healthcare, retail and B2B. Mike is a joy to work with, a real mensch. So insightful and innovative.
- » Now, my clients, who are often large organizations with significant roadblocks that can halt the progress of new ideas, understand the full value of what I bring. More emotion and story illustrate my relevance.

CEO HIFIBUYS – USA



» SITUATION

Audio Alternatives had built a respectable clientele, but it was slow to grow. People had to know about it before they could find it. In an all-things-digital world, that wasn't enough. There needed to be a way to bring new audiophiles in to build local traffic and to expand the firm's then brand new online presence.

» APPROACH

Storyminers reviewed current operations and facilities, interviewed the staff, and checked out the competition in-person and on-line. Armed with the latest in customer expectations, we worked with the founder to uncover his vision for the future in great detail. By weaving in a focus on customers' needs and influencing what comes first in marketing, the CEO decided to build an experience store. The focus would switch from buying gear to enjoying amazing music-based experiences.

Several years later, the CEO purchased and reinvigorated one of the Southeast's favorite, big-box audio entertainment brands, HiFi Buys. He applied the customer experience principles from Storyminers to shape his next-generation in-store and on-line experiences.

» RESULTS

Now, HiFi Buys operates a destination specialty store in the heart of Atlanta's #1 shopping district, sales have doubled, and customers enjoy an up-to-date digital-first marketing experience that dovetails with its in-store experience.

If you're interested in hearing music at a level you've probably never heard before, you can check out the store on-line or head in for a visit.

www.hifibuys.com

» CHICK-FIL-A, USA

Innovation is now as important to this QSR brand as its hospitality origins. Storyminers helped the company envision its future drive-thru experience with live actors. Our recommendations helped improve both the drive-thru experience as well as the **innovation process** itself.



» TELUS, CANADA

Storyminers helped one of Canada's largest Telcos extend their experience/story framework and designed and facilitated a **5-country interactive workshop**. The TELUS team explored journey maps, adaptive business design, and other tools to help them transform not only the experience, but the underlying capabilities that deliver it.



» PIEDMONT HEALTHCARE

What started as a typical access-to-care project became an **Innovation Accelerator**. Improved patient/caregiver experiences, helped the hospital system earn more from elective procedure and fund needed initiatives in basic care.



MIKE WITTENSTEIN

QUESTION ?
Just Ask

www.storyminers.com/yama



CLICK HERE to listen to
Mike on: 'OFFICE POLITICS
AND THE FINE ART OF
SUCKING UP'

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