

Story Sources

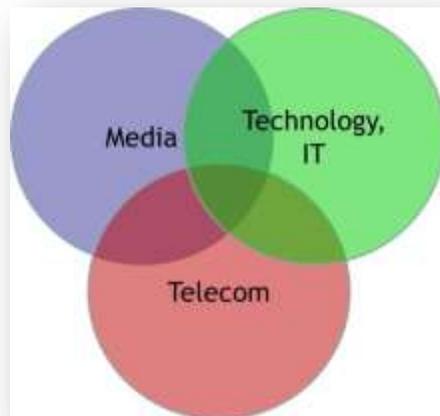
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One of the most common questions that I get in the storytelling workshops is, "What do you read to stay on top of all the goings-on in the world that yield the stories you tell?" It's a good question, and one that I'll address in this post.



As many of you know, I work in the world of technology, at the intersection between Telecom, IT and Media. My colleague Joe Candido and I spend our time studying the ebb and flow of these three sectors and more importantly the impact that they have on various verticals including healthcare, transportation, education, government, manufacturing, and a number of others. Our job is to distill down the vast amount of data generated by the interaction among different verticals and the technologies they encounter to create insight. So it might surprise you to know that in my quest to stay on top of the happenings in Telecom, IT and Media I don't read any trade journals - as in none. Zip. Nada. Huh?

Here's the reason. I know the technologies in these sectors very well because I've worked in this world for more than years, often in very technical roles. I've written more than 50 books about the inner workings of these technologies, so I'm comfortable with them. Is my knowledge 100% current? Nope. But it's current enough that I know what I don't know and also know when I have to retreat to the standards or the technical press to refresh my knowledge of one technology or another.

So where do I cast my attention? What sources do I seek out? What do I read? Who do I talk to? these are all good questions, so I'll spend some time in this post answering them as well as I can. As I've noted in prior posts this is a bit of a moving target, and some of these questions I'm still trying to formulate answers to. So bear with me and we'll see what I come up with.

What I Read

I'll begin with magazines and journals (This doesn't include the photography magazines I receive every month, even though they're instrumental in my personal storytelling craft). As you'll see they're pretty diverse.

Magazines and Journals

- [The McKinsey Quarterly](#). This business journal is fantastic for insight into the high-level leadership trends that are imposing their will on the industries they serve. The *Quarterly* is available in digital format for tablet readers and is excellent.
- [The Economist](#). Perhaps the best weekly news magazine (although they refer to themselves as a newspaper) being published today, *The Economist* provides a truly global view of the goings-on around the world, dividing itself into sections that address each region of the world as well as technology and other specific areas of interest. Every quarter they also publish a *Technology Quarterly*, in which they address the hot tech topics that the world is seeing. The *Economist* is available in a digital format as well.
- [National Geographic](#). Perhaps the best monthly collection of stories in print, *National Geographic's* supremely talented writers and photographers are on the bleeding edge of storytelling every month, creating compelling content that delivers on-the-mark every month. I strongly recommend the digital edition simply because in addition to the articles, subscribers also get video content and interactive maps that dramatically enhance the richness of the written content.
- [Business Week](#). *Business Week* has a decidedly American bent to it, but that's OK: Even though the articles are largely about business issues in the U.S., that's not completely true. Articles in *Business Week* are increasingly global in scope and provide insights that are similar to those provided by *The Economist* in terms of broad perspective. Easy to read, often funny, *Business Week* is also available in a digital edition.
- [Foreign Policy Magazine](#). Before you start questioning me about a magazine that focuses on Foreign Policy, hear me out. Mark Twain once wrote that "Travel is fatal to bigotry, prejudice and narrow-mindedness." And while you may not be able to travel as widely as you would like, magazines like *Foreign Policy* give you the next best thing. Rich with far-ranging articles about globalization, politics, foreign policy, and many other topics that are rich with storytelling lore. The [history](#) of the organization is fascinating and will give you insight into the value that this remarkable magazine brings. Like the others, it is also available in a digital edition.
- [The Atlantic Monthly](#). This wonderful publication advertises itself as the publication that reports on "news and analysis on politics, business, culture, technology, national, international and life." They do this, and more. Few magazines are as richly wide-ranging as this one. Also available in a digital edition for tablet readers.
- [Wall Street Journal](#). What can I say? The truth is that I don't read the *Wall Street Journal* every day – far from it. I do, however, read the news flashes I receive in e-mail as a subscriber to the WSJ's digital edition. Those flashes often send me digging into the full-blown version of the paper in search of a more detailed article. For example, a couple of weeks ago I received notification of an article that had just appeared in the *Journal* called

“Why Big Data Matters.” This happened to be an area of focus for me at that point in time, and the article was rich with exactly the content I needed. Again, digital edition available.

- [The local newspaper of whatever town or city I happen to be in.](#) I can't emphasize this enough. Relevance is a critical element of effective storytelling, and one of the best ways to ensure relevance is to imbue your stories with local color. Nothing is more irritating to an audience in another country than a presenter who insists on using references from their own country. If you're working in Canada, take the time to learn something about Canada! Draw maps of Canada! Use Canadian cities as references! Don't talk about Starbucks, talk about Tim's!
- [Deloitte publications](#) – a remarkable variety of them are available at the company's Web site. Deloitte's Technology, Media and Telecommunications (TMT) practice publishes a range of documents which are free and available to anyone who wants to download them.

Authors

It's hard to provide a concise list of books that I recommend because I am a voracious reader. I average about 120 books a year that cover a broad swath of things that keep me informed about the international marketplace that I'm so interested in. But I also read authors who are first and foremost good storytellers. I won't recommend specific books here (maybe in a later post – let me know if you have specific requests), but I *will* recommend specific authors. Here are my favorites (I recommend ANYTHING they've ever written):

- Rick Bragg. One of the world's best contemporary storytellers. For a taste of good writing, read “All Over but the Shoutin.’”
- Thomas Friedman: The author of “The Lexus and the Olive Tree” and “The World is Flat,” this New York Times journalist and bestselling author is great at providing a view of the world and its complex issues through a storyteller's view.
- Robert D. Kaplan: Equal parts historian, political scientist, travel writer, and 100% storyteller, Kaplan's books offer gripping views of the complex world we inhabit. Start with “To The Ends of the Earth.”
- Fareed Zakaria: The host of CNN's GPS program has written several books, the best of which is called “The Post-American World.” This is not a book about the decline of America, but rather about the rise of everybody else. A truly well-presented case with far-reaching implications.
- John McPhee: McPhee asks the questions that nobody else thinks about in his many, many books. This guy knows how to tell a story better than most. I recommend “Uncommon Carriers” as a good place to get started on his books.
- William Least Heat-Moon: I credit Bill with being the man who made me realize that I wanted to be a writer. His seminal book, “Blue Highways,” came out in the early 1980s and he has written a number of well-received travel essay collections and stories since then. Start

with *Blue Highways*, but be prepared: halfway through the book you will find yourself packing the car for a four-month road trip.

- Tom Peters: Equal parts curmudgeon, visionary and consultant, Peters enchanted the world with “In Search of Excellence” in the early 1980s and continues to churn out thought-provoking material. Start anywhere, but be sure to read *Excellence*. It’s a bit dated but still as good today as it was when it first appeared.

Podcasts

I spend a lot of time in airplanes, rental cars and hotel rooms, so I also listen to Podcasts that keep me informed about specific things. They include:

- [The Classic Tales](#) (great way to “read” classic literature without actually reading the stories).
- [This American Life](#) (from National Public Radio). Sometimes, bizarre, always entertaining and thought-provoking stories about life in the United States.
- [This Week in Technology](#) (TWIT): The host and crew discuss a wide range of entertaining technology stories every week. Very, very good.
- [The Cato Institute Daily Podcast](#):
- National Geographic Video Shorts: Available through iTunes University and at the National Geographic site, these are lectures presented by the Geographic’s best people. Fascinating and absolutely rich with stories.
- [TED](#). Founded by Richard Saul Wurman (author of “Information Anxiety”) in 1984, TED (abbreviation for Technology, Entertainment and Design) brings together the best and the brightest in a series of conferences that take place several times a year around the world. Available at the TED Web site or as an iTunes video Podcast, I consume TED videos the same way I consume daily vitamins – at least one every day. One of the best sources of inspired thinking I know.

Books

Finally, books. This is particularly difficult because I read – a *lot*. I’m not going to recommend any particular titles because we’d be here until the end of time. So if you are looking for books on a particular topic, please reach out to me and I’ll come back with one or more titles on the subject.

There are others, of course, and I suspect I’ve left out some of the best ones. If you are interested in a particular topic or medium, please send me a message at Steve@ShepardComm.com and I’ll come back to you with suggestions.

Thanks for reading.