

How a Small Business Hacked One Most Competitive Industries Around

A new entrepreneur in the age-old world of hotels is using a unique brand of storytelling to thrive.



It's been said that in order to build a die-hard following around your products, you must make your customers feel like a better version of whom they already perceive themselves to be. If this is the case, then Ben Weprin and his new company [Graduate Hotels](#) are destined for ever-growing success.

Weprin observed that while it is often the neighborhood surrounding a university that is among a city's most charming, the hotels in these areas are usually bland and uninspiring. As such, the [serial entrepreneur](#) took it upon himself to completely re-imagine the "university hotel." The resulting company Graduate Hotels has experienced a surprising level of rapid growth in an industry that is notoriously competitive.

That's where storytelling has come into play. Weprin realized that people who choose to spend time in a college neighborhood when they visit a city tend to view themselves a certain way--literate, artistic, quirky, et cetera. While staying in a Marriott, Hyatt, or Hilton does not feed this self-image, there were, until recently, no good alternatives. Graduate Hotels was able to step into the void and make an immediate impact.

Graduate Hotels is only the latest in a long line of brands that have used this strategy, many of which are now considered legendary. While Apple certainly makes quality products, its users pay a premium as much for what being a Mac owner says about them than for the actual machine's functionality and features. The same goes for Shake Shack, Heineken, and Rolls Royce, to name a few. People buy all of these products not because of how they taste, feel, or perform but because of the stories they allow consumers to tell about themselves.

It is an example any small business should follow. You may not have the budget or infrastructure to be able to win on price or distribution. But by positioning your product to help your customers project a certain image--to others and to themselves--there's a good chance you'll find your business spreading like bedbugs in a warm mattress.