

From zero  
to **hero**  
in just 15 minutes

# THE NO B.S.

GUIDE TO

## WRITING A KILLER 'ABOUT US' PAGE



THE NO-KIDDING,  
**NO NONSENSE,**  
TELL-IT-LIKE-IT-IS,  
**QUITE POSSIBLY INFALLIBLE**  
GUIDE TO TELLING YOUR  
COMPANY STORY  
**WITHOUT SOUNDING LIKE A**

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# About your business

Imagine you're in a new-business meeting. A big one.

You've made it to the boardroom of a major company who you've been dying to do business with from the day you opened your doors. You're 25 storeys up, taking in a breathtaking view of the city below. Before you are seated 12 dark-suited, busy-looking business people – including the company CEO.

They're looking at you with a range of expressions on their faces.

Expectation. Anticipation. And at the far end of the table, the company cynic – total boredom etched upon his face.

The CEO introduces you briefly to the team, then turns to you and says, “why don't you tell our team something about your company”.

Here's your moment! Your big opportunity.

And you've come prepared (clever you!). You switch on your PowerPoint presentation and there's the first slide – a glorious photo of your office.

You gaze lovingly at the photo and launch into your spiel: “Apex Limited was established in December 2006 with two directors, Bob Smith and Jennifer Jones, combining their industry experience and design skills to provide a bespoke design service.”

Behind you, Mr Cynic rolls his eyes. A couple of other people swivel their chairs to gaze out at the view. Oblivious to their lack of interest, you charge on.

“The Directors have over 20 years experience between them ranging from working in major design companies and marketing offices, working in the healthcare, infrastructure, FMCG and automotive sectors. Both Directors are Qualified Design Practitioners and Professional members of The Design Institute.”

You pause for breath. Nearly there!

“In addition to the two directors, Apec Ltd has 4 technical staff, 7 design staff and 3 office administrators.”

You turn to face the room. Shock horror – it’s empty!

You blew it. Big time.

Now I know what you’re thinking. No one – and certainly not you – would ever deliver such a weak presentation when offered the opportunity of a lifetime.

But guess what? People do. Frequently.

In fact, that spiel is exactly the About Us content we found on a major firm’s website. All we’ve changed are the names and dates to protect the guilty.

## **People deliver weak business presentations all the time. They’re called About Us pages.**

Now I get why companies post boring content on their websites.

You’re busy. You have a limited budget. You’ve got a go-live date to meet and little time to get anything done.

But dull content costs you big time. While you’re boring potential customers to death, your competitors are winning them over with compelling stories.

So what’s the solution?

It starts with asking the right question. And that question is not “how did we get to where we are today?” It’s more like “what is it about us that connects with what our customers want?”

When you ask that question, you see the world differently.

That’s because you’re now seeing it through your customers’ eyes.

And when you look from your customers’ perspective, you may suddenly discover that you really *do* have a compelling story to tell. It just may not be the one you’ve been telling.

## WHY DO PEOPLE CLICK ON YOUR ABOUT US PAGE?

People love stories. It's been that way since language arose. (Who knows – it may even be *why* language arose.)

But there's a caveat. People only love stories that are interesting. And the only stories that people find interesting are those that connect with them – their interests, concerns, fears, desires and ambitions.

That rules out how your business got started, sorry. Unless your business got started in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean during the Storm of the Century while you and your business partner were battling for survival in your brave little craft after having just discovered the wreck of the Titanic using nothing more than a compass and a strong hunch.

If you think finding a good story is hard, you're right. It is hard. But it's far from impossible.

And coming up are three approaches that'll help you get there.

## THREE APPROACHES TO A KILLER ABOUT US PAGE

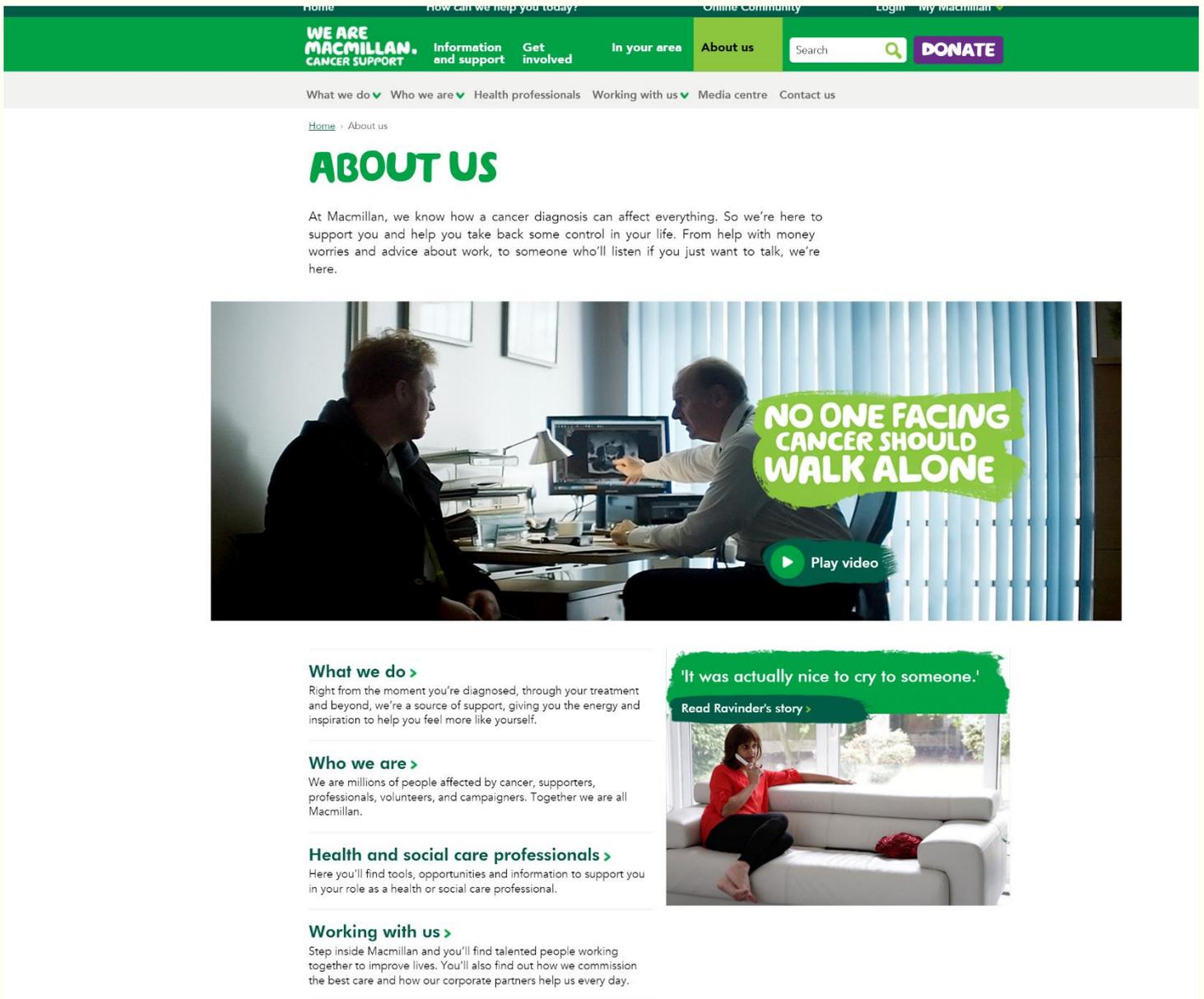
OK, so your business didn't start in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. No problem. You can still engage your readers. Here are three good approaches:

1. Talk less about your services, and more about the problems you solve.
2. Express an opinion or two.
3. Tell a great story about your business (not a crap one).

Let's look at each of these in turn.

## Approach 1. Talk less about your services, and more about the problems you solve.

Mostly people visit websites because they have a problem they want solved. If you can get to the heart of what that problem is, you can grab your visitor's attention immediately – and keep them reading.



Home How can we help you today? Online Community Login My Macmillan

**WE ARE MACMILLAN. CANCER SUPPORT** Information and support Get involved In your area About us Search **DONATE**

What we do Who we are Health professionals Working with us Media centre Contact us

Home About us

## ABOUT US

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything. So we're here to support you and help you take back some control in your life. From help with money worries and advice about work, to someone who'll listen if you just want to talk, we're here.

**NO ONE FACING CANCER SHOULD WALK ALONE**

Play video

**What we do >**  
Right from the moment you're diagnosed, through your treatment and beyond, we're a source of support, giving you the energy and inspiration to help you feel more like yourself.

**Who we are >**  
We are millions of people affected by cancer, supporters, professionals, volunteers, and campaigners. Together we are all Macmillan.

**Health and social care professionals >**  
Here you'll find tools, opportunities and information to support you in your role as a health or social care professional.

**Working with us >**  
Step inside Macmillan and you'll find talented people working together to improve lives. You'll also find out how we commission the best care and how our corporate partners help us every day.

**'It was actually nice to cry to someone.'**  
Read Ravinder's story >

Take a look at the About Us page from [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk). Notice how the very first sentence gets into the reader's world.

The image is a great choice too. It shows the world from the reader's

perspective – we’re looking at the PC monitor from over the patient’s shoulder.

The rest of the About Us page is a wealth of helpful information. Yes, who Macmillan are is an important part of the story, but it’s not the main focus. The focus is on making sure the visitor can get the support they need.

Now imagine you or someone close to you has just been diagnosed with cancer. How would you respond to this page? I know my reaction would be, “thank heavens, someone who knows what I need and is providing it!”

Nice work.

## Approach 2. Express an opinion or two.

When was the last time you read a mission statement that grabbed your attention?

Don’t worry, I can’t remember either.

Most businesses trot out bland statements that are just variations on the same old industry themes. In other words, they look like they’re saying something, but really they’re not.

Check out these statements from the About Us page of five design agency websites:

*In today’s world design has been heightened as a key factor in the growth of businesses.*

*If you’ve come here looking for a big idea then we can’t help you. Here our ideas are blue, bold and bodacious. And that is just in our thinking!*

*We have strategy, creative, media, technology, data and analytics under one roof. We believe this integrated and digitally-led approach is the future for businesses in the connected age who want a creative, innovation and communication partner to help them grow.*

*XYZ is a brand strategy and digital design agency that brings brands and culture together. With a belief that culture drives commerce, we leverage*

*shared values and ideals to inform strategy and design, creating experiences that inspire life and inspire action.*

*We believe that great ideas are the heart and soul of all successful online marketing campaigns.*

Would you knock down the door of any of these agencies to have them work for you?

Here's the crazy thing. Some of them are seriously good agencies. Their work is amazing. But the way they talk is deathly dull. And, ironically for designers, mostly wildly overwritten.

I'm assuming you, too, are really good at what you do. And that you'll fight hard to give your clients the best you've got. And that you don't settle for half-baked work.

In which case, I invite you to take a stand for yourself and your business. Say something real. Provocative. Challenging.

Here's a statement from another design website:

*If you're going to try, go all the way. There is no other feeling like that. You will be alone with the gods, and the nights will flame with fire. You will ride life straight to perfect laughter. It's the only good fight there is.*

## **Take a stand for yourself and your business. Say something real. Provocative. Challenging.**

Don't be afraid to inject some humour into it either, like this from design studio [I Shot Him](#):

*Our motto: Changing hearts, minds and habits.*

*Your motto: Smelling farts, behinds and rabbits.*

You don't have to aim for the stars. In fact, a brave, down-to-earth statement can be more credible than an over-the-top one. SEO company [Moz](#) opens its

About page with “Making the web a better place”. That’s followed by an engaging timeline that tracks the company’s growth from 2004 and demonstrates *how* Moz has been fulfilling on that mission.

Check out [Kickstarter’s](#) About Us page for another example of a clear, compelling statement that you can believe in: “Our mission is to help bring creative projects to life.” That, too, is followed by information that demonstrates how that mission is fulfilled on. Notice the factual statements:

*“To date, tens of thousands of creative projects – big and small – have come to life with the support of the Kickstarter community.”*

*“Over 10 million people, from every continent on earth, have backed a Kickstarter project.”*

*“Since our launch ... \$2.6 billion has been pledged and 111,092 projects have been successfully funded.”*

Of course you don’t have to express an opinion or mission on your About Us page – or anywhere on your website, for that matter. But if you *do*, make it brave, credible and memorable. Otherwise, you just look ordinary.

### **Approach 3. Tell a great story about how your company operates.**

Talking at length about yourself is usually a bad idea. But occasionally, a business will have a story so compelling that it demands to be told.

Beer company Schlitz is a great example. Founded in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in the mid 1800s, the company was doing okay by the early 1900s, holding fifth place for market share. It was also being outgunned by its larger competitors, who had more money to spend on advertising.

Schlitz did a smart thing. They called in one of the greatest advertising copywriters of all time, Claude Hopkins. Hopkins also did a smart thing – he took a tour of a Schlitz brewery and asked lots of questions. Here’s what he learned:

- It took 1,200 brewery experiments to craft Schlitz.
- Schlitz drilled artesian wells over 1 km deep to gain access to pure water.
- Beer was cooled in plate-glass rooms filled with filtered air to avoid contamination.

Following the tour, Hopkins asked Schlitz, “Why don’t you tell your customers you do this?” Schlitz replied: “It’s no big deal. Every brewer does this.”

But it was a big deal, and Hopkins knew it. He knew that beer drinkers would be fascinated by what brewers found commonplace – and would also find it a powerful reason to choose one beer over another.

Hopkins then wrote ads like this.

Within a few months, Schlitz was the United States’ leading brewer.

So here’s the question: What are you doing that, to you, seems ordinary, but to your customers would seem extraordinary? And why aren’t you telling your customers you do this?

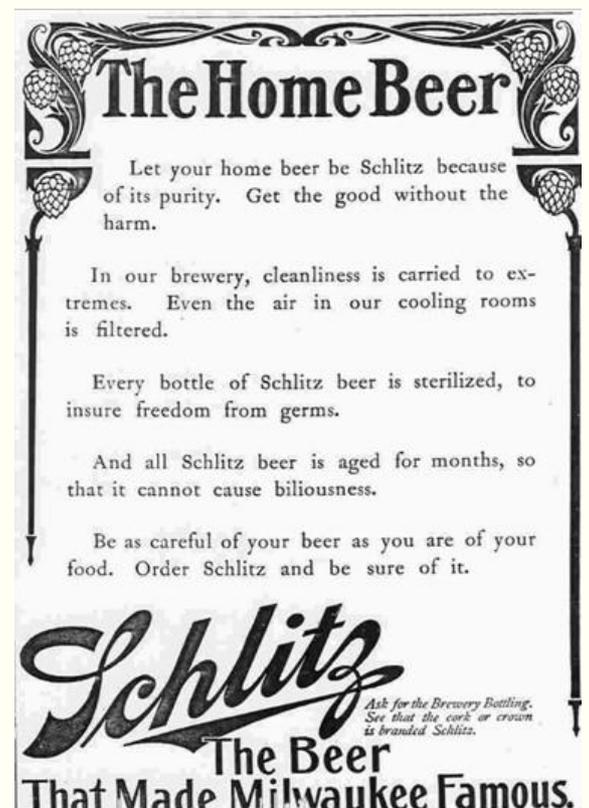


Image source: Swipe Worthy

**What are you doing that, to you, seems ordinary, but to your customers would seem extraordinary?**

## TWO NON-NEGOTIABLE RULES

So far we've looked at three possible approaches you can take with your About Us page. The key word there is "possible". You may find a different, equally compelling approach.

But there are two things that I assert are non-negotiable. Not just on your About Us page, but in all you say and do.

### Non-negotiable rule 1: Be human.

Whatever else you do, let your humanity shine through.

People still do business with other people.

You don't have to have perfect teeth, a full head of hair, or a face that Kim Kardashian would kill for. You don't have to be the best at what you do.

You don't even have to be especially likeable.

Great as those things are, they're not what draws other people to you. Being authentic does.

If you're a fussy grump, let your fussiness and grumpiness shine through. Oscar the Grouch is one of Sesame Street's most endearing characters, you idiot. (Just don't be an a\*\*hole, ok?)

If you're slightly ditzy, celebrate that. (Not so much if you're off the planet though.)

**If you're fussy and grumpy, let that shine through. If you're a bit ditzy, celebrate that.**

Designer [Joseph Payton](#) is clearly a design geek – and he makes no secret of the fact. I find him way more engaging than the design companies mentioned

earlier, who mostly seem intent on making the Next Big Statement.

[SalemTown Board Co.](#) is a Tennessee skateboard company founded by two guys who loved – you guessed it – skateboarding, and wanted to contribute to their community. Their About Us page beautifully captures those two passions. I challenge you to watch the video and not want to buy one of their skateboards.

Companies can have personalities too. Kickstarter have done a nice thing on their Team page, by categorising their 100+ employees into groups: artists, bicyclists, comedians, etc.

[Santander Bank](#) is a big business (more than \$77 billion in assets), but you wouldn't think it when you first land on their About Us page. The first thing they acknowledge is that you probably haven't heard of them. That self-deprecating statement is totally disarming (and also accurate, at least in my case).

Then, in simple, warm language, they tell their story. Like Kickstarter's, it's packed with facts and figures – good, concrete stuff that demonstrates who Santander Bank is, as opposed to BS puffery that says nothing.

Here's the amazing thing. Take away that opening paragraph, and I don't think Santander Bank's About Us page would make nearly the impression that it does. On their own, facts and figures are cold. What brings them to life is the context in which they're presented. If I think you're arrogant and full of yourself, all the information you give me will seem like showing off. If I like you, the same information will feel more like a dinner conversation with someone I've just met and want to know more about.

## Non-negotiable rule 2: Be truthful.

Being human and being truthful are closely linked. You can't BS someone and hope they'll warm to your humanity – not over time, anyway. Equally, if you tell the truth without empathy and warmth, you'll just sound cold.

Now when I say be truthful, I don't just mean don't lie and don't exaggerate.

I also mean don't use words and phrases that can't be tested, or those that are so worn they've now lost all meaning. You know the ones. "Market leading". "State of the art". "Innovative thinking". "Customer centric".

Spray empty words around and people will assume you don't value your words. Then they'll assume that nothing you say is quite what it seems.

That's a heavy price to pay for being lazy.

Be truthful. That is, say something that you can back up with facts, figures, results or other sound evidence.

In 2014, global communications company Cohn & Wolfe asked 12,000 people in 12 countries to rate the [top 20 desirable behaviours](#) in a brand. The top three attributes?

1. Communicating honestly about products and services
2. Not letting customers down
3. Acting with integrity at all times

Now does that mean you can't have fun with hyperbole? Of course not! Humour is and probably always will be a powerful way to win people over.

Just don't treat your customers like idiots. They're not. And even the ones who are have social media working overtime on their behalf. Lies and exaggeration will get found out.

*"Independent.' I'm so sick of that word. I reach for my revolver when I hear the word 'quirky.' Or 'edgy.' Those words are now becoming labels that are slapped on products to sell them."*

*Jim Jarmusch, movie director*

**Spray empty words around and people will assume you don't value your words.**

## Who's it really about?

By now, you're probably clear that as far as I'm concerned your About Us page isn't about you at all. It's about what your visitor needs.

If you keep this in mind, I don't think you can go wrong.

Journalists are masters at writing to satisfy the reader. They're trained to tackle the five W's in every story – who, what, when, where and why. Because that's what their readers want to know (test this for yourself next time you start reading a news story).

For an About Us page, the biggest W is the *why*. “Why should I keep reading?” “Why is your business here?” “Why would I do business with you?”

You'll naturally cut the crap when you authentically address those questions. And what you'll be left with is a story worth telling. One that connects with readers and has them happy to do business with you.

**Your About Us page is about your readers' needs. Keep this in mind and you won't go wrong.**

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