

# Standing Out With Storytelling

## How Odell Printing Separates Itself From the Pack

BY REVA HARRIS

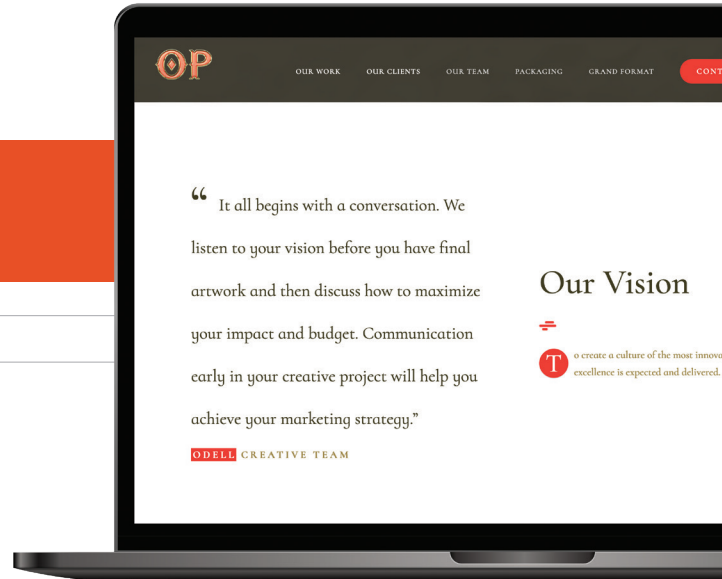
Everyone loves a good story, and for Sonoma County-based Odell Printing, storytelling is at the heart of what makes them different. Discerning clients, many of them wineries, rely on Odell for “multi-pass” specialty projects that involve elements like foil embossing, die cutting, and specialty papers. “Our ideal client is someone that has a premium product that wants to also communicate the story of their brand,” says owner Nicholas Ammar. “And we decided that we also should be doing that ourselves.”

### Stories connect us

Although Odell is a family business, Ammar hasn’t always worked in printing. Before committing to take over his parents’ print shop, he studied communications and cultural anthropology at the undergraduate and graduate level. Those classes sparked an interest in human behavior. “When you see a huge billboard for Apple, and it’s a picture of a dog or a sunset, why would they spend \$2 million on that? Unless they know something that most of us don’t know, which is that we connect to that type of brand story.”



Custom Box



Odell Printing Website homepage at [odellprinting.com](http://odellprinting.com)

At its core, that’s what branding is. And that insight and curiosity about what connects us fuels Odell’s marketing strategy. Their messaging revolves around who they are, not just what they offer. “We aren’t telling people that we’re 15% off. We aren’t telling people that we have the best customer service. We’re attempting to bring people into our story about who we are and what we do,” Ammar says.

What is that story? Well, it starts with Ammar’s parents, who started the business (under the name Ajalon Printing) in 1953. Ammar started out cleaning the bathrooms and presses and later graduated to bindery and prepress work. After exploring other career paths, he decided to buy the business from his parents, who were planning to retire. And when the owners of Odell Printing decided to retire in early 2018, Ajalon bought them out and began operating under the name of the larger, more well-known brand.

With decades of experience under their belt, Odell's team of expert print professionals is known for working hand-in-hand with clients to bring their creative vision to life. Brands turn to them to push the limits of traditional printing projects and create custom collateral, packaging, and more.

### If you don't tell your story, who will?

Of course, it's not enough to just have a good story, you also need to make sure it's being heard. "I think that the story was helpful, but even more so what differentiated us was actually committing to our story," Ammar says. "If we don't tell it, no one's telling it." Following that line of thinking, he decided to invest more in sales and marketing during the pandemic, instead of cutting the budget or simply maintaining the status quo.

For the company's website, he wanted to include as many people as possible on the About Us page. They performed internal interviews and wrote most of the employee bios on Odell Printing's website, including both their professional skills and personal tidbits in each write-up. For him, it's important to pull back the curtain and talk about the people behind the company and how they approach their work. "What differentiates all the biggest brands is the story that we tell ourselves about the brand. And the reason we tell ourselves the story about the brands is because they've told us their story."



Nicholas Ammar, Owner of Odell Printing

## "The best marketing is telling stories."

That means not just telling people what they can do, but showing them as well. And for a printer, what better way to show your skills than with your own collateral? It's something that many print shops don't do, preferring to focus more on their client projects than their own. But Ammar sees things a little differently: "The question that everyone has to decide based on their brand and the story they're trying to communicate is, is it worth it? And in our case, it definitely is." He and the team created innovative, high-end collateral, such as their 8-pass business cards, that went above and beyond anything they'd seen other printers do.

### Shake things up to stand out

With the combination of a proactive sales team, high-end collateral, and strong messaging, Odell Printing has broken away from the pack. Prospects say their marketing is bold and different. In a world where messaging centers on fastest turnaround, best service, and lowest price, Ammar and his team stand out in people's minds because of their story.

It's something he believes more small businesses can do. By letting go of old ways of thinking and breathing new life into their brands, printers and creative agencies can connect with potential clients in new ways. "The best marketing is telling stories. But a lot of print shops are really afraid to tell anyone about any of their clients or take photos in the back shop because they're afraid that they're going to lose the account," Ammar says. But that restricts your messaging.

Shaking things up can yield surprising results, and from Ammar's point of view, you just have to get started. "There's a tendency to stick to the default, which is to just let it be. I think you should do anything other than let it be. Take some action."



Odell Printing 8-pass business card and sticker