
A GUIDE TO STORYTELLING FOR NON-PROFITS

Stories Worth Telling



CAPACITYCANADA

Acknowledgments

This Storytelling Guide is dedicated to Peter and John. They are innovative CEOs of non-profits in Waterloo Region. They share a belief regarding the power of storytelling. You will read in this guide how they are transforming their organizations with deliberate strategies to create storytelling cultures.

For over 20 years, Jennifer King, the principal author, has brought passion and creativity to her roles in journalism, media, business development, international aid, and non-profit capacity building. As a founding member of Capacity Canada (formerly Capacity Waterloo Region), Jennifer recognized from the outset the profound importance of helping non-profits to build their skills in all areas of communication and storytelling. She helped kick-start changes in how Waterloo Region's non-profits approach storytelling and has introduced our region to world-renowned storytelling experts, such as Andy Goodman, Dan Pallotta, and National Geographic's Karen Kasmauski and Bill Douthitt. Jennifer's insights into the balance between head and heart - stories and evaluation - are evident throughout this guide. Tanya Darisi, Capacity Canada's Leader in Evaluation and Development, has worked closely with Jennifer to create a model for marrying evaluation and storytelling. In the chapter on Collecting and Analyzing Stories, Tanya brilliantly demonstrates her ability to combine her academic PhD research training with an ability to measure impact through telling stories.

Thank you to Matt Miller, Capacity Canada's Executive in Residence for Marketing and Branding, for putting the finishing touches on the production of the guide. As a long-time post-secondary teacher in graphic design, Matt is an invaluable mentor for non-profits.

Every non-profit organization will want to read this guide thoroughly and refer to it often. I can't imagine a more relevant, current, and resource-rich document for organizations that want to engage all the folks that are important to them. The Storytelling Guide is the copyrighted property of Capacity Canada. We give our permission for you to further distribute this document. We do ask that you acknowledge Capacity Canada in any disseminations of Guide, in part or in whole.

Cathy Brothers, Executive Director in Residence, Capacity Canada



“Maybe it’s because we’re all so overloaded with information. Maybe it’s because we’re all so starved for meaning. Or maybe it’s because, thanks to social media, everyone’s become a broadcaster these days. Whatever the reason, we’re all getting the same memo at the same time: if you want to be heard, you’d better learn to tell better stories.”

Jonah Sachs, founder and CEO, Free Range Studios and author, Story Wars

It’s a brand new storytelling world and we have no more excuses. It used to be that the media controlled the message. But today, every organization can be a publisher. For perhaps the first time in the modern history of our sector, we have the control and the tools in our hands to tell and distribute our own stories.

This guide builds on the work Capacity Canada has been doing in the area of storytelling for non-profits. We set out on this initiative primarily to tell our own story in a way that connected the worlds of storytelling and evaluation. What we quickly realized was that there was a strong appetite from our peers to learn about better ways to tell stories and (convey the difference they’re making.)

This guide summarizes much of what we’ve been touching on through our work. But we’re not aiming to reinvent the wheel. There are plenty of great tips and guides available online so we’ll be pointing you to a variety of those, as well as the resources and tools that we have found helpful in our work.



Chapters

1. Why We Need to Tell Stories
2. Finding your story
3. Collecting and Analyzing Stories
4. Preparing & Capturing Your Story
5. Telling the Story, Visually
6. Nine Lives
7. Creating a Storytelling Culture

Who’s This Guide For?

We believe that storytelling is a role every person in your organization can, and must, play. In fact, it’s the only way to ensure that great stories come to light. If everyone understands the role of stories in an organization and feels that they are valued for their contribution, then you start to build a storytelling culture that positively feeds and supports program development, continuous improvement, human resources, evaluation, marketing, fundraising- the list goes on.

This guide is for many of the storytellers in your organization: senior leaders, marketing and communications professionals, evaluation and research professionals.

It includes seven chapters plus resources throughout, examples from the for-profit and non-profit world, and an upcoming tools supplement to the guide.

We hope that you find this guide to be practical and immediately useful to you and your organization. Please share with us your own stories. Tell us how you used the information in this guide. You can reach us at info@capacitycanada.ca. You can also join in the conversation on social media ([twitter: @capacitycanada](https://twitter.com/capacitycanada) / [facebook: fb.com/capacitycanada](https://facebook.com/capacitycanada)) or on our website at capacitycanada.ca.



“Even if you have reams of evidence on your side, remember: numbers numb, jargon jars, and nobody ever marched on Washington because of a pie chart. If you want to connect with your audience, tell them a story.”

Andy Goodman

Why We Need to Tell Stories

A good story has power. The power to inspire. The power to energize, and the power to move people to action.

Good stories have the power to build understanding. To entertain. To teach. To humanize the big picture.

Most importantly, good stories have the power to be remembered.

This storytelling power is right at your fingertips. We all have the ability to tell stories - it's part of our DNA, passed down from the beginning of humankind. Stories have been called “the connective tissue of the human race.” As young children, we instinctively learn to tell stories and we yearn for stories to be told to us.

But our natural storytelling nature is suffering. “Knowledge of the fundamental underlying forms of story, the principles of story, has been lost, in many ways,” says Robert McKee, legendary screenwriter and self-described Hollywood story doctor.

Our natural instincts may also be covered up by years of dust as we've rattled off facts and figures and jargon.

Well, it's time to dust off and start thinking in stories again.



We don't suggest doing away with facts and figures though. Just as data can be dry, some stories can be too, well, fluffy. We're proposing a balance, between stories and data; a kind of marriage to unite the heart and the head.

Andy Goodman, storyteller extraordinaire, emphasizes that to change people's minds, you can't start with the facts. If a person is set on their point of view, facts and figures won't make it through the brain's filtering system. But tell a good story and bingo, you're in! A crack opens and it's up to you to widen it.

Good stories can:

Make people feel. And when people feel, they can be moved to act.

Cut through the clutter. There is so much digital and visual noise out there that a good story can cut through. A good chunk of online content is simply filler - people are craving good stories more than ever.

Arm your evangelists. Help the people most likely to talk about you to tell consistent stories that have impact.

Help you improve. Stories can be powerful assets for internal learning, allowing you to see patterns and connections that you might normally miss.

Build a stronger organizational culture. Telling stories about your organization's work shows staff, clients, volunteers, and others that you see them, hear them, and appreciate them.

Wake people up. Have you been using the same funder report style for a decade? Want to bet that you're not making it easy for your funder to understand what you do and how you're making an impact?



Resources

How nonprofits should be using storytelling on Socialbrite, featuring an interview with Suzanne Smith, head of Social Impact Architects.

[Click to see How nonprofits should be using storytelling](#)

Why We Need Stories, a Nieman Reports post by Jacqui Banaszynski

[Click to see Why We Need Stories](#)



“The shortest distance between two people is a story.”

Terrence Gargiulo

Finding Your Story

The saying goes that everyone has a story to tell. Close your eyes and picture that. You’re walking down the street and that guy in the suit, that woman holding a child’s hand, those students rushing to class - every one of them has a story waiting to be told. Every person in the cars next to you as you wait at the stop light. Every person in your next meeting. Every co- worker. Every client. How many people do you see each day? How many stories does that equal?

But based on our work to date it seems that many of us are either overwhelmed at the sheer number of stories at our reach, or we can’t seem to crack the shell open and find the kernel of a story within.

Finding stories takes work. It requires curiosity and a way of thinking that you must consciously work on. Exercise that muscle and the payoff is rich.

Ira Glass of PBS’ *This American Life* emphasises the necessity to set aside time to find and try out stories. In the steady work of pulling together a regular show, Glass says that he kills a half to a third of all the stories he and his team try.

In “[10 ways to find stories other journalists are missing](#)” (you’ll find great advice to journalists that you can adapt to your role as storyteller), Tom Huang offers this tip to finding untold stories.

“Take a different route to work. Eat lunch at a neighborhood you haven’t spent much time in. Drop in on a random community meeting. Visit a church you’ve never been to. If you’re a sports fan, go to a concert. If you’re a music fan, go to a game. Get out of your routine.”

Stepping out of your routine takes time and we’re all running a deficit in that department. But stories won’t find you unless you’re investing the time to find them, too.



If you’re too close to the work or don’t have the time to explore the story possibilities, consider using a miner - someone who can come in to your organization with fresh eyes and the sole purpose of digging for stories waiting to be told. This could be someone with journalism skills or communication and marketing expertise - whatever the skills, it needs to be someone with curiosity.

Here are some other tips to help find a good story:

Take time. Slow down and keep your eyes open for possibilities. If we’re always moving 100 miles an hour, we can’t possibly notice the stories that are in front of us.

Listen. To find a great story you need to listen for it. Listen for the types of stories your funders/volunteers/etc. want. Listen in person, listen online. Talk to people. Ask questions, then lean back and let them talk.

Wake up curious. Diane Sawyer, American journalist and broadcaster, said, “If you’re curious, you’ll probably be a good journalist because we follow our curiosity like cats.” Think like a journalist. Be inquisitive. Don’t settle for the short or first answer - ask follow-up questions to get to the story.

Make it a team sport. Get everyone on board. It takes time but soon, your friends, staff, volunteers, board members will be looking for stories, too. Ask people to email you a story - make it simple and easy for them to share with you. Show them you genuinely care about what they’re working on.

Don’t play it safe. Don’t look only for the easy or good stories. Search for the ones where someone took a detour, made a mistake, or hit an obstacle. Engineers Without Borders annual Failure Reports are great examples of how to positively profile organization’s mistakes. [Click to see Failure Report here](#)

Don’t work with the end in mind. Allow a story to reveal itself. Don’t decide on the ending then look for a story that fits.

Write it down. When something significant or memorable happens, get it down on paper. Build a story bank for ongoing reference. Once the event has passed, you’ll lose some of the crucial details that enliven a story.





Interviewing People

The interview is one of the best ways to find your stories. There are plenty of books and guides online on how to interview people, whether from a journalism perspective, or a qualitative research point of view. Whichever way you come to storytelling, there are some interviewing basics that will help ensure you gather rich information that is as objective as possible. Most revolve around the key tool of any interview: the question.

- 1. Use open-ended questions.** You don't want "yes" or "no" answers. Ask what, how and why questions. For example, instead of asking someone, "were you worried coming to Canada?" ask "what was it like to come to Canada?"
- 2. Ask simple, straightforward questions.**
- 3. Don't ask leading questions.** And don't make statements. Ask questions to learn, not to establish your position.
- 4. Work through the silence.** Often, the best stories come after an uncomfortable pause.
- 5. Don't overscript.** If you're reading a list of questions off a page instead of engaging in real conversation, the answers will also be less spontaneous and authentic.
- 6. Use follow-up questions.** Often, it's the follow-up questions that dig deeper and uncover the real story or nuggets of rich detail or memory.
- 7. Always aim for face-to-face interviews.** Spend time up front breaking the ice, if needed. Get to know the person and allow them to get to know you before jumping in to the "official" interview.
- 8. Prepare.**

Story Ideas and Story Prompts

If you're still in need of inspiration, you'll find some story ideas below to get you started. You may also want to try a few of the story prompts that follow - questions that will help expose stories.

Story Ideas:

- 1.** Profile a client, a volunteer, or a staff person
- 2.** Do a series showing what it's like behind-the-scenes at your organization.
- 3.** Speak to the front line people. What story ideas do they have for you?
- 4.** Capture a day-in-the-life story from the perspective of a client, a staff member, or a volunteer.
- 5.** From one person's perspective, feature key issues and how your organization is tackling them.
- 6.** Do Q&A sessions where a member of the community interviews you.
- 7.** Feature guest posts from leaders in your field.
- 8.** Build legacy stories. Write stories of how your organization came to be. Go back and feature the key people that were part of your early organization or key turning points.

Also read Kivi Leroux Miller's blog post at Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com, [15 Places to Find Article Ideas for Your Nonprofit Newsletter](#)

[Click to see 15 Places to Find Article Ideas for Your Nonprofit Newsletter](#)





Story Prompts

Ann Handley of MarketingProfs.com created this colourful presentation, [How to Tell Your Company's Story: 8 questions to get you started](#)
[Click to see How to Tell Your Company's Story](#)

Also consider subscribing to Leroux Miller's Monthly Non Profit Writing Prompts for creative ways of identifying stories in your organization.
[Click to subscribe to Leroux Miller's Monthly Non Profit Writing Prompts](#)

Other story prompts include:

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1. What is unique about what your organization is doing?
 2. What's new?
 3. What are the timely issues?
 4. What are your recent achievements?
 5. How did your organization get started?
 6. What challenge have you been up against?
 7. What is the problem your organization/program is trying to solve?
 8. Have you solved that problem in an innovative way?
 9. Is there an old story you can go back to and update?
 10. What is happening/has happened that people need to know about?
-

Resources

For an example of an organization that invested in telling its legacy stories, you may wish to look at Asia Development Bank's Reflections & Beyond publication
[Click to see Reflections & Beyond](#)

11. What motivated each of your board members to join your organization?
12. Why do your donors contribute to your organization?
13. Ask staff about a memorable moment - a time when they felt an emotional connection to the work they do.
14. What are you most proud of in your organization?
15. What is the best lesson you've learned this year?
16. How do you see your organization? Do others see it the same way?
17. How are you making a difference?
18. Imagine you're an archaeologist - what stories would you find if you were digging under the layers and history of your organization and its people?



“We can tell people abstract rules of thumb which we have derived from prior experiences, but it is very difficult for other people to learn from these. We have difficulty remembering such abstractions, but we can more easily remember a good story. Stories give life to past experience. Stories make the events in memory memorable to others and to ourselves. This is one of the reasons why people like to tell stories.”

Roger C. Shank, from Tell Me A Story

Collecting and Analyzing Stories

Once you start to recognize the abundance of stories around you, it's time to apply some filters that will help you identify the keepers.



Filter #1: Find the stories that demonstrate impact and fit with your organization's strategies, goals, values and mission.

A Little About Impact

We're all being pressed to demonstrate and communicate the impact of our programs and services. Impact speaks to both value and accountability to the extent that we are, and are seen to be, making use of resources to achieve meaningful change. But it's not an easy task.

We all use evaluation. We use it to demonstrate the effect and outcomes of our programs. And we all use storytelling to communicate our experiences of change and growth. Both help us understand what we do. But on their own, they can only go so far.

At Capacity Canada, we've been working on a Storytelling and Evaluation Framework that helps bring together these two, often separate, worlds.

Drawing storytelling and evaluation together in strategic and systematic ways can better help us learn from, communicate about, and deepen our impact.

Being Strategic

One of the strengths of stories in evaluation is that they can show just how complex our work is. This complexity can also make it easy to get lost in stories, and overwhelmed with the information they contain, especially when you are collecting multiple stories.

To help use stories more effectively, ask yourself:

1. Why am I collecting this story?

Your purpose will guide the kinds of questions you ask and the kinds of stories you look for. Reasons for collecting and telling a story include:

- To share your success
- To advocate for change
- To learn about what works and what doesn't
- To share resources and knowledge
- To persuade or influence an audience
- To motivate change
- To inform

Think about how your stories will be used and who they will be shared with. Will stories be:

- Used internally?
- Shared with funders and donors?
- Shared with the community more broadly?
- Used as marketing?

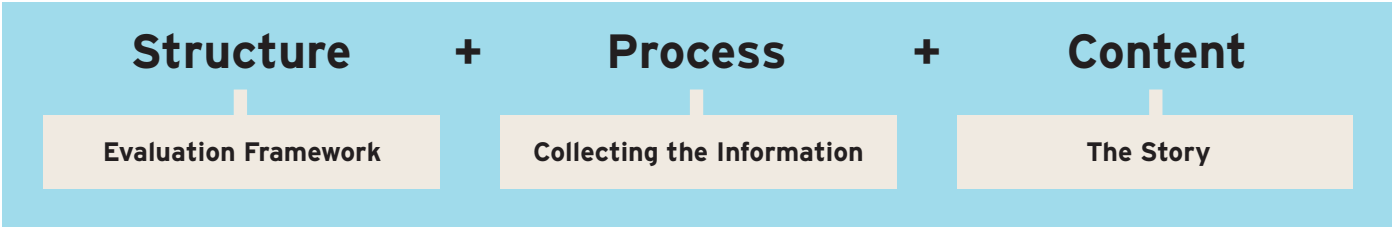




2. Is my storytelling aligned with a plan or framework?

Keep your strategic plan, your logic model, or your community impact plan in mind. Whatever framework you use, let it guide you in the stories you collect and how you analyze them.

Make sure the stories you eventually tell feed and tie back in to your plans. Beware of stories that undermine or seem inconsistent with your plans. It will create confusion or send mixed messages with your audience.



Here is a worksheet to help think through your goals, story elements, and your story of impact.

Storytelling and Evaluation Worksheet

Outcome:
The short and intermediate term changes expected as a result of specific program activities.

Impact:
The longer term and broader difference that results from involvement in the program.

Structure

What does your logic model tell you about your impact?

Process

What are the key pieces of your story?

+

The Story

What story do you have to tell about your impact?



Collecting Stories

Whether you use a storytelling approach, or more of a research approach, there are many ways to collect a story. Stories can be collected through:

- Interviews
- Video
- Photography
- Written submissions
- Journaling, drawing, or other art forms
- Community story collectors

Analysing Stories

Analysis and reflection are important in your storytelling work. Capturing and sharing a story with a funder is great, but you can go further and deeper by building in time to reflect. Know and understand the relationship between the information you have and the claims you can make because of that information. Using sound methods of analysis, documenting the analysis process, and reporting results fairly will help to build the credibility of using stories with evaluation.

Stories are valuable and rich, and can be used much more effectively but you do need to:

Keep your questions unbiased: at the beginning of this guide, we shared with you our belief that there is an ideal balance between stories and evaluation; between the head and the heart. Keeping that in mind, ask yourself: Are you searching only for success stories? Or for a specific set of results? Be open to hearing the positive, negative and unexpected about your work and impact.

Follow a systematic process: try to use a standardized process for collecting stories. For example, use a similar set of questions and style.

Keep interpretations grounded in the stories themselves: there are usually multiple ways to interpret and understand stories. Whatever claims you make, the content of the stories needs to clearly show that these interpretations make sense.

Triangulate: stories cannot be the only source of information if you are going to make interpretations about impact. Other data (e.g. survey, third-party reports) is also needed to create credible findings.



Tips for analysing stories

- 1. Group similar stories together - are there themes that emerge?
- 2. Think about representativeness - are they typical or unique cases?
- 3. Step back and look for patterns - are there connections between events?
Are a number of people saying the same thing?
- 4. Describe the patterns in writing - How do the patterns relate back to your program?
- 5. Ask colleagues for input - Do others see the same thing?
Are there different interpretations?



Filter #2: Find stories that are personal and emotional.

Believe it or not, most people do not share your passion for your cause. They don't care so much about your organization as they do about the people you help. So it's incredibly important that we humanize our stories in order to connect with the people reading or watching. Stories are about people, not organizations. If you can do only one thing to change the way you're telling your story, make it about a person. People relate to people.

To compare the two approaches, read this:

"St. Mary's Regional Cardiac Care Centre provides first-class surgical care to more than 750 patients every year. We are leaders among our peers, providing timely consultation, compassionate care, and achieving excellent outcomes."

Now, read this.

"I remember thinking clearly 'this can't be happening to me.' In hindsight however, I was displaying all the classic symptoms, but at that very moment, I was in complete denial."

There was no way I was having a heart attack. I am barely over 50, and I work out almost every day. I eat well and I manage stress effectively. It must be something minor I thought.

Less than an hour later, I almost died.

The doctor thought I was going to be an easy case, especially given my fitness level and overall health. She didn't expect my artery to be 100% blocked and she certainly didn't expect to shock me with a defibrillator 15 times, something she had never done before.

Did you feel the difference between each "story?" Both were taken from St. Mary's General Hospital's marketing but one clearly does a better job of tapping into the emotional and personal.

Effective stories are genuine. They're about hope, aspirations, and emotions that connect one person to another. Feelings lead to action.

In an @appetite blog post, Finding the Human Element in Food Storytelling, Tom Barritt shows us how the local food movement changed the way stories about food are told. [Click to see the Human Element in Food Storytelling](#)

"As the local farmer has found a voice, the narrative has shifted," says Barritt. "Food is no longer an impersonal commodity." He offers some good advice on finding the human element of the story, including:

"Size Doesn't Matter - Whether it's a backyard garden, a local farm or a large regional operation, food is grown by people who do this work for a reason. It's their chosen profession, and they're probably passionate about what they do. Move beyond labels of "big," "small" and "local" to focus on the individual people who make up your operation. Like any good writer, probe for the "why?" Why do your people do what they do? What motivates them? This is the story local farmers tell so well."

"Celebrate Your Heroes - Who is the protagonist in your story? Who are the "doers?" Read great stories about local farms and study the characters that make up the story. Heck, go back and read "Johnny Appleseed" again. There is often a strong personality at the center of a compelling food story with deep personal conviction who had a great idea or overcame a significant challenge. Who are the people in your operation who have those heroic qualities, and how can you highlight their work?"

Try substituting the "food movement" for whichever one most closely connects to your work. Do his ideas still ring true?





Filter #3: What do you want the story to do?

What's the take-away? Why are you telling this story? Is the story you selected the right one to achieve your goals? Ira Glass gives this (advice:)

"At some point, somebody's got to say 'here's why the hell you're listening to this story. Like, here's the point of the story. Here's the bigger something that we're driving at, here's why I'm wasting your time with all this'."

Knowing what you want to say is harder than it sounds. Sit down with an index card in front of you. Write down: your key audience (be as specific as possible); the specific purpose of the story; your key message (stick to one), the feeling or reaction you want from your audience, and the "call to action," or what you want someone to do after reading or watching your story.

Stick this on your bulletin board or tape it next to your computer and reference it while you're pulling your story together.

The 3 Filters Checklist

1. Is the story consistent with the vision, mission and goals of your organization?
2. Is the point of the story clear?
3. Have you made the story personal?
4. Will the story make the reader feel something?
5. What's the point of the story?

Resources

More storytelling and evaluation resources

[Click here to see more resources on Capacity Canada's website](#)



"The missing ingredient in most failed communication is humanity."

Annette Simmons

Preparing and Capturing Your Story

So, you've collected the building blocks of a story and you've found a good one.

Now what?

First things first: refer back to that index card. This will be your road map as you prepare your story.

Then, we want to point you to Andy Goodman's book, *Storytelling as Best Practice*. Before you put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, we suggest you read this book. It will give you a clear idea of the key elements of a good story. Goodman's free Free Range Thinking newsletter is worth subscribing to, too.

[Click here to see Andy Goodman's book](#)

In the June 2007 issue Goodman presents The 10 Immutable Laws of Storytelling. He starts off in typical Goodman humour:

"The question arises at least once during every storytelling workshop I lead, and it drives me crazy. "Can my organization be the protagonist of my story?" a well-meaning nonprofiteer will ask politely. "No!" I want to scream. "No! No! A thousand times no!" Discretion prevails, however, and I explain just as politely that people relate to people, so stories about your work – any line of work, really–must provide human protagonists to draw the audience in and lead them through the narrative. And that's not just a recommendation, I hasten to add. When it comes to telling stories that an audience will remember and even repeat to others (the ultimate payoff for a well-told tale), consider this a law."

That's Law Numero Uno: Stories are about people. Other laws include "Let your characters speak for themselves," "Audiences bore easily," "Stories don't tell: they show," and "Stories have clear meaning." [Click here to read more](#)



In the October 2003 issue Goodman talks about his Seven Questions to Sharpen Your Stories (also in his book):

1. Who's the Protagonist?

Just as a car needs a driver, stories also need someone to drive the action. Use real names where possible, or else composite, fictionalized ones (like Joe).

2. What's the Hook?

Begin your story at a place where the audience can identify with the situation, or with the protagonist's goal. The idea is to hook them from the start.

3. What Keeps It Interesting? Predictable stories are boring; throw some barriers and surprises in there to keep your audience's attention.

4. Where's the Conflict? There is no drama without conflict ("narrative demands reversal," to quote Aristotle), and heroic action is heightened when juxtaposed against villainous misdeeds.

5. Have You Included Telling Details? Brevity is a goal, so try to find the few well-chosen details that concisely and vividly paint a picture of the world you are portraying.

6. What's the Emotional Hook? In return for their time and attention, readers expect more than a recitation of the facts. Give them an emotional experience that makes their time worthwhile.

7. Is the Meaning Crystal Clear? "We don't need more information," writes Annette Simmons in "The Story Factor." "We need to know what it means. We need a story that explains what it means and makes us feel like we fit in there somewhere."

If you can answer all of those questions, you're doing great!

In reading Goodman, you'll also discover what a story is not. It's not a description of what you do and how you do it. It's not a fact sheet. And it's not the About Us blurb on your website. A story has a beginning, middle and end. It has tension or conflict. It has characters and a plot. It has details and emotion.

[Click here to see more of Andy Goodman's Seven Questions to Sharpen your stories](#)

Story Structure

To show this simply, consider the advice from Pixar storyboard artist Emma Coats' (@lawnrocket). Her 22 Rules to Phenomenal Storytelling has been making the rounds on social media recently. Here is one of her rules (based on the Story Spine method attributed to playwright Kenn Adams) that she says all stories have in common.

Once up a time there was _____

Every day, _____

One day, _____

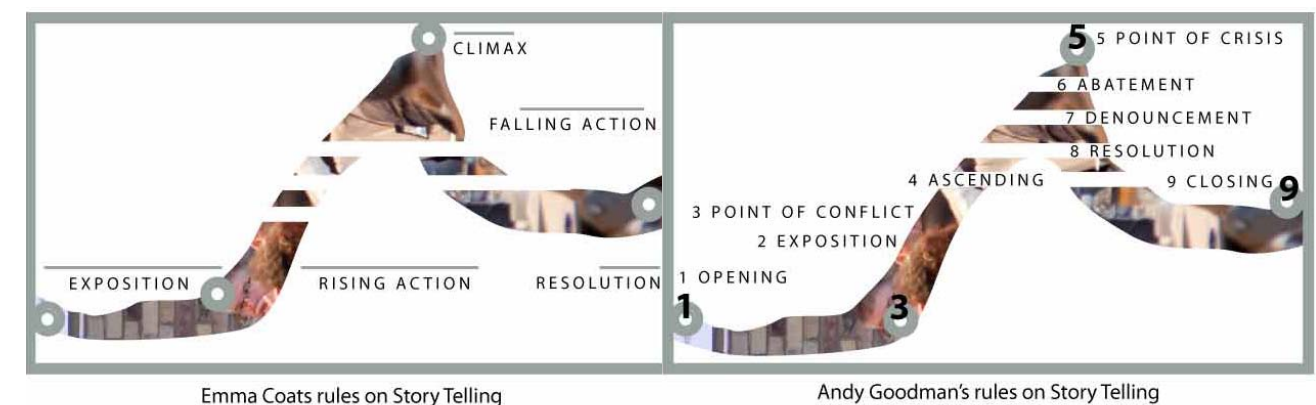
Because of that, _____

Because of that, _____

Until finally _____

Simple, right? But effective? Absolutely. Pixar's rules don't only apply to fairytales and other fiction. Try them on your own organizational storytelling.

Visually, Coats' and Goodman's advice looks a little like this:



This is the classic plot structure, complete with tension and conflict. For another take on the basic plot structure, watch this entertaining video.

[Click her to see Kurt Vonnegut graphs the plot of every story](#)

Of course, not every story needs to follow this basic structure. It won't always be appropriate and you won't always have the time or space. But it should give you a good idea of the elements that create a compelling story that people want to follow, all the way to the end.





Make Me Care

Ultimately, a good story makes us feel something. It makes us care. Andrew Stanton’s must-watch TED talk, The Clues to a Great Story says “make me care... please, emotionally, intellectually, aesthetically, please just make me care.”
[Click here to see Andrew Stanton’s TED talk](#)

Anthony Reinhart, a former *Globe and Mail* journalist and now a storyteller for Communitech, the technology association for Waterloo Region, can point to dozens of stories he wrote that connected with readers only because he brought a bigger issue or organization down to a personal level. He remembers one story he wrote about a fatal construction accident, where the victim’s family, who lived outside of Canada, had no money to fly the body home. The story illicited tremendous response from readers, with one person in particular offering to fly the body home for free.

Reinhart says this happened often. These emotional responses to stories happen when readers relate to the story you’re telling. They want to know, “what happens next.”

“You’re fighting for mindshare,” says Reinhart. “Our world has enabled everyone to be a publisher” and with an explosion of content, good content is standing out more than it used to.

Digging Deeper If you want to delve a little deeper into story structure, Andy Goodman’s Story Structure Worksheet will help you think through the elements of your story.
[Click here to see Andy Goodman’s Worksheet](#)

Resources

- 1. The Story Factor: Inspiration, influence, and persuasion through the art of storytelling Simmons, Annette
- 2. Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins by Annette Simmons
[Click to see Whoever Tells the Best Story](#)

- 3. Stanford Social Innovation Review:
[I Want You to Meet Joe: How a Riveting Story Can Get Your Message Across](#)
[Click to see I Want You to Meet Joe](#)
- 4. Wilton Blake’s Nonprofit Storytelling Resources
[Click to see Nonprofit Storytelling Resources](#)
- 5. The Nonprofit Marketing Guide: High-Impact, Low-Cost Ways to Build Support for Your Good Cause “Spread Your Message Further by Telling Great Stories” Chapter, by Kivi Leroux Miller
[Click to see Nonprofit Marketing Guide](#)
- 6. Demonstrating Impact: A Guide for Storytelling by Northern California Grantmakers
[Click to see Demonstrating Impact: A Guide for Storytelling](#)
- 7. Vibrant Communities Storytelling Guide:
[Click to see Vibrant Communities Storytelling Guide](#)
- 8. Believe Me Story Manifesto from Get Storied:
[Click to see Believe Me Story Manifesto](#)
- 9. A Storied Career’s list of storytelling tools:
[Click to see list of storytelling tools](#)
- 10. Presentationzen.com’s blog post, Robert McKee on the Power of Story
[Click to see Robert McKee on the Power of Story](#)
- 11. Story Guide: Building Bridges Using Narrative Techniques including The Difference Between a Report and a Story, Used to be common knowledge
[Click to see Story Guide: Building Bridges Using Narrative Techniques](#)
- 12. Patrick Hanlon, author of PrimalBranding: Create Zealots for your Brand, Your Company, and your Future.
- 13. From MindTools:
[Click to see MindTools](#)



“Somebody once wrote that there’s no more seductive sentence in the English language than, 'I want to hear your story,' and maybe they’re right. Because often you don’t have to do any more than just say that.”

Mitch Albom, Detroit Free Press

Telling Your Story, Visually

There are so many ways to tell your organization’s stories, it can be overwhelming. Ultimately, you’ll want to use many of them at once (see the next chapter, Nine Lives). But before we explore a few visual options, here are a few tips to keep in mind, regardless of the medium you use:

- **Use a storytelling, conversational tone.** It takes practice, but limiting the “organizational voice” in your story will help bring it down to a personal level. Read a good feature story in a newspaper or magazine and study its tone.
- **Show don’t tell.** Use details and appeal to the senses. Tell us what you see, smell, hear, feel, taste. As children’s author, Barbara Greene, says, “If you tell me, it’s an essay. If you show me, it’s a story.”
- **Know your purpose.** What’s the end goal of the story? What do you want people to do?
- **Prepare.** Build in enough time to fully prepare and research your story.
- **Keep it short and sweet.** In a world of shorter attention spans, shorter stories have more chance of being read or watched than a longer one.
- **Don’t use industry lingo or acronyms.**
- **Understand the one** the single most important thing you want the story to say.
- **Be clear and concise.** Use simple language for easier readability.

- **Be bold. Be original.** Unique stories get noticed. Use the typical story arc as a guide only – it’s not a science and sometimes being unpredictable, experimental and writing your own rules is the better way to tell a story.
- **Use the active voice.** That’s the difference between “John presented his idea” and “The idea was presented by John.” A few of these tips, and more, are mentioned in this short video from NPR’s Scott Simon
[Click here to see Scott Siomon’s Hot to tell a Story](#)

Visual Storytelling

Visual content is fast becoming one of the keys to making your stories stand out from the digital noise. ‘Don’t just tell me. Show me.’ That’s what’s being demanded online as visuals trump the written word. Visuals can increase engagement with your audience and stimulate sharing, one of the important ways search engines now rank content.

Karen Kasmauski, an international photographer who’s shot more than 25 stories for National Geographic, and Bill Douthitt, Senior Managing Director of Special Projects for National Geographic, recently spoke to non-profits and photographers in Waterloo Region on why good stories need great images.

[Click to see a highlight of tweets from the session on Storify](#)

“Bad content is worse than no content,” Kasmauski says; a poor image on a website can do more harm than no content at all. It gives the viewer an immediate negative impression of your organization.

Of course, anyone can take a picture but it takes real work to make a good one. Kasmauski and Douthitt strongly recommend using a professional photographer – one who’s work and personality fit with the project you want to undertake. Images are one of the most powerful tools you have to tell the world what you’re about – investing in great photography will reap rewards by getting you noticed and creating a positive impression.



Karen Kasmauski



Bill Douthitt





For non-profits working with outside photographers, Kasmauski and Douthitt offer these tips:

- **Know what you want to say** with the images and how you want to use them before you set a photographer to work
- **Establish clarity** in your message
- **Have an agreement** between you and the photographer outlining the project goals
- **Identify the responsibilities** of the client and photographer
- **Have a deadline** - it helps manage story development and maintain focus
- **Know what the end usage of the visuals will be** - it will determine the type and level of resources you will need

A little about editing

We've all seen the sites - our cousin's Facebook picture gallery with 100 posted pictures from a birthday party, with just two that are worth looking at. The others are blurry, repetitive, unflattering, or just bad. Hopefully we as nonprofits are doing better than that, but there are still too many of us not putting enough effort into editing the countless images we make.

Douthitt says editing is "getting rid of all the stuff that isn't interesting" and "arranging the stuff that IS interesting in a way that communicates." Somewhere around 5 or 6 images should be enough to tell a story. Other editing tips:

- **Edit with someone else.** They might not be as close to the images as you are and can offer a more objective view of what's interesting or suitable.
- **Select only quality images.** Develop a sequence for impact, with unrepentive images.
- **Ask yourself** if the visual story has a plot, a main message, and a theme.
- **Ask yourself** if the photos capture the why and how of the story?
- **Ask yourself if your visual story tells people something new?** Does it offer a new perspective? Does it show something unusual that people wouldn't normally see?

Social Media

When it comes to visual storytelling and social media, it's a marriage made in heaven. You are the publisher - you can get your images out into the world through countless social media platforms like Pinterest, one of the fastest growing social media platforms, Facebook, which this year introduced the visual Timeline feature, and Flickr, Instagram, Tumblr, and Facebook.

Despite the rapidly growing influence of social media, many non-profits still don't have a meaningful or strategic presence on social media. Sixty-six percent of U.S. adults are on Facebook; 20% are on LinkedIn; 16% are on Twitter. According to Alexa.com, the top social media sites in Canada include Facebook (#3), YouTube (#4), Wikipedia (#7), LinkedIn (#8), Pinterest (#16), tumblr (#19), Flickr (#39), instagram (#58).

Some of these platforms haven't even hit their stride yet, but already, media like Fast Company call visual marketing the "breakout trend of 2012."

"When it comes to their products, businesses are learning to show, not tell, and visual content sites are fueling our desire for beautiful photography and sensational design," says Fast Company in The Rise of Visual Social Media. "Two years ago, marketers were spreading the maxim that 'content is king,' but now, it seems, 'a picture really is worth a thousand words.'"

[Click to see The Rise of Visual Social Media](#)

MarketingProfs.com's Nick Westergaard delivered a useful Checklist for the Visual Revolution in Six Ways to Prepare Your Brand for Social Media's Visual Revolution "Brands that can rock visual media will find themselves market leaders," says Westergaard.

[Click here to see Six Ways to Prepare Your Brand](#)

With their permission, here it is in full: A Checklist for the Visual Revolution

Your brand's visuals, then, are more important than ever. As Convince & Convert's Jay Baer noted during a recent panel at SXSW, we are moving into a time when "content creators may not even have to be writers." What does that mean for marketers?



Here's a six-item checklist to ensure that your brand is ready for the coming visual revolution.

1. The basics still matter

Your visual vocabulary starts with a strong foundation—a solid logo and corporate identity. However, more than making sure that your letterhead and business cards match, your brand team needs to ensure that you have typography that can transcend platforms and a lexicon of app-friendly iconography as well. You also need to consider how your brand can flourish in a controlled ecosystem (e.g., your website) as well as offsite platforms (e.g., Facebook).

2. Have a plan

Though this tip may apply to any new social endeavor, it rings especially true here. Too often, those with visual savvy in organizations (the creatives!) are kept out and are brought in only after the fact—to “make things look pretty.” You need to bring in those visual thinkers at the initial stages of your campaigns to help you visualize your story across social channels. In addition to personnel, you also need a plan for attacking various platforms. What are you pinning on Pinterest? How do you use Instagram?

3. Teach storytelling

Take some time to teach your team how to capture moments and tell stories visually. Consider bringing in a photographer to deliver a guest lecture for some Friday fun.

4. Understand the mechanics of ‘pinable’ images

Though Pinterest can be a powerful platform for a brand, using it still requires planning. That means including large, engaging photos that stand out in a sea of boards. You also need to be cognizant of the need to stand out when coding your site to ensure that your images are “seen” by Pinterest’s bookmarklets and other pinning tools.

5. Make your past as visual as your present and future

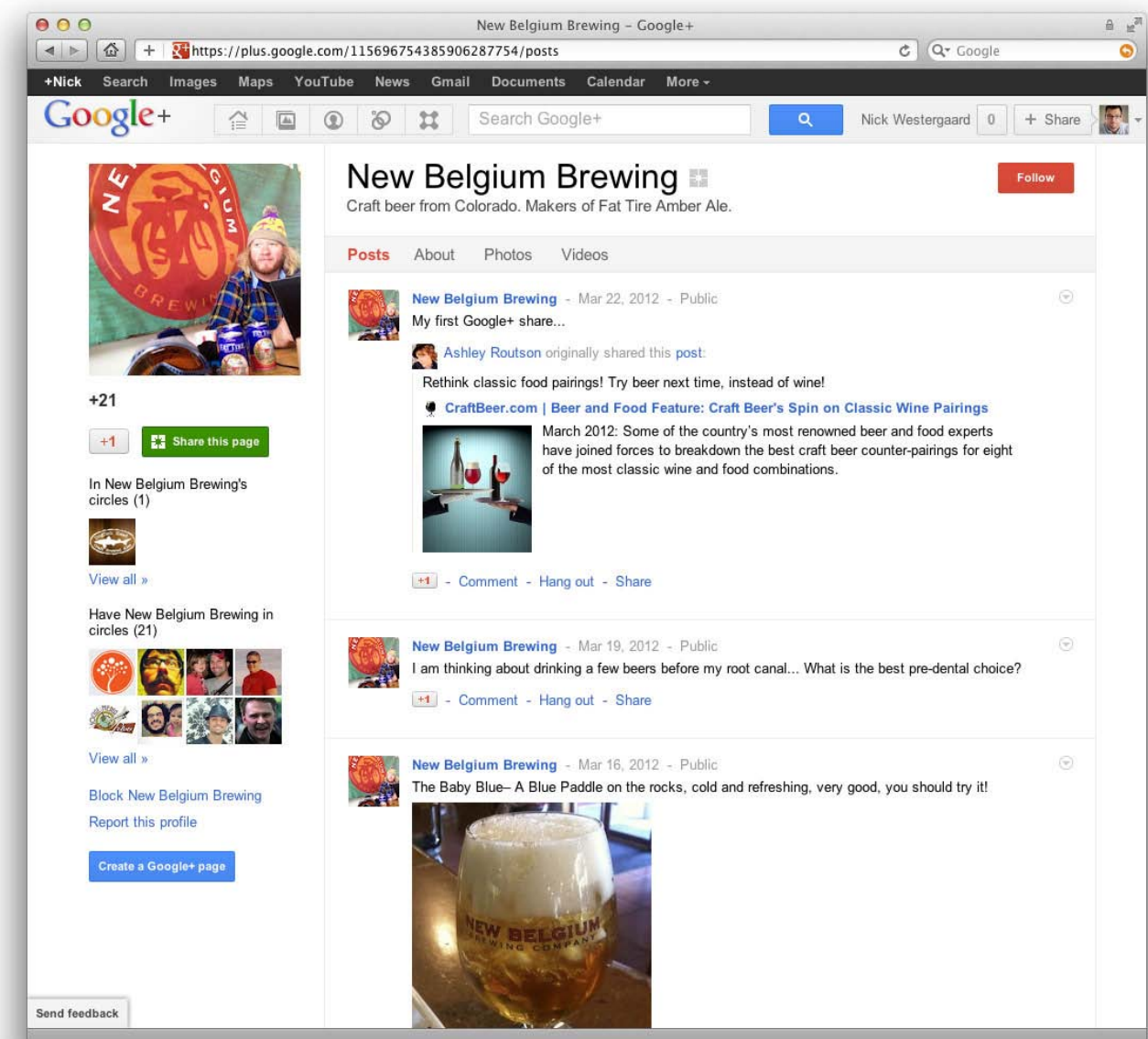
In addition to covering your visual bases from now on, make sure you digitize images from your brand’s past. Tools such as Facebook’s Timeline give tools to brands for telling their stories socially. Coke and Starbucks, for example, do a great job of that on their Facebook pages.

6. Photography can’t be an afterthought

Many organizations have a couple of trusted photographers they contact in times of need, (e.g., for events or launches). That won’t suffice any more. You need a strategy for consistently creating more interesting imagery to feed the larger spaces on Facebook’s Timeline... and for creating the slices of life for visual storytelling on Instagram.

Fun fact

New Belgium Brewing, a Colorado brewery, shares Instagram responsibilities among five photographers for greater variety in its brand story.



Social Media Strategy

The mountain of social media platforms can be overwhelming. But your organization doesn't need to be on every site - where you go depends on your social media goals and where your target audience can be found. Your social media approaches flow from your overall organizational goals and strategies.

The key is understanding that social media "isn't about monologue- it's about dialogue," says Ritu Sharma, co-founder and Executive Director of the Social Media for Nonprofits conference. Users expect authentic dialogue and they will disengage from organizations and brands that are in monologue mode.

Blogging is still worthwhile if you have unique stories to tell and are willing to invest the time to keep it fresh and develop a following (always tie blogs in to your other social media). According to blogging.org, 60% of U.S. businesses have a company blog but 65% haven't updated their blog in one year or more!

To learn more about planning and strategy for social media, and to keep on top of the latest in social media, visit sites like Nonprofit Tech 2.0, Mashable, Social Media Monthly, regularly.

[Click to see Nonprofit Tech 2.0](#)

Video

Video follows the same line as visual storytelling - it's where the online world is moving to. Making a video can seem daunting but you can produce one on a tight (or non-existent) budget with the right resources.

The goal of your video will indicate the resources you should be putting in to its production (will it be shown online? At a fundraiser? At a board meeting?). Bring in the best people you can afford and, together, review the goal, define how you will tell your story, who will be involved and interviewed, and what process you need to go through to come to a final product.

Take some time to research the better non-profit videos. What do you like about them? What works? Study them to help guide you to your own style of storytelling.

Study news organizations featuring human interest stories, like CNN Heroes, NBC's Making a Difference and CTV's Local Hero. While the production values and budget certainly differ from your own, the key principles of storytelling are the same. And the main ingredient for all of them? People. Not organizations.

[Click here to see CNN Heroes](#)

[Click here to see NBC's Making a Difference](#)

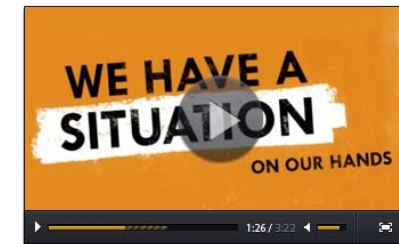
[Click here to see CTV's Local Hero](#)

Socialbrite is a great website for nonprofits. We recommend checking out their 8 great examples of non-profit storytelling. You'll want to sign up to receive See3's Daily DoGooder, too - a cause video is delivered to your inbox every day. See3 teams up with the Case Foundation every year to produce The DoGooder Nonprofit Video Awards.

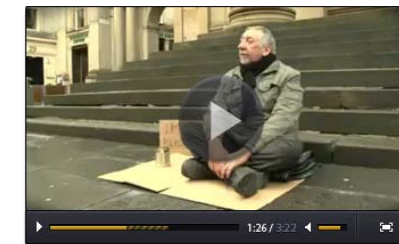
[Click here to see recent winning videos for a little video inspiration](#)

[Click here to see 8 great examples of non-profit storytelling](#)

Other examples of great non-profit video storytelling include:



The Girl Effect



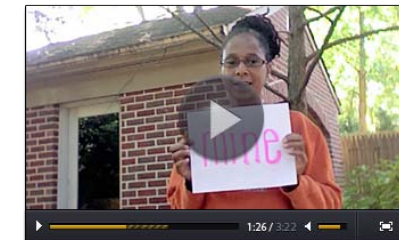
The Power of Words



Canadian Cancer Society



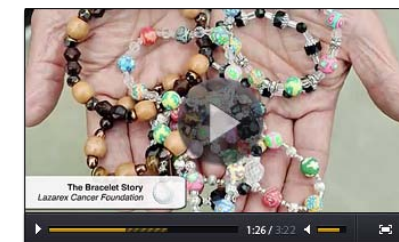
Hockey Canada PSA



Repower America



Storytellers for Good



The Braclet Story



A Glimmer of Hope



Charity Water's

Video sharing site, YouTube, has created some helpful features for non-profits, including its Call to Action Overlay and the Thermomter, both worth checking out, particularly for fundraising-oriented videos.

[Click to see Call to Action Overlay](#)

[Click to see the Thermomter](#)

The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation's Centre for Community Knowledge initiative has a strong video component and has a companion guide for producing a video on a budget, including how to storyboard, shoot, and edit.

Hopefully your organization has already registered with TechSoup Canada. Not only can you access donated software at incredibly reasonable prices, but TechSoup has a myriad of technology resources including a Multimedia & Design section with how-to's on video, photo editing, and web design.

Digging Deeper

Scott Simon's video can be found in YouTube's Reporters' Center, a great resource if you want to learn more about shooting video, visual storytelling, writing, and conducting good interviews.

[Click to see Reporters' Center](#)

To hear even more tips, take one hour this week to listen to Goodman speak on Storytelling for Good Causes.

[Click here to hear Andy Goodman speak on Storytelling for Good Causes](#)



Resources - Visual Storytelling

Socialbrite's Visual Storytelling Checklist lists essential steps to take before creating a video or digital story.

[Click to see Visual Storytelling Checklist](#)

Moleskin's online community is a great example of excellence in visual storytelling.

[Click to see online community](#)

To see a variety of creative uses for Instagram, check out their blog

[Click to see their blog](#)

Resources - Video

Mastering Multimedia blog's Teaching is a great resource to learn more about video storytelling

[Click to see Mastering Multimedia blog's Teaching](#)

Witness' Video for Change Curriculum also offers free online resources, covering both the how-to and hands-on as well as the strategy behind making videos for social change. Its focus is on video for advocacy but the basics and tips translate to all uses.

[Click to see their Video Production Resources](#)

nyvs.com's Video Storytelling series with Michael Rosenblum, starting with

Video Storytelling Basic Techniques: The Ground Rules video tutorials.

[Click to see The Ground Rules video tutorials](#)

[Click to see See3 Communications' web and video resources](#)

[Click to see Digital Storytelling from Soup to Nuts](#)

[Click to see YouTube's Next Cause 2012 Playlist](#)

Visual Storytelling: The Digital Video Documentary by Nancy Kalow, from The Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University





Resources - Social Media

Social Media for Social Good: A How-To Guide for Nonprofits and Your Nonprofit Tech Checklist

[Click to see Social Media for Social Good: A How-To Guide for Nonprofits and Your Nonprofit Tech Checklist](#)

The Case Foundation’s website features many resources, including basics like “how to use YouTube” to articles like “what’s your video strategy to raise funds?”

[Click to see the Case Foundation Website](#)

A good example of an organization that is moving from an older model of marketing to one of “brand stories” using social media to its fullest is Coca-Cola. Go watch its Content 2020, in particular, Chapter 3 on the evolution of storytelling from one-way storytelling to dynamic storytelling.

[Click to see video Content 2020 video](#)

Resources - Digital Storytelling

Inside the Story (Ebook) - Duke’s Digital Video Documentary how-to guide

[Click to see Inside the Story \(Ebook\)](#)

The Digital Storytelling Cookbook from the Center for Digital Storytelling

[Click to see The Digital Storytelling Cookbook](#)

“It takes a thousand voices to tell a single story.”

Native American saying

Nine Lives

You are going to put a lot of thought, energy, and resources into telling your stories. You’ll also need to put as much energy into getting your story out there - there’s no point telling a story if no one reads it. This simply comes down to marketing and time.

Hand-in-hand with getting your story out is repackaging and rewriting - telling different versions of your story for different mediums, platforms and goals.

Think of your story like the cat’s nine lives and aim to give each story as much longevity as possible - don’t let your story die after its first performance. The repetition can also pay off through increased awareness of your message.

Let’s look at some of the mediums you can use to repackage your story:

Print

1. Annual reports
2. Training documents
3. Newsletter
4. Reports
5. Fundraising letters and cases for support
6. Donor thank you’s
7. Media releases
8. Books
9. Case studies
10. A poem
11. A collage
12. Advertising



Online & Digital

- 13. Website
- 14. Emails and email campaigns
- 15. Podcast
- 16. Ebook
- 17. Reports
- 18. Video
- 19. Documentaries
- 20. Social media: Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Tumblr, Flickr, YouTube, Pinterest
- 21. Blog posts
- 22. Infographics
- 23. QR codes
- 24. Photo captions

Face-to-Face

- 25. Presentations
- 26. Speeches
- 27. Meetings
- 28. Orientation
- 29. Signage
- 30. Theatre
- 31. Media pitches and conversations
- 32. Special events
- 33. Exhibits
- 34. Trade show booths

Resources

99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style by Matt Madden.
[Click here to purchase 99 Ways to Tell a Story on amazon](#)

Dan and Chip Heath’s Made to Stick



“A big part of a CEO’s job is to motivate people to reach certain goals. To do that she must engage their emotions, and the key to their hearts is story.”

Robert McKee, screenwriter and author of Story

Creating A Storytelling Culture

Everyone in your organization is a storyteller. Are you giving them the tools they need to help tell your story? Do they even know the stories that you want told? How well do they answer the question, “what do you do?”

St. Mary’s General Hospital Foundation and Lutherwood are two organizations that are building a storytelling culture. Both organizations share the belief that storytelling is a core part of their work and that storytelling makes them better at what they do.

St. Mary’s approach to storytelling is “absolutely purposeful” ,says Peter Sweeney, President of the Foundation. “You have to immerse yourself in the culture of your organization. You have to reach out with purpose and explore every facet of your organization, most often from the perspective of your - fill in the blank - your patient, client, customer. Practically, we spend a lot of time making sure we’re connected with the front line staff.”

Sweeney stresses that you must ask for stories. “People don’t know to share stories if you don’t tell them you want them. Our staff know, if they get a good story, they let me know.”

Lutherwood is another organization that is intentionally building a storytelling culture. Shortly after attending a Capacity Canada storytelling workshop, Kim Lester was invited by her management team to give a presentation on what she had learned.

She and her colleague tried an experiment.



Her co-worker started with a presentation highlighting the numbers that demonstrated the impact of Lutherwood's foundation.

Next, Kim told the story of a withdrawn, hard-to-reach boy who staff had little luck connecting with, until the day an on-site construction worker took him under his wing.

"A couple of hours later, I asked the team what they remembered from the first presentation," says Kim.

"I couldn't remember the details of the first story!" recalls John Colangeli, CEO of Lutherwood, surprised himself by his lack of recall. But he clearly remembered the personal story. "It was an impressive and powerful exercise," says John.

Kim has been invited to do the same presentation to other teams within the 425-staff organization. And in her own fundraising team, they have made improved storytelling team goal. While the team had always tried to identify and tell stories, the workshops have helped them make storytelling a habit.

"It's on a more intentional, purposeful level now," says Kim. "While we used to tell more broad stories of our work, I'm now more specific, more personal," she adds. "I always think, 'what's the one message I want people to leave with'."

"It's taught me to tell stories, too," adds John, a testament to the way Kim has been able to bring what she learned back to the organization and share it. "As a leadership team, we can learn it and take it to the rest of the staff," he adds.

John sees the tremendous potential that stories have to bring to life the impact the organization has through a great variety of programs. John also believes in their power to inspire staff and the thousands of families who interact with Lutherwood every year.

It's not costly to implement storytelling, he adds - it's just about being intentional.

Much has also been written on storytelling and leadership. Leading by example, like John and Peter, is one of the best ways to build a storytelling culture. A recent Forbes.com post by Dan Schwabel called How to Use Storytelling as a Leadership Tool gives examples of how successful companies have made storytelling a part of their leadership practices. A common thread? All of them are purposeful in their approach and intention, and invest in it.

[Click to see How to Use Storytelling as a Leadership Tool](#)



Schwabel interviewed Paul Smith, author of *Lead with a Story*. Smith says:

"Some (companies) have a high level corporate storyteller whose job it is to capture and share their most important stories. At Nike, in fact, all the senior executives are designated corporate storytellers.

Other companies teach storytelling skills to their executives (because they certainly aren't learning it in business school). Kimberly-Clark, for example, provides two-day seminars to teach its 13-step program for crafting stories and giving presentations with them. 3M banned bullet points and replaced them with a process of writing "strategic narratives." P&G has hired Hollywood movie directors to teach its senior executives how to lead better with storytelling. And some of the storytellers at Motorola belong to outside improvisational or theater groups to hone their story skills."



Ideas to Help Build a Storytelling Culture

- 1. Start at the top.** If it doesn't start here, it will likely fail. Your top leadership needs to authentically value the role of storytelling and encourage it, understanding that every employee, volunteer, board member and client is a potential champion of the organization.
 - 2. Story cafes.** Hold a monthly event where you gather employees or volunteers to share inspiring stories.
 - 3. Storybank.** Create an organizational story bank to record these stories. The story bank holds images, releases, reports, and stories.
 - 4. Make it someone's responsibility.** If storytelling isn't
 - 5. Equip yourself**
 - 6. Create a process for sourcing stories**
 - 7. Read and watch good non-profit stories.** Also read and watch how media and for-profit brands tell their story.
 - 8. Train**
-

Resources

Lead with a Story: A Guide to Crafting Business Narratives That Captivate, Convince, and Inspire by Paul Smith

[Click here to purchase Lead with a Story on amazon](#)

Creating a Culture of Storytelling by Roger Burks, Senior Writer at Mercy Corps, from NTEN's 2010 Nonprofit Technology Conference

[Click here to see Creating a Culture of Storytelling](#)

