

Digital Storytelling

What it is

Digital stories are first-person visual narratives told in the storyteller's own words and voice. They can combine text, still images, and short video clips that allow an individual to express their story of being impacted by a particular issue or program in a succinct and relatable way. Digital stories are often exhibited on an agency website, perhaps on the homepage or in a section dedicated to personal stories of local residents. However, an agency may also include a digital story as part of a larger news story about their program or project that is posted on a local news source's website.



"My wife and I have friends who worked at the Shawnee Mission Head Start. Through them, we learned about the Head Start model. Our son has learning disabilities due to Williams Syndrome. He absolutely loves Head Start and has shown remarkable improvement."

-Tristan Gudvangen
Children enrolled in 2012

The Mid-America Regional Council of the Kansas City Metro Area has a campaign called '50 Faces of Head Start' that gives insight into the personal stories of those who have benefitted from the program. Head Start provides comprehensive early childhood development and education services.

Why it Works

Demonstrating how an agency's program or a particular topic an agency wants to address affects the lives of real people provides a human element that can generate interest in or sympathy with a cause. Used at a local or even regional scale, some of the people sharing their stories may be recognizable, which allows viewers to understand a particular agency action on a personal level. At any given moment, there may be myriad agencies operating in a variety of capacities within a community, so it is important to find ways to stand out in the crowd. By providing compelling, relatable, personal stories, an agency can more effectively communicate the gravity of an issue and make its causes and goals seem more real.

When to Use It

Digital storytelling is an optimal strategy for allowing a target audience to make deep personal connections to an issue, program, or cause. It can also be very effective in demonstrating how relevant events have progressed over time. Digital stories can show how a specific event effected an individual or family, how someone benefitted or could benefit from a program, etc.

Audience

Personal anecdotes are relatable in some way to all people. Anyone who has the ability to access an agency's website and view the digital stories will be able to take something away from the experience. An agency may want to tailor digital stories to be most appealing to a specific target audience. However, they can also be used to broaden an agency's audience.

Estimated Level of Effort

If an agency already maintains a website, posts advertisements online, or is regularly featured by local new sources, creating a platform to exhibit digital stories should be relatively painless. The biggest effort required will be seeking out people with stories and asking them to contribute. Some additional effort may be required in developing the actual content, depending on the desired production value.

Cost Considerations

Presuming an agency already has a website that is regularly maintained, the only guaranteed costs involved are those related to seeking out people with relevant stories to share and reformatting the website to accommodate those stories. However, there may be some additional production costs if the agency has to record video footage or take pictures, or if those sharing their stories want some form of compensation.

Example

Mid-America Regional Council's '50 Faces of Head Start' Campaign, Kansas City Metro Area:

<http://www.marc.org/Community/Head-Start/50-Years-of-Opportunity/50-Faces-of-Head-Start>

Resource

http://www.scottishhealthcouncil.org/patient_public_participation/participation_toolkit/digital_stories.aspx#.V7Z825grLIU

