DIGITAL STORYTELLING:
THE POWER OF FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVES

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What is Digital Storytelling?

Digital storytelling uses currently available digital media to share stories. It enables the storyteller to combine a narrative with images in a brief (2-5 minute) movie.

The Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California says that their mission is "to promote the value of story as a means for compassionate community action." Sharing stories is a way to break down barriers and to build empathy, and contemporary technologies allow for easy production and sharing.

The Process of Digital Storytelling

There are many different kinds of digital storytelling projects, and the techniques used may vary. This is a good place to start, though, from the founder of the Center for Digital Storytelling. It is a good reminder that what is most important is the story, rather than the technical aspects of creating the movie and putting it online.

The Seven Steps of Digital Storytelling, by Joe Lambert
1. Owning your insights (clarifying what the story is really about)
2. Owning your emotions (knowing your audience & what you want to share)
3. Finding the moment (finding the moment in which things changed)
4. Seeing your story (what images come to mind when recalling moment X, moment y, in the story?)
5. Hearing your story (what will it sound like when you speak your story? Is there music?)
6. Assembling your story (How will you structure the story? Which words will be spoken over which images?)
7. Sharing your story (who is your audience? What is your purpose?)

Basic Steps for Storytellers
1. Write your story.
2. Revise your story. It is good to share your story with others, to develop a sense of audience and feedback before creating the digital story. This can be done in a Story Circle, in small groups, or in pairs.
3. Choose/create images.
4. Match up images and your story using a storyboard. A storyboard allows you to visually map the narrative onto the images. That way, you will know when to switch images.
5. Create the digital story using software

Telling a story and sharing images
Consider what makes a good story.

The Center for Digital Storytelling offers these seven elements of a digital story. Thinking about these elements can be helpful in developing and revising a story.

1. Point of View

Who is telling the story, and why?
2. A Dramatic question
This is not necessarily a literal question, but some question that advances the narrative
3. Emotional Content
The author's emotional connection to the story creates avenues for empathy and shared concern
4. The Gift of the Storyteller's Voice -- both literally and figuratively
5. The Power of the Soundtrack – will there be music or other sound effects?
6. Economy
How to use just enough content to tell the story without overwhelming the listener
7. Pacing
How is the listener invited into the story and carried along on it?

Storyboarding

Storyboarding can be quite simple – post-it notes paired with photographs, or a Word document with images on one side and the narration on the other. The important thing is to plan how your images and narration will be paired, so you know which text you want spoken over which image.

Technology

Once the story is written, the images are selected, and the narrative has been storyboarded, it can be made into a movie using technology that suits your needs.

Most of the technologies work in similar ways, so learning one will help you to pick up others. The technologies that are the easiest to learn will be the least robust in terms of "extras," but a simple digital story might be just fine for your needs. For example, some mobile apps allow for a voice-over, but not also for music. Don't get overwhelmed by features that you don't need. The most important part is sharing a story.

Recommended Software
Free versions of software sometimes put a "bumper" at the end of the video (a slide with the program's name). You can often upgrade the software to eliminate this. Check on this before you choose a piece of software, so you are not disappointed. You might consider upgrading only when you are ready to finalize your video, if it is a monthly subscription (like We Video).

iOS apps: Adobe Voice (iPad only), Storyrobe, SonicPics (these apps cost a small amount of money. Both are basic and very easy to use. SonicPics allows for music plus a voice-over, while StoryRobe allows only for a voice-over.) StoryRobe and SonicPics are made for the iPhone, but will also work on the iPad. There is also 30 Hands, which is free, but the free version does include a bumper.

Android: Com-Phone Story Maker. Because I do not have an Android device, I have not been able to try this, but it looks like it works very similarly to the apps above.

PC/Mac/Mobile:
We Video (cloud-based video editor) – This makes it easy to make short movies without taking up space on your computer. There's a free version and a paid version for people who need more features. WeVideo has a very good help system, with short videos describing each aspect.

WeVideo also has an app for iOS/Android (WeVideo Video Editor)

The free version will put a "bumper" (advertisement for the program) on your video. You might consider upgrading only when you are ready to export (it is $4 a month).

PC: Windows Movie Maker, PhotoStory 3

Mac: iMovie (also on mobile)

Resources and Digital Story Repositories:

The Center for Digital Storytelling www.storycenter.org

The Center for Digital Storytelling YouTube Channel:
https://www.youtube.com/user/CenterOfTheStory/playlists

- www.silencespeaks.org (Human rights project of Center for Digital Storytelling)
- www.storiesforchange.net
- www.generationfive.org (stories against child sexual abuse)

Grimme Institut (Germany) www.grimme-institut.de (Has PDF about Digital Storytelling, in German; sponsors workshops and panels on DS).

There are many examples of Digital Storytelling online. Spend some time looking and you will get a sense of the variety of approaches.

Ethical Issues

There is an ethical responsibility to helping someone tell his or her story. The well-being of the storyteller should take priority over all other concerns, throughout the process.

The storyteller should have informed consent over what happens to the story. This should be understood as an ongoing matter, not the simple issue of signing a single release form.

Digital Storyteller's Bill of Rights: http://storycenter.org/ethical-practice/

For a rich discussion of ethical concerns in public health digital storytelling, I recommend the essay by Aline Gubrium, Amy Hill, and Sarah Flicker, listed below.

Copyright Concerns

If at all possible, storytellers should be encouraged to use their own images. In addition to avoiding copyright issues, this will usually produce more powerful visuals. If this is not possible, the storyteller can look for unrestricted images on the Web.

Music is also copyrighted, although some of the apps have free background music. A technologically adept or musical person might also create original music using Garage Band (Mac, iOS) or other audio software.

A Sampling of Resources and Scholarship in English

Gubrium, Aline. "Digital Storytelling: An Emergent Method for Health Promotion Research and Practice." Health Promotion Practice, 2009, Vol. 10 (2), pp. 186 – 191.

Gubrium, Aline C., Amy L. Hill, and Sarah Flicker. "A Situated Practice of Ethics for Participatory Visual and Digital Methods in Public Health Research and Practice: A Focus on Digital Storytelling." *American Journal of Public Health 104.9 (2014): 1606-1614.*

Lambert, Joe. *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community.* New York: Routledge, 2012

Vivienne, Sonja and Jean Burgess. "The Digital Storyteller's Stage: Queer Everyday Activists Negotiating Privacy and Publicness." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 2012, Vol. 56 (3), p. 362 – 377.

Vivienne, Sonja. *Digital Storytelling as Everyday Activism: Queer Identity, Voice and Networked Publics.* PhD thesis, Queensland University of Technology.