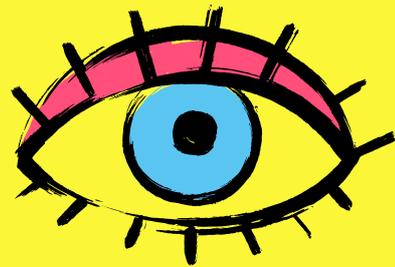


# Digital Storytelling

A short Introduction



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UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN

“The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller. The storyteller sets the vision, values and agenda of an entire generation that is to come.”

Steve Jobs, 1994

## Storytelling

Storytelling – this hyped buzzword describes nothing other than something that has been inherent to human beings since ancient times: telling stories. In the past, people gathered around a campfire; today, our screens flicker from dawn to dusk. We humans are captivated by stories. Storytelling is the method of conveying a message in a gripping story. Emotions play an important role in this.

In the age of social media, new factors are shaping modern storytelling:

- our attention decreases with the flood of information
- We consume digital products faster than analog ones
- Algorithms control our consumption

So how do we manage to capture our target audience for a moment so that they give us precious lifetime, listen, read, like or even recommend us?

Sound complicated? It surely is not simple. But along with talent, a good instinct, creativity and empathy, storytelling is ultimately a craft - and one that's a lot of fun! This guide's purpose is to help you learn this craft.

## Basics of (digital) storytelling

### Favorite food

Why do you prefer listening to certain people over others? What are these people better at? Or on social media: Why do you believe a person? Why do you follow a brand? And why do you share their posts? There is almost always a story behind it that appeals to us. It grabs us and stimulates us, generates emotions or catapults us into new worlds. We humans need stories to help us find our way in the labyrinth of our lives. They help our memory, orientation, our emotions, they support and motivate us and ultimately hold us together as a community. Stories shape our identity.

Storytelling is closely related to the so-called narrative and is very important especially for our topic of environmental protection (see chapter 2). Narratives are patterns of thought, explanation and interpretation. With such parameters we construct and reconstruct our world. Narrative memory, for example, plays an important role in decisions we make. Whether a narrative becomes socially accepted (e.g. "Switzerland practices nature-oriented agriculture") depends on who tells it, how current and understandable it is, and ultimately how easily it can be woven into one's own lifeworld.

There is no universal recipe. But at least we can all agree on one thing: We all like to eat well. However, tastes differ, which makes it all the more important for a chef to know not only the ingredients, but also the preferences of the guests, i.e. the target group. Especially in the age of digital fast food.

## Emotional bait



Nevertheless, there is a universal model in the structure of narratives: For example, every story consists of a beginning, a middle and an end. Translated dramaturgically, this means: there is an initial situation, a complication and a solution.

But the mere fact that something happens does not make a story exciting. Only the questions why and how will spice up the narrative - they do not describe a state, but an action. Both questions focus on our emotions, because: We process an emotionally packed message much better than dry facts and data. And, after all, we want a message not only to get across, but also to stick. As science shows, we keep events with strong emotions in our memory much longer. And: People not only store good stories better, but in part as if we had experienced them ourselves. This is exactly why research is so central, because people believe good stories even more than facts.

Before we start telling a story, we should ask ourselves: What emotion can this story trigger? It's exciting when you realize for yourself: You may not remember the details of a story, but all the more you remember a feeling you had at the time. If we have this answer, we can deliberately use emotional bait later in the dramaturgy. In this context, let us keep our goal in mind: In the field of environmental protection, we don't just want to inform or educate people, we also want to mobilize them. Too often, we only convey knowledge (e.g. important data/facts) or aesthetics (e.g. great graphics/drone images) and forget the benefits, the empathy, the excitement and most importantly: the relevance. It is the combination of all these factors that makes a story exciting.

## Classic vs. digital storytelling

Today, we share more stories than ever before. Yet the basic structures (beginning, middle, end) remain the same even in digital storytelling. With the multimedia possibilities, however, stories have become more complex. This against the backdrop that our attention span is decreasing. Whether 7 or 3 seconds (TikTokers even talk about the first, crucial second): The beginning determines whether we stay tuned or click away, it has to pull us in immediately. In video-lingo, this is why we speak of the "most compelling shot" at the beginning of the story. This can also be a statement in the text.

One basic rule also applies to digital storytelling: FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION. While in traditional storytelling the content is told in a specific form (e.g. book format, press release, fixed broadcasting slot), in digital storytelling it's the other way around: the function determines the narrative form. So before we tell a story digitally, we need to define our goal and target audience precisely, and then choose the appropriate channel.

In traditional storytelling, people have long spoken of the so-called hero's journey as an archetypal narrative structure: A hero who or which has to overcome hurdles until the happy end. This type of storytelling still works in most films, series and books. But multimedia lets the classic hero's journey slip into the background, because the importance of the audience, has changed: Watching a hero, a heroine go on adventures, assumes the audience is passive. This is not necessarily the case with social media, where mediators and users are on an equal level. Interactions on behalf of the community are strongly desired and, in the best case, the community itself provides input and user-generated content. The community should be actively

cultivated so that a deep bond can develop. In this selfie generation, many users also prefer to be the center of their own story, i.e. to be a hero themselves.

On the subject of environmental protection and the hero's journey, it should be noted that the rise of Greta Thunberg is a unique example of a hero's journey in the climate crisis. From outcast schoolgirl to spokesperson for the international climate movement to the "Greta effect." Still, it's important not to attribute the issue to a lone wolf, because it is the mass that can have a big impact on people's behavior as well.

Another difference to classic storytelling is the visuals: we show what we tell. Our brains process images much faster than text, so image-rich stimuli are all the more important. It is true that text is still the basis of many posts on the Internet. But photos, videos and easy-to-understand information graphics are much more effective in attracting users' attention.

Audio is also gaining value (podcast, audiobook, sounds) - ideally the different elements are combined in a message.

## Remember:

- be original
- be surprising
- be short and to the point
- throw emotional bait
- be relevant
- do not copy
- avoid clichés
- do not forget your message
- do not forget your target audience



## Stories on websites

In addition to many audiovisual tools, websites also offer the possibility of presenting and linking information more comprehensively. Here, too, the rule is now: Image/video first. Moreover, the text follows the rules of the inverted news pyramid: the core, the most important keywords, come first, followed by source, details and at the end the background. In online language, this is why we speak of "beef first".

The text is well structured with paragraphs and catchy titles. One thought per paragraph and use strong verbs. Numbers should be written out, because our brain stumbles over them and this is how we gain the reader's attention. To be avoided at all costs: Nominal style, too many adjectives, word monsters and nested sentences.



**Important:** Check the content on the smartphone.



## Stories on social media

Apps like Facebook, TikTok & Co. have become a veritable storytelling industry: Over 4.6 billion (!) people use social media worldwide and we spend a lot of our time on it. Important: Each channel, each platform has its specific characteristics in terms of format, tonality and users. The content must therefore be adapted or prepared individually - always in check with the social media strategy, in which this is precisely defined.

Questions concerning the social media strategy: Who do we want to reach? What goal are we pursuing? Which KPIs do we define? What resources are available to us? And not unimportant: What does our target group want? This is a common mistake: As a company, you



have a message, but does it interest your target audience? An increasing number of followers, clicks, conversation, etc. are all well, but they do little to measure success if they cannot be contextually evaluated!

A message is only successful if the interest of the company interacts with the interest of the users and, in the best case, is shared by them.

## But why do people share?

- They want to strengthen bonds with other people ("I'm thinking of you").
- They show that they are part of a movement (e.g. climate movement)
- They want to increase their social status
- They evaluate a certain content as emotionally strong or practical

## What (often) works:

Games, quizzes, ratings, stories, augmented reality, do-it-yourself tutorials, life hacks, edutainment, fact check, history channel, cat content (animals in general), memes, vacation pictures, food, challenges, gaming, hauls, personal stories

## What bores:

Lengthy texts, too many technical terms, poor quality, conventional press releases, advertising texts.



## Stories with video/picture

Image and sound combined - this helps us to process information better, faster and also more emotionally. Attention is drawn even more by a moving image than by mere text or pictures.

In addition, videos have a more credible effect on the audience and are more authentic. Here, too, multimedia possibilities are increasing: perspectives (drone, 360-degree cameras, selfie), colors, sounds, music, all of these can turn a video into a firework.

But a video alone is not enough, here too you need a clear strategy with objectives, otherwise the effort (video production is costly) is not worth it.

When producing a video, you should therefore ask yourself the basic question at the beginning: What do I want to say with it? What is the core of my story? In television, one speaks of a statement desire, which is ideally defined before each production. ("The audience should experience that/how...").

The following table also helps to decide what kind of video to make:

## The “Hero-, Hub, Help-Modell”

	Hero- Videos	Hub- Videos	Help- Videos
Description	Elaborate videos with surprising and captivating content	Videos with relevant and dialog oriented content	Videos with searchable and useful content
Audience	Surprised	Interested	Seeking
Main function	Entertain, appeal emotionally	Interact, engage users	Inform
Focus	Shareability	Relevance	Findability
Frequency	Rare, Highlights	Regular	Often
Core figures	Views, shares, cumulative reach	Comments, Likes, Clicks per subscriber	Organized access, ranking, watchtime

### From PR Workshop: Youtube & Co. A strategic guide for videos

How long a video should be is often subject of question. There is no general answer to this question. As short as possible, as long as necessary. But, longer formats are also popular and

prove the opposite. The decisive factor is therefore: the quality of the content, the frequency and the recognition, not the length!

## Storytelling in the climate crisis

Communication around the climate crisis is enormously exciting and challenging because the initial situation is so contradictory. According to the current worry barometer in Switzerland, the topics of environmental protection and climate are near the top of the list. Nevertheless, even though we are affected, we act too little and not quickly enough. There are many reasons for this, including psychology, behavioral economics, but also communication.

### **Important for us as storytellers:**

Knowledge alone does not ensure change! This is where we come to the emotions mentioned. In the past, science assumed that it was mainly facts that influenced our decisions and that emotions were merely a rational disturbance. But today we know that emotions play an important role in our actions.

Especially as environmentalists, we want to appeal to the behavior of our fellow human beings. But how? In order for us to change, we not only need visually comprehensible information, but also attention and personal involvement. Ideally, a solution is presented that gives hope, creates majorities and influence. The journalist Ronja von Wurmb-Seibel has created a striking magic formula that can be applied very well to communication in the field of environmental protection. It is as follows:

## **SHIT PLUS X**

Schit stands for everything we don't like, in our case the climate crisis or climate policy, but also our worries, fears, despair.

**X** means things, solutions, approaches that we need to make for this shit/these problems to become smaller or even disappear. If you know the background of behavioral psychology, this formula makes even more sense to you. Because on the one hand positive feelings make us more creative, more cooperative and more open to change. On the other hand, as a social being, people need role models and stories to guide them. For these reasons, too drastic and negative communication can be counterproductive. For example, it can lead to people withdrawing out of helplessness or because they think it is too late to act anyway. Psychologist Nicole Harré says: Tell tales of joy and not tales of terror! Positive narratives have a greater potential to mobilize and they are identity-building. We should therefore invite our supporters to keep acting and make them feel like they are not alone, but that they are indeed part of an important movement.

### **Common hurdles in climate communications include:**

- The story is missing
- Facts are boringly strung together
- Reference to the user's real life is missing
- apocalyptic communication, which is paralyzing



# A checklist for good storytelling

## Preparation

- What is the goal of the story? (Brand presence? Call to action? Do we want to engage, explain or persuade?)
  - What is our core message? (Define statement)
  - Who is our target audience and what are they really interested in?
  - What do the users need to know in the end?
  - What resources do I have?
  - Why are we communicating in this given moment?
  - Align considerations with social media strategy.
- Once function is clarified, choose format/channel

## Story

- What emotion is being addressed?
- Describe action, not condition
- Is the story relevant and why?
- Are facts true?
- What is the core of my narrative?
- What is the driving question?
- Which identifying characters appear?
- Does the beginning immediately pull you in (hook)?
- Am I telling a slim enough story?
- Do I tell the story clearly enough?
- Is there emotional bait?
- What is surprising?
- Review W-questions (who does what, when, where why, what for).
- How do we create closeness?
- Check core message again and again!

## Image

- Image rights clarified?
- Does the text match the image?
- Does the image make you want more? (Sensual? Aesthetic?)
- Does the image surprise me?
- What form of presentation do I choose? (e.g. image gallery, carousel)
- Have I chosen the right cut out? Image correction necessary?
- Adapt format according to channel
- Images/infographics displayed on end devices understandable and pictorially correct? (PC /Mac, tablet, smartphone?)

## Text

- "beef first?"
- Concise?
- Short?
- Portioned?
- Does image match text and vice versa?
- Title and URL SEO-ready?

## Video

- Is it worth the effort?  
Why video and not just image and text?
- Image rights cleared?
- Does text support video?
- Is the format right?
- Is the sound right?
- As short as possible, as long as necessary?
- Adapt format according to channel
- Video displayed on end devices understandable and pictorially correct? (PC /Mac, tablet, smartphone?)

## Publication

- Before publication: obtain feedback
- A/B testing
- Spelling?
- Catchy and trending hashtags set?
- Do links work?
- Timing of publication? (Current topics more likely in the morning, in-depth more likely at noon or in the evening, entertainment or update more likely in the evening).
- Monitor reactions
- active community management, taking up inputs, commenting, embedding
- proper analysis, put in contextualized evaluation
- Write down and share learnings

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Author: Samira Zingaro

Samira Zingaro is Lead Creative Digital in the communications department of WWF Switzerland.

During her career as journalist she worked for various Swiss media, including the Swiss radio and television.



Initiiert von WWF Schweiz  
Unterstützt durch Mercator Stiftung Schweiz  
und die Hamasil Stiftung

One Planet Lab, Deutschschweiz  
Patricia Matzdorf  
patricia.matzdorf@wwf.ch  
044 297 22 84

Leitung One Planet Lab, Romandie  
Ingrid Fumasoli  
ingrid.fumasoli@wwf.ch  
021 966 73 84