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Grants and Resources for Sustainability
PREMIUM



Storytelling for Fundraising

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Introduction

Stories are powerful tools that define human development, culture and traditions. They have the ability to engage, motivate and inculcate positive attitude in people. It is for this reason that kids are introduced to stories right from an early stage. Stories are an effective communication tool that is liked by people of all ages.

Over the years storytelling has transformed considerably and has evolved as an important tool in content based marketing. No matter what product or service a company offers, their primary concern is to develop humane stories that have an instant connect with people. You might have observed that most advertisements on Television, Internet and Newspapers are build around human characters, which helps us to associate ourselves with them.

As an NGO professional you might be confused, so as to what are you supposed to do with stories and storytelling? You are no script writer, author or a content development company, that you need to write stories. To a certain extent you are right, because as an NGO your primary work is to help people and not write stories. But is that all!! Don't you think you should share and publish your success stories, so that people know what your organization does? Don't you want more people to connect to your cause? Remember that as long as your organization deals with people (donors, project staff, beneficiaries) you need stories.

Storytelling may sound easy but one should understand that it is an art that can be perfected only with practice and hard work. Using the tips and guidelines in this guide, you will soon master the art of storytelling. This guide will provide you with all the necessary fuel required for writing effective and viral stories.

What is storytelling?

All of us have grown up listening to stories of one form or another, some mythological, some fictional and some real ones. A story can be simply understood as the narration of a true or fictional event in a way that the listener/audience learns and experiences the emotions of the main character of the story. Storytelling is the process of sharing stories to provide entertainment, create awareness, preserve culture and transfer information. Storytelling often entails improvisation of the original content to make it more appealing and engaging to the listener.

Storytelling and Fundraising

Fundraising requires meticulous planning, painstaking research and great deal of effort. At times the process of proposal writing becomes so technical and competitive that it robs off the humane touch and emotions associated with the cause. Even though the primary purpose of a fundraising campaign is to raise funds, it also aims towards connecting people to real causes and real people. Storytelling can be a powerful communication tool in fundraising as it creates awareness, instills emotions in people which ultimately leads to enhanced donations and funds.

Successful NGOs use stories not just as case studies or for promotions but also integrate them in their fundraising campaigns. Well if you think your NGO doesn't have a story, you are very wrong. There is always a story, all you need is to capture it and use it as per your requirement. Even if you have just recently started an NGO, you have a story. You can talk about the thought behind starting the NGO, the people you consulted, the problem that the NGO addresses, the solution that it offers, the primary beneficiaries and so on.

Importance of Storytelling in Fundraising

Storytelling is gaining wide popularity amongst various sectors. Stories are an important tool not only in marketing but also have a huge role in raising fund. Some of the reasons why storytelling is important in fundraising is given below:

1. Stories are easy to remember: Yes they are and that is the reason why most of us still remember the bed time stories and fairy tales that we had heard when we were children. Similarly, when your NGO has an excellent story about how your intervention in an area brought about a drastic impact, it is easy for the reader/listener to remember.
2. Alter boring data into appealing content: Facts and data can help you lay emphasis on issues by supporting your proposition, but unless you are a mathematician or a statistician, numbers won't charm you. Stories help in adding the WOW factor to these numbers and bring a feel to them.
3. Easy to understand: Stories are far easier to understand than research reports and technical papers. By weaving a story around your NGO and the causes that you work for can create content that is easy to understand.
4. Stories instill emotions: Stories have the power to infuse emotions that an academic paper or report cannot. You might have cried or laughed while watching a movie, just because story evoked your emotions. Reports made by NGOs often contain information overload which make them bulky and boring. If stories are integrated within the reports people will feel more connected with the organization and its causes.
5. Stories can amplify change: If your story is liked by people, there are chances they will narrate it to their friends and as more people hear about you, they will want to help you in one way or other, thereby amplifying change. You might have seen how some stories become viral and travel the whole world.

Key Elements of a Story

A story is composed of a few elements that make it complete and effective. While writing a story for your NGO remember to have the following elements:

1. **Protagonist:** He/she is the main hero of the story. This is the person, community, organization around which the whole story is built. If your NGO works for HIV victims and provides them livelihood options, you can select one beneficiary and make her the protagonist. In the story talk about their name, age and the problems they face.
Example: "I was shocked when I was tested HIV positive, during my pregnancy. I had contracted the virus from my husband, who recently succumbed to the disease. I want to raise my daughter in a healthy and safe environment." Sheila (27) is a young widow who lives in the slums of Mumbai. She wants to learn tailoring so that she can earn enough for her daughter and herself. Here the protagonist is the woman named Sheila.
2. **Antagonist/Conflict:** In normal sense, he/she is the villain of the plot, in the case of your story this relates to the negative situation that exists in a given area. Taking the example from above the antagonist is HIV. Discuss about how it affects the life of your protagonist.
Example: HIV and AIDS remain a persistent problem for countries around the world. Even though great progress has been made in preventing and treating HIV, there is still much to do. Sheila faces stigma and discrimination across all settings be it at home, healthcare or workplace. Her family has abandoned her; she has lost her job and is usually never involved in community activities.
3. **Resolution:** Unless and until you have a solution to the problem, there will be no point narrating a story. This section in the story will talk about the actions you have implemented or propose to implement for resolving the problem.
Example: Sheila can live a better living and ensure a quality life for her daughter only if she is able to increase her income and avail benefits from government schemes. She needs to be made aware about schemes and programs run by government so she can benefit from them. For enhancing her livelihood, she needs to be trained on tailoring and provided with a sewing machine so that she can start her tailor shop.
4. **Transformation:** This section should deal with the changes that are an outcome of the intervention. Most donors look forward to see how their funds have impacted the beneficiaries or are likely impact on the people.

How to Gather Stories?

All your stories are there in the field/project site. You will have to talk to your field staff to help you in capturing the best stories. But before going to the field to collect stories it is important to form a broad framework.

1. Who is the Audience? Make sure you identify the audience for whom you are writing the story. For instance if writing to a donor , the pitch of the story should emphasize on the need for them to support the cause, but if writing for a press release the story should focus on the impacts of the intervention. This will also determine the use of language, technicalities and compositing of the story.
2. Who will write the story? As mentioned earlier, story writing is not as easy as it may sound. The success of the story largely depends on who tells the story. It is thus important for you to find a person who is passionate about the cause, knows your organization and has great writing skills.
3. What platforms will be used to publicize the story? There are several ways of sharing your story. These can be printed on paper, can be part of your annual reports, or can be uploaded on your website, or can be shared through social media. Many NGOs also use pictorial representation and videos for sharing their stories. You will have to curate the story according to the platform you select. For instance stories for social media should be short and crisp, while for reports you can have a detailed story.

Once you have answer the questions above you can proceed to the field to gather the most interesting stories and cases. Using the steps given below will make the process of story easy for you.

1. Prepare a Questionnaire: You should have a questionnaire containing all the necessary questions related to the story. Some questions that you can ask the beneficiaries can be- What difference do you see after (XYZ) intervention in the area? Can you explain the difficulties you face in the area? How will this intervention help you?
2. Identify the central character of the story: While you ask the same question to many people you will realize that the answers given by some are more genuine and interesting than others. Identify these groups/people as the central character and get more detailed information from them.
3. Be Patient while collecting information: You should listen carefully to the things that the central character of the story speaks. You need to be very careful while collecting the information so be friendly and patient throughout the process. Give them time to think and don't pressurize them in anyway.
4. Collect visual images: To make your stories more effective and appealing it is always beneficial to collect images. Visuals and graphics are always more impactful. Strong

images will instantly make people feel for the cause and evoke the emotion necessary for supporting your cause.

5. Structure the story: All the information that you have collected should be properly structured. Remember the story should flow consistently and all the elements of it are interconnected.

Approval from the interviewee: Once the first hand information has been structured in form of the story the draft should be approved by the interviewee. On receiving approval you can go ahead and publish the story at various platforms.

Tips for good storytelling

When writing a story for fundraising it is essential that you have the following integrated within the story.

1. Is time bound: Your story should clearly indicate that support from donors should come within a specified time? Setting a deadline in the story will create a sense of urgency that would ensure the donor to act fast.
Example: Children of XYZ orphanage are eagerly waiting for Christmas celebration. Your support can help us feed a child; please donate before the 23rd of December!
2. Is specific: Your story should clearly spell out what you expect from the reader. Many stories just talk about the problems and possible solutions but nowhere mention how the reader can support the cause. If you are looking for financial help clearly mention that you need a certain amount of money, in case you need books, clothes or toys clearly mention it in the appeal.
Example: How about donating some books to our shelter. Our children love to read and in your books they will find a new friend.
3. Is emotional: Emotions can be called the life line of a story. It is the emotions that lead to immediate connect of people with your organization. Expert fundraisers always keep a human tone in their appeal.
Example: Vikas, 8 Yrs saw his father being swept away in the mud and boulders that had washed down the hill over their house after the cloud burst. Vikas is very young to work as daily wage worker in place of his father. Now his mother works in his place while Vikas takes care of his little siblings in their makeshift home. A decent one time meal will be a luxury for him, leave alone education.
Vikas is not alone. This region of Garhwal has over a hundred families left without their bread winners and with no regular source of earning or a roof over their head. Having lost their houses and livelihoods the flood victims seek immediate support. Please forward to ABC such donations, that you feel can help the Vikas and other devastated families.
4. Focus on one character: While writing the story makes sure that you keep a central character around which the entire story revolves. This will help the reader to connect to the character and build an emotional bond with him/her.
5. Stick to the theme: Do not divert from the theme of the story. Be precise and focus on just one story line, to allow your readers to really connect with the protagonist.
6. Use social media: Social media sites are a platform for social interaction and every post you make on a social media platform is an opportunity for customers to convert. By posting your stories on social media you get immediate access to a large pool of people.

Every blog post, image, video, or comment you share is a chance for someone to react, and every reaction could lead to a site visit, and eventually a conversion.

7. Use personal connections: Make sure to use personal connections, while writing. Words like you, yours, our, us, we creates a sense of belonging and gives a personal touch to the story.

Example: Your support can make a difference in the lives of XYZ community.

8. Use Simple Words: Chose your words wisely. Simple words and sentences are easy to read and understand. Use the words that do justice to your story. Remember it is not about fancy words that make the story, but it is the emotions that are weaved in it. You definitely don't want the reader to use a thesaurus to look for the meaning of words.

9. Mention your contact details: The primary purpose of the story is to create a sense of urgency and at the same time provoke people to take action for the cause. If the reader is really touched by the story there are chances that they would like to know more about the issue. Clearly mention your contact details so that they may contact you.

Example: We will love to hear from you, please feel free to contact us.

Contact details: Website, Mail, Telephone, Mailing Address

10. Payment details: As your primary focus for writing the story is to raise funds, make sure you mention the payment details. This would also mean that you inform the donors if your organization has the necessary certifications that offer tax exemption etc.

The strongest fundraising children's stories have real characters; real problems and real solutions that are weaved together in a well-chosen settings and attractive style. Use the tips from the guide and become a master storyteller.

Happy Storytelling!!

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October 14, 2016