

Chapter 3

STORYTELLING FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE



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Marher
HERITAGE
MARKETING

STORYTELLING AS A BUZZWORD

Nowadays we find storytelling everywhere.

We find storytelling in care professions (narrative medicine), in business (corporate storytelling), in politics (storytelling in political campaigns), in entertainment (under the pandemic we lived a kind of “Netflix society” in which we consumed a lot of tv series, a lot of stories).

This large use of the word “storytelling” has made the concept entirely indeterminate. For this reason, it is useful to remember what storytelling is.

STORYTELLING DEFINITION

One of the possible definition of Storytelling is the Serrat definition:

«Storytelling is the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life-lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights» [Serrat, 2008].

The key-word in this definition of Serrat is “evoke”. A chronological list of facts is not Storytelling. In the same way, storytelling is not the analytic description of an event. Narrative requires a great power of imagination and, we could say, a great capacity to evocate something else, something that is “behind” the fact. To be able to link fact and events each others and to evoke something else behind them is a crucial skills to become a good storyteller.

What does it mean that fact are connected each others? We give you a practical example. To write **“The king died and then the queen died”** is describing two different and separate facts. To write "The king died and then the queen died **because of grief**" is making a story [Erlach, Muller, 2020].

The second example consists in a story because the fact that the queen died is not only a fact that follows the first one (the king died). It is a consequence of it. Consequently, we could say that, **in a story, we have facts linked by cause-effect relationship.**

WHY IS STORYTELLING
IMPORTANT?

A. WE LIVE IN NARRATIVE ECONOMIES

According to Nobel Prize Robert Shiller, stories are a key change factor for modern economies. From this perspective, narratives drive economies more than mathematics. More specifically, economies are driven by «popular narratives» spread through word of mouth or social media. A “narrative” contagion that affects people and policymakers [Shiller, 2019].

B. MARKETS ARE NARRATIVE ARENAS

Markets are increasingly becoming narrative arenas where, alongside the intrinsic quality of products, the ability of brands and companies to know how to evoke a universe of stories, traditions and values (cultural and ethical) is fundamental to stand out among the competitors.

Therefore, being able to craft stories and portraying company values is becoming a crucial skill to master to exert an attractive value towards increasingly attentive and aware customers [Fontana, 2020].

C. STORYTELLING IS A SENSE-MAKING PROCESS

Stories are able to open windows into the emotional and symbolic lives of people and organizations. In this way, we could say that storytelling is a sense-making process, especially thanks to its ability to reveal our identity and how we are are from others. [Gabriel, 2020].

D. STORYTELLING INCREASE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AND SAVE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Storytelling is able to increase social interactions because stories have a social function. Furthermore, storytelling can play an important role in saving and spreading Cultural Heritage. Research activity linked to the storytelling process can save and disseminate, using narratives techniques, tangible and intangible heritage [Klueg, Pranskuniene, Vagnarelli, 2021].

STORYTELLING FOR HERITAGE MARKETING

As seen in the previous module (Chapter 2), the development and implementation model of the heritage marketing strategy has four phases.

We are going to use this model, adapting it, for developing a storytelling process for Cultural Heritage:



1. AUDITING

Thanks to the process described in the previous chapters, the cultural heritage resources of the organization have been identified.

In the “auditing” step of storytelling process, it is necessary to identify the **narrative capital** of it. Not all the cultural heritage resources of an organization could have a narrative capital to develop. To choose the best one is a fundamental step of the storytelling process.

The narrative capital consists in the **raw material** (documents, old pictures, book, articles, video etc.) that has a “potential” to become a good story. For example, in the case of the one of the most famous cultural heritage sites in the world, the Egypt pyramids, one of the most evocative narrative capital is the life story of the pharaohs buried inside it.

The tool MARHER project developed for auditing and visioning the narrative resources of an organization is **Canvas for Cultural Heritage** (more on this in chapter five).

2. VISIONING

After having identified what is the narrative capital to develop, it is necessary to know **how** is the vision to implement it.

A second fundamental step consists in defining the core values we would like to communicate through the story. The values are the core messages of our story. Examples of core values of a story are longevity, tradition rooted in a specific territory, tradition of innovation, passion, work-ethic, family business.

Beside the main message of the story, the **Canvas for Cultural Heritage** will help us in defining the other resources useful for implementing the storytelling process. For example, targets, channels to fuel the story, stakeholders to engage in it and so on.

After this process we will know if our priority is: to communicate and manage social awareness and public image of our organization; to strengthen the sense of belonging and shared values with the staff; to create engagement with stakeholders or to improve brand awareness and brand loyalty.

The Canvas for Cultural Heritage will also identify the output of the process: video, podcast, book, article etc. Another essential step for starting making the story.

3. MAKING

At this stage, thanks to the **Canvas for Cultural Heritage**, we know what operational tools we are going to use for communicate our story: book, video, pictures, podcast etc.

Now it is time to make the story.

The tool **Storyboard for Cultural Heritage**, developed by MARHER project, will help us in achieving this goal.

Making story consists in: a) collecting all the elements of the narrative capital (pictures, video, interview, text etc.) we previously identified for developing the story; b) to portion them in autonomous single parts of a unique story; c) to distribute them in a plot that is able to engage your audience; d) to create interaction between the elements of the narrative capital and additional emotional contents like music, sounds effects etc. if presents. The last stage of the process is to release the story.

4. CONTROLLING

Also, in storytelling it is important to monitor the progress and effectiveness of communication. Some key performance indicators (which vary according to the strategy we have decided to implement) that can help us are:

- surveys
- interviews
- attendance at company sites and event
- number of visitors to the museum/archives/sales points...
- interaction on social channels
- insights
- feedback from stakeholders and their level of involvement

The objective of the controlling step is also to get into the story to adapt and modify it on the base on the data and reaction collected.

How to channel stories

Stories can be channeled through different platforms:

Off-line:

- traditional writing texts like books and articles;
- corporate museums and catalogs;
- pictures exhibitions;

Online through Digital Storytelling:

“...digital storytelling combines the best of two worlds: the "new world" of digitized video, photography and art, and the "old world" of telling stories.”

Dana Atchley, Digital Storytelling pioneer

Examples of digital storytelling are: websites, blog, podcast, short videos

STORYTELLING TIPS

We propose a useful model for applying the tips of storytelling to cultural heritage (from the Europeana website: <https://pro.europeana.eu/>)

- **BE PERSONAL:** Personal stories can bring the past to life and help people relate to history on an emotional level. Consider the human significance of cultural artifacts and sites. Help people imagine themselves in someone else's shoes.
- **BE INFORMAL, BUT EXPERT:** People want to learn from experts, but it shouldn't be a chore. As long as the content is well-informed, the format and tone of your story can be experimental and playful. Finding the right balance is important.
- **THE HIDDEN STORIES:** So much cultural history remains untold. When choosing subjects, consider who is missing from the picture, and try to give a voice to a range of people and communities.
- **ILLUSTRATE YOUR POINTS:** A key strength of the cultural heritage sector is its wealth of visual imagery. Long written or spoken narratives can be hard to engage with. Breaking up the story with visual (or audio) material, and building in time to reflect on it, can enrich the experience.
- **BE SPECIFIC:** Specific topics can still engage a broad audience. Start from a particular detail that lies at the heart of your story, then move to the bigger picture. Personal stories and well-chosen images can help keep your focus.
- **BE EVOCATIVE:** Cultural history stories need to be based in fact, but the facts don't need to be dry. Don't be afraid to use descriptive and evocative imagery and approaches and invite the viewer to place themselves within the scene.

- **TELL STORIES FROM PEOPLE:** if the story is told by a person, or the story is about people, the listener is more likely to connect with the story and empathize.
- **USE CLEAR BUT PRECISE LANGUAGE:** the listener has to and wants to understand, so don't use too technical language, but still give correct information.
- **TELL CURIOUS AND COVERT STORIES:** look for topics, subjects, events that might be curious to the listener and try not to tell already known stories.
- **USE VISUAL ELEMENTS:** using only words (written or oral) could make it difficult to engage the listener. Use visual material (videos, photos, objects...), but also audio, to keep the interest alive.
- **USE SPECIFIC TOPIC:** this can help to engage the listener.
- **BE EVOCATIVE:** evoking powerful images can lead the listener to be moved, to share, to empathize. Then also to remember and perhaps to act

A good story needs to have these characteristics:

- **SEMPPLICITY:** the simpler the story, the stronger it is. Avoid the superfluous, cut out what does not serve the narrative.
- **AGENCY:** if the 'moral' is made too explicit, the stories are not persuasive. It is better to leave gaps and let the audience figure out the meaning for themselves.
- **FAMILIARITY:** the more familiar a story seems to the audience, the more powerful it is. The most effective stories are often built on ancient models.
- **DRAMA:** the drama serves to give a dynamic to the story, also from an emotional point of view. Be careful not to overdo it!
- **IMMERSION:** the more we can immerse the audience in a story, the more likely they are to connect with beliefs and values that are consistent with it.
- **RELATABILITY:** if you want audience to be immersed in your story, make it as relatable as possible. The more people identify with the main character in a story, the more likely they are to feel 'transported' by the narrative.

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EXTERNAL LINKS

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- <https://www.abccopywriting.com/2013/12/10/what-really-makes-a-good-story>
- <https://www.athenaplus.eu/index.php?en/207/digital-storytelling-and-cultural-heritage>
- <https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/2011/2011.03675.pdf>
- <https://teachwitheuropeana.eun.org/learning-scenarios/digital-heritage-bridge-between-past-present-and-future-with-digital-storytelling-ls-tr-577/>

«Having a heritage does not in itself create value, only the opportunity to do so» (Urde et al. 2007)