

Storytelling: Using Narrative to Communicate Design Ideas

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Is this a good story?

Good morning! I'm speaking to you live from the West Wing of the White House. Today we have a very unique opportunity to take part live in an extremely historic event which...

Let's try that again

Good morning. Eleven months ago a 12-hundred pound spacecraft blasted off from Cape Canaveral, Florida. Eighteen hours ago it landed on the planet Mars. You, me, and 60 thousand of your fellow students across the country along with astro-scientists and engineers from the Jet Propulsion Lab in Southern California, NASA Houston, and right here, at the White House, are going to be the first to see what it sees, and to chronicle an extraordinary voyage of an unmanned ship called Galileo 5.

So...what makes a good story?

- Facts
- Situation
- Character
- Plot
- Resolution

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Exercise: Gather the facts for a story

For your product:

- Who uses it?
- What are their goals?
- When - under what circumstances is it used?

Example:

MyPayroll.com

Used by bookkeepers to write company paychecks twice a month. Their goals are to make the checks accurate and to have them ready on time.

Stories are patterns

They...

- Present a coherent vision of the world
- Store and transmit knowledge
- Help organize facts in new ways

Stories shape decisions

- What makes a story convincing?
 - Coverage
 - Coherence
 - Uniqueness
 - Goodness-of-fit

Decision makers look for the most compelling story from their personal library of possible solutions, comparing each to the current situation.

See Sources of Power by Gary Klein

Exercise: Writing the story

- Write a short story that shows an example of you're your product is used

In the previous exercise you wrote:

- Who uses your product
- What are their goals
- When - under what circumstances is it used

Stories are part of a culture

- In business, stories:
 - Express the company's vision
 - Convey corporate culture and values
 - Share information

Copier repair staff formed an informal knowledge network of technical support solutions through sharing stories at a bar after work


See *The Social Life of Information* by John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid


Stories are memorable


- What does this tell you about a company or its logo?

- Our logo reflects our corporate goals, presenting an image that is:
 - professional
 - web like
 - modern and stylish
 - eye-catching
 - more than "just trendy"

Let's try that again...

It starts with a distinctive font. Individual, striking, and maybe even quirky, but still readable. 

Next we add a friendly face. It's not only how we see ourselves, but the face we show the world. 

The word 'corporation' anchors our name, because no matter how fun, creative and friendly...we are a business. 

Finally we add the companies we work with and all of the ideas, creativity and designs we bring to them.



Stories are an analysis tool

- Stories help us understand what happened by:
 - Organizing events into a sequence
 - Assigning actions to specific characters
 - Inferring causality and relationships

User stories

- Profiles
 - Summary of key characteristics or facts about a group of typical users
- Personas
 - A sample person, representing a profile
- Scenarios
 - A story with the persona as a principal character

User profile example

Jack-of-all-Trades

- Overwhelmingly female
- Know a lot about their company's business
- Often the office manager, handling more than just accounting
- Even split between those who see their work as a job and those who see it as a career
- Use general office software plus a few special use programs
 - They describe this as many different programs
- Persistent intermediates, learning just enough to get by
- Tend not to make decisions about which software to use

Persona

- Specific character with a name, job title, background and personal history along with personal goals and wishes.



Scenario

It was late on a Wednesday afternoon before Kathy discovered that a special bonus check had not been cut. The bookkeeper was on vacation, so it was up to her to get it done.

She had not used the bookkeeping program for a while, and only remembered that special checks could be difficult. reading the post-it notes on the wall next to the computer, she scanned for instructions, and was relieved to find one for bonuses.

Following these brief notes, she found the right screen and puzzled her way through the on-screen instructions. Moments later, the missing check was rolling out of the printer. As she breathed a sigh of relief, she left a note with what she had done.

Exercise: Revision

- Re-write your story as a short scenario that makes a specific user the hero of their story?

Moving from scenario to design concept

Here's what we know:

- The task is difficult
- Unfamiliar users may need to complete it because the task cannot be deferred
- Primary users make themselves cheat-sheets to help remember functions

Design Ideas:

Add a feature to allow primary users to add "if you need to..." instructions for replacements

Use a wizard to walk users through the task

Be sure the wizard has a checklist for the complete task - can users add their own procedural notes?

Continue to use scenarios

- Include the scenario in demonstrations for stakeholder feedback
- Be sure usability evaluation plans for appropriate user groups include the situations like the scenario
- Other groups like QA, training and (of course) documentation may find them useful

Another scenario

This story was:

- Used situations drawn from user interviews
- Showed the product in action
- Made the user the hero of the story

February 17th. 3:23 p.m. London, England: Susan Bentley needs product information. She just received an inquiry from a pharmacist concerning a customer on vacation who lost his allergy medication in San Francisco. He needs to find a place to purchase it in the UK or to have an alternative.

Sue uses the Product Encyclopedia to access the entire consumer product database. A search by product name, ingredient and country produces a total of three different options. She contacts the pharmacist and forwards the information.

Reading

Neuhauser, Peg C., Corporate Legends and Lore: The Power of Storytelling as a Management Tool. PCN Associates, Austin, Texas, 1993 ISBN: 0-07-046326-3

Klein, Gary, Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1998. ISBN 0-262-61146-5

Brown, John Seely and Duguid, Paul. The Social Life of Information. Harvard Business School Press, 2000; ISBN: 0875847625

Murray, Janet H. Hamlet on the Holodeck : The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace. MIT Press, 1997; ISBN: 0262631873

Hilary McLellan's Techhead site - articles and links to stories resources online - <http://www.techhead.com>

Contact Information



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Whitney Quesenbery designs interfaces for projects from web sites to applications and helps companies implement a user experience capability to improve the usability of their products. She is an expert in developing new concepts that achieve the goal of meeting business, user *and* technology needs.

As one of the developers of LUCID (Logical User-Centered Interaction Design), she promotes the importance of a user-centered approach and usability in design.

Whitney She on the board of directors of the UPA and web site manager of the STC Usability SIG