free-range thinking™ is a monthly journal of best practices, resources and generally useful stuff for public interest communicators who want to reach more people with more impact

Photo © Charity: Water

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Stories Where Photos Do Most of the Telling

Even when you have a good story, telling it on your website can be tricky. Video is probably the most visitor-friendly format, but it can be expensive and take too long to produce when you want to respond quickly. A text- only approach can save time and money, but even the most finely crafted prose may go unread by site visitors surfing from page to page at Internet speed.

Fortunately, there are a growing number of platforms that can help you combine photographs and text to tell visually engaging stories, and to do so quickly and at low cost. We've surveyed a number of these platforms and selected three that we can highly recommend. Check out each overview, see some beautiful and inspiring examples of nonprofit storytelling, and find the platform that will work best for the stories you want to tell in the New Year. Full story. *Please note: Apple Mail users may need to scroll down manually.*

Who Told It Best? Join us Thursday and Find Out!

If there's one question we hear more than any other during our storytelling workshops and webinars, it's this: "Who does it best?" My default answer, which never fails to disappoint, is "It depends." There are so many different kinds of stories to tell and so many different ways to tell them that it's impossible to give a concise answer. But since this question has arisen so consistently over the years, we finally decided to spend a few months scouring the web to identify some of the best storytellers in the public interest community.

On December 15th (11a-12n PT/2-3p ET) we will offer a one-hour webinar showcasing exemplars from the US and all over the globe. Join us and be inspired by outstanding storytelling from the Nurse-Family Partnership, Playworks, City Year, Encore.org and many others. Tuition is just $49.50 per person and group discounts are available. Grab your seat here.

Our Tribe is Gathering Again. Will You Be There?

Do you use strategic communications to drive social change? Some of the smartest people who do will be gathering at the University of Florida from March 1-4 to compare notes on what's working, what's not, and what may be worth trying in the coming year. If you're a regular reader of this newsletter, you should probably be there, too. The *frank* conference, now in its fourth year, is a unique gathering of community builders and change-makers that ranks among the most informative, entertaining and inspiring events you can attend - but a trip to Gainesville is by invitation only. To see if *frank2017* is right for you, click here.

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Exposure
Created for photographers, Exposure encourages storytellers to let their pictures do most of the talking and to use text sparingly. For organizations that are used to telling their stories with only (or mostly) text, Exposure's design provides a built-in corrective for this habit. Though we generally recommend using many images to tell your stories, we must add that if you do not have high-quality pictures to start with, your images could detract from your story rather than adding to it.

Similarly, because the space for text is limited to a few paragraphs between each image, lean prose is another necessity for this site. Exposure offers special rates for nonprofits (50% off their "Business" and "Pro" packages), unique domain names, an incredibly responsive staff, and simple drag and drop tools that make it extremely easy to get started.

Many nonprofits have already created stories that are visually stunning and emotionally compelling using this platform, including CARE International, America's Heartland Alliance, and Charity: Water.

Medium
Started as both a platform and publisher for writers of online content, Medium offers a range of tools for creating online stories while also providing a built-in audience. Between 25-30 million unique viewers visit Medium's website each month, so while you are directing users to your stories from your website, you may also get some traffic directly from their site.

Medium has a number of elegant templates allowing for flexibility in design without overwhelming storytellers with choice. They also offer some unique tools like layering text over images, creating image grids, and easily incorporating media from a number of different other platforms (like SoundCloud, Vine and Instagram). Though this is a free platform, all stories are only available at Medium's domain, and at the bottom of every story, they display links to other stories.

Organizations like StoryCorps have created some terrific stories on Medium which seamlessly incorporate audio, including this piece.

Atavist

Like Medium, Atavist offers a platform that can also work as a publishing tool. The key difference is that rather than publishing to a central website, Atavist allows storytellers to publish on their own domains or to easily create Facebook Instant Articles. Of all the platforms we looked at for this article, Atavist offers the most flexibility in terms of design, incorporating media from other platforms (like YouTube and Vimeo) and ease of displaying the stories on sites like Facebook once they are written.

The drag-and-drop tools simplify the creation of unique-looking stories, as does the ability to create custom charts and maps within the site. But flexibility is not always your friend. If you are wary of your own design sense, Atavist may not provide enough guidance for you, and your story may fall victim to digital clutter. The Earthwatch Institute used Atavist to create this beautiful story on their own domain.

No matter which site you choose to display your stories, beautiful pictures and clean design can only take you so far. The principles of good storytelling still apply, but hopefully these tools will help your stories stand out and engage more supporters in 2017.

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Upcoming online classes at The Goodman Center

TELL BETTER STORIES	PRESENT BETTER	DESIGN BETTER CAMPAIGNS
Storytelling: Tapping the Power of Narrative	Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes	Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter
January 5, 12, 19 & 26 9am - 10am PT	January 10 & 11 11am - 12pm PT	January 17 & 18 11am - 12pm PT

About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

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