



## Storytelling and the Art of Reputation Repair

***The "Our City, Our Story" project shows how a handful of well-told stories can begin to repair the reputation of an entire city.***

As with many other American cities, the economic downturn of 2008 took its toll on Rockford, Illinois. By 2010, unemployment had hit 16%, and as if that wasn't bad enough, national media started shining a very unflattering spotlight on the city. In January 2011, *The New York Times* published a very discouraging article entitled, "Portraits from a Job-Starved City," and soon after other major media outlets began piling on.

Both *Forbes* magazine and *The Wall Street Journal* listed Rockford as one of America's ten most dangerous cities. And even "The Daily Show" took its shot, portraying Illinois' third largest city as an urban wasteland dotted with fast food restaurants, abandoned buildings and very little else. When the city wheeled out a new slogan, "Real. Original. Rockford." to rekindle civic pride, some residents felt it was so inauthentic and cliched that they re-punctuated it as "Real original, Rockford."

Pablo Korona, a Rockford native, worked on campaigns to promote the city, but he also believed they were missing the mark. So he decided to launch his own video storytelling campaign, one that would forego chamber of commerce-approved boosterism and instead focus on small, personal stories. Using Kickstarter, Korona set a goal of raising \$3,750 to cover basic startup costs such as designing a logo, building a website, and creating awareness for his alternative approach. In 48 hours, he raised more than twice that amount, and the filming for "Our City, Our Story" was under way.



Pablo Korona

June 2013

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How stories are helping a beleaguered city

### Improve Your Presentations This Week

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## About Us

*free-range thinking* is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit [www.agoodmanonline.com](http://www.agoodmanonline.com) and [www.thegoodmancenter.com](http://www.thegoodmancenter.com).

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"The Torchlighter," the story of Vincent Chiarelli, was the first video completed. In about five minutes, it tells the story of a long-time Rockford resident whom most locals knew only as "Vince the tailor," but who once ran a small record label that considered signing - but ultimately passed on - a bunch of kids who would become The Jackson Five. "Nobody knew this story," Korona said, "but it wasn't so much a story about missed opportunities as about what Vince still possessed." (See for yourself [here](#).)



"Our Curiosity," the thirteenth episode completed, introduces the people who work at Forest City Gear, a local company that manufactured parts for the Mars Rover. The [video](#) has become so popular, Korona said, it has been embedded in thousands of websites and recorded over 500,000 views.

"Our City, Our Story" has grown into a 15-episode series and has attracted favorable coverage from *The Washington Post*, *Entrepreneur* magazine, and *Fast Company* (which labeled Korona a "branding vigilante"). It has also attracted sponsors who will fund more stories, but more importantly, it has been embraced by the residents of Rockford. "I keep getting calls," Korona told me. "You have to do a story about *this*, and you have to do a story about *that*." Some of the people featured in the series (including Vince the tailor) have become local celebrities.

Rockford still hasn't made any top-ten-places-to-live lists yet, but Korona has the sense that the campaign is starting to turn the tide. "We were still on the *Forbes* [most dangerous cities] list again this year," he said, "but the stories are building accountability within the subjects themselves and a greater sense of community. All I can do is show the character that exists here. When you start talking about character, it's hard to be dismissive."

[^ back to top](#)

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# Improve Your Presentations This Week

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Do you have a sneaking suspicion that your presentations aren't everything they could be? (Maybe it's even more than a suspicion.) Join us online this week and learn:

- The five most commonly made mistakes in presenting
- The three qualities audiences want most
- Why the opening and closing segments are the most important
- How to make PowerPoint your friend and not your enemy



"Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes" is a two-hour webinar scheduled for June 18th and 19th from 11a-12n Pacific (2-3p Eastern) each day. Tuition is \$250 per student and discounts are available for organizations that register three or more students. Get more details and register online at [The Goodman Center](#).

[^ back to top](#)

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