GUIDE TO DIGITAL STORYTELLING ON THE SDGs

Ontario Council for International Cooperation (OCIC)

Tapestry 2030

OCIC
Ontario Council for International Cooperation

INTRODUCTION

This guide is designed to present non-profits with an understanding of the storytelling potential of various digital technologies. It is not an exhaustive list of storytelling technologies - rather, it provides an introduction to specific platforms and presents considerations to support impactful platform-specific storytelling.

With this guide, we hope to inspire you to employ some of these digital storytelling techniques to share your diverse stories of action towards sustainable development, your vision and hopes towards 2030 and beyond, and your ideas and perspectives on transformative, inclusive and intersectional change.

ABOUT OCIC

The Ontario Council for International Cooperation (OCIC) is an expanding community of Ontario-based international development and global education organizations and individual associate members working globally for social justice. As a Council, OCIC strives to increase the effectiveness and collective impact of its members' efforts to promote sustainable and people-centered development in a peaceful and healthy environment, and to educate and engage the Canadian public on global issues.

OCIC
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The opinions and interpretation in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

Canada

AGENDA 2030 &
THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

Adopted by Canada and all 193 United Nations Member States in September 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a 15-year global framework centered on an ambitious set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with 169 targets and more than 230 indicators.

The Agenda encompasses four central tenants:

1. The 2030 Agenda is universal in nature and applicable to every country, meaning that the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs are as relevant in Canada as everywhere else in the world.

2. The 2030 Agenda is ambitious and aspirational, acknowledging the need to move beyond conventional actions and seek transformative solutions.

3. The SDGs are interlinked and indivisible. The achievement of any goal is linked to the achievement of others.

4. The 2030 Agenda is only achieved when no one is left behind, ensuring that all people can participate in, contribute to, and benefit from sustainable development.

Resources & further reading on the SDGs

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/
https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/
https://sdg.iisd.org/
https://sdgresources.relx.com/

DIGITAL STORYTELLING FRAMEWORK

Digital storytelling is a broad term that describes the use of digital technologies to tell stories.

Digital storytelling platforms include, but are not limited to:

Hypertext: websites, wikis, interactive fiction, blogs, non-linear stories, etc.
Social Media: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.
Video: online documentaries, vlogs, 360 video
Games: persuasive games, educational games, mobile games, etc.
Mobile Applications: portable stories, wearables, locative media, etc.
Augmented Reality: location-based narratives, vignettes, tangible interfaces, etc.
Transmedia Stories: stories that are intentionally split across multiple media platforms.

Today, it is no longer enough to take analog content (think: text, pictures) and simply transfer it onto digital platforms. Non-fiction digital storytellers (for example, those sharing the stories of stakeholders within the non-profit sector) need to consider a number of factors before publishing their work. Some of these include: accessibility, inclusion, storytelling affordances, as well as ensuring that the collaborative process remains authentic to all stakeholders.

In the following sections, we briefly discuss each of these concepts in the context of digital storytelling.

ACCESSIBILITY

The experience of using a computer is not the same for everybody. In human-computer interactions (HCI), the presence of disabilities or impairments can be a barrier to effective computer use. Here, accessibility refers to the ability of a computer system to reach all people, regardless of the users' accessibility concern or severity of impairment. Common accessibility strategies include providing "alt-text" (alternative text) for visuals and pictures, or closed captioning and subtitles for audio content.

AbilityNet in the UK has a nice article on the general guidelines for preparing alternative text for web: https://www.abilitynet.org.uk/blog/five-golden-rules-compliant-alt-text

The Canadian Association of Broadcasters has some great captioning standards for content creators: http://www.cab-acr.ca/english/social/captioning/captioning.pdf

Another effective strategy is to check to make sure you are using valid HTML, as this will make it easier for the user's own browser to apply their own style sheet. Users are able to set up their own style sheet preferences within their browser. These styles (e.g., background colour, font size, etc.) will override whatever styles your designer has set up, making the website easier for the user to use. In order to ensure that their style sheet (CSS) is applied correctly to your site, you must ensure that your code validates according to the W3C standards.

For immersive media like Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, and Games, the guidelines are constantly shifting as the technology itself evolves. However, there are a few rules of thumb that help keep your content accessible. For example: providing both audio and visual content/descriptions; taking advantage of tactile feedback (e.g., vibration); and adding customizations to the experience, such as the ability to modify the size or contrast of virtual objects so that the digital media story is more accessible.

INCLUSION

Inclusive Design is a sub-field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) that encourages content creators to design applications for the full range of human diversity: think physical and cognitive ability, language, income, culture, gender, and so forth. These factors all influence user perceptions, so the diverse experiences of users are taken into account by following a set of design principles that makes the technological platform (whether that's a computer, a digital TV, a smartphone or other applications) more inclusive.

Further information on Inclusive Design can be found at the Inclusive Design Toolkit project hosted by the Ontario Government:

https://www.ontario.ca/page/inclusive-design-toolkit

STORYTELLING AFFORDANCES

The concept of an *affordance* was coined by psychologist James J. Gibson and later introduced to the HCI community by Donald Norman in his book *The Psychology of Everyday Things*. An affordance is an approach to design that provides a visual clue to an object's function and use. Here, what we mean by affordance is the importance of considering the capability of each digital platform in maximizing the impact and effectiveness of your storytelling.

It is important to make meaningful choices when deciding on a digital platform, since they don't all support the same function or reach users in the same way.

Understanding the different affordances of each platform helps us choose the right one for the kind of digital story we are trying to tell. When deciding, for example, that you want to tell a story using Augmented Reality, it is important to ask: "why Augmented Reality, and how can we leverage its affordances to effectively tell this story?"

So what are the storytelling affordances of each of these technologies? What can we do with one that we cannot do with another? How do we want to tell our story? How do we want to interact with our audience? The chart below provides a very basic overview of storytelling affordances by type of platform:

HYPERTEXT	SOCIAL MEDIA	DIGITAL VIDEO
• Multiple narrative paths • Low tech requirements • Novice readers	• Pervasive • Easy to create, edit, and update • Supports high level of community interaction	• Smaller format • Pervasiveness of digital camera • Ease of editing • Greater narrative control
GAMES	**MOBILE**	**AUGMENTED REALITY**
• Procedural rhetoric • Replayability • Variety of genres • Agency	• Portable • Accelerometers • GPS/location-based • Apps	• Annotate spaces • Augmented perception • Active information

CASE STUDY #1 Exploring the Affordances of Augmented Reality

Augmented Reality (AR) involves the "augmentation" of real-world environments or objects through computer-generated models. AR experiences can be supported via a wide array of hardware, including wearable technologies, Head-Mounted Displays (HMD), projectors, and mobile technologies.

AR differs from Virtual Reality (VR) because VR takes place within a completely simulated environment. On the other hand, AR involves a virtual overlay in a real (non-digital) environment and can involve multiple sensory modalities: visual, auditory, haptic (touch/vibration), somatosensory (e.g., pressure, pain, or warmth), and olfactory (smell). Overlaid sensory information can be constructive (meaning it *adds* to the natural environment) or destructive (meaning it masks the natural environment).

Applications for AR can include content that is relevant to:

1. **Specific places**: including communities, peoples, and ecosystems;

2. **Games***:* e.g., the gamification of real-world, or

3. **Augmented Documentary:** a novel genre that explores such things as biographical or historical experiences, political activism, or poetic expression.

Immersive technologies are presently being used as storytelling tools within the same sphere as the work being done at OCIC. For example, the #SpreadYourGoals2030 campaign by the UN SDG Action Campaign and media company Weischer Media allows users to take photos of themselves with stylized wings meant to represent the SDGs. Photos are then posted to social media in order to raise awareness. These types of AR applications are playful and tend to have a quick uptake by users. We believe that small-scale AR, focused on storytelling, will help OCIC share the impact of its members stories in a way that is meaningful and memorable.

OCIC's TAPESTRY 2030 for People, Planet and Prosperity

TAPESTRY 2030 is a multimedia exhibit about people, planet and prosperity. The tapestry aims to make visible the hundreds of thousands of human weaves that connect us, and invites us to learn and be inspired by the meaningful efforts underway for sustainable development, globally. The stories are rooted in the experiences of individuals and organizations with links to Peru, Nepal, Tanzania, Eel Ground First Nation, Chippewas of Nawash First Nation (Neyaashiinigmiing), Garden Hill First Nation and seven Ontario communities, in partnership and solidarity with members of OCIC.

With this exhibit, our aim is to explore the links between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030 using creative storytelling methods such as digital storytelling and Augmented Reality to showcase reciprocal local to global connections and inspire people to see themselves reflected in the movement towards people, planet and prosperity.

CASE STUDY #2

Exploring Digital Storytelling through OCIC's *Transformations: Stories of Partnership Resilience and Positive Change*

TAPESTRY 2030 was born out of *Transformations: Stories of Partnership, Resilience and Positive Change.* Transformations is a collaborative multimedia project, launched in 2015, that brings together the diverse voices and perspectives of individuals, communities, and organizations working together to strengthen society. Its aim is to present a decolonized vision of international cooperation based on partnership, participation, and active solidarity.

This award-winning photojournalism initiative is one of OCIC's key public engagement initiatives. To date, it has profiled remarkable stories of individuals and organizations connected to 17 OCIC organizational members hailing from Peru, Nepal, Tanzania, and various First Nations communities in Ontario. Over 40 physical and 8 virtual exhibits have been created and exhibited in public spaces such as Canada's National Arts Centre, Toronto's Metro Hall, the CBC Atrium, and public libraries in Ontario.

These co-created narratives showcase stories of everyday actors contributing to universal sustainable development. They speak to the importance of localizing global issues as part of collective efforts to "leave no one behind," one of the principles articulated by the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030. Some of the issues that have been profiled to date include: comprehensive cleft and palate care for children; children and youth empowerment; and the advancement of women's rights through socio-economic development programs.

Transformations also shines a light on the human capacity for resilience and positive change, sharing innovations in conservation agriculture; climate change mitigation; gender equality; as well as Indigenous communities' efforts to advance community health, food security and food sovereignty.

PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Transformations is designed to make the case for transformative collaborations. The partnership approach and the resulting narratives are rooted in the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness [PDF], a set of mutually shared values guiding the development work of civil society organizations (CSOs) worldwide.
OCIC seeks to practice the Istanbul Principles as the overarching framework for the stories that we share. In creating this collaborative program, we work closely with members and their local and international partners in planning and undertaking the site visit and the resulting exhibit. As a way to implement these principles into practice, OCIC and our partners then jointly develop a Partnership Agreement so that our mutual efforts are of significant value to all.

Working through a collaborative approach also helps build trusting relationships by honoring participants' right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent, a principle outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [PDF]. The concept of Free Prior and Informed Consent applies to photography projects just as much as it does to mining projects, and employing a collaborative process is in itself a step towards reconciliation. Here we explore an example of its applications 'in action':

Example of language used in OCIC's partnership agreement on Usage Rights of Photographs

To ensure clarity of copyright, photo use and crediting, OCIC integrates the following language within its Partnership Agreement, signed by all partners:

"All photos, audio and video content produced during and for this initiative will be the property of OCIC for unlimited and non-commercial use, in perpetuity. Copyright remains the sole and exclusive property of the photojournalist, Allan Lissner. The photojournalist grants OCIC, and all selected partners non-exclusive print and electronic reproduction rights for global distribution. These reproduction rights do not extend to any other third parties unless otherwise agreed. All partners agree not to sell any images containing identifiable OCIC or partner logos or employees without prior consent, agree not to remove or cover OCIC or partner logos, or to allow any of the images to be used in any way that would knowingly damage the public image of participants, OCIC, its members and their global partners."

TIPS FOR CREDITING PHOTOS

For best practice, include a photo caption with the names, and when possible, the context or place of those in the image. Make sure photos used outside of their original context include photo credits with each usage. Photo credits can include:

Photo by [Artist]/[Organization], Courtesy of [name or link to project]

For example:

Shaelyn Wabegijig places tobacco in the Otonabee river in Nogojiwanong/Peterborough, ON.

Photo by Allan Lissner/OCIC, Courtesy of TransformationStories.ca

CREDIT PLACEMENTS

Websites

- Include photo credits at the bottom of the page.
- Place credits adjacent to photos.
- Use a "mouse-over" to credit photos.
- Create a web page dedicated to photo credits.
- Include a link to transformationstories.ca

Print Materials

- Place credits adjacent to photos.
- Place credits on the inside cover.
- Use footnotes for credits.
- Place credits in acknowledgments section of document.

PowerPoint

- Place credits adjacent to photos.
- Include a slide for credits at the end of your presentation.