Project 1: Storytelling for Business: Annual Report

Storytelling
People remember stories. They engage, inspire and encourage people to act. For nonprofits, they can be used effectively in just about any method of communication.

All nonprofits have stories to tell about how their constituency was impacted through their work. But many organizations don’t fully recognize the power their stories have to help them connect with their audience. Storytelling is one of the most important devices in your communications toolkit. How better to illustrate your impact than to “show” your constituents a successful outcome?

Data can tell the story of how you plan to make a difference in your community. Many of the stories we want potential supporters to understand are centered on revealing the truth behind a situation. The truth can become obvious when you reveal the problem through statistics. These statistics can be a powerful way to communicate the scope of the problem you’re addressing and the impact you and your donors are able to have in the community.

How storytelling can benefit your messaging:
- Stories “show” your reader rather than “telling” them. They help position you as an expert and build trust among your audience.
- Stories are memorable and touch readers in a personal way.
- Stories help you focus your message to avoid communicating too much unnecessary information.
- Stories help you bring independent pieces of information together into a coherent message. Think about using storytelling in annual reports, on your website, in newsletters, fundraising campaigns and direct mail. Keep stories short and relevant to your audience, and make them about a single person or group of people. And don’t forget to deliver an underlying message that ties back to your mission and goals.*

Annual Reports - Purpose
In the U.S., corporations are required by law to file a financial statement with the federal government and make the information available to its shareholders. Most companies wrap this information into an annual report and use the report as a way to positively communicate business goals and successes to current and prospective shareholders.

The majority of states in the U.S. require nonprofit organizations to file annual financial information with the state where they are registered. Like for-profit corporations, non-profits use the annual report as a public relations vehicle. Because non-profits depend on funding by individuals and corporations, the report provides insight into the organization’s mission, goals and achievements.

Formats
For many years, annual reports were designed and produced as printed books. Within the last decade, both for-profit and non-profit organizations have shifted their reports to digital formats as a way to realize financial savings through the elimination of printing, mailing, and administrative costs. The result is a communication tool that can be easily distributed to a large audience.

However, many organizations still use the opportunity to print low quantity reports, where financial data and content is compressed or edited. The form, paper, and printing techniques, as well as contextual and physical interaction with the printed object becomes dominant. The physical engagement with the book translates into a unique marketing artifact.

PDFs are the most common digital format for reports as well as publishing sites like ISSUU. The downside of PDFs is inefficient scalability for mobile devices; the inability to bookmark or take a user directly to a specific page of the publication; and a lack of interaction. The better digital alternative is the Web.

Project
Using your research from PEW Research Center as a starting point into issues that you find compelling—locate existing organizations that are advocacy change or support the issue. Research the organizations and choose one that has an annual report available. Use the report’s primary content—text and financial data—as the basis for a print or web-based report. The redesign should not include the existing report’s images or concepts, though you will maintain the organization’s logo and general identity.

Design Methodology
The key to a strong annual report is the story or narrative that frames and supports the report, and by extension, the organizational mission. This is achieved by using a metaphor that communicates the organization’s vision and strengths. The visual metaphor is most effective when it works hand-in-hand with the written narrative (story). Together the two can present a powerful image of the organization and dramatically increase its public perception.

Key Elements
Title & Cover - The label “Annual Report 2014” and the name of the organization should appear on the report cover as an indicator of its origin, purpose and content, but neither is the main title of the report. A more effective title will reference the narrative. Together the title and cover set the stage for the content that follows.

Introduction - The introduction is a letter from the organization’s director or CEO. This upbeat letter reflects the story that you want to present. This may need to be edited or rewritten depending on your concept.

Accomplishments - A select number of successful programs and their highlights. This section should be results oriented and point to positive activities that produced real results.

People - Testimonials from individuals that benefited from the organization.

Financials - Financial statements; decide how much information to include and how to illustrate it. Should these be long tables or lists; a graphic display of data; or both?

*http://nonprofitanswerguide.org/faq/marketing-communications/how-can-we-use-storytelling-to-effectively-position-our-organization/
Graphs—supporting either national statistics or stats that are related to you PEW research.

Lists - Donors, board, staff, members, key volunteers. This list should be adjusted based on the size of the organization.

**Process/Schedule**

**Tuesday, January 20**
Assign Project
Select 1-3 organizations and present the story of each of the organizations.

**Thursday, January 22**
Present 1-3 organizations. Write a paragraph about each that engages us and that tells the story of the organization. Include 3-5 images that relate. Select one to focus on.

**Tuesday, January 27**
— Collect as much data (texts and imagery) from a recent report by your organization.
Due Storytelling Presentation (present to all)
See Link (fast company)
— Present an pdf screen presentation (8 1/2 x 11”) about your organization that includes:
1. The name and identity
2. A paragraph that describes the organizational mission.
3. 2-3 report narrative concepts (metaphorical or otherwise)
   Present each with supporting typographic, image, and color attitudes or visual and conceptual inspirations.

**Thursday, January 29**
Present pagination thumbnails. Examine the existing annual report, pull the necessary content from that report, work on editing or retelling this story and present in a rough thumbnail narrative to show pagination and breaks.
Present example of written narrative tone
Present 1 page layout of a narrative spread to show grid structure, typographic options, color and imagery.

**March 17-19** Spring Break

**T March 24**
Due Annual Report

**TH March 26**
Present Stationary
Resume Editing and refinement

**Grading Criteria**
- creativity and inventiveness of concept/story
- good hierarchy and logic text information
- unique/appropriate choice of typeface(s)
- unique/appropriate style of imagery
- appropriate/good use of tables and graphs
- final technical craft
- overall process/effort

**Final Format**
Printed book at least 24 pages digital pdf
OR
Web based report