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3, 2, 1 ACTION!

The Power of Digital Storytelling

Director's Brief

OBJECTIVES

- **To** promote NYU Shanghai Library's services and policies with a more engaging and entertaining approach by integrating new media and digital tools;
- **To** involve library patrons in our daily operation and management by creating digital narratives that are based on their personal experiences in the library;
- **To** encourage creative thinking among the library staff and provide training opportunities on video production and digital storytelling.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This brief looks at how academic libraries can integrate digital storytelling in its practice of marketing, managing, outreaching, and providing opportunities of professional development for library staff. According to Stephens, "ideas, concepts, and trends of our socio-technological landscape" lay the foundation for hyperlinked library practice (2016). Academic libraries, in order to stay connected to their dynamic communities and adapt to the rapid changes in the digital world, need to be creative in their daily operations and practices.

By combining storytelling, new media and trending technologies, digital storytelling will bring great value and serve that purpose effectively. As Fields and Díaz pointed out, digital storytelling can be used "not only for teaching and learning purposes, but also for internal organizational development, for marketing and external development, as well as outreach to the campus community and beyond" (2008, p.67). This brief will look closely at the benefits of digital storytelling and provide practical guidelines for its implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Academic library plays a unique role in higher education as it not only provides learning and teaching support to students and faculty, but also serves as an institutional educator and advocate of community principles and values. Being a public space on campus, smooth operation of the library requires that every community member respect others and be responsible when using library resources and services. Therefore, it is important to proactively engage with library users and creatively tackle problems like noise, seat-hogging, ignorance of library policies, etc. to raise awareness of mutual respect and ensure a better user experience for all community members. Under the notion of “library as creative classroom”, we need to “fully embed the potential of [information and communications technology] to innovate and modernize learning and teaching practices”, and strive to be “well-trained, user-focused staff who understand how people of all ages can learn socially” (Stephens, 2016, p. 126-128).

Digital storytelling, with a technological focus and its social nature in the creation process, approaches the audience in a more engaging and effective manner that traditional storytelling may not be able to achieve. Studies show that “a digital story can engage students’ visual and auditory senses in a way that the written word alone cannot” (Suwardy, 2012). Moreover, successful digital storytelling “helps to build conceptual skills like understanding a narrative and using inductive reasoning to solve problems”, and it demands technological skills that are essential for library staff who “need them to keep up with a changing world” (Czarnecki, 2009). To make digital storytelling successful, the library should base its content on the observation of patrons’ daily interactions with library services, and then present it in a polished and professional digital format.



Background

Digital storytelling is generally defined as the practice of “creating and sharing stories using digital tools, incorporating multimedia elements such as image, sound, and words in a narrative that is then disseminated via a web platform” (Goek, 2018). Digital stories are typically short videos that focus on a particular topic and convey a clear message. In today’s world, digital storytelling is widely adopted by all kinds of organizations for various purposes which include “the telling of personal tales, the recounting of historical events, or as a means to inform or instruct” (Robin, 2006). In the early 1990’s, one of the digital storytelling pioneers, Joe Lambert, co-founded the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) and started to help people create and share their personal stories “through the combination of thoughtful writing and digital media tools” (Robin, 2006). As the term suggests, digital storytelling emerged with the popularization of digital media tools and has evolved with the change of interpersonal communication ever since.

Practice & Impact

Goek concludes that people use digital storytelling for various purposes which can be generally grouped into three categories: pedagogy, engagement and communication (2018). Researches have been conducted across the world and have demonstrated how digital storytelling is positively impacting users in these practices. Benmayor finds that the process of digital story making “empowers and transforms students intellectually, creatively and culturally” which makes digital storytelling “a signature pedagogy for the new Humanities in the 21 century” (2008). Klæbe, Foth, Burgess and Bilandzic state that digital storytelling “encourages broad inclusive participation and interest” with its “locally produced and locally relevant content” (2007), and thus making the narratives more engaging to the community members. Besides, digital storytelling as a communication tool also conveys messages in a more creative and relatable way. Pera’s research shows that it “enables rational, emotional, and relationship experience” which even motivates the audience to act “beyond a vicarious role-taking process” (2016).



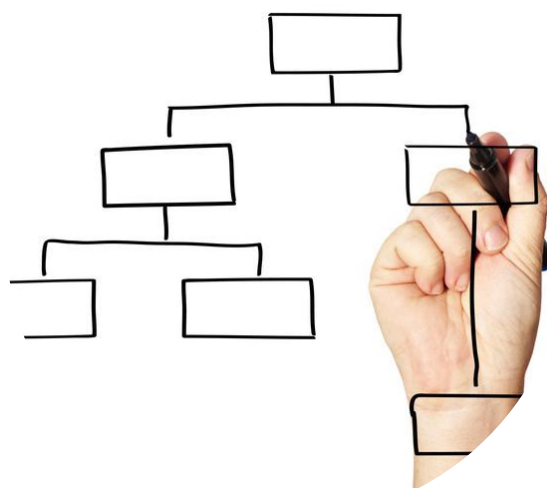


Challenges

Digital storytelling is not without its problems when it comes to the creative process. Successful digital storytelling not only requires the creators to be equipped with sufficient digital literacy, but also demands good storytelling skills. Bad storytelling won't make any difference even though it's combined with digital media (Robin, 2006). Another challenge the creators are facing is related to copyright and intellectual property. Creators must be aware of the risk they are taking when utilizing digital content from the Internet and they are expected to use all images, music and other materials responsibly and respectfully (Robin, 2006). To address these issues, creators may need to plan ahead and receive basic training on digital skills like video production and script writing. Additionally, they must know their audience well and have a thorough understanding of the message to be conveyed, so that their ultimate goal can be fulfilled with digital storytelling.

Implementation

As a warehouse of knowledge and technology resources on campus, academic libraries, such as NYU Shanghai Library, have a great advantage in implementing digital storytelling to advocate for community values. The NYU Shanghai Library should involve its talented staff team, including student employees and interns, in the planning and creation of its own digital stories. On the one hand, experts on videography and video editing can organize workshops for those who are interested in this project and make sure



that the final product will be a professional deliverable. On the other hand, people who are good at storytelling and script writing should facilitate the communication and collaboration within the team, in order to find inspiration and create intriguing content which reflects how community members are interacting with the library in an educational and engaging way.

Conclusion

Digital storytelling approaches our life in a creative and engaging way and provides a great opportunity for different organizations to tell their own stories and interact with the targeted audience. Today's academic libraries need to be adaptive and reach users with a proactive mindset. Digital storytelling makes a great tool of education and communication with its unique narrative techniques. Besides, by integrating digital technologies and storytelling in their marketing strategy, libraries can promote services and resources, thus building an emotional relationship with users.

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