

Six lessons in storytelling

By [Nicole Biondi](#)

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Storytelling as an art form is ancient, part of what makes us human. As the world shifts to all things digital, our storytelling has adapted, but remains an effective tool for marketing and building brands. For tourism professionals, storytelling can be incorporated all the time as a means of reaching visitors and potential visitors. Here are some pointers for creating productive narratives:



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Why storytelling?

The key to unlocking the power of storytelling is realising that it is all about people, not about the brand as such. People respond to people, so if you are intending to tell stories, they must be authentic, having meaning for the audience.

Storytelling takes the abstract concept that is a brand and personalises it, giving it meaning to the audience. It allows the marketer to steer clear of hard-sell techniques and tap into the emotions that can govern decision-making processes. More than that, though, in a digital environment of online interaction - Instagram, Facebook, websites, Twitter, SnapChat and more - it allows for engagement with the audience.

There are thousands of stories being told around what could be viewed as a digital campfire, providing endless opportunities.

Who are the storytellers?

You needn't necessarily be the storyteller. For example, letting others tell your stories for you can be incredibly effective as their stories capture that personal engagement and highlight the themes you want to project. An example of this from the Cape Town Tourism perspective is the Love Cape Town Neighbourhoods video series – the storytelling goal was to reach people who are interested in the global “travel like a local” trend by highlighting intimate stories from smaller neighbourhoods. Using a narrator who actually lives in the neighbourhood provided authenticity to that. Especially since, in the case of the Somerset West video, Jesse, the narrator, chose his favourite spots.

Embrace collaborative technologies

Collaboration is an essential part of audience engagement. This can range from crowdsourcing content to engaging active users themselves to tell your stories. When you type #capepoint into an Instagram search over 50,000 images tagged as #capepoint appear. And there is a similar result for Kirstenbosch. A great way of populating an Instagram account for your attraction is by selecting and reposting the images or videos that visitors have taken at your attraction and shared on Instagram. Choose the ones that you believe best represent your brand story - not forgetting to give credit to the source of course.

According to social media experts, the Instagram accounts that do best are those that use at least 25% of others' images to complement their own. It also saves you from spending a fortune in time or resources trying to produce all of your own content.

One tool that can be effective is an "Instatakeover" – for example, you allow a popular Instagram user to explore attractions and then use your brand's Instagram account to share the experience. This taps into that user's audience and increases your own audience.

Other forms of collaboration include getting your own staff to tell their stories or even the visitors themselves; these can be recorded and shared. Of course, those visitors must have had experiences that met their expectations. Immersive, multi-sensory experiences are the way forward, embracing all of the opportunities technology presents. Table Mountain has done this well with Voicemaps. The narrated exploration enhances the visitor's experience by providing more information and sensory engagement – immersive experiences promote better memory retention and get visitors to share their experiences.

Principles of effective storytelling

Jasper Visser – international change agent, innovator and facilitator specialised in culture, heritage, and the arts - has stated that the story needs to be unique and unexpected. As Kevin Allocca has said, the unexpected is one of the three primary reasons videos go viral on YouTube.

The audience must be reached where they're looking for stories; whether that's on social media, on the streets or in general media, not necessarily on the brand's website. The stories must be easily accessible and foster discussion.

The story must be about the audience as people are far more likely to listen to themselves (or people like them) when having their dreams and goals addressed – the kinds of stories they'd like to tell.

Each great story in the digital age needs a physical element or the promise of physical fulfillment, allowing for real-life connections. It's a world we're all discovering, but this storytelling in the digital environment promises mesmerizing immersion and, ultimately, has the power to transform lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicole Biondi is the strategic communications and content manager at Cape Town Tourism

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