VISUAL STORYTELLING
A BRIEF PRACTICAL GUIDE
Visual storytelling has not been an overnight sensation, but instead it has been the result of a continued evolution of social media platforms, along with user and organizational behaviors.

Research indicates that consumer interest in visual content isn’t necessarily just a preference; it’s actually easier and faster for humans to process. The right picture can go further than just telling your story visually; it can make you feel emotions, evoke memories, and even make you act differently. Humans are wired to process visuals differently than text and to respond differently to pictures than to words. Although human communication has existed for about 30,000 years, it has been only in the last 7,000
In the 1960s, Professor Albert Mehrabian showed that 93% of communication is in fact nonverbal. By this he meant that most of the feelings and attitudes of a message come from the facial expressions and the way the words are said, and the rest, only 7%, derives from the actual words being spoken. It isn’t even just the meanings of a message that are conveyed more precisely by visual information. Even issues of trust and credibility are carried by images far more so than text.

Here are some facts to keep in mind:

We are wired for visual stories

Although human communication has existed for about 30,000 years, it has been only in the last 7,000 years that humans developed a written language. Painting was the only way to convey a message visually. Then came writing and the printing press. Humans evolved over millennia to respond to visual information long before they developed the ability to read text.
We suffer from information overload

We receive 5x as much information today as we did in 1986.

34 gigabytes or 100,500 words – the amount of information we consume outside of work on an average day. [10]

On average users only read 28% of words per visit.

Shortened attention span

The average modern adult attention span is somewhere between

2.8 and 8 seconds.

94% more total views on average are attracted by content containing compelling images than

14% increase in page views is seen when press releases contain a photo.

46.1% of people say a website’s design is the number one criterion for discerning the credibility of an organization.

Publishers who use infographics grow in traffic an average of 12% more than those who don’t.

Posts with videos attract three times more inbound links than plain text posts attract.

Viewers spend 100% more time on pages with videos.

Including a photo and a video in a press release increases views by over 45%. 
What is visual storytelling?

To use video, pictures, symbols, colors, and words to communicate ideas, illustrate information or express relationships visually. Visual storytelling is about making complex information easier to understand. Compelling Visuals grab people’s attention.

It takes many forms and appears in many media. Some familiar forms include video, animation, charts, graphs, maps, diagrams or timelines.

It tells a story with visuals. It can tell “how many?” “when?” or “where?” It can show trends over time, compare elements or reveal hidden patterns.

What is not visual storytelling?

It is not the same as graphic design, film-making nor is it only about making something aesthetically pleasing. It’s not about branding, style, making a glossy product or something that looks “corporate.” Visual storytelling is not just a matter of making text pretty or entertaining, but of shaping understanding and clarifying meaning.
In order to develop and implement a successful visual storytelling strategy, storyteller must focus on many elements. But among all of them, the most important is the storytelling itself.

All of the successful visual storytelling examples prove that the content’s storytelling element is as just as important as the use of the visuals. Even it would not be exaggeration having a story is more than visual itself. That is the reason why we should focus on what storytelling is first.

**Storytelling Techniques**

The monomyth (also called the hero’s journey), is a story structure that is found in many folk tales, myths and religious writings from around the world. In a monomyth, the hero is called to leave their home and sets out on a difficult journey. They move from somewhere they know into a threatening unknown place.

**Good for:**
- Taking the audience on a journey
- Showing the benefit of taking risks
- Demonstrating how you learned some newfound wisdom
The mountain structure is a way of mapping the tension and drama in a story. It’s similar to the monomyth because it helps us to plot when certain events occur in a story.

It’s different because it doesn’t necessarily have a happy ending. The first part of the story is given to setting the scene, and is followed by just a series of small challenges and rising action before a climactic conclusion.

It’s a bit like a TV series – each episode has its ups and downs, all building up to a big finale at the end of the season.

**Good for:**
- Showing how you overcame a series of challenges
- Slowly building tension

### Nested Loops

Nested loops is a storytelling technique where you layer three or more narratives within each other.

You place your most important story – the core of your message – in the centre, and use the stories around it to elaborate or explain that central principle.

**Good for:**
- Explaining the process of how you were inspired/ came to a conclusion
In medias res storytelling is when you begin your narrative in the heat of the action, before starting over at the beginning to explain how you got there.

By dropping your audience right into the most exciting part of your story they’ll be gripped from the beginning and will stay engaged to find out what happens.

**Good for:**
- Grabbing attention from the start
- Keep an audience craving resolution
- Focusing attention on a pivotal moment in your story
PARTS II
Success Factors for Visual Story

The efficiency of a visual story by its capacity to:

**Engage and entice**: its ability to get attention, often through an arresting or memorable image,

**Communicate a convincing argument**: summarising complex concepts in a way that the intended audience will respond to,

**Draw the viewer in**: giving them a way to connect directly to the content or explore the issue further.

A Good Visual Campaign...

In visual campaigns, a significant part of the job of expressing how things are, how they ought to be. Whether directly presented or implied, in any good visual campaign you should be able to read a visual argument: the facts of the matter and the problem, the implied promise of the future and the implied justification for change.
What Can Go Wrong?

visual information aimed at people who are not ready to receive it or don’t share our understanding of the problem

an image that people cannot bear to look at because it is too strong, such as explicit documentation of a tragedy, will not enlist support and, worse, may be perceived as manipulation.

a campaign that makes use of the wrong technology platform for its particular audience will not reach it.

Then how?

There are many ways to tell a story or to present data. How do you know what kind of presentation to use?

The main thing to consider is: which archetypes will help you to communicate your message?
ANALOGY

Elephant’s fear of the mouse
COMPARE

Middle East Crisis: Who backs an Immediate cease-fire?

Yes

- Immediate cease-fire with the possibility of negotiation
- Halting arms supply to Hamas
- Investment in UN-sponsored negotiations

No

- Immediate cease-fire with Israel retaining control
- Taking a passive stand on the attack on Gaza
- Investing in UN-sponsored cease-fire

PROVOKE

IS THIS YOURS?

Greenpeace
MAKE CONNECTIONS

direct consumption of water through visible, everyday acts such as flushing a toilet, and the indirect, invisible consumption of water

PERCEPTIONS- MATERIALIZE IT

In trying to understand an issue, we are often asked to comprehend measurements that are difficult to grasp.
COMEDY

WHAT CAN GO WRONG AGAIN?

Visual Cliches - The hazards of overdoing it and relying too much on grabbing attention quickly, without offering useful or insightful information.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOBv2Cx8WIE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7E-Ym5LEJA
STORYTELLING VIA VIDEOGRAPHY & PHOTOGRAPHY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICcE72RwEyc&index=1&list=WL
SHOT COMPOSITION

All great pictures and videos have one thing in common — they are well composed. Composition — also called “framing” — is fun to talk about, because there is no right or wrong. The only rule is that there are no rules. But there are a few tips to help you take better pictures:

FRAMING

Pay attention to framing. Nothing ruins a photo faster than distracting elements in the background. Don’t get so focused on the photo’s subject that you ignore what else is going on around them. Watch out for poles, trees and power lines, and look all the way around the edges of the frame, asking “Is this what I really want?”

RULE OF THIRDS

Learn the Rule of Thirds. The human eye has its “visual center” and this is the place that it is naturally drawn to. Imagine the viewfinder is divided into thirds, both horizontally and vertically. This grid creates four points where the lines cross. For the greatest impact, place the subject where the lines intersect, instead of in the center of the frame.
FOREGROUND AND BACKGROUND

Every photo has a foreground and a background. How you want people to look at your picture tells you what to do with the foreground and background. To blur the background, zoom in close and choose a large aperture setting (like F2.8). This works really well for pictures of a person.

LINE OF SIGHT

Change your line of sight. Try kneeling, or even putting the camera on the ground. Or climb a flight of stairs so you’re higher than the subject you’re photographing. Digital cameras with twist and tilt LCD screens make it even easier. Changing angles provides a new way of seeing things, and makes for a more dramatic picture.

LEAD THE EYES

Look for elements that lead the eyes through the photo. A winding path, a row of telephone poles or even a line of chairs at the beach can serve as elements in a good photo.
FIND PATTERNS

Keep your eyes open for patterns. Interesting photos can be made of the waves and patterns created by drifting snow, a flock of birds flying in formation or pipes stacked at a construction site.

GET IN CLOSE

Try getting in close. Look for texture, in the wrinkles of a face or the bark of a tree. Pay attention to details.

CROPPING

Cropping brings a photo to life. If you edit photos on the computer, you are no longer limited to the standard 4 x 6, 5 x 7 or 8 x 10 print sizes. Look at each photo and think about what you really want people to see. Then crop everything else away. Try some unusual shapes, like panoramas or narrow verticals.
CAMERA SHOTS

ESTABLISHING SHOT OR EXTREME LONG SHOT (ES)
Used to establish a setting or sense of place. Shot is captured very far away from the subject.

LONG SHOT (LS)
Captures all of the subject, this shot generally establishes the size of the subject relative to place (for example a person from head to toe).

MEDIUM SHOT (MS)
This shot captures half of the subject, generally seen from waist to head for a person.
CLOSE-UP SHOT (CU)
This shot focuses in closely on the subject. Used most frequently with people during interviews.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP SHOT (ECU)
Goes in even closer to the subject than the Close-Up Shot and is used to focus on details or to make a more interesting shot.

CAMERA ANGLES

BIRD’S EYE VIEW
Shooting the subject from way above.
HIGH ANGLE
A shot that is just above the subject looking down, but not nearly as high as Bird’s Eye View. This shot can make the subject look or seem smaller and inferior.

LOW ANGLE
A shot that is just below the subject, looking up at them. This shot is used to make subjects look larger and more powerful, for example the President is usually shot from a low angle.

CANTED ANGLE
A shot that it is tilted. Generally used to create the feeling of imbalance.
How do you feel about plans?
What makes visual storytelling different when you are doing it for a campaign for a particular social, legal, cultural, political, or economic change?

- Storytelling is at the service of your goal for change and your message, rather than just the story itself or the ideas of the filmmaker.

- Advocacy storytelling is about effectively communicating this message to the audience and encouraging them to act.
“You want to move your audience to action. That’s the difference between advocacy media and entertainment media. Entertainment is a passive experience. It’s laid out by the filmmaker. A good advocacy filmmaker turns things over to the audience.”

Peter Wintonick
• Clear goals and objectives
• A thorough situation analysis
• Determining your target audience
• Developing effective messages
• A sets of strategies and tactics
• Roles and Responsibilities
• Evaluation and Planning

Goals and Objectives

• The outcome of what you’re trying to accomplish vs. how you will accomplish it
• What’s going to change as a result of your communications?
• Linked to your organization’s organizational objectives
Situation Analysis

Public landscape: Consider the ways in which your organization and issue is positioned and understood by the public. Public opinion research is absolutely invaluable for bolstering (or sometimes contradicting!) your own “best guesses.” It is well worth searching for any public opinion research that has already been conducted on your issue area or organization.

Media Environment: A clear understanding of the media landscape in which you will be operating is critically important. Allies and Opponents: Avoid making “shopping lists” of allies or competitors. Who publicly supports your organization’s position
Your Audiences

- Who are you talking to?

- What do you want them to know about you?

- What do you want them to do?

**Emotion – Information - Motivation**
Your Audiences

- Audience Group
- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Location
- Occupation
- Education
- Personal online behavior
- Motivation and objectives
- Our objectives
Your Audiences

Let’s do an exercise.

Your 3 most important audiences.

Messages

Message Development
Or Story Telling
Strategies and Tactics

Basically, **strategies** are the broad, creative ways you are going to achieve an objective. **Tactics** are the specific activities that help you execute your strategy.

Strategies and Tactics

- **Goal**: What are you trying to accomplish?
- **Strategies**: “Game plan” for accomplishing goals
- **Tactics & Tools**: Activities--how you execute your strategies.
Strategies and Tactics

**Goals:** To increase awareness about domestic violence  
**Strategy:** Mobilize the media against domestic violence  
**Tactics:** Create a social media campaign/send newsletters/make a short film/send post cards/arrange a photo competition.
• Provide support/services
• Increase awareness/visibility
• Support policy change
• Help gain support and recognition
• Increase funding
• Change behavior or attitudes
• Recruit volunteers
• Attract members, clients, donors, etc.
• Organize community

Planning Your Information Design

What kind of data is best presented as a picture, video, chart, a diagram or a map? In what way, screen, print or?

How do you know what information to focus on and what to exclude?

What is your overall strategy?

What is my key message or desired outcome?

What can I leave out?
What will move your constituency or target?

How it will be read by your target audience? Does your audience have a prior interest in your subject or are you trying to reach a new audience?

Consider the story you are telling as well as the tone, style, and format of your message.

The goal is to summarize your story in one clear, direct sentence. This is your mission statement.

Confirm it by answering three important questions:
- **What is your purpose**
- **Who is the audience?**
- **How will we tell the story? - Style and Approach**
- **How will the story be used? - Dissemination**
What is your purpose?

• Educate – ABOUT the issue
• Motivate – CARE about the issue
• Mobilize – ACT upon the issue

Messages

A few good message tests…

1. Is it personal?
2. Are you conveying uniqueness?
3. Is there a call to action?
4. Does it add value?
Messages

Stories + Facts

emotion  “proof”
heart  statistics
connection  numbers
self-identification  a need beyond one

Style and Approach

What content is crucial to provide? Who is the storyteller? Whose perspective and whose voice? Who are the participants? What tone would best serve your documentary? Somber? Provocative? Authoritative? Humorous?

What is the best balance among observation and discovery, interviews, narration, voiceover and re-enactments? How will you use graphics and music? Is the story quick paced or lyrical? What’s the optimal length? (Less is almost always more.)
Distribution

How and where will the piece be used? What is the primary use of the finished product?

Fundraising? Volunteer recruitment? Something else? It’s important to stay focused on your primary use.
Η εκδήλωση χρηματοδοτείται από την Ισλανδία, το Λιχτενστέιν και την Νορβηγία στο πλαίσιο του Προγράμματος «Έμπρατε όλοι Πολίτες», το οποίο είναι μέρος του συνολικού Χρηματοδοτικού Μηχανισμού του ΕΟΣ για την Ελλάδα, γνωστού ως ΕΕΑ Grants. Διοργανωτική Επιχείρηση του Προγράμματος είναι το Ίδρυμα Βιομηχανών. Στόχος του Προγράμματος είναι η ενδυνάμωση της κοινωνίας των πολιτών στη χώρα μας και η ενίσχυση της κοινωνικής δικαιοσύνης, της δημοκρατίας και της βιώσιμης ανάπτυξης.
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