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Nonprofit storytelling: six reasons to start telling great stories

By: Carly Euler | MemoryFox

There is an iconic episode of AMC's *Mad Men* when Don Draper gets the opportunity to pitch a marketing campaign to Kodak for its new slide projector. In his meeting with the Kodak bigwigs, Don uses his own family photographs to showcase the projector as a carousel — one that allows purchasers to move through time and wax nostalgic.



The pitch has a striking emotional effect on the room, forcing some of the characters to dig deep and reflect on relations with their own loved ones. And while yesteryear's slide projectors have been replaced by devices that can fit in one hand, the tenet of Don's winning pitch still holds true: A story told by visuals pulls at the heartstrings in a big way.

For nonprofits, telling your story — and empowering others to tell it on your behalf — is essential in building and sustaining critical connections with your community, volunteers, and donors. And these days — even more so than in the era of Don Draper — visual content MUST be part of the equation.

Six reasons to embrace nonprofit storytelling

Here are six reasons to embrace and integrate nonprofit storytelling into your marketing and fundraising efforts:

1. Storytelling humanizes the work you do

The United States is home to approximately 1.3 million charitable nonprofit organizations. People have plenty of options when deciding where to invest their time, money, and resources. From cancer support groups and animal rescues, to education and social justice initiatives, the nonprofit sector encompasses a wide range of causes.

Differentiation is key, and storytelling is the most effective way to do it.

In today's world, photo and video content has never been more important when it comes to sharing your impact with your target audiences. These visuals are no longer just “nice-to-haves,” they are fundamental. Whether donors are giving \$5 or \$5 million, they want to know their contributions are making a difference — and as nonprofit leaders, it's your job to show them! Access these free [12 Months of Gratitude Canva Templates](#) to get started making compelling content using your great stories.

2. Nonprofit storytelling empowers your advocates

When you're looking for a new dining experience, it's one thing to read on a restaurant's website that they're the number one Italian restaurant in the city. It's another — and much more telling — to read reviews from past patrons.

The same is true when it comes to companies selling products and nonprofits championing a cause. People want to hear directly from someone with first-hand experiences, which is more powerful than taking your word for it. Nonprofit leaders are among an organization's biggest cheerleaders, but empowering supporters -

your staff, board members, program participants, volunteers, and donors - to tell your story is what will truly make a difference.

Nonprofit storytelling puts a spotlight on the people who have been most directly impacted by an organization's efforts, such as someone whose life has changed through volunteering, a student who was able to continue their education because of scholarship funds, or a cancer survivor who hopes to see funding for a cure. These are the impactful stories that leave the biggest mark.

3. Where the written word fails, photos & videos thrive

Have you ever found yourself struggling to find the right words to describe how something affected you? If so, you're certainly not alone. Despite our best efforts, there are times when text just doesn't cut it. In those cases, videos and photos can do the talking for us.

To demonstrate impact, nonprofits can no longer just tell, they need to show. Imagine an annual report that's just pages of text or a social media post about a fundraising event that doesn't include any pictures - neither one would be compelling. The stories you're sharing are more memorable with visuals to match.

The power of visual storytelling through graphic design can be a game-changer for your cause. Whether it's creating eye-catching social media posts, compelling donation campaigns, or impactful event materials, graphic design plays a crucial role in inspiring action. Explore these [5 Graphic Design Tips for Nonprofits](#) to take your graphic design to the next level.

4. Stories stick with us

There's a reason your uncle has been telling the same story at every holiday gathering for the last 30 years. It's the same reason the stories you read to your kids are the same ones your parents read to you. Stories stick with us.

And we have the numbers to prove it! According to the [Stanford Graduate School of Business](#), stories are remembered up to 22 times more than facts alone. While a potential donor may not know your exact mission, they will remember the video they saw telling the story of a local family experiencing job loss and food insecurity who found resources at your food pantry.

Facts, figures, and data have their value. But at the end of the day, real-life stories of your efforts in action are what resonate the most.

5. Nonprofit storytelling enhances transparency

Transparency is crucial in establishing trust with donors. Nonprofits must provide transparent information about how donated dollars and cents will be utilized effectively. When sharing these details, storytelling techniques can be employed to illustrate the journey from inception to completion, showcasing the impact of each step along the way.

Donors appreciate knowing how their contributions will make a difference, and transparency enhances their confidence in the organization, increasing the likelihood of their continued support. With [donor retention rates](#) hovering between 40% and 45%, communicating transparently is not something that can be ignored!

6. Great stories inspire action

At the end of the day, the goal of any nonprofit is to inspire people to act: donating, volunteering, signing a petition, contacting public officials, or attending an event. Storytelling is an incredible tool for getting people to remember your cause and to take it one step further and act. For nonprofits, storytelling is about creating emotional connections that move people to take action. And the people you inspire can be your nonprofit's next advocates, further spreading the word about the work you do.

Storytelling has the unique ability to connect with the people who care about your nonprofit's mission on an emotional level, helping them understand the impact of their contributions and inspiring them to support your cause. There is no time to waste, so start your nonprofit storytelling journey today!

Carly is the Marketing Manager at [MemoryFox](#), and comes from the nonprofit world ready to elevate the hundreds of nonprofits in the MemoryFox community. She currently serves as the Co-Chair of the Wily Network's Young Professionals Association, and has previously held positions at numerous nonprofits with a wide range of missions and visions. During her time working for nonprofits, she has specialized in marketing, communications, and fundraising. Storytelling has been an integral part of each role.