



Want Action? Tell Positive Visual Stories

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Photo Courtesy Gaia Visual

By Laura Mahler

Some methods of storytelling are more fruitful than others. And nonprofits rely heavily on being able to tell their story really well.

For instance, studies into online donor activity reveal that **video is currently the hot ticket to accessing hearts and minds**: with a 64% higher response rate to 'Calls To Action' after watching, as opposed to other formats.

A tweet with an image will get around 150% more retweets than one without – imagery is one of the strongest means of storytelling in our world today.[1]

And prospective donors tell us this is true – **91% of audiences prefer visual or interactive messaging**.[2]

Visuals provoke emotion and reaction in different ways to words. They capture moments that some words cannot. They have been used to tell some of the hardest stories in history, and illustrate horrors and atrocities across borders and languages.

Those seeking change have used images show these to the world. However, we are seeing that, over time, this method loses impact. In many cases, it is too easy to avert eyes and ignore the poster, message or advert. **Too much, or for too long, and our emotional sponge becomes saturated with other people's suffering**.[3]

If someone has heard it before, it can be almost impossible to arouse a high emotional response and stimulate reaction. **And statistically, those encouraged to act by guilt are unlikely to reengage**. They seek to pay their dues and close the book.[4]

Instead, coinciding studies are finding that **people want to share the stories & videos with their friends and followers that gave them a happy buzz**.

These are positive stories: those with solutions or constructive arguments on world problems. These are the ones most likely to spread outside of normal news feed bubbles. [5]

As well, viewers will **spend longer in general on stories that are more balanced and optimistic**.[6] Brain mapping also shows consumers remember them for longer after viewing, again with the desire to share stories they think their peers will respond to.[7]

This all accumulates to mean that solutions-based visual storytelling is in many ways superior for reaching more diverse groups of people.

And maybe most importantly for the storyteller: this method leaves people feeling **more empowered and incentivised**.

Vast survey results into this show 12% more motivation and 10% more connectivity to their community after seeing balance and optimism.[8] When people feel involved, and see the payback of efforts others are making and the potential payback of their own

actions, they are evidently more motivated to act, than when shown suffering and hardship – especially when served up in the enormous, ever ‘refresh’able soup of disaster headlines and bad news.

This is huge, ground-level, online activism. And it’s accessible and actionable by the billions of people online every day.

Positivity itself feeds physical and practical action, and this action actually continues to feed a personal positive outlook for an individual. This creates, for them, a powerful loop of positive action and, for the world, a powerful loop of positive change.[9]

[1] <https://sumo.com/stories/visual-storytelling-marketing>

[2] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2018/04/02/visual-content-the-future-of-storytelling/#4549af4d3a46>

[3] Courtney Seiter (2014). *The Science of Emotion in Marketing*

[4] Natalie Nezhati (2014) “Have the public had enough of manipulative charity marketing?” *New Internationalist Blog*

[5] Jonah Berger, *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*

[6] https://www.constructivejournalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Publishing-the-Positive_MA-thesis-research-2016_Jodie-Jackson.pdf

[7] <http://cn.isr.umich.edu/publications.html>

[8] <http://michellegielan.com/resources/research/>

[9] https://www.constructivejournalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Publishing-the-Positive_MA-thesis-research-2016_Jodie-Jackson.pdf

Laura Mahler tells visual stories for and about nonprofits, NGOs, charities – really anyone doing something to make the world a bit better! If you’d like to see how she can tell your story, you can see her work on Instagram [@gaiavisual](#) and [@filmthechange](#) or visit [Gaia Visual website](#).

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