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Storytelling through design

Roger Sametz, President and Founder, Sametz Blackstone Associates

Andrew Maydoney, Vice President, Research and Strategy, Sametz Blackstone Associates

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Storytelling through design

by Roger Sametz and Andrew Maydoney

While the methods and materials of design give “form” to communications, Roger Sametz and Andrew Maydoney compellingly argue and illustrate that the ultimate goal of manipulating type, color, imagery, space, and time is to tell stories—to engage “teller” and “listener” in a dialogue that builds comprehension, commitment, participation, loyalty, and trust.



Roger Sametz, President and Founder, Sametz Blackstone Associates



Andrew Maydoney, Vice President, Research and Strategy, Sametz Blackstone Associates

Once upon a time...

before there were mouse pads, moveable type, or even written languages, there were stories—and storytellers. And although storytelling’s popularity has flowed and ebbed—perhaps seeming to hit its nadir in the twentieth century, driven by efforts to reduce all knowledge to analytical models¹—storytelling has endured. Indeed, stories have moved from caves to campfires, to library floors, to become a “communication tool” embraced by corporate leaders, gurus of knowledge management, and now, practitioners of strategy and design.

Why? Because telling stories works. Because stories stick. In the words of one knowledge-management-expert-turned-storyteller, Stephen Denning, “Storytelling is natural and easy and entertaining and energizing. Stories help us to understand complexity. Stories can enhance or change perceptions. Stories are easy to remember...and engage our feelings...Storytelling enables individuals to see themselves in a different light, and accordingly take decisions, and change their behavior in accordance with these new perceptions, insights, and identities.”²

Multiple-intelligence theorist Howard Gardner adds: “In recent years, social scientists have come to appreciate what political, religious, and military figures have long known: that stories...constitute a uniquely powerful currency.”³ And finally, narrative expert Robert Fulford opines: “Stories are how we explain, how we teach, how we entertain ourselves, and how we often do all three at once. They are the juncture where facts and feelings meet. And for those reasons, are central to civilization.”⁴

1. Stephen Denning, *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2001), p. xv.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xv.

3. Howard Gardner, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), p. 3.

4. Robert Fulford, *The Triumph of Narrative: Storytelling in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000), p. 9.

More and more, in our communications practice, we're "building" and "telling" stories to connect our clients to their key constituencies: current and prospective customers or participants, investors, partners, donors, boards, staff, peers, media. Gardner posits that there are three fundamental kinds of stories: stories of self, stories of the group or community, and stories of value and meaning.⁵ We translate "self" to be both the teller (client organization) and the listener (constituent/s)—because every good story involves the listener in the story, and encourages the listener to interpret and complete the story in his or her head. Group and community stories are about how the organization and its offerings fit within relevant and/or competitive landscapes or into a constituent's community context. Stories of value and meaning are just that—what an organization or offering means, what it promises, what expectations it meets, what benefits it affords—in the mind and heart of the "listener." (This kind of story can also be told internally.) We believe, like Gardner, that stories can use one, some, or all of these approaches to communicate.

That said, stories can be crafted and told at different levels, with different goals, to:

- Build brand recognition and relevance—by connecting the desired brand attributes to the organization and its offerings, investing meaning in an organization's brand cues (messages, symbols, type, color, and so on), and by encouraging people to learn what you want them to know and remember.
- Foster connection and trust among an organization and its offerings and its key constituents—a connection deeper and more lasting than a transaction—by creating "ways in" and "resonant points" that match a constituent's needs and interests.
- Correct outdated notions or misperceptions.
- Simplify the complex.
- Explain "why" and "why you should care" in addition to "what" and "how."
- Connect to "listeners" on both analytical and emotional levels, communicating both the denotative and connotative.
- Lead to action and effect change—externally or internally.
- Build communities.
- Move people along a relationship—and trust-building path. Whether an

organization is selling missiles, presenting concerts, recruiting students, or raising funds, stories can help move prospects from awareness to comprehension, to participation, to commitment, to loyalty, to renewed awareness, to support, in the case of development initiatives.

And while storytelling might be most readily associated with yarns spun around a fading campfire, children gathered around the pleated skirt of a librarian in 1955, or the president addressing Congress, stories can be compellingly told with few, or without any, words. Cave paintings, tapestries, stained-glass windows, painting, sculpture, and music all tell stories. Einstein's formulas tell stories, as do chromosome and genome maps. There's a continuum—from verbal to nonverbal—of ways to tell stories.

Communication designers as storytellers

Although usually thought of, too narrowly, as a strictly visual discipline, communication design is uniquely situated at the intersection of verbal and nonverbal communications. The best of the profession have (consciously or not) embraced this intersection and understood that the opportunity to combine verbal and nonverbal "vocabularies"—each to ratchet up the other—generates particularly effective, lasting communications. This intersection is also a great perch from which to tell stories.

And as the amount of communication we all are exposed to escalates as technologies, media, channels, and competition expand, there's a pressing need to evolve and implement communication strategies and programs that can be heard above the growing din—that resonate with and engage people. Telling stories—using perhaps the oldest communication platform—offers significant potential.

But telling stories is not what most communication designers do, think about doing, or are usually trained to do. It requires a mindset change. The change is simple (and maybe also profound). The methods and materials available to "give form" to communications already provide the tools and opportunities to tell memorable, persuasive stories—if the use of these tools is modulated through the lens of storytelling. Across media—print, digital, presentation, environmental—the happy result will be com-

⁵ Op. cit., p. 14.

munications that connect more directly to constituents, build trust, involve audiences (converting them from passive viewers to engaged participants), and move people to desired responses.

The storyteller's art

Maybe because storytelling is so old, there is a high degree of consensus about what makes a good story—whether it's a story told to children to transmit cultural values, a story told in the board room to effect organizational change, or simply a story told to a friend at a bar to share ideas and ideals. There are lots of "tips" offered, especially online, but we've found that a good way to categorize (and ultimately translate) what makes a good story is to think in terms of *content*, *execution*, and *interaction*.

Content

Elements of effective stories include:

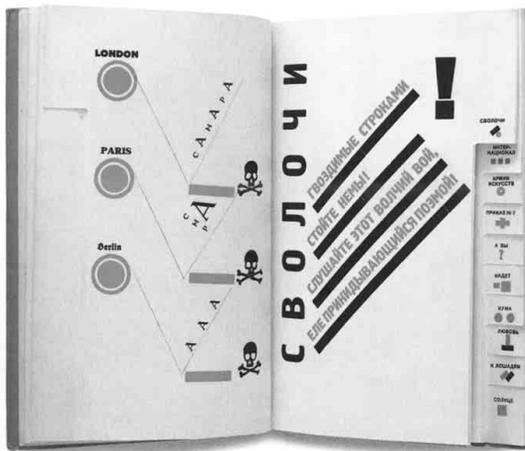
- Relevance (the story touches what people care about, or can be prompted to care or think about).
- A back-story—what happened before, or offstage, that has an impact on the story. Back-stories also offer opportunities to deepen the relationship at later dates by telling more of the story as the relationship evolves.
- Understandable context—the starting points, setting, and back-story are familiar within the context of the listener's experience.
- Something unfamiliar or not known.
- Something explained or made sense of. A story can "show you how to behave in a particular situation, how to resolve a problem, or why something happened the way it did.... [Stories] have a prescriptive normative value: Do x, and y will occur."⁶
- A discourse that is plausible and has the ring of truth (the teller is believable and trustworthy).
- Character. Who/what is the story about? Me? You? Us? A larger community? Values or meaning?
- Progression. A beginning, a middle, and some form of closure that encourages the

6. Larry Prusak, *Storytelling in Organizations*, at <http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org>.

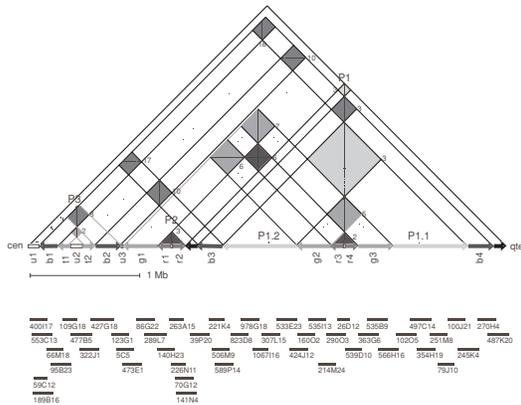
Verbal and nonverbal storytelling



Stories can be told both with words and without, through cave painting, smoke signals, annual reports, or virtual reality tours. (Above) Storytelling decades ago at the Boston Public Library; "Punch and Judy," early 1830s, from Robert Leach's *The Punch & Judy Show* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985, p. 64); Buster Keaton as "Sherlock Jr.," 1924, from Robert Knopf, *The Theater and Cinema of Buster Keaton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 127); opening bars of Serge Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, 1936.



$$G\mu\nu = 8\pi T\mu\nu$$



El Lissitzky's rendering of *For the Voice*, by Vladimir Mayakovsky, 1923; Albert Einstein's symbolic formulation of the theory of general relativity, 1915; streamlined refrigerator containers from the Hall China Company, for Westinghouse; David Page Lab/Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research, dot plot of the AZFc region of the Y chromosome (Tomoko Kuroda-Kawaguchi, Helen Skaletsky, Steve Rozen, 2002).

listener to view the world slightly differently—often translating to set-up, build-up, and pay-off.

- Detail. What specific things or points need to be described more fully and focused upon to increase relevance, resonance, and truth for the audience—to move them to think or act differently?
- A proposal to think or act differently.

Execution

In an email discussion, members of the National Storytelling Association compiled a definition of storytelling: “Telling involves...contact between teller and listener.... The teller’s role is to prepare and present the necessary language, vocalization, and physicality to effectively and efficiently communicate the images of a story. The listener’s role is to actively create the vivid, multi-sensory images, actions, characters, and events—the reality—of the story in their mind based on the performance by the teller, and on their past experiences, beliefs, and understandings. The completed story happens in the mind of the listener.”⁷

Combining advice from Barry McWilliams’ *Effective Storytelling: A Manual for Beginners* and Aaron Shepard’s *Storytelling Page*, an oral storyteller needs to master:

- Emphasis
- Repetition
- Variety
- Transition
- Pacing
- Proportion
- Portraying multiple characters—through one’s voice (tone, pitch, volume, speed, rhythm, articulation, silence), facial expressions, gestures, and body position in relation to the audience (for instance, both McWilliams and Shepard reference a “storytelling V,” in which the teller shifts 45 degrees to represent different characters)

Interaction

Interaction happens on two levels.

1. Between and among the “executed” components of content
2. Between the teller and the listener (audience/constituent/prospect)

7. Barry McWilliams, *Effective Storytelling: A Manual for Beginners*, at http://www.eldrbarry.net/roos/st_defn.htm

Boston Ballet: Telling new and different stories

Boston Ballet had a new story to tell. The artistic director, the executive director, the coaches, the dancers, the choreographers—all were new. The organization’s vision was also new, and it was presenting a different onstage experience. Previous communications had one focus—the product—and this largely took the form of one-off, performance-specific, sales-only-focused posters and collateral.

We needed to tell a story that worked on several levels. It needed to connect performances to one another and to the institution; it needed to talk to many more audiences than just subscribers; it needed to be as vibrant and transformational as dance itself; it needed to be a story people would remember and repeat; it needed to generate “buzz.”

The main characters in the story are the dancers and the audience—and the interaction between them. The back-story is about everything it takes to choose, fund,

choreograph, rehearse, and mount a show—right down to makeup, last-minute adjustments to costumes, and light cues.

The imagery building blocks provide for each character and each level to be rendered differently. The dancers are photographed in black-and-white on seamless backgrounds to emphasize their athleticism and form; the audience is captured in the sumptuous theater in which the Ballet performs, in color; the back-story is rendered in edgy pastels.

Three design moves help tell the story in print, on banners, and on the Web site: the intercutting of images, which creates an active rhythm; a signature curve that crops all the compositions and gives all communications a lyrical quality; and the interrupting hard verticals, which reinforce precision—one of which also contains the tagline “beloved traditions/new experiences.”



BOSTON BALLET

MIKKO NISSINEN | Artistic Director

Translating the storyteller’s art through the building blocks of communication

Storytellers often resist verbatim transcriptions of “told” stories. When reduced to the evenly gray texture of text on a page—without the articulation, modulation, rhythm, and pacing that the teller’s voice and body provide—stories often die. (They can, of course, be rewritten, using a different set of “literary” conventions to build back in what was lost in transcription.) But the methods and materials available to all communication designers—the “building blocks”—provide a rich and varied palette with which to construct and tell stories.

Building blocks can be thought of in two categories:

1. That which an organization can legally own—its logo/s, logotype/s, and any registered taglines
2. That which an organization can’t own, but which come together in almost every communication—key messages, and focused approaches to typography, color, imagery, design gestures, space and time, and language usage

Building blocks of communication

what you can own

- name
- logo / logotype
- tagline

focused approaches

to what the organization can't own, but which come together in almost any communications to tell a story

- typography
- color
- imagery
- signature design gestures
- space and time
- language usage

content

execution

interaction

While brand identifiers (logos, logotypes) can tell stories (two examples are included here), more often they are invested with stories and attributes to become the short-hand symbol for what an organization means and promises.

On the other hand, focused approaches to the selection and deployment of color, type, imagery, and so forth, provide not only the voice, gestures, and body to tell stories, but also the glue to hold stories together—both within a single story and from story to story. And while much of the raw material upon which these building blocks draw is available to all (there are a lot of colors and type fonts), it's the choices made—around content, execution, and interaction—that create a set of blocks that can effectively tell an organization's stories, generate connections with desired constituents, and start to be “owned” by the teller and trusted by the listener when delivered consistently—across media and time.

Making Choices: Content

Communication designers are always making choices, and decisions are based on a range of

criteria, some of them purely formal. But assembling a set of storytelling building blocks for an organization is about creating and conveying meaning—and involves looking inward and outward, closely. Inward to the organization and its culture—its vision, values, goals, target constituencies, desired responses, and the attributes that need to be associated with the organization or offering. Outward to the constituencies (and they are seldom monolithic) to understand these groups' expectations, needs, interests, past history with the organization, and the experience you're asking them to share. Outward also to understand the relevant and competitive context in which the story will have to live—and compete.

Choosing a typeface, or several, to tell a story involves integrating the “inward” and “outward” learning and matching that to the type fonts that support the needed meaning and attributes. And type often has meaning on two levels—its sensory effect (it “feels” hard or soft, friendly or elegant, human or mechanical) and its cultural associations (Snell Roundhand will always evoke weddings; Futura references the Bauhaus and all



Flour: A logo tells a story

The logo for Flour Bakery + Café not only tells an identity story that is very much in sync with the personality of the management-consultant-turned-baker proprietress, but it also makes clear that what one buys and eats actually gets made on the premises. You gotta break eggs to make brioche.

Scudder University: Stories of real life

One of the critically important tenets of storytelling is trust. If the listener does not trust the teller, the story will simply not stick. To quote the writer Annette Simmons: “Before you attempt to influence anyone, you need to establish enough trust to successfully deliver your message. . . . Trust in ‘who you are’ becomes the connection that serves as a conduit for your message.”⁸

In working to improve participant education for retirement fund manager Scudder Investments of Deutsche Bank, we knew establishing trust would be vital. Communications for retirement planning are awash in images of yachts, islands, and trophy homes. But our client was talking to people working on factory floors trying to make ends meet. The pervasive industry approach and our client’s target demographics were not aligned; it was clear that a new approach was needed. We developed a new retirement education story (“Your life, your reality—you can plan to succeed”) for people for whom yachts would not likely be an option, people whose day-to-day lives precluded giving much thought to retirement.

Research also revealed that many of our client’s constituents either did not graduate high school or had not gone any farther than high school. Our job was to build knowledge in a constituency that was, for the most part, unschooled. We began by identifying a system for educating and learning that offered us the best way to connect with people at varying education levels—a concept known as Multiple

Intelligence, developed by Howard Gardner at Harvard University. Gardner dubbed his work and his research lab Project Zero, because the goal was to leave no person behind. He suggests that intelligence comes in many forms—not just the linguistic and logic of typical Western education systems—and that educating and learning should recognize and work with these other “ways of learning.”

The program was deployed in multiple media across the US. Imagery depicted real people; no models were used. Copy eliminated, as much as regulatory requirements allowed, financial service jargon. And everyone working on the education campaign was instructed to “keep it real!”

Scudder Investments’s participant education program tells a story of how real people can succeed in their retirement planning—and it places plan participants and prospects in the story. It builds trust and confidence by acknowledging the realities of daily life. It brings a simple method for retirement planning to anyone, regardless of financial status or education level. It is a robust story articulated through equally robust verbal and visual building blocks. The results drew higher participation and increased volume in retirement planning.

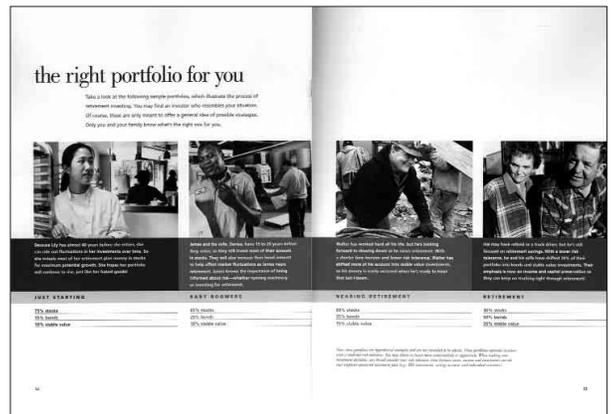
8. Annette Simmons, *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion Through the Art of Storytelling* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2001), p. 5.



Interactive, online retirement planning lessons for the uninitiated—making concepts of retirement planning clear through sound, movement, and interaction.



Retirement education kit—printed on-demand for personalization and tighter connection to constituents.



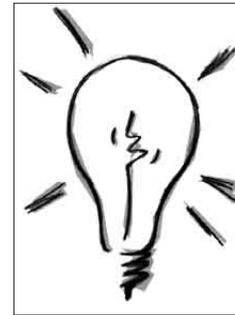
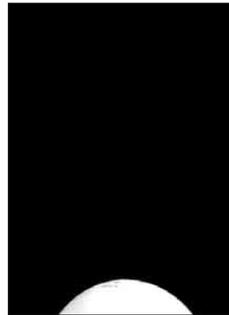
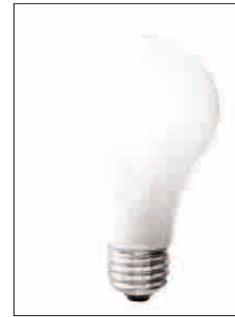
the associations it radiates, even if not actually identified by the audience; and ye olde Caslon Antique conjures up colonial America). These associations can either reinforce or detract from the sensory meaning. Some faces, of course, have almost no meaning, probably because of their ubiquity: Times Roman, Verdana, and Arial are good examples.

In parallel with Howard Gardner's taxonomy of story types, imagery can be about me-you, a group-community, and/or value-meaning. To build an imagery storytelling building block, the first decision to be made is "Who and what are the story about?" Is it the organization and/or its offerings, the user-participant beneficiary of the offerings, the context in which the "me" and "you" interact, value and benefits, or some combination? In addition to "telling" about the characters in the story (and the character of the characters), imagery can also contribute to setting a familiar context, introduce a "new" element to the story, explain, help establish the back-story, and supply the detail that makes the story compelling.

Content of imagery can be representational or evocative, straightforward or metaphorical. The former is often more appropriate to show a person, place, or thing in a story; the latter connects well to stories of process and value. (Of course, there are no "rules." Even people can be implied. Two coffee mugs and a plate of cookies around a half-completed Scrabble game certainly evokes people even if no one is shown.) Either approach—and there's a continuum of options between representational and metaphorical—should evolve from looking inward and outward.

Colors, like type fonts, have both sensory readings and cultural associations. Red, while being attention-grabbing and hot, can also mean "stop" and, in financial stories, "red ink" or losses. Primary colors, especially when used together, can either evoke the simplicity of Dick+Jane or the canvases of Mondrian and De Stijl, depending on your cultural reference points. But cultural associations are, of course, culture-specific. Red, for instance, is associated with marriage and the birth of sons in China, while white references death and mourning; in Egypt, black connotes fertility. That said, it is often how color is deployed—how the building block is executed—that sets the context, tone, and rhythm of the story.

Execution affects content



How an image is rendered can significantly alter its meaning in a story. Choice of medium, point of view, lighting, and cropping can make a big difference.

Making Choices: Execution

All words are not created equal. Through choice of font, weight, size, leading, column width, and use of space, the communication designer can give voice to a story—and vary the volume, pitch, rhythm, emphasis, and articulation in much the same way an oral storyteller does. A blank column creates a pause; a contrasting column width—with type rendered in a contrasting face, weight, or color—creates another level, another character, much as a storyteller does when he or she shifts position. Large, generously leaved type welcomes readers and gets them comfortably seated in front of the teller.

Of course, voice matters greatly. Telling the story in the third person and never referencing

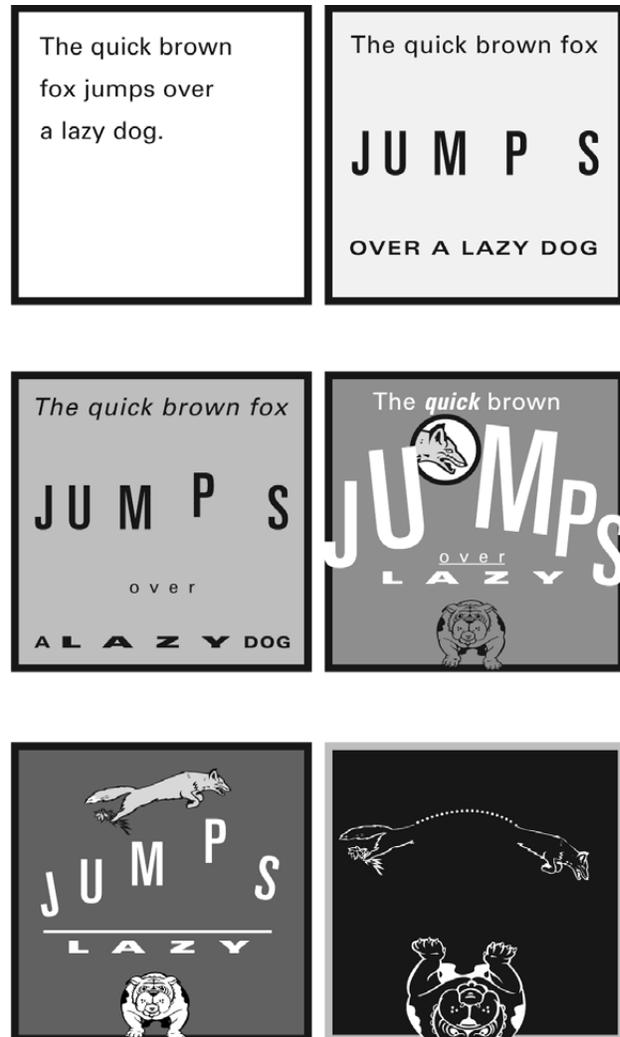
the role of the listener-audience creates distance, and dis-cludes the listener you're trying to engage. While not always appropriate, the closer the story gets to first and second person—me and you—the more the audience is encouraged to see themselves in the story.

The effect of imagery is largely determined by how imagery is executed; different choices will tell different stories. How an image is rendered can either reinforce desired brand attributes or undermine them. If the intent is to present a high-tech product as cutting-edge, it might be harder to communicate this if the image is rendered in soft focus, in pastels—though it then might be seen as accessible and friendly, a different story. Similarly, presenting a group of people who are “there for you” might not be as convincing if the lighting is harsh and there are angular shadows across faces. (While these two examples play to stereotypes, stereotypes do inform the context people bring to hearing a story.)

Choice of media is very important. Often, illustrations are as much about the style of the illustration as the content—and the story may then be driven by the illustration style. How an image is cropped, if it's silhouetted or in the context of a background, choices around color and focus, whether the image is crisply stationary or blurred and on the move—are all choices that either reinforce a story or work against it. Content and execution must both work toward the same end.

Space and time, though often thought of as options available only within richer media, are important building blocks in print and presentations, much as they are in film and video. Decisions around space create hierarchies of information and emphasis. (In a story that involves a product and user, if the user is several times the size of the product, the story is more likely to be about how the product affects the user. If the product commands significantly more real estate than the user, the story is probably about “speeds and feeds”—and will be less about the customer and benefits.) Choices around space and time help to set the pace of the story—is it drawled out or communicated with a sense of urgency? Together, these building blocks also establish a structure for how the story is experienced. Is there one linear story? Is the story to be experienced on multiple levels, expressed in running, contrapuntal voices? Are there resting points or decision points along the

Bringing a story to life



Even with the most rudimentary set of building blocks (one type family and two pieces of line art), the pangram we all learned to type can be turned into an engaging story.

way? The disposition of space and time can also help to clearly set up the story's beginning, middle, and end.

Making Choices: Interaction

Much as the live storyteller combines words, differing voices, gestures, and body positions—and modulates the performance to best engage the listener—the communication designer needs to consider the building blocks both singularly and as a system, checking that the interaction among the content and execution of the different building blocks increases the likelihood that the intended constituent(s) will find the story relevant and compelling, see their

Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research

Stories that explain, educate, and engage

"The Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research is a nonprofit, independent research and educational institution with pathfinding programs in cancer and AIDS research, structural biology, genetics, infectious disease research, developmental biology, and transgenic science. Its mission is two-fold: improve human health and welfare and extend the boundaries of knowledge for future generations."

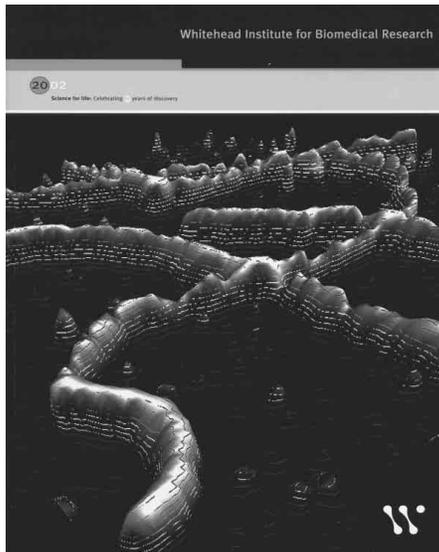
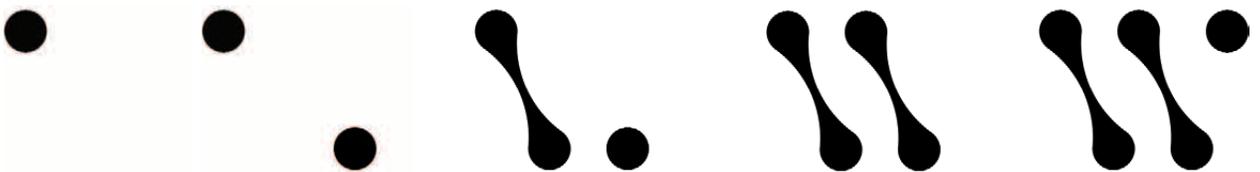
—from Whitehead Institute's home page

The Whitehead Institute needs to tell stories to people and organizations with very different interests, needs, and education. The organization needs to communicate "hard" science to peers, foundations, and prospective post-docs; "chewy" science to a wider scientific community, prospective industry partners, and some donors; and

"soft" science to many current and prospective donors and to the wider MIT community. And for the "chewy" and "soft" audiences, benefits (or possible benefits) have to be clearly connected to research. "What?" has to be answered with "So what?"

The communication architecture we evolved acknowledges these different audiences and tells different, appropriate stories—sometimes the "soft" story nested within the "hard"—through clear typographic hierarchies. Imagery of people "discovering" is linked to diagrams that explain and to "science as art"—imagery from the labs that is graphically compelling, helps to build a story, and is proprietary.

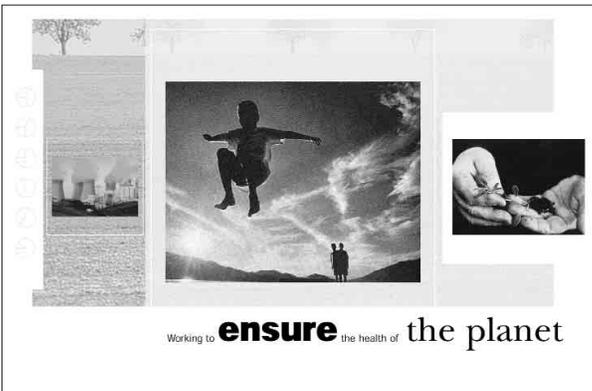
Even the Institute's new logo works on two levels: for the scientist, it's about cell division; for the layperson, it captures the dynamism and energy of science unfolding.



International research and consulting:**Making the complex relevant and real**

A large global research and consulting firm that worked in many markets and in many countries, and afforded a range of services, was having trouble getting its message across—trouble, in fact, defining who it was, for whom, and why anyone should care.

We first worked with it to develop messages and stories that would resonate with what different constituents were looking for—messages that met these different groups on their terms. And we collaborated to evolve a story hierarchy that moved from high-level corporate messages to specific stories about how real people benefited from this organization's participation.



We replaced its existing inwardly focused, organizationally based communication architecture with print and digital materials that told stories of benefits, beneficiaries—and how the company's expertise and commitment made, makes, and will make a real difference.

The approach to imagery we evolved was all about telling stories. Wherever possible, a "problem/challenge" image was linked to a "solution" image and supported by a hands-on image of a company consultant or technician, all framed by a background image that provided both context and glue.

Articulated typography assured that the benefits and main points of the story would be grasped quickly: "Making a difference by helping to get new drugs to market quickly" also reads as "helping... quickly."



own interests and needs reflected, and make the desired decisions. The listener experience has to be aligned with the goals of the storyteller.

That is, if the story is about technological prowess and user-friendliness but is delivered via a Web vehicle that is hard to navigate, sends viewers down dead-end tunnels, has imagery that doesn't connect to the story, is rendered in colors that don't reproduce well on monitors, and is slow to load—then the story will never be about technological prowess and user-friendliness, no matter how well-crafted the text. Similarly, if the story is about the benefits of a particular service to, say, a family, but the text is presented in undifferentiated gray blocks in the third person and the only imagery is photos of the organization's headquarters—it's not likely to be a convincing story. Even if each building

block is well thought out individually, but together they don't cohere, the story will be less effective. A background color choice can sap energy from what would otherwise be compelling imagery; lack of hierarchy among levels of type and imagery (even if the individual choices make sense) may make it hard for the listener to track and follow the story; decisions around space and time may cause a story to be heard in a sequence not intended, with confusion rather than connection resulting.

And it's important to remember that "storytelling is not a panacea—it doesn't always work. Storytelling can only be as good as the underlying idea being conveyed. If that idea is unsound, storytelling may well reveal its inadequacy."⁹ And storytelling does not replace analytical thinking, though it does give it "context and meaning. Abstract analysis is often easier to understand when seen through the lens of a well-chosen story."¹⁰

9. National Electronic Library for Health, National Health Service, Specialist Library: Knowledge Management. *Storytelling*. At http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/storytelling_toolkit.asp.

10. Ibid.

Vialog: The story of annual performance and innovation

Vialog, now Genesys Conferencing, was a true innovator in group communications. At a time when group conference calls were for the privileged few corporations that could afford it and when such events required intricate logistical planning, Vialog made the tool accessible and easy to use for everyone. In its cornerstone annual report, we told the story of what it means to really, physically communicate in a geographically boundless business landscape—through innovative group communications.

Compositions of imagery, illustration, text, and ideas express the impact of a growing industry in a shrinking world—sharing, interacting, transforming, communicating, resolving, collaborating. In a clear explanation and illustration of how the company was leading its industry, the annual report told how the company’s employees were revolutionizing, expanding, innovating, and ever-evolving their products, services, and solutions. The choice and execution of the building blocks work together to tell the story of how the company innovates to bring people together—regardless of physical or technical modality or geographic locale.



Image detail of spread from the annual report



When it all comes together

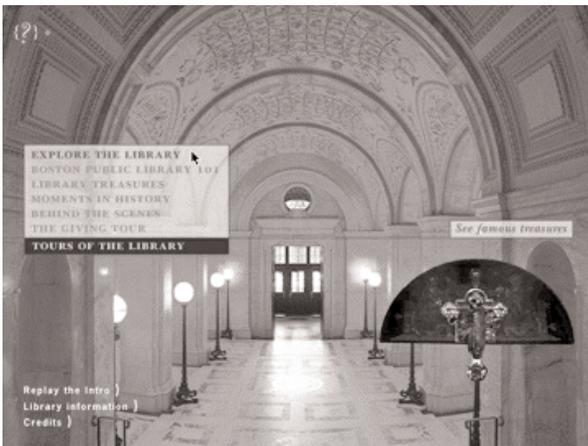
Building and telling stories that connect teller to listener involves making decisions across a matrix of choices. But when there is alignment among an organization’s goals, attributes, and promises; the listener-constituent’s needs, interests, and expectations; and the content, execution, and interaction of the building blocks of communications—storytelling brings communications alive. Brand-building is advanced, the complex is made clear, the “whys” are understood in addition to the “hows” and “whats,” and people become engaged in a dialogue that is deeper and more enduring than a single transac-

tion—an interaction that fosters healthy relationships based on commitment, participation, support, and trust.

Let us close with these words from Robert Fulford: “We can say of stories what W.H. Auden said about books: Some stories may be unjustly forgotten, but no stories are unjustly remembered.”¹¹ m

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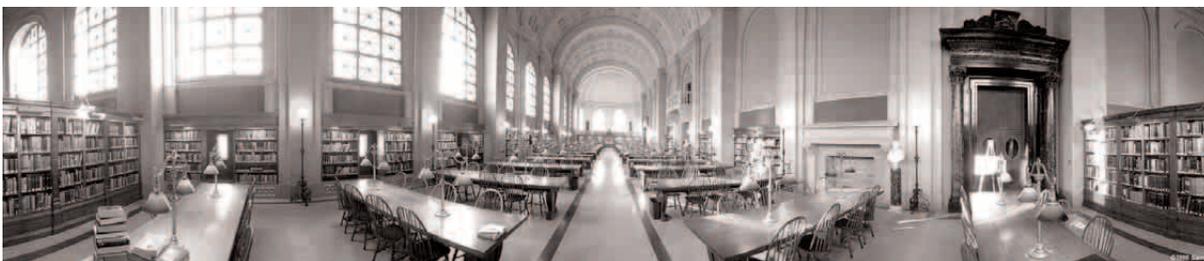
11. Op. cit., p. 6



The introductory video resolves to the virtual lobby of the BPL; participants are invited to explore the art, artifacts, and architecture of the McKim and Johnson buildings (named for their respective architects) through a choice of stories, or tours. The menu offers an unguided tour in which the audience builds his or her own story; a tour perfect for the fourth grader who wants to know how a library works; one focused on the library-as-museum; a tour focused on the terrific collection of historical artifacts; and a story created for the trustee trying to raise money.



As you explore the CD, you click on art, artifacts, and architectural elements of the building to read, or actually hear, stories from a variety of perspectives—docents, curators, librarians, patrons, and so on. (The CD and Web interfaces offer more than three and a half hours of oral histories.) On any screen, one can use a mouse to zoom around spaces, pull out a map and move nonlinearly about the buildings, listen to a range of commentaries, or read through some of the many volumes that are also incorporated in the CD.



Fifteen of the some 4,000 total individual shots are electronically stitched together to provide the virtual spaces for mouse-driven exploration—and images in print that marry art, architecture, and technology.

Suggested Readings

Armstrong, David M. *Managing by Storying Around: A New Method of Leadership*. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Clarke, Cheryl A. *Storytelling for Grantseekers: A Guide to Creative Nonprofit Fundraising*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Denning, Stephen. *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations*. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2001.

Fulford, Robert. *The Triumph of Narrative: Storytelling in the Age of Mass Culture*. New York: Broadway Books, 2000.

Gabriel, Yiannis. *Storytelling in Organizations: Facts, Fictions, and Fantasies*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Gardner, Howard. *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.

Lipman, Doug. *Improving Your Storytelling: Beyond the Basics for All Who Tell Stories in Work or Play*. Little Rock, Arkansas: August House Publishers, 1999.

McWilliams, Barry. *Effective Storytelling: A Manual for Beginners*, at http://www.eldrbarry.net/roos/st_defn.htm.

Maguire, Jack. *The Power of Personal Storytelling: Spinning Tales to Connect with Others*. New York: J.P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1998.

Seeger, Pete, and Paul DuBois Jacobs. *Pete Seeger's Storytelling Book*. New York: Harcourt, 2000.

Shepard, Aaron. *Telling a Story, Stories to Tell*, at <http://aaronshp.com/storytelling>.

Roger Sametz, President and founder of Sametz Blackstone Associates, received his BA from Yale University and an MFA in Graphic Design and Photography from the Yale School of Art and Architecture.

Since founding Sametz Blackstone in 1979, Roger has collaborated with a wide range of corporate, academic, cultural, and professional service clients to help them to better communicate their value—and values—to a range of target audiences. Representative non-profit, cultural, academic, and research institutions include: Harvard University, Harvard Medical School, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Bentley College, Dartmouth's Tuck School, Yale University, MIT Sloan School of Management, the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research (and associated Genome Center), the McGovern Institute for Brain Research at MIT, the CBR Institute for Biomedical Research, CIMIT (Center for the Integration of Medicine and Innovative Technology), Harvard-MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology, the Boston Symphony Orchestra (including Pops and Tanglewood), FleetBoston Celebrity Series, Boston Center for the Arts, 90.9 WBUR and the WBUR Group (an affiliate of National Public Radio), the Boston Public Library, the New England Aquarium, and Boston Ballet.

Corporate and professional service clients have included, Goodwin Procter, Abt Associates, Arthur D. Little, Compaq / Digital, Raytheon Company, Crane & Company, State Street, United Asset Management, as well as a range of high-tech start-ups.

He serves on the Executive Committee of the Board of Associates of the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research, the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the American Jewish Committee, the Corporate Fundraising Committee of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Board of Directors of the Corporate Design Foundation, the Board of Directors of the Boston Center for Arts, and is an Overseer of Boston Ballet. He is a member of the American Institute of Graphic Arts and the Design Management Institute. For three years Roger was president of the American Institute of Graphic Arts, Boston, and continues to serve on that group's Advisory Board. He has juried design contests here and abroad and was a past national chairman of the AIGA Communication Graphics show. Most recently, he was a juror for the Communication Arts annual design competition.

Roger has been a guest lecturer at the Amos Tuck School at Dartmouth, the Sloan School at MIT, and the Johnson School of Management at Cornell. He has twice been a featured speaker at the IBM Design Leadership Symposium; he was a speaker at the national Bio conference in Seattle and at the Design Management Institute's conference on brand re-imagining held in Montreal.

Andrew Maydoney, Vice President, Research and Strategy, at Sametz Blackstone Associates, Boston. He holds a BFA in design and photography from Southeastern Massachusetts University and has studied at Syracuse University, MIT, as well as extensively in the fields of media technology and organizational development.

Andrew's clients at Sametz Blackstone include: the American Ireland Fund, the Boston Public Library, Millennium Pharmaceuticals, Raytheon Company, BankBoston, Deutsche Bank / Scudder Investments, City of Boston, Harvard University and MSPCA. Maydoney has juried contests and graduate theses, lectured, taught, and facilitated workshops on communication and new media strategy, design, and production internationally. He has guest lectured to trade organizations in communications, biotechnology, academia, social services, high-technology, culture, and the arts. For a variety of social service organizations, he has mentored students, judged business plans, lectured on communication planning and led students on trips to the wholesale marketplace in New York City to study supply and demand economics.

Recently recognized by Boston Business Journal as one of the area's "top 40 under 40 executives," Maydoney is an active member of the board of directors of several New England organizations, including Bottom Line, an organization that helps at-risk urban youth get into, and graduate from, college; the Fuller Museum of Art, New England's only museum focused on contemporary craft; as well as the Business Council for WGBH, Boston. A member of numerous communication trade organizations, Maydoney has authored articles for various trade and business journals, and his work has won many awards and accolades.

About Sametz Blackstone Associates

Sametz Blackstone Associates is a twenty-five year old, Boston-based practice that integrates strategy, message development, design, and technology to create compelling communication programs that help evolving organizations better navigate change.

Clients include academic and research institutions, life science organizations, professional service firms, businesses, cultural organizations and other non-profits, and government agencies. Sametz Blackstone has always approached communication and design as important tools to help organizations realize both their strategic and tactical goals—effectively connecting strategy to implementation—in order to get results.

Sametz Blackstone has years of experience helping organizations, both startups and centenarians, articulate their vision, identity, brands, strategies, and messages. They work with clients to define positioning, develop branding and identity systems, logos, complete communication plans, collateral systems, websites, CD-ROMs, and whatever is needed to connect clients to their constituencies. Their collaboration helps clients build or re-energize brands, enter new markets or geographies, promote offerings, increase participation in programs, raise capital, recruit and retain talent, and add value to the enterprise—over the short and long term.

Located in Boston's historic South End in a Victorian brownstone, Sametz Blackstone works with clients both around the corner and around the world.

Sametz Blackstone Associates

Compelling communications—integrating strategy, design, and technology to help evolving organizations navigate change

40 West Newton Street	+ 1.617.266.8577 phone
Blackstone Square	+ 1.617.266.1937 fax
Boston, Massachusetts	blackstone@sametz.com
02118 USA	www.sametz.com