

## The Power of Storytelling

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Daniel Pink's 2005 bestseller *A Whole New Mind* discusses the rise of the Conceptual Age – embodied by a “high touch, high concept” approach. The times require the ability to cut through the sensory clutter and craft a satisfying narrative alongside the recent drive for data and insights. **The good news** is that the social sector has a wealth of stories to tell – lives changed, art created, and communities impacted. The sector creates meaning (an important attribute according to Pink) as its social currency. **The bad news** is that, with so few resources, the social sector considers marketing and communications a luxury. However, with the advent of social media, one story created via video on Vimeo, picture on Instagram, or presentation on Prezi can travel across the globe in an instant. You don't need a large budget or access to the conventional media to tell your story.

Before you employ these tools, **what do you say and how do you say it?** To answer this question, we'll take cues from our favorite storytelling professionals – English teachers, Madison Avenue advertising executives, and Hollywood screenwriters.

Your English teacher would say start first with an outline and then answer basic questions. For this exercise, DO NOT think about what marketing materials you already have; instead, start fresh. Here is a list of key questions:

- Who are you (as an organization)?
- How do you impact human life? To what end?
- Why should I care?
- Why should I care now?
- What should I do?

The key in this [exercise](#) is to keep asking yourself the most important question – *how do I impact human life?* If you use qualitative data in your evaluation plan, you may find that insights from clients or patrons assist you with describing this impact. Try this exercise with someone unfamiliar with your organization, in order to get an objective viewpoint.

(Continued on reverse)



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**“Whatever you call it, the ‘new economy’ is at its core, a storytelling economy.”**

– Frank A. Mills

See [Exercise #1](#) for a helpful guide.

Next, Madison Avenue advertising executives use a pyramid with “the big idea” at the top. Think Subway and their “Fresh” campaign or Volvo and their emphasis on safety. Or, in the nonprofit sector, the American Cancer Society and their Birthday campaign. *What is your big idea?* Ask yourself:

- How are you different?
- What do you want to be known for?
- What difference are you making?

The key to this [exercise](#) is to brainstorm multiple ideas in a creative setting. Just let yourself go and then edit later. It also helps to try out this exercise in a group setting and then get feedback from outsiders about which words or images stand out to them. See [Exercise #2](#) for a helpful guide.

Finally, we are all mesmerized by the stories of Hollywood . . . but all the stories from Hollywood follow the same formula. Every commercial, every movie, every TV show follows the screenwriting rules of “*how to tell a compelling story.*” Think about your story and use this formula to your advantage:

- Who is the hero?
- Who is the antagonist?
- What is the happy ending?

The key to this [exercise](#) is to follow the formula on your own terms. You do not have to use every element of the guide, but adapt the major elements of the story to shape your narrative. Feel free to borrow from others – the best stories are re-crafted from universal themes. See [Exercise #3](#) for a helpful guide.

Once you are clear on your message and have a “hook” through your big idea, it should be easier to tell your story and find the right tool to help you tell it. Storytelling is a vital technique for the social sector to learn and then master. **Your story is powerful – make the world stand up and take notice.**

