

# The Power of Story

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## ABSTRACT

Accomplished speakers recognize the value of incorporating stories into presentations to make a point and/or help the audience remember a concept. This principle is no less true for instructors in an academic setting. As technology advances, faculty are increasingly challenged not only to engage students, but maintain learner interest throughout content presentation. Lectures and overhead transparencies have been overused and today are often ineffective, especially when competing with presentation software files, videos, DVDs, CDs, and distance learning techniques; consequently, maintaining participant engagement becomes a daunting task for facilitators of learning.

Digital storytelling has recently come to the forefront as both an accompaniment and an alternative to traditional delivery modes. With the advent of easy-to-use scanning, presentation, video editing, and sound recording software at reasonable prices, instructors have more options. This presentation and paper review the process and the results of a digital story workshop conducted with faculty at California Lutheran University.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.3.1 [Computers and Education]: Computer Uses in Education – *collaborative learning, computer-assisted instruction (CAI), computer-managed instruction (CMI), distance learning.*

## General Terms

Management, Performance, Design, Human Factors, Theory.

## Keywords

Student engagement, faculty development, digital storytelling, presentation software, video editing, distance learning, blended learning, instructional technology, instructional delivery, instructional design.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Accomplished speakers recognize the value of incorporating stories into presentations to make a point and/or help the audience remember a concept. This principle is no less true for instructors in an academic setting. As technology advances, faculty are increasingly challenged not only to engage students, but maintain learner interest throughout content presentation. Lectures and overhead transparencies have been overused and today are often ineffective, especially when competing with presentation software files, videos, DVDs, CDs, and distance learning techniques; consequently, maintaining participant engagement becomes a daunting task for facilitators of learning.

Digital storytelling has recently come to the forefront as both an accompaniment and/or an alternative to traditional content-delivery modes. With the advent of easy-to-use scanning, presentation, video editing, and sound recording software at reasonable prices, instructors have more options. This presentation and paper review the process and the results of a digital story workshop conducted with faculty at California Lutheran University.

The presenter will describe the process employed to introduce the concept to faculty and “sell” them on the notion that creating digital stories to enhance the quality of instructional delivery is a wise investment. Examples of digital stories created with presentation and video editing software will be played during the conference session to illustrate the concept. Next, an overview of the process to create a digital story will be presented. Additional digital stories will be played to demonstrate various topics and presentation styles that are possible in an instructional setting. The presenter will conduct a discussion/question and answer period to help attendees identify uses of the digital storytelling technique in their own learning environments. Throughout the presentation there will be opportunity for audience feedback and questions.

## 2. PREPARATION

The presenter was introduced to the concept of digital storytelling at a New Media Center Conference in May 2001. Thereafter, she attended a three-day workshop at the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) in Berkeley, California. The training was conducted by Co-Directors of the Center, Joe Lambert and Nina Mullen. During the training at the CDS the author created a five-minute digital story. Consequently, and prior to the first digital storytelling workshop, two additional digital stories were created for demonstration purposes to introduce digital storytelling to the faculty at California Lutheran University. One file was created on a PC using Adobe’s Premier, version 6.0, video editing software. The other was created on a Mac computer using iMovie, version

2, a video editing software application that is included with the OSX operating system. The process of creating additional files using varying platforms and software helped the author become better prepared to mentor faculty during the subsequent workshop.

### **3. ELICITING FACULTY PARTICIPATION**

To introduce digital storytelling to the faculty, the author wrote a short proposal requesting a tabletop demonstration at the off-campus faculty fall retreat in 2002. The proposal was accepted and at the retreat two of the demo files were played during an informal period as faculty visited various presentations in an exhibition-type venue.

A one-page flyer that listed the seven steps in preparing a digital story was available at the retreat tabletop display. In addition, the flyer listed several web sites that provided more examples of digital stories. The date of the faculty workshop and registration information was also noted on the flyer. A sign-in sheet was available at the display table, and after the retreat the presenter followed up by contacting individual faculty who had demonstrated any level of interest in the project. The theme of the workshop was “The Power of Story” and it was held in January 2003.

In the meantime, faculty who visited the tabletop demonstration at the faculty retreat and who indicated an interest in learning more were invited to a 60-minute informational session. In addition to “screening” a sample digital story, content at the information meeting included a discussion related to the value of using digital stories as an instructional delivery strategy. Next, the steps required to create a digital story were reviewed (see below). Steps participants should follow to prepare for the workshop were outlined; e.g., identify topic/subject area, gather images (either digital or hard copy to be scanned), and draft a script. The session concluded with asking for a commitment from attendees to participate in the five-day workshop.

### **4. “THE POWER OF STORY” WORKSHOP**

The workshop was held in a Mac computer lab and iMovie was the video editing software used. To begin the workshop activities, the presenter again described the seven steps involved in creating a digital story. After an image scanning demo, some participants began scanning while others recorded voice over files in the TV studio located a short distance down the hall from the Mac computer lab. A student assistant was available to help participants create the sound files. From this point forward each participant worked at an individual pace; however, periodically and as need arose, a group demo was offered by the workshop facilitator.

### **4.1 Seven Steps to Create a Digital Story**

The steps to create a digital story include:

1. Determine subject matter.
2. Gather images to represent concepts to be presented.
3. Conduct research necessary to develop the storyline.
4. Develop a script to support the images and researched data.
5. Record voice over files.
6. Select background music and/or sound effects.
7. Use video editing software to integrate images and sounds files.

### **5. THE NEXT STEP**

Four months after the initial workshop, the presenter created a ten-minute demonstration file using PowerPoint XP (2002) to illustrate another method of creating digital stories. The PowerPoint method is less complex, providing a more straightforward process for creating digital stories. Next, two information sessions were held to showcase the demo and discuss how recently added functionalities in PowerPoint can be employed to enhance instructional delivery. A question and answer period was conducted, along with a discussion of various techniques used to create specific effects. An attendance record was maintained so that the presenter could follow up and encourage attendance at five half-day workshop sessions scheduled for about ten days later. In addition and prior to the workshop, the presenter met with individual faculty who had expressed an interest in digital storytelling with PowerPoint, but who were unable to attend either one of the information sessions. The demo file was played and explanations of functionalities used to create various effects were discussed at the one-on-one meetings. Eleven faculty and two graduate students attended the subsequent five half-day workshop sessions. This workshop was held in the PC computer lab, which was more suitable for participants than the location of the Mac lab for the previous workshop, since most faculty on the California Lutheran University campus are Windows-based.

### **6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 “The Power of Story” Workshop**

Five faculty completed the workshop and each produced a digital story. A survey was sent to those who attended. The consensus was that digital stories have merit as an instructional delivery strategy that engages students. However, those faculty who routinely use a PC were uncomfortable using the Mac computer. In addition, iMovie was too basic to handle everything they had wanted to include in their files; e.g., certain transition effects. Some indicated that creating digital stories using this method required more time and effort than they could afford to spend on developing such an instructional delivery strategy.

After faculty workshop participants have had an opportunity to use their digital stories in the classroom, an assessment should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of enhancing instructional delivery using digital stories. The faculty workshop

facilitator maintains copies of each digital story created during this workshop. Plans are in progress for developing a digital storytelling web site which will serve as a repository for stories that can be shared across the University's academic departments. The workshop leader continues to investigate other methodologies that enhance the process of creating digital storytelling files.

## 6.2 “Creating Digital Stories Using PowerPoint 2002” Workshop

The week following this second workshop a survey was sent to the eleven participants. The questions asked included:

1. Please note anything about this workshop experience that you thought was positive/beneficial/productive/helpful.
2. Identify anything that should be changed/modified/enhanced in order to improve the workshop.
3. What do you believe are the “payoffs” for having invested your time and energy in this project?
4. Would you like to participate in additional training for PowerPoint? If so, how soon?

Recurring themes indicated that participants learned new techniques in PowerPoint to enhance their presentations files. In addition, they identified that using the on campus sound recording booth in the television studio down the hall from the computer lab was not beneficial. They felt they would achieve satisfactory quality with less perplexity in recording voice overs by using the headsets at individual workstations in the computer lab.

Participants indicated they liked the opportunity to work in a lab setting with mentored assistance available. They also indicated the flexible structure of the workshop provided opportunity for individuals to work at their own pace on projects that were of interest and value and better suited to individual academic responsibilities and teaching styles.

The consensus was that participants would be interested in additional PowerPoint workshops. Note should be made that fall workshops have been scheduled. In the meantime, the presenter will identify opportunities to discuss with individual faculty members the use of PowerPoint to create digital stories in order to enhance instructional delivery and increase student engagement.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks are offered to Dr. Druann Pagliassotti, assistant professor of Communication Arts at California Lutheran University, who created “The Cornbury Question” digital story during the “Power of Story” Mac workshop. Dr. Pagliassotti's digital story will be demonstrated at this conference. Other faculty digital story projects not identified at the time of this writing may be exhibited during the presentation.

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