digital storytelling

resources & inspiration

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creating a d i g i t a l
s t o r y can feel like a daunting task.

AMIII

which platform to use? which style?
will you use audio? what about video?
is Written text necessary for your story?
how would your voice sound?

there are good ways

and not so good ways.

this guide gives you several examples, resources &

inspiration to start thinking

about story

in new & exciting ways.

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platforms

the web offers more and more spaces to create stories, some are clearly designed for this and others less so but may nevertheless offer interesting opportunities.

unless you work on your own site with your own code, it is of fundamental importance to choose the platform that is right for you and, even more so, for a specific story.

if you're not familiar with the options, it pays off to take some time to study them closely and play around for a while. see also what other people are doing with the platform. don't be shy contacting people, either other users or the team behind the platform. often, people are eager to help out and share about their own experience with the platform.

keep the following in mind:

- how much clutter around your story is acceptable?
- how much liberty do you have for your design?
 - image size and placement
 - background
 - typefaces and fonts
 - text alignment
- what are specific design options of the platform?
- is there an option to embed from other sites and what would your story look like embedded elsewhere (if possible)?
- is there an active, suitable, community?
- how is your work integrated within the platform?
- which rights on your work do you maintain?
- is there advertising and is this acceptable?
- how much effort does it take for non-native users to access your work?
- are there native publications or collections your work could belong to?

a b c



as soon as you say 'image' most people will instantly think of photography, but any sole-standing visual element can be considered imagery.

be it photography, illustrations, icons, graphic design elements and even gifs: it can all be incorporated in a story.

the most important thing to remember is only to include imagery when it adds to the story. know why it is there or leave it out. not all stories and/or designs benefit from visual work.

think about what imagery can do. it can clarify elements of your story, but also be used to draw people in (especially with a header image). imagery can be used as a divider in the text but also be the sole visual element when accompanied by sound.

when it comes to digital storytelling, think about the particular advantages of the web: movement. text and imagery can be animated and therewith specific effects can be achieved: the gif is a strong tool in storytelling.

consider whether or not to be literal with your imagery. for many subjects literally imagery is just too boring. think about imagery that captures the atmosphere rather than a depiction of the events described.

avoid clichés, they have been done a thousand times and often add little to nothing to your work, nor will they appeal to an audience.

lastly, consider using one image or a collage of images as a background (use an overlay if needed). it gives body to the narrative and quickly can become a defining design choice, making a story stand out easily.

G b C

audio

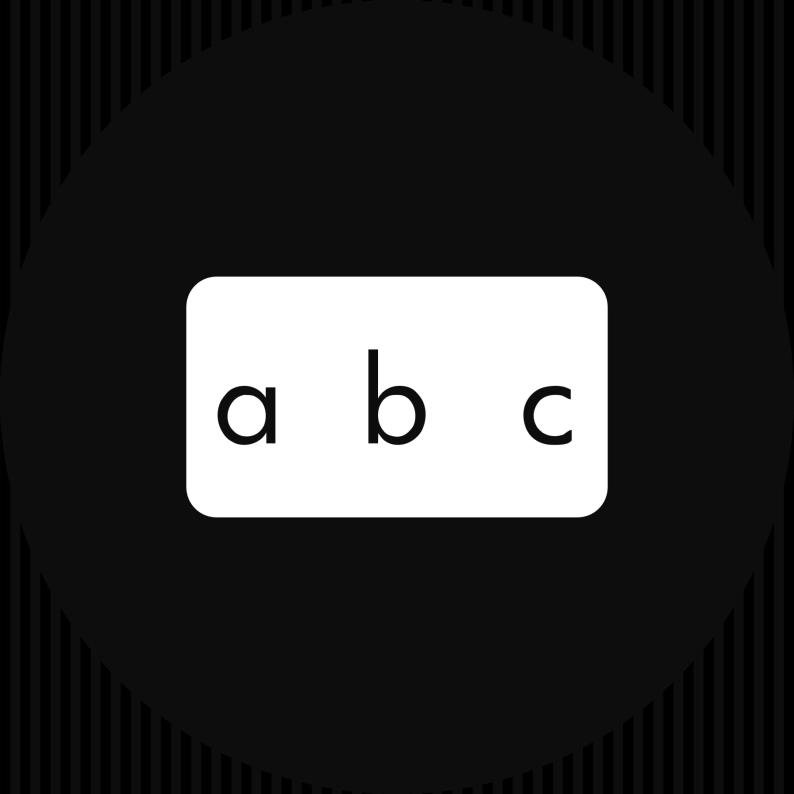
for many, the use of audio is daunting and while it may take you some time to put something together, it is less difficult than it may seem. the one condition is to truly tap into your creative mind and to let go of conventions. if you're willing to take that leap, soon enough you'll be surprised by what you can achieve.

there are various ways to use sound. you can let sound be the 'voice' of your story, use sounds and narration (spoken word) together (soundscape) or just use some ambient work and/or music to support your voice and/or written text.

when you decide to create a soundscape be wary of being too literal, it easily comes across as condescending and it's difficult to make appealing, that does not mean literal effects can't be used but consider using them as an effect than being the body of your soundscape. when you use your voice (or somebody else's) keep a few things in mind: speak calmly, a tad slower than in normal conversation and pay attention to your articulation. be sure to use a proper microphone or headset and edit out noise and (too) audible gasps and breathing. adding some reverb in editing may make you sound more pleasant.

while you should not become a robot, overt emotion can quickly become too much. record yourself a few times and see what works best. keep in mind when your sound work is very dramatic, chances are your voice better remains calm. often people sound better when they stand up and a smile comes across in your voice.

think about body. use ambient sounds to fill the voids in your soundscape. be it the wind or the sound of a power plant, something humming in the background often does miracles. don't be shy to just try out a lot of different things. why can't that old lady sound like an old typewriter?





when it comes to the use of video you don't have to automatically think about (short) movies. it can also be purely animated text or an atmospherice piece to support a soundscape and/or narration.

use video only for longer animation work (more than a few seconds), otherwise opt for a gif instead.

a big advancement of video is its appeal. it's promising (even if the video may actually not be promising at all) and in our visual-minded world video easily attracts attention.

at the same time, however, it may feel more demanding than audio and/or written text. use it where it's right and not because you can.

the use of video can bring amazing results and in some cases may even be necessary to achieve the desired result but use it only where it truly enhances the narrative.

a b c



be bold. think about the narrative and why it matters. kill your darlings (or put them in a drawer for another story). writing hurts, as you will have to get rid of amazing passages and phrases for they do not fit within the story. get used to it.

go deep. have the guts to be honest. tell your story, and tell it in the way only you can tell it. avoid mediocrity and choose your angle carefully.

be creative. a story does not need to go from a, via b, to c. let it begin with c, or even b. be non-linear when it adds dimension. make a mosaic by weaving in another narrative that emphasis the main narrative. use eye dialect, add another language. mix it up.

be concise. make it as long as it needs to be but not a single word longer. edit vigorously.

consider language. which words do you use and why? don't show off your language skills but use it when it's appropriate and helps the narrative.

be global. not everybody lives where you live, make sure the world can understand.

consider text placement, challenge yourself with word limits. think about the use of typefaces and fonts.

prepare yourself never to publish the written words as it may just become audio only. and if so, read it out loud and see if it still works.

read and see how others use their words. let others read your words and ask for an honest response.

don't be afraid of humour, but let it make sense.

don't be afraid to shock, but let it make sense.

be bold.



des ign

while it shows up at the end of this guide, the design of your story is something to consider at the beginning, as this is where you decide how all the various elements come together.

which typeface is suitable for your text, or perhaps more than one? how does graphic design gives a visual language to your story? which imagery is used and how is it placed within the narrative? how does the audio tie in with the overall design and does video need further embellishment?

once you get the hang of digital storytelling you'll find these design questions become fundamental to the actual story and will play a more and more important role.

placing two paragraphs underneath or next to each other evoks a different feeling. having an actual image or an icon helps determine an atmosphere. the use of colour, or lack of, helps to push a certain emotion. always remember that a digital storyteller is not just a writer, there are more elements that come into play. it's a decision whether or not this is daunting or challenging.

take inspiration from everything you see, not just other stories. look at how colours, shapes and placement is used. read up about design. walk into a museum. bookmark and tag excessively, take pictures of anything that looks ordinary until you really start looking, experience the world as a kid, be a tourist in your own town. look up why your street has that specific name, where does your family come from?

ask others for advice, people who should know and people who shouldn't. hear the voices of others, even if you disagree.

use all this and build an inspiration log, partially online, partially on paper and partially in your head, that you can return too time and time again.

and now? now start designing.

О В С

resources

on the following pages you'll find various resources to get yourself started. please note that for this guide only sites and platforms are listed which are either free to use, or offer a (limited) free plan.

while you may need to sign up, all mentioned sites and platforms are accessible to everyone and allow you to publish and/or use its material.

many of the sites are non-profit. if you find yourself using them frequently, please consider a donation to the respective site.

be aware of licensing. these resources all allow for the work present to be used elsewhere, but the way may vary. please respect artistry by respecting the restrictions a platform and/or creator may have placed on their work. always give proper credit.

the names of the sites are hyperlinks.

platforms

medium is a publishing tool gaining more and more traction. it is used by storytellers, journalists, companies and organisations alike. it offers many creative possibilities and a very clean interface. play around and you can do more than you think. the platform allows for embedding from most other sites. the interface is clean and intuitive. medium lends itself well for both short and long form.

besides that, any user can start a publication, collection stories and articles published on the site. some of these have thousands of followers. if your work is selected (perhaps after you submitted it) you can quickly gain great exposure. n e W h i V e is a place for chaos, presenting you with a blank canvas where you can run wild. it allows for text, images, sounds and whatever more you can think of. you'll become part of a community that is unlike any other on the web, often feeling like the good ol' days when creativity reigned the internet. a great space for more experimental short stories.

C O W b i r d calls itself the library of human experience. the tools are simple to use and through tags your story becomes embedded within the greater web. it is a site known, however, for frequent updates which completely change the way things works which can heavily impact previous work and often not for the good. the quality on this site varies heavily and nowadays it is mostly used by people who enjoy writing but not practice their skill.

besides that, the options available for free users are limited.

fold is a platform to create modular multi-media stories. on the left comes your narrative, on the right your embeds and links to other sites.

it can stand on its own but also works great to create a companion work with background information on your main story elsewhere, avoiding the latter to become cluttered.

teles copic text exists specifically to create telescope stories. it is a great and fun tool but does not allow for design and can't be embedded elsewhere.

i magery

f l i c k r is one of the leading photography (and other imagery) sites and offers an advanced search tool to find appropriately licensed work within millions of images.

W i k i m e d i a belongs to wikipedia and is an often forgotten source of amazing material, almost everything creative commons licensed or existing in the public domain. especially with historical and more obscure subjects amazing imagery can be found.

the noun project is a site with passionate designers from all over the world focusing on icons. all work is creative commons licensed or exists in the public domain. creative icons are a great alternative to traditional imagery and this site has thousands of them, for just about every noun possible.

audio

frees of creative commons-licensed sounds on the web, completely created by its user base, there is an active community, though participation is voluntarily as sounds are accessible to anyone with a free account, not as crazy a sound you can imagine and chances are you can find it here, quality varies, but there is more than enough of high quality.

C C m i X t e r is a community powered site with thousands of samples of original music and vocals, all creative commons licensed.

free music archive is a site where lesser known musicians often release work for free, in every genre imaginable. while everything is be aware not everything here is licensed for reuse.

C O m p O S e r S who release work within the creative commons (selection)

kevin macleod dexter britain matti paalanen scott buckley ian fisher

W i k i m e d i a belongs to wikipedia and is an often forgotten source of amazing material, almost everything creative commons licensed or existing in the public domain. especially classical music and traditional music but many more examples and also sounds can be found

applications

g i m p is one of the best image editors that comes as freeware. it is packed with options to edit and create imagery (including gifs) and with a plugin is also suitable for short animations.

p i X r is a free tool allowing you a basic edit (cropping, scaling, etc) of your images but also has many filters to add some spice to your imagery and make a set more cohesive.

C a N V a is a tool with several filters and overlays, allowing you to place text and banners creatively within images, or to say it simple: a very easy graphic design tools making it easy for everyone to create these kind of images.

a U d a C i t y is freeware to edit audio and comes with tremendous options. you can use it to just remove some background noise, build complex soundscapes or anything in between. it takes some learning but much of it is intuitive.

I i g h t w o r k s is a video editing tool used by the pros. while the free version lacks a few options it still offers many options to create and edit video.

a v i d e m u x is a basic editing tool for video, allowing you to cut, filter and encode. less options than lightworks, but easier to get started.

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