

A storied future

Let's say you get two letters in the mail asking for donations.

One spells out in great detail how much money the group has raised in the past, how wisely it spent the money, and how many people it served.

The second letter spotlights just one child, whose life is better thanks to the organization's work.

Which letter is more likely to get your attention? To move you to write a check? Probably the letter that tells a story, not the one that just lays out the facts.

Thanks to the Internet, we can get all the facts we want. But to make sense of those facts, we humans crave stories. We seek emotional connection. We want drama and context: It's the difference between the Yellow Pages and a restaurant guide filled with candid reviews.

So what turns facts into stories?

Newsweek editor-at-large Evan Thomas says stories need conflict: "The mainstream media ... are prejudiced, but not ideologically. The press's *real* bias is for conflict. Editors ... have a weakness for war, the ultimate conflict. Inveterate gossips and snoops, journalists also share a yen for scandal, preferably sexual."

Peter Kaplan, editor of *The New York Observer*, has said that every good story needs a hero and a villain.

And novelist E. M. Forster used this example to suggest that stories need emotion:

The king died, and the queen died.
The king died, and the queen died of grief.

In an increasingly noisy world, attracting the public's attention—and compelling your customers and potential customers to act—requires that your marketing messages incorporate the elements of a good story:

Conflict. How can your product or service bring about a happy ending for your customer?

The hero and the villain. How does your product or service turn the customer into the good guy?

Emotion. How will your product or service make the customer happy, satisfied, secure, triumphant?

Telling a story is what separates the life of the party from the bore, the good teacher from the bad, the successful marketer from the mediocre.

Well said

“They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything.”

Joseph Conrad, author