

15-Second Storytelling: How to Make an Impact With a Mobile and Social Audience



By Philip King
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I came across a thought-provoking piece of writing by Chantelle Baxter, the founder of One Girl, a fantastic charity started in Australia.

The title was “3 Powerful Storytelling Lessons That Every Nonprofit and Small Business Should Know.”

I agree with so many of the points she makes. Since nonprofits don’t have a tangible product to sell, storytelling becomes that much more important. We’re asking people to give their time and money to make the world a better place, so we have to inspire them with our stories.

When I finished reading her blog and watching the three-minute video, I thought of some recent campaigns I’ve helped run. The clients are both relatively large charities, and their goals were to increase awareness of and participation in their upcoming fundraising events. They were both concerned that registration levels were lower than in years past, and they wanted to use online advertising to amp up the traffic on their websites.

I like to think about online advertising as online storytelling. Our goal is to get a click, or a view, or a like. We have to tell a short-but-catchy story to get someone’s attention.

For example, Google AdWords limits us to 25 characters for the headline, and 35 characters each for description line one and line two. Since spaces count toward the character limit, this becomes a storytelling challenge. It’s a little bit like writing a haiku. We need to say something that represents the brand of the organization, but we have a very specific goal in mind: generating clicks to a website. We also have to consider search keywords that our anticipated audience may use.

Display ads let us work with images. But which images should we use? One idea we’ve found effective is to use Facebook for testing images. We select a few of our favorite photos and create image ads based on those, and then run a competition.

After a few days, we use Facebook Analytics to see which ads have the highest relevance score and which ads have the best click-through rates. We then use the winning images to create display ads on Google.

Another online storytelling tool is video. You've probably heard how popular video advertising is getting on social media and mobile devices. We've tested this and the results are illuminating.

In a recent campaign, we used a 40-second video and offered it to about 400,000 people on Facebook. This generated close to 100,000 views. On average, men watched about 25 percent of the video and women watched 27 percent. People on desktop devices watched about 31 percent, while people on mobile devices watched about 26 percent.

In another campaign, we decided to use a shorter video—just 15 seconds long. We offered this to about 1 million people on Facebook, which generated 123,000 video views. Men watched about 46 percent of the video; women watched about 53 percent. There wasn't much difference between mobile and desktop.

Since this is a rapidly evolving field, I encourage you to adopt an experimental mindset when exploring online advertising. I enjoy that it's a mix of art and science, of creativity and statistics. There's no question that nonprofits need to incorporate online advertising as part of their storytelling. What is uncertain is how much time and money each organization should invest—a question that should be answered with measurable results.

Just make sure your videos aren't too long!