

# Storytelling with Data

## 1. Telling Stories with Data

### The Art and Skill of Storytelling

- Storytelling combines **creativity** and **structured communication**.
- Modern business environments are increasingly:
  - **Data-rich:** Vast amounts of data generated from various sources.
  - **Data-driven:** Decisions are increasingly based on data analytics and empirical evidence.

### The Impact of Effective Data Visualization

- Good visualization can be transformative:
    - **Communicate Research Findings:** Making complex analyses understandable.
    - **Nonprofit Fundraising:** Presenting compelling data to potential donors.
    - **Board Presentations:** Providing clear insights to executives.
    - **Audience Engagement:** Ensuring the message is not only delivered but also retained.
- 

## 2. What Makes a Great Story?

### The Magic of Stories in Various Contexts

- Stories are powerful in multiple formats:
  - **Theatrical Plays:** Gripping narratives and character development.
  - **Movies:** Visual storytelling with emotional resonance.
  - **Books:** Deep dives into narratives and imagination.
  - **Speeches:** Motivational and persuasive elements.

- **Presentations:** Combining visuals, data, and storytelling.

## Qualities of a Good Story

- **Attention-Grabbing:** Catches the audience's interest immediately.
- **Guides Through a Journey:** Develops a logical and emotional arc.
- **Emotional Connection:** Stories with emotional undertones are more memorable.

## The Classical Narrative Structure

- **Origins:** First articulated by Aristotle and Plato.
- **Aristotle's Framework:** Every story should have:
  - **Beginning:** Establishes the setting and introduces characters.
  - **Middle:** Develops the conflict or central challenge.
  - **End:** Provides closure with a resolution.

## Three-Act Structure Explained

### 1. The Setup:

- Introduces the main character(s) and setting.
- Presents the status quo or the protagonist's normal world.

### 2. The Conflict:

- Introduces a challenge or obstacle.
- Builds tension and suspense.
- The protagonist encounters difficulties and must make critical decisions.

### 3. The Resolution:

- Shows how the conflict is resolved.
- Leaves the audience with a sense of completion or a call to action.

## Long-Lasting Impact of a Great Story

- **Immersive Experience:** The audience remains engaged throughout.

- **Memorability:** The story is easy to recall and share with others, even after a long time.
  - **Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic's Insight:** The best stories are those that linger in the mind.
- 

### 3. Storytelling in a Business Setting

#### Robert McKee's Framework

- **Background:** Award-winning writer, director, and screenwriting lecturer.
- **Business Application:** Discussed in the *Harvard Business Review* how storytelling can be a powerful business tool.

#### Two Primary Methods to Persuade People

##### 1. Conventional Rhetoric:

- Often presented as:
  - **Bulleted Facts and Statistics:** Delivered through PowerPoint or reports.
  - **Intellectual Engagement:** Relies heavily on logic and reasoning.
- **Drawback:** The audience may internally debate or resist the presented facts.
- **Insight:** "People are not inspired to act by reason alone" (Fryer, 2003).

##### 2. Storytelling:

- **Emotional Connection:** Links ideas with feelings.
- **Engagement:** Captures attention and motivates action.
- **Requires Creativity:** Crafting a story is more challenging than presenting raw data.
- **Deeper Impact:** Moves the audience beyond intellectual acceptance to emotional investment.

#### Key Questions for Story Development

- **Protagonist's Desire:** What is needed to restore balance in their life?
- **Core Need:** What fundamental need drives the protagonist's actions?
- **Obstacles:** What barriers prevent them from achieving their goal?
- **Decision Making:** How does the protagonist navigate challenges to achieve their goal?

## Critical Story Components

- **Struggle:** Highlights the adversity faced by the protagonist.
  - **Conflict:** Central to keeping the audience engaged.
  - **Suspense:** Maintains anticipation and curiosity.
- 

## 4. Crafting an Effective Elevator Pitch

### Concept of "The Big Idea" (Nancy Duarte, *Resonate*, 2010)

- **Purpose:** Deliver a succinct and powerful message within a short timeframe.
- **Application:** Ideal for scenarios like elevator pitches, quick meetings, or media soundbites.

### Three Components of a Strong Big Idea

1. **Unique Point of View:** Offers a fresh perspective or insight.
2. **Conveys What's at Stake:** Clearly outlines the potential risks or benefits.
3. **Expressed in a Complete Sentence:** The message should stand alone and be clear.

### Example of a Well-Formulated Big Idea

*"Based on analysis of sales in the market over time, to be competitive, we recommend launching our new product at a retail price in the range \$5.99–\$7.99."*

---

## 5. Focusing Your Data Story

## Avoiding Common Pitfalls in Data Presentations

- **Over-Analysis Syndrome:** Presenters often feel the need to showcase all their hard work.
- **Data Dumping:** Showing every chart, table, and analysis conducted.
- **Risk:** This approach can overwhelm the audience and dilute the key message.

## Strategies for a Focused Presentation

- **Identify Core Insights:** Distill the analysis to the top three insights or "gems."
- **Avoid TMI (Too Much Information):** Share only the data that supports your story.
- **Maintain Engagement:** A focused story is more compelling than an exhaustive presentation.



---

## 6. Understanding Your Audience

### Three Central Questions (*Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic, 2015*)

#### 1. Who is Your Audience?

- **Identify Stakeholders:** Define specific groups or individuals.
- **Understand Their Perspective:** What are their priorities and concerns?
- **Anticipate Their Needs:** What information will resonate most?

#### 2. What Do You Need Them to Do?

- **Explicit Calls to Action:** Clearly define what action you want from your audience.
- **Avoid Assumptions:** Don't expect them to draw conclusions without guidance.

#### 3. How Will Data Help Your Point?

- **Select Relevant Data:** Choose data that directly supports your argument.
- **Evidence-Based Storytelling:** Data should act as concrete evidence for your case.

---

## 7. The "Big Ass Number" (BAN) Technique

- **Definition:** A "Big Ass Number" (BAN) is a large, bold, and visually prominent number that highlights a critical metric or key takeaway.
- **Purpose:** Instantly grabs attention and delivers an impactful message without needing complex visuals.
- **Examples of Effective BANs:**
  - **Revenue Growth:** "\$1.2 Billion in Annual Sales"
  - **User Engagement:** "95% Customer Satisfaction"
  - **Cost Savings:** "Saved \$500,000 in Q1 2024"
- **Design Tips:**

- Use **large fonts** and **bold colors** to make the number stand out.
  - Provide **minimal supporting text** to maintain focus on the BAN.
  - Place in a **strategic position** on the slide or report, usually at the top or center.
  - **When to Use:**
    - Highlighting **key performance indicators (KPIs)**.
    - Presenting **summary statistics** in dashboards.
    - Emphasizing **milestones** in presentations.
  - **Avoid Overuse:**
    - Using too many BANs can dilute their impact.
    - Reserve BANs for the **most critical data points**.
- 

## 8. Preparing for Deliverables: Clarifying Context

### Understanding the Request for Deliverables

- **Possible Requesters:** Clients, stakeholders, supervisors.
- **Challenges:** You may not always have full context or background information.

### Key Questions to Ask Yourself

- **Background Needs:** What information is critical to understanding the issue?
- **Audience Analysis:** Who will consume this information? What are their biases?
- **Data Familiarity:** Is the audience familiar with the data presented?
- **Addressing Risks:** What weaknesses might undermine your case?
- **Success Criteria:** Define what a successful presentation or deliverable would achieve.

### Best Practices



- **Clarify Ambiguities:** When possible, ask for additional information to fill knowledge gaps.
- **Proactive Preparation:** Anticipate potential questions or objections.