Storytelling + Design

The Value of Story
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Storytelling, the Original Internet

- Storytelling is the oldest and most valuable form of communication known to humankind

- The oral narrative in history, society, and culture

- Storytelling provides a way to meet some of the challenges that designers face in today's corporate environment when contributing to human-centered values in the business decision-making process

Human Hard-Wiring

- Human beings are hard-wired to tell and listen to stories.

- Human beings are creatures of language and for most of our existence, oral storytelling is the way we have communicated.

- Stories are how we make sense of the world.

- We organize the information that comes to us into a story format

- For millennia, people told each other stories.

Human Hard-Wiring

- The written word is a very recent development in the big picture of human history; radio, movies and TV, even more so.

- Our ability to process the information that comes to us in this way is both very primal and very highly developed

- Story helps us make choices

- The stories aren't good because they're old, they're old because their good

Old World, New View

- Driven by the need to thrive in today's business climate, business is starting to be more responsive to less traditional ways of expressing value. The word 'storyteller' is now included in job descriptions

- Storytelling is a 'hot' topic in the ethnographic community with a focus on understanding how ethnographers can connect storytelling to the business bottom line in ways not easily seen on a spreadsheet, in a persona, or conveyed with a diagram

Ethnographer as Storyteller

- Because it is difficult to know whether ethnographic statements are based on anything more than personal impressions, many ethnographers are convincing only to the degree that the ethnographer is a good has mastered rhetoric. (Bakker 1992:40)

It's about people

- People are becoming the focus – it is not about the product – it is about the person using that widget, the holistic experience of using that widget and what the story about where the widget came from or how it was created.

- People want meaning.

- Stories are how we make meaning out of our experience.

Telling the Story

- There are several methods currently used to communicate in the corporate arena
  - Conversation
  - Printed materials (visuals that you can hold, touch)
  - Video
  - Electronic presentations
  - Personas and scenarios (specific to design research)
  - Models and diagrams (experiential, behavioral, usage)
- All of these involve storytelling

Business Value

- How do we explain how the stories that we have collected the have value and how they can help the business?

- Every story must be told from the point of view of: "how is this going to help my business?"

Receiving the Message

- Written word recent development

- We are hard wired to receive information that way and fit information into a narrative format

- We carry these stories around with us and if we see the information fits into the format of a story that we know

  – Example: Trial -- Focus Groups
    The sum total of the information is not the story, the meaning and the emotional impact is the story

Facts are not absolute

- Facts are subject to change
- For example:
  - The world is flat: knowledge of the spherical Earth was developed in 6th century BCE
  - There are 109 Elements in the Period Table New information: Since 1994, six new elements have been discovered
- The story is the meaning and context that we ascribe to the facts

More than Facts

- Knowledge and facts will only take you so far
- It takes imagination to go beyond the known facts and get to something new
- Economy of innovation
- Leap of the imagination always has to go beyond the known facts
  – Example: Jonas Salk
  – Polio Scare of the 1950s
- "Imagination is more important than knowledge" ~ Einstein

3 Principles of Good Storytelling

- Authentic voice
- No Barriers
- Trusting the story
  - It is not about you as the teller, it is about the story

Instant Storytellers

Encounters with Bees

Learning to…
- Ride a motorcycle
- Snowboard
- Navigate the Subway System