

7group

SYNTHTEGRATIVE THINKING

February 4, 2014

THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY

Every Building Tells A Story: Export the Learning

The purpose of LEED is to transform the market. The process of transformation typically integrates learning – in the case of buildings, by the owner, design team and the building occupants. Understanding the “how it works” of green building helps people understand systems thinking, integrative design, and contributes to sustainability literacy. Information dashboards and signage help occupants and visitors learn about and understand the value of the green features in a building. But what about extending that learning to a wider public? The web is the obvious distribution channel.

In the late 1990s, Pennsylvania’s Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) undertook their first green building, and proposed to do a video about the project. Wide distribution of this video would exponentially expand the number of people who learned about the building, and at that time, what defined a green building. This was before broadband gave us 24-hour a day access via YouTube and web video.

Pennsylvania’s First Green Building not only followed the design and construction of the PA DEP building, it took viewers out to see how materials were produced: recycled steel, bio-based wood products, carpet tiles, etc. In the end, we produced six videos that were widely distributed on public television, cable access television, and the PA DEP gave away thousands of DVD copies. *PA’s First Green Building and Lessons Learned* (the second video in the series that really focused on our early understanding of integrative design) were both adopted for use in early LEED training workshops. Ultimately the videos served multiple purposes:

promotion of PA as a leader in green building, education of building occupants and visitors, education of design professionals, and education of the general public.

We would argue that the success was due in large part to the fact that these were well-told stories – and because the story design allowed for multiple audience access. Since then we have had the opportunity to develop visual stories on dozens of projects – from schools to hospitals to office buildings, both public and private.

Bottom line: every building is a story opportunity, and we'd even suggest that buildings have a responsibility to export their knowledge.

The Power of Visual Storytelling: Moving Images Move People

The real power of visual storytelling is the ability to provide a viewer access to people and places they would otherwise not meet or travel to. Video allows viewers to “meet” people and hear directly from them; it allows people to “travel”, to “tour”, and go “behind the scenes”.

Well-told visual stories engage and structure information much like a well-written story, but do so in a contemporary communications form. To an extent, story is structure and structure is often derived from understanding the true purpose of a video.

There are three big reasons to leverage video:

1. Consumers love video. YouTube is the second most popular searched website.
2. Easily accessible across media devices: television, computer, tablet, mobile, etc.
3. Boosts your search engine results ranking.

Couple that with the fact that 65% of the population are visual learners, it makes sense that video works.

A Well Told Story is a Requirement

Given that broadband and mobile devices have made video ubiquitous, what is today's requirement?

A well-told story. Narratives have surpassed product and marketing pitches and stories take the place of boring biographies on “about us” pages.

We approach the development of a video story by:

1. Understanding the purpose of the communication: education, motivation, inspiration;
2. Understanding the content;
3. Casting real people whose perspectives combine into narrative;
4. Capturing real people as they are: spontaneous, sincere, believable;
5. Gathering visuals that tell the story, that illustrate with meaning, that reinforce the message;
6. Editing the words of others and integrating multiple voices to complete ideas;
7. Paying close attention to rhythm and pacing to maintain viewer engagement.

Real People Stories

The power of real people storytelling is that marketing and information messages are presented in an unscripted way, based on the personality of real persons. We learn from real people, not from an outside narrator. Real people share perspectives and information; real people communicate expertise and passion. And often, the way ideas are expressed is as important as the ideas themselves.

Tell your story – well.

Tom Keiter
7group Partner

If you no longer wish to receive email bulletins from 7group, you can instantly [unsubscribe](#).
7group • 183 West Main Street • Kutztown, PA 19530