

Social Capital Conference (SoCap09)
Fort Mason – San Francisco
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Panel Topic: Creating a Narrative for Social Investing

Moderator: Jacob Harold – Hewlett Foundation

Panel Participants:

Sean Stanndard-Stockton – Tactical Philanthropy Advisors
Perla Ni – Great Nonprofits

Purpose:

The panel discussion centered on the role of creating a narrative in communicating donor opportunities within the non-profit and philanthropic investment sectors. In addition, the role of narrative (also referred to as story-telling throughout the session) was explored in regards to how non-profit organizations can learn from the stories others tell about their organizations.

Design/methodology/approach

Identifying the natural intersection of anecdote and data is where authentic narrative emerges. As stated by the moderator, “ the plural of anecdote is not data and the plural of data is not truth” (Harold). As social networking becomes the mainstay of where information is retrieved and often used for decision making purposes, it has re-shaped the need for non-profit organizations to be authentic story tellers and, at the same time, be open and ready to having dialogues with those that tell stories about the positive and/or negative impact that the organization has in obtaining real social change via their organizations efforts.

Traditional marketing methods have a tendency to be inauthentic in their messaging due to the “self-reporting” nature of advertising a product and/or service. In the new context of what narrative brings to marketing social enterprises is the opportunity to embrace the mission, challenges, successes, failures and goals into a story that is transparent and truthful. Most importantly, through a story format, potential donors and investors are able to recount the many dynamics of the organization.

Findings –

Organizations are not in control of their stories due to the complexity of the social marketing network dynamic. The level in which they tell their story holistically and authentically will be directly related to how sustainable the organization is in the long term and the actual impact the organization has in fulfilling its stated mission.

The greatest social impacts have come from organizations that know themselves from a positive *and* a negative perspective and are cognizant of those areas that need to be improved. Donor/investor conviction is gained and informed decisions are made when stories are told in an all inclusive and transparent manner. All data impact points, financial and social, are brought to life via an authentic narrative collected from diverse and collaborative resources.

An emerging trend in this area is the use of “feedback loops” which are a collaboration of views from end users, non-profit developers, volunteers etc. Organizational structures are built on these collaborative feedback loops and become the foundation of the guiding principles of the organization.

Practical implications –

Mainstream media is the main sources of narrative. It is imperative that an organization shapes its

narrative through these intermediaries on a continual basis.

With the volume of information circulating on the global communication networks, narratives require us to develop intelligent listening skills and information filters in order to best align our values with those organizations able to express their financial and social impact goals through a compelling narrative.

Strategically aligning the right philanthropic donors or investor with the right non-profit organizations not only requires a compelling and authentic narrative on behalf of the organization but a larger infrastructure of how the information becomes available. Fragmentation occurs in how information is dispersed causing missed opportunities for constructive dialogue between potential donors and organizations in need of capital.

Originality/value

Narrative defined as the balance between data and experience will be the space in which social impact and financial return can be communicated and remembered bringing about an increased potential for capital acquisition.

Key Words

Guidestar, Great Non-profits, Global Giving, Network for good, Just give, Give well, Razoo, Philanthropedia

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