Digital Storytelling in the Blue Dot Movement

Prepared for the **David Suzuki Foundation**

219 – 2211 West 4th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V6K 4S2

by Halina Miho Rachelson, Wongelawit Teka Zewde, and Kerim Sertturk

finalized on March 2, 2015
Introduction

The David Suzuki Foundation’s Blue Dot movement brings together ordinary people from diverse communities across Canada to achieve an amendment to the Canadian Constitution. The right to a healthy environment is distinct in that it could protect all citizens’ access to clean and safe water and air, fertile soil, and healthy food. Despite striving for this common goal, a movement as demographically diverse and geographically widespread as the Blue Dot campaign, risks fragmentation. Communities and individuals participating in the movement need to feel connected to others who share their vision. Thus, the Blue Dot movement would benefit from digital storytelling, a method that allows individuals from communities all over to assemble their stories through electronic media forms that are later streamed online for other participants to see.

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling combines traditional elements of storytelling, collecting and sharing photographs, and using sound with modern media elements such as voice and video recording technology and the Internet to document a personal narrative that is then made public. It allows people with little technical experience with online media and computer editing programs to create something of potentially high impact. Digital storytelling in the Blue Dot movement has benefits for both the storytellers and the audience. The storyteller is able to develop a sense of agency in communicating his or her story, while the audience has the opportunity to hear a unique, spontaneous, sincere voice, and acquire a taste of the grassroots experience. If successful, the digital storytelling piece becomes a “mosaic” that represents the collective image of the Blue Dot movement that encourages further participation and reflection by participants.

If the Blue Dot movement were to engage participating communities in creating digital storytelling projects, either through video, audio slideshows, or podcasts, the movement could be further democratized. Digital storytelling can serve as a learning platform for participating communities within the Blue Dot movement that develops from shared stories of trial and error in getting the right to a healthy environment passed at the municipal and provincial level.

There are various methods of digital storytelling that the Blue Dot movement communities could use to communicate their stories. The ones mentioned in this report include audio slideshow, video, and podcast, each of which serves different purposes within the context of the Blue Dot movement.

Audio-Slideshow and the Blue Dot Movement

Given the already existing resources of photographs from the Richmond Blue Dot movement, an audio-slideshow could be used. In order to portray the collective story of the community rather than highlight individuals’ stories, photographs accompanied by sound and voiceovers offer many benefits.

Some benefits of audio-slideshow include:

- The ability to capture a single moment is something a photograph from the Blue Dot movement can easily do, as a picture of a campaign meeting, rally, or celebration evokes powerful meaning.
- The viewer has more control over absorbing information presented, especially as Blue Dot movement photos can be interpreted in many ways.
• Audio-slideshow requires less editing than video and podcast, thus leaving more time for story development and soundtrack selection, which is particularly convenient as participants in the Blue Dot movement have limited time to devote to creating and perfecting such a media art piece due to competing obligations.
• The senses are not as over-stimulated as in video. Through digital storytelling, other viewers from the Blue Dot movement ought to feel inspired, not overwhelmed.
• Photography allows the digital storyteller to be engaged in the event, unlike when recording video footage. For Blue Dot participants who want to take photos of a community campaigning event or anything else of relevance to their story, they will be able to easily do this while remaining present for the moment, especially if it is a significant one. When sound is added, the image is contextualized. Perhaps a community has a specific song that was played during campaigning events. This music has the potential to add some context and/or pacing to the photos.

In addition, research shows:
• 11/14 participants in focus groups based on age and gender chose audio-camera over camcorder as their method for digital storytelling.
• When accompanied by “ambient sound”, memory of a photo can be enhanced, as opposed to video commentary.

Some disadvantages of audio-slideshow include:

• Matching sounds to a voice over recording can be challenging, especially for digital storytelling media artists who have no previous expertise in editing or those living in remote communities where limited computer and Internet access could render one less media literate.
• It may be difficult to choose and archive photos, as various photos might have been taken at a Blue Dot event and not everyone agrees on which photographs would be most appropriate and representative of a local campaign.
• Audio-photography is not as popular as video in modern media.

**Video and the Blue Dot Movement**

In the modern era, video is powerful method to convey a message and reach a large audience. According to data from comScore, in February 2012 alone “U.S. Internet users watched nearly 38 billion videos of online video content, and 7.5 billion video ads.” As shown, video is popular, particularly among youth. Therefore, the story of youth and young adult individuals and communities participating in the Blue Dot movement can be told well using video.

Some benefits of video include:

• Human beings tend to retain more information with visual and auditory combinations, especially if both are able to conjure up memories or emotions related to participating in the Blue Dot movement, even for a volunteer from a different community.
• Videos are more accessible than ever and can easily be shared on social media, as well as compressed and transferred via email and applications like Dropbox, which provides advantages for communities trying to share their stories for other Blue Dot communities to see.
• Compared to other media forms, video has more potential to be shared and go viral and inspire people globally, such as the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge in 2014 or Malala Yousafzai’s UN speech in 2013. If the Blue Dot movement is looking to reach a national or even global audience in its endeavor to secure the right to a healthy environment for all Canadians, a YouTube video could certainly help publicize this.

• Individuals can learn make their own homemade videos and share their story without much expertise on video production and editing, for example, using applications such as iMovie and MovieMaker and posting the finished product on the Blue Dot and David Suzuki Foundation websites and/or YouTube.

• Digital storytelling artists can easily stream videos from their mobile devices and computers, so their stories go live immediately.

Some disadvantages of video include:

• Video production and editing can be a tedious, technical process and thus, very time consuming. The process of making a story line that fits well with footage requires skill.

• When recording video footage of a Blue Dot event, the person behind the video camera must remain focused and cannot fully experience the event.

• Audio and visual components must be of good quality for viewers to enjoy the video, especially in today’s world, where exposure to high quality media is high; this could pose a challenge for those less proficient in recording and editing.

• Not everyone has access to a video camera or some other good quality recorder mobile devices. This must be considered as many of Blue Dot’s contributors are from communities adversely affected by the digital divide, such as rural, low-income, or First Nations communities. In addition, while secondary school and university students can easily obtain these devices from student learning centres and media services, the youngest and oldest members of the Blue Dot might have less access to such technology.

Podcast and the Blue Dot Movement

Podcasts, a more avant-garde media form often used by academics or radio enthusiasts, are a convenient method of digital storytelling because focus is on sound, not visual components, for the producer and listener alike. The content of the story is, therefore enhanced, giving the chance to powerfully tell individual stories.

Some advantages of podcasts include:

• Creating a podcast is easier compared to other types of digital storytelling because it only requires a microphone/audio recorder and a computer or smartphones for storage and editing.

• The cost of creating podcasts is relatively small as most Blue Dot participants already possess the equipment to record sound: a smartphone.

• Audio files are easy to upload and embed to websites, presentations, and other sources of digital communication for broadcasting, which is helpful as Blue Dot communities want their stories to be shared.

• Few computer and no directing skills are required for podcasting as the editing process is fairly simple, so even the less media savvy Blue Dot volunteers can participate.
The voice becomes sole medium, allowing the narrator to have more control and focus on the story itself.

Audio files can be stored on any device that has a speaker. The file can be easily carried and spread from person to another person due to this portability.

When someone listens to a podcast, the story being told becomes the focus. No images, live recordings or additional sounds can distract the listener away from the story.

Some disadvantages of podcasts include:

- The popularity of podcasts is significantly smaller compared to that of other digital media forms and thus, podcasts are more difficult to find online, which Blue Dot storytellers eager to communicate their stories might find this discouraging.
- The lack of imagery limits the learning capabilities and memory for many people, especially visual learners, of which there are probably many in the Blue Dot movement.
- Podcasts are not efficient when they are 1-3 minutes, as they are usually much longer and a Blue Dot movement digital story, given the sheer number that could be published online, should be kept concise.
- In a podcast, the only way to convey emotion is through the voice, and at times, facial expressions and gestures are very important in expressing the true feelings behind a story.
- Podcasts are usually created in a series, such as NPR's Radio Lab, and are progressive with one podcast usually followed by another so that the audience is kept connected to the story. With the Blue Dot movement, it is suggested that those who upload their digital stories tell their story once, as the project is not designed to become part of a series. Instead there will be an accumulation of digital stories posted by various communities all over Canada.

Conclusion

There were many considerations to be made for our pilot project for the Richmond community’s digital storytelling piece. In our analysis, we had to consider both our time constraints of producing and editing for a finished product as well as the ease to which other communities would be able to replicate such a media piece. For different communities that are comprised of varying age and demographic groups, either audio-slideshow, video, or podcasts can be employed accordingly. In our opinion, audio-slideshow served our purposes better than video and podcasts because it caters to both visual and auditory learners, requires minimal editing, enables the use of a variety of media methods, and can be presented in fewer than five minutes for the entire Blue Dot community to see. The recording process was relatively simple, although clear sound was difficult to achieve given our limited technology. Photos had to be high quality as resizing them for iMovie programs could reduce the pixelation and make them blurry, which we encountered when creating our audio slideshow. Finding music that kept up with the pace of the photos and narration was also challenging, as it had to be well balanced with these two factors in order not to be distracting to the viewer.

Based on our research and discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of different methods of digital storytelling for the Blue Dot movement, it is clear that participating communities across Canada can convey their experiences in a powerful way that involves elements of sound, language, and visuals. Crafting a digital storytelling project would provide stakeholders with a sense of belonging to a greater movement and allows for reflection and critical thinking about the movement’s principles.
communities begin to use digital storytelling as a platform for communication, participants will be constantly informed about the movement’s progress.

Further Reading


