

## My world through my camera phone

[Steve Vosloo](#) · San Francisco (United States) · 9/10/2007 18:59 · 36 votes

Today's teenagers are hooked on their cellphones. While for some, MySpace or FaceBook are essential elements of their communication tool set, the vast majority of youth around the world rely primarily on their cellphones for staying in touch. According to [research](#) from the MobileD (for "mobile education") initiative, the average South African teen cannot imagine life without a cellphone: "They sleep with it, eat with it, live with it, the teenagers see themselves and their cellphone as one." But although we are witnessing a "social revolution" in cellphone usage among teenagers, very little research has been done in this field. How do youth socially and communicatively interact with their phones? How can cellphones be used to document their lives? And in a world of global communications, can this mobile device be a conduit for increased cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity?

John Kuner and I, both Fellows at Stanford University (USA) are conducting research into digital storytelling for youth. We tried to answer these questions, along with South African-based Adele Botha, who is on the MobileD team. Over August and September we took a group of teenagers from San Francisco and Pretoria (a South African city near Johannesburg), from different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds, gave them a bunch of camera phones and told them to document their lives, put the material online and to engage each other around that.

The project spanned two media: the camera phones were used to capture visual content, and the web was used for presentation of, and communication about, the content. Every week John and I would meet with the San Franciscans to discuss a new task, based on a series of themed prompts, such as: tell us about the food you eat. The teens would sometimes conduct research online, shoot material at home or in their community, copy it to a PC, do some editing and then upload to the web as a post to their own blog. The group in San Francisco were interns on a summer programme at the Bay Area Video Coalition and had recently completed a course in video production, so they used Final Cut Pro for movie editing. We mostly used Nokia N90 handsets, and [Vox](#) as the blogging platform. Each teen created their own blog account, but were invited as members into a single, private group for the project. For project management and task communications we used [Basecamp](#). The broad themes for the self-documentation were: about me (where I come from; the story of my name; my favourite books, bands, things; the food I eat; and my room); my community (what it looks like; what I like about it, etc.); and a relevant issue in my community. We asked them to think about their own culture as a context for the project, to try to frame their lives, communities and issues within their particular cultural milieu. "Mobiquette", acceptable etiquette when using camera phones, was also discussed beforehand.

Due to budget constraints, we could not have the teens upload content directly from their phones to Vox, which is a pity because the immediacy of cellphone communication is one of its greatest features. A photo of cool graffiti, taken while walking home from school, which is uploaded immediately, is so much cooler for being "in the now". While today's teens thrive on that instant gratification, the time difference between the USA and South Africa meant that this wasn't such a major factor after all. Because of differences in school calendars between the U.S. and South Africa, not all of the themed tasks were completed by both groups.

So, what did the teens come up with? Basically, some amazing work!

Ben grew up in the Haight Ashbury neighbourhood of San Francisco, the epicentre of the sixties hippie movement. He is a big fan of graffiti as a form of street art, which comes through in his [neighbourhood video](#), appropriately set to a song by a busker on Haight Street, recorded with

his cellphone.

Lupe lives in the Mission District of San Francisco, a traditionally Hispanic community with beautiful wall murals, which is clearly evident in her [neighborhood video](#). She is Mexican American, named after the Virgin de Guadalupe and shows us her Rosary beads in her [room tour](#).

Diem, who's family moved from Vietnam to the USA when she was three, spoke about her lunch from Starbucks, how the only thing it represented was convenience and that she knew nothing about the person who'd made the sandwich. The [post about her](#) that includes a video tour of her room (thanks Diem, that's brave!), tells us more – explicitly and implicitly – about her culture, both Vietnamese and as a typical U.S. teen. Her [neighborhood video](#) encapsulates the cultural diversity of San Francisco.

Christian, a San Franciscan native, [talks](#) about his planned shoot to introduce his [neighbourhood](#), including the new property development happening there, before heading out “into the field.”

The South African postings included a video of someone [bridge jumping](#), of a [pet parrot](#), photos of hunting trips to [game farms](#) and a visit to [Rosebank flea market](#) in Johannesburg. Instead of writing about what he did with his free time, Shane (15) made a [video](#). While the U.S. kids were more into hip hop and graffiti, the South Africans enjoyed heavy metal, fantasy books and braaing (barbecuing). As Brandon said: “[I love] a good piece of meat, just the right spicing and a little pink on the inside is perfect!” In general the South Africans were good about explaining local slang and the meaning of Afrikaans words. Computer gaming was also very popular. Brandon went on to say: “I am very into anything and everything electronic or computer related since I was about nine, the way everything just meshes together is just fascinating. Take the current state of computer graphics ... it's becoming so real that it's blurring the lines of reality.”

While much of the material was fairly high level, e.g. “I can't survive without my iPod,” or a photo of a pet dog, there were moments of very personal disclosure, such as the resentment felt towards the U.S. government by one girl because her father had to spend 13 years in a re-education camp in Vietnam after being abandoned by the US army after the war there. Or a boy's pain in working through his parents' divorce, even though they continued to live in the same house (“in different rooms, of course!”). All of the personal moments, including those that are not necessarily deep or painful, are endearing and alive with teenage honesty.

These moments became the essence of the project, and only began to appear when a certain degree of trust had developed between the teller and the listener. It is here that the cellphone could come into its own, for if there are stages of engagement (low trust, menial engagement moving to high trust, meaningful engagement) then using this device that is so entrenched in the lives of teens, this “trusted” device, could have a catalytic effect on “loosening up” the actors and fast tracking to a higher level of engagement.

For the “issue in your community” prompt, the San Franciscans decided to work as a group on homelessness, which is a big problem in the city. They first discussed the issue amongst themselves, conducted desktop research, compiled interview questions, and then headed out to take photos and conduct interviews. Ben's [series of photos](#) and [Lupe's photos](#) and [interview](#) with someone from the Coalition on Homelessness provided good insight into the issue. Here the theme was more about how one portrays an issue in your community to the world? How do you capture the essence of the problem? What do you show, what don't you show?

Of interest was the readiness of the teens to publicly publish their work. They could have made their blogs viewable only to the members of our Vox group, but most of them chose not to limit access in any way.

So what about Creative Commons? Only one of the teens had heard of it! Some of their videos gave cursory references to material used, such as “Music by the Grateful Dead” but that was about as detailed as it got. We also had the U.S. group find videos on YouTube as part of their topic research.

Regarding homelessness, one of the teens found a video of Lisa Simpson performing a protest song. The video has since been taken off YouTube, presumably for copyright reasons. In a 2005 **survey by Pew Internet**, 75% of US teens that downloaded music off the web thought that this, along with file sharing, was so easy to do that it was unrealistic to expect people not to do it. Couple this attitude with the **fact** that now more than half (55%) of all online American youth ages 12-17 use online social networking sites, that routinely allow widgets for including music, video and photos, and the need for widespread education around licensing becomes very clear.

And what about did they think about using cellphones to document their lives? "The camera phones were cool, different," said a participant. One teen said that she would never have considered using camera phones as a way to educate and influence others. But once they began the project, using the camera phones for this purpose became natural for all of them, although lighting and sound were noted as issues to watch with camera phones. These devices are different to digital or video cameras because of their 'everydayness'. They are always on hand, are used many times a day and so are perfectly suited as the device to capture the moment, which is often when cultural nuances are revealed.

The teens learned much about each others' lives, and about their own, simply by having to think about all the things they like, don't like, eat, watch, say and do. When documenting their own lives the teens realised how much they are influenced by the many cultures surrounding them, from traditional family culture, to that of the community, their peers, or simply the times – living as a teenager in 2007 in San Francisco or Pretoria. A common theme was how they were proud of their heritage. As Ben said: "I think its important to show the many sides of San Francisco to the kids in South Africa because it is a place so full of culture and life."

While differences between the groups were noted and discussed (the South Africans hunt more than their US counterparts!), it was really the high level of similarities that surprised everyone. Diem said: "I learned how our cultures [US and South African] contrast, and also how they're similar. I think that was my favorite part." About the South Africans, one US teen struggled for the right word and then said: "They were more 'civilised' than I expected. Their interests are European and Westernised."

One of the goals of this project was to explore the use of new forms of communication devices and media to foster cross-cultural awareness. Both cellphones and blogging, supported by in-person group discussions, proved to be successful tools for this purpose. Further, while computer access and broadband Internet connectivity is much more prevalent in developed countries, cellular infrastructure is good, and handset pervasiveness, or at least its growth rate, is often higher in developing countries. Cellphones are a common device to bridge these two worlds in much needed cross-cultural collaborative projects.

Much more research is needed in this space. John Kuner's **Project VIEW** and MobilED will continue to explore the boundaries to find the cross-cultural and educational value in cellphone usage. And much awareness needs to be raised around Creative Commons and licensing in general. For now, we have shown that cellphones have a place in the creation of meaningful user-generated content, and make for a fun ride!

tags: **San Francisco United States culture camera-phone cellphone teen youth blog san-francisco pretoria**

**extracted from: <http://archive.icommons.org/articles/my-world-through-my-camera-phone>**

# Telling stories, the location-based digital way

[Steve Vosloo](#) · San Francisco (United States) · 14/5/2007 16:23 · 24 votes

Location-based digital storytelling overlays a physical landscape with a digital one in a way that enhances the experience of the physical with additional sights, sounds and stories. Think of a Google Map of your home town with your grandmother's stories pinned to it here and there: to the open field where once a flea market bustled on Saturday mornings, or the old movie theatre where she once romanced.

This exciting and engaging form of merging physical and digital worlds is by no means new, but is becoming increasingly popular thanks to technological advances ' making **locative media** devices, such as mobile phones and GPS-devices, cheaper and more pervasive ' and the emergence of a range of new Web 2.0 services. In this article we will explore a few interesting location-based digital storytelling projects, and then look at tools that you can use to create your own mapped stories.

Imagine walking through a few city blocks that seem quite drab, the very ordinary sight of warehouses converted into offices and artist studios, no doubt colorful on the inside but not much to look at from the street. By just walking around you have no sense of the history of the place, the stories that lie beneath the surface. **Scape the Hood** is a location-based digital storytelling project that changes that: with a GPS-enabled HP iPAQ Pocket PC running location-based software developed by HP Labs, you can walk around the neighborhood and learn about its history and culture. As you move around, the pocket PC loads appropriate images and audio pieces. Now, knowing that a mural was inspired by the memories of the death of the artist's mother or that the one converted warehouse was actually a canning plant transformed by artists into one of America's first live/work spaces, suddenly gives new meaning to the few blocks of SOMA, San Francisco, that surround **KQEDs Digital Storytelling Initiative**, a partner of this project. You can hear the gurgle of a creek that ran where a street now lies, listen to the sound of trains that once carried corn oil to a mayonnaise factory that has since become a Starbucks coffee shop and also see images from this bygone era. What's more, you can select sounds and descriptions from different eras to experience what life was like on a particular corner at a particular time. **Abbe Donne**, executive producer of the project describes this as 'narrative archeology' because it 'peels back the layers of the neighbourhood' which aren't obvious from the streets.

Scape the Hood is a textbook example of location-based digital storytelling. The **Mobile Bristol Centre**, collaborators on the project, imagine a 'digital canvas' painted over a physical environment where your presence and actions trigger the digital media experiences that augment the ambiance of the space. But not all location-based projects are context-aware in terms of a person's physical movement through a space. Many cases allow virtual armchair travel. **Third Ward, Houston**, is a place and a collection of stories. The residents of this historically black community, which is now being gentrified and redeveloped, are trying to deal with the concomitant threat to their identity. The stories, mapped to specific locations in the area, are told by residents as they remember life in the neighborhood. **America's Highway: Oral Histories of Route 66** is the result of a university assignment to capture the history of one of America's great, but now decommissioned, highways. In the summer of 2002, students Jay Crim and Shekar Davarya drove across the country on Route 66, interviewing people who lived, worked or traveled on the road. The result of that summer is part history lesson, part travel guide for those exploring Route 66 today. Both of these sites use text, audio and video to present their digital stories.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has teamed up with **Google Earth** to **raise awareness about the ongoing genocide in Darfur, Sudan**. In the Google Earth application, users see the Darfur region covered with flame-shaped icons denoting burned villages, with links to images of burnt-out huts, tented camps that house displaced refugees, and photographic diaries of people who have lost family members and homes to the violence. The effort aims to create a 'community of conscience' among Internet users.

Two great examples of projects that allow both context-aware discovery and virtual travel are *[murmur]* and *Organic City*. **[murmur]** is an 'archival audio project that collects and curates stories set in specific locations,' that started in Toronto in 2003 and now includes Vancouver, Montreal, Edinburgh and San Jose. Walking around these locations, armed with a mobile phone, you come across *[murmur]* signs (of a green ear) that display a telephone number and location code to call in order to listen to stories submitted by regular citizens of the neighborhood. Currently the *[murmur]* team will interview storytellers to capture the content, but they are exploring the option of anyone submitting their story for a particular place. You can also take walking audio tours from your web-enabled PC, For example, explore **Spadina Avenue** in Toronto. But says Shawn Micallef, co-creator of *[murmur]*, 'you'll be missing out on half the fun.'

Organic City is a community storytelling project that allows users to author and access stories related to the city of Oakland, California. The website is the hub for anyone to tell and find stories in text, audio and video formats. By creating a platform that can be populated by anyone, creators Seamus Byrne and Sarah Mattern have enabled the organic growth of the Oakland community's collective memory. An interesting result of this type of platform, where information from various sources is layered over common, public spaces, is that the resulting stories are not the usual linear narratives, but rather non-linear threads that can be joined together in many different ways, collectively making up the whole story about, for example, a street corner.

### **That's cool, but how can I do this too?**

Thanks to Web 2.0 **mash-ups** that facilitate user-generated content, a number of mapping services make it easy to create your own place-based digital story. Google Maps recently launched My Maps, which lets you create and share personalized, annotated maps. All you need to do is create a Google account and you can begin mapping. By using different colored and shaped pins, you can communicate the aspect of time over the space, like the **World of Hello World**. Microsoft's **Live Search** is a similar service.

In **Flickr**, the super cool image hosting site, it's possible to add geographic information or 'geotags' to photos, in other words to tell Flickr exactly where they were taken using latitudinal and longitudinal co-ordinates. The good news is that you don't need a GPS or know-how to tell your location by looking at the sun to join in the fun. See the **Flickr tutorial** on how to geotag your photos and then use **Trippermap** to put a flash-based world map on your own website with those geotagged images pinned to it too. Trippermap's **Geotagger** also allows you to easily add geotags to your Flickr photos using Google Earth. One other cool thing to do with Flickr is to add notes to a photo, for example **Toronto, 1970s to 1990s**.

**MapBuilder** is similar to Google's My Maps. **Community Walk** and **Wayfaring** are similar services to MapBuilder, but they also allow paths to be drawn between locations. The downside of Community Walk is lots of Google Ads, while the upside of Wayfaring is that it lets you track who is interested in your maps and paths.

**Joe Lambert**, storyteller *extraordinaire* and Executive Director of the Center for Digital Storytelling, which has created **StoryMapping**, describes this work as a call to action. 'We can now create maps that share stories about the places that matter to us, and place our life stories in countless geographic contexts.' Exactly where this is all headed, and for what, we have yet to find out. All we know is that the tools are there for us to create new experiences by blending the digital with the physical, be it for personal, educational, commercial, social change or other purposes. So, what are you waiting for?

### **Further links**

- **StoryMapping**. Interviews with the creators of *[murmur]*, *Organic City* and *Scape the Hood* can be downloaded from the StoryMapping **podcasts** page.

- The **Mobile Art and Locative Media** page provides an extensive list of mobile and locative art projects, including place-based storytelling.
- **Geobloggers**: a blog about "maps for people, locations, stories and stuff ... and sometimes flickr gossip."

tags: **United States** **media-events** **storytelling** **digital**

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# How to licence mixed media, without a law degree

[Steve Vosloo](#) · San Francisco (United States) · 6/3/2007 16:04 · 33 votes

In this era of user-generated content, everyone is creating websites, videos and audio remixes. Brand new digital artifacts are created by linking, embedding and streaming of multiple media sources ' each potentially released under its own license. When uploaded to independent media hosts, such as Flickr or YouTube, the content's licensing may be affected. In a world of mixed media, how do you negotiate the potential minefield of legalese surrounding your content? How can you be creative and stay legal? And how do you protect your own digital creations when you put them out there for the benefit of millions of screaming fans?

To fully answer these questions you would need a law degree. But since most of us don't, I discussed these issues with licence diva, Mia Garlick, who until recently was Creative Commons' general counsel at their San Francisco-based office.

We came up with a few basic guidelines to help the digital artists, writers, readers, bloggers, remixers and mash-up maestros of today be web-enabled without being the target of the next Copyright Inquisition. The common scenarios below helped to illustrate the key points.

**The footer of my site says: 'Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 License.' Then on the [Credits page](#) is a note: "Boy photograph courtesy of Charley (Note: this image is NOT creative commons)". Is this legally sound?**

Yes, it is. But there are two concerns with this approach: i) the link to a site's credits is usually in the footer and is easily missed by users who don't scroll down to the bottom of the page, and ii) the definition of "work" in 'Except where otherwise noted, this work should be clarified where possible.

To address the first issue, you should put any particular licensing information as close to the content as possible. For example, on the page showing a [photo of Forest Whitaker](#), the credit is right next to the image. Even better is to put that information in the alternative (ALT) text for the image, so that if you mouse-over the image the tool tip will display 'Forest Whitaker. Photo: Vince Bucci, Getty Images, AFP'. Of course the same would apply to video and audio files.

For the second issue, on the credits page of your site you should explain what you consider the 'work' on the site to be. For example, 'Except where otherwise noted, all text and images on the site are by Steve Vosloo.' It is quite feasible for you to display logos or other trademarked material on your site, that is not for purposes of commercial gain or defamation, this constitutes 'fair use'.

The trademarks of other organizations, including our sponsors, may be included in the site from time to time and are the property of the relevant rightsholder and subject to their terms of use.

**I take a photo, or create a video, that inadvertently has public art and advertisements in the background. Do I need to give credit for these?**

No. This again falls into the realm of fair use. Since you're not making money off the art or ads, there isn't a problem.

**I create a short movie, comprised of a video clip and three digital photos that I took, my voice-over and a royalty-free soundtrack song, which I bought from [Premium Beat](#). How do I communicate my content's licensing and that of the sound bite? Must I always create credits for the movie, shown at the end?**

When deciding where to indicate licensing information, it is again a case of 'more is better'. CC takes a three-pronged approach to this:

1) Include credit information in the media itself, for example credits shown at the end of a video or, as in the case of [Magnatune](#), a 'shout-out' at the end of their try-before-you-buy audio tracks referring

listeners to Magnatune;

2) Include credit information on the website or other source from where the content is being downloaded, for example, on the page for [American Bach Soloists Favorite Cantatas album](#) on Magnatune there is a clear link to license information for that album. If you upload your images to Flickr, the license information is displayed on the [photo page](#);

3) Embed the license information directly into the file. Currently this is only possible with MP3 audio files through [embedding of metadata](#) into the file itself. The CC developers have promised this functionality in additional formats ' images, video, etc. ' in the future.

In the example of the movie you created, what you need to say regarding the bought song all depends on the licensing terms of use for the third-party from where you bought the content. Sorry folks, but you have to read those terms and act appropriately! In the case of Premium Beat, they retain ownership of the file, even though you buy a worldwide 'non-exclusive' license to play the song. You can't sell the song, though. Based on the [terms](#), the credit for this video should include the song information as follows: "Sounds of Samba'. Some rights reserved, PremiumBeat.com.'

### **I upload the movie to YouTube.com. Now who has licensing rights to the piece?**

There are two fundamental issues to remember here. Number one: if the content is yours, you always own it. Assigning ownership to someone else can only happen in writing and with your signature. This is pretty much a universal truth. Number two: when posting your content to external sites you agree to their Terms of Use. This means that you don't lose ownership of the content, but you agree to whatever terms the company that operates the site has. Usually this means, granting that company a 'worldwide, non-exclusive, etc.' licence to do certain things with your content. YouTube's Terms of Use include the following:

"For clarity, you retain all of your ownership rights in your User Submissions [your submitted content]. However, by submitting the User Submissions to YouTube, you hereby grant YouTube a worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free, sublicenseable and transferable license to use, reproduce, distribute, prepare derivative works of, display, and perform the User Submissions in connection with the YouTube Website and YouTube's (and its successor's) business, including without limitation for promoting and redistributing part or all of the YouTube Website (and derivative works thereof) in any media formats and through any media channels. The foregoing license granted by you terminates once you remove or delete a User Submission from the YouTube Website."

As discussed on [Boing Boing](#) last July, this means that YouTube can make an advert for itself using a snippet of your uploaded video without having to pay you for it. Furthermore, any of its successor businesses, such as Google, can do the same. On the other hand, if this happens and you don't like it, you can delete your video off YouTube and they can't use it anymore.

A similar situation exists with MySpace.com, which is why the artist Billy Bragg decided to [pull his music off MySpace](#) based on their old terms. After [causing quite a stir](#), Bragg actually got MySpace to reword their terms, which now requires you to grant less rights to them than before.

Below is an excerpt from the updated MySpace Terms of Use (nicely worded, in fairly plain English. Thank you, MySpace):

"The license you grant to MySpace.com is non-exclusive (meaning you are free to license your Content to anyone else in addition to MySpace.com), fully-paid and royalty-free (meaning that MySpace.com is not required to pay you for the use on the MySpace Services of the Content that you post), sublicenseable (so that MySpace.com is able to use its affiliates and subcontractors such as Internet content delivery networks to provide the MySpace Services), and worldwide (because the Internet and the MySpace Services are global in reach). This license will terminate at the time you remove your Content from the MySpace Services. The license does not grant MySpace.com the right to sell your Content, nor does the license grant MySpace.com the right to distribute your Content outside of the MySpace Services."

Again, by posting your content onto this site you give some of your rights ' not ownership, but other important rights ' to MySpace and its affiliates, that is, News Corporation.

As a final example to drive the point home, in **'Fighting sites that hijack rights'** Bill Thompson explains that the BBC News encourages members of the public to send in amateur news photos and assures that 'you still own the copyright to everything you contribute'. But again, by sending in a picture you give the BBC the right to 'publish and otherwise use the material in any way that [it] wants, and in any media worldwide'.

Of course some sites are more user rights-friendly than others, such as **Blip.tv** for video and **Flickr.com** for images. When uploading photos to Flickr an 'All Rights Reserved' license (for the person uploading the images) is applied by default. The site also offers the option of various CC licences. An interesting blunder happened in late January, though, when Yahoo!, who owns Flickr, broke its own **Terms of Service** by streaming Flickr images tagged with 'wii' ' regardless of their license ' onto the Yahoo! Wii portal page. Users responded almost immediately with **outrage** and an impressive display of mass online civil disobedience that involved tagging any Flickr image with 'wii' and thereby polluting the Flickrstream. The result ranged from the **funny** to the mildly unsavory. Yahoo! soon realized their mistake and rectified it.

The bottom line is, read the fine print and make sure you're happy with the terms of a particular media hosting service. The exposure that you enjoy on sites like YouTube, MySpace or BBC News might be tempered by what you have to give up.

tags: **policy-law user-generated-content licensing**

***extracted from: <http://archive.icommons.org/articles/how-to-licence-mixed-media-without-a-law-degree>***

# A quick guide to implementing ICT for development projects

[Steve Vosloo](#) · San Francisco (United States) · 20/12/2006 13:45 · 30 votes

Any initiative that uses ICT as a tool for attaining development goals, for example, improving health care or education ' falls under the umbrella term of 'ICT for development (ICT4D)'.

In November 25 Tech Laureates were honoured at the [Tech Museum Awards](#) in Silicon Valley, for using technology to benefit humanity in innovative ways. But not all ICT4D projects are so successful. In fact, since the late 1980s, the sector has been characterised more by project failure than success. Over time a body of knowledge and culture of information dissemination has developed, enabling those in the sector to improve the likelihood of project success by avoiding mistakes, and building on the pioneering work of others. Many case studies have been conducted on ICT4D projects to identify best practices and lessons learned. Drawing on the case study series by [Bridges.org](#), a few of the common best ICT4D practices are described here.

## Pre-project best practices

1. Conduct a needs assessment
2. Ensure ownership, get local buy-in and find a champion
3. Identify key external challenges

## Project rollout best practices

1. Avoid duplication of efforts
2. Take small achievable steps and stay focussed
3. Stay Focussed
4. Critically evaluate efforts and adapt as needed

## Post-project best practices

1. Final project evaluation
2. Disseminate information
3. Make it sustainable

## **Pre-project best practices**

Before an ICT4D project is actually rolled-out, a number of key steps must be taken to put the project on a solid footing for implementation and continued operation.

### **1. Conduct a needs assessment**

This may seem obvious, but conducting a needs assessment is an often-skipped activity, even though it lays the foundation for project success. It enables the definition of the exact development problem to be addressed, provides scope for setting project goals and ensures that the solution is delivered in an appropriate way to the beneficiaries. A good example is the initial needs assessment conducted by IESC Geekcorps.

[IESC Geekcorps](#) is a US-based non-profit organisation that draws on a database of more than 3,500 volunteers with a high level of technological skill and matches them with communities in the developing world with the aim of making the communities 'digitally independent'. The volunteers spend months with businesses or organisations there, assisting their growth and development via the transfer of technological skills and expertise. The initiative did [pioneering work in Ghana since 2000](#) and recently won a [Tech Laureate](#) for its Desert PC initiative in Malian radio stations.

But before Geekcorps initiates projects, it makes assessment trips to a particular area or community to understand the technical and business development needs there. The trips also allowed Geekcorps to gather broader facts, such as the state of the local economy and ICT infrastructure ' which it uses as indicators when deciding on potential project interventions.

Because the needs of project beneficiaries were not considered, many community computer centres in Africa have remained unused, collecting dust. This is a classic ICT4D failure, a case of technology 'dump-and-run'. In simple terms the solution is this: give the local people what they say they need, instead of what you think they need. If rural farmers need market prices for their crops, then offering Microsoft Powerpoint courses in the newly built computer centre is not going to draw them in. Only by first speaking directly to the intended beneficiaries about their needs will a project be targeted. This is the foundation for project success.

## **2. Ensure ownership, get local buy-in and find a champion**

On-the-ground initiatives must allow for direct participation by the beneficiaries so that a sense of ownership is fostered. In the long term, this results in sustained local support for the project. Finding a local 'champion' who believes in the project, and will advocate for it, is essential. Ideally this person is well known and respected within the community. The SATELLIFE project illustrates the benefit of garnering support from the community.

The goal of the **SATELLIFE PDA Project** was to demonstrate the viability of handheld computers or PDAs, for addressing the digital divide among health professionals working in Ghana, Uganda and Kenya. Since the original project began in 2002, hundreds of PDAs have been distributed to healthcare workers in developing countries around the world who have also initiated **handhelds-for-health projects**.

When implementing a SATELLIFE project the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Makerere University (a project partner) was appointed the local champion. This senior figure could reap support for the project at a high, organisational level.

## **3. Identify key external challenges**

Identifying the key challenges to a project means that contingency plans can be made to mitigate the risks. The Environmental Information Network project in Ghana experienced some challenges typical to developing countries.

The **Environmental Information Network Project** of Ghana used ICTs to link the databases of two national environmental agencies. The database was publicly available for free use. Local and international researchers, government agencies and other environmental organisations could use its information to support decision-making, intervention strategies, and awareness campaigns about environmental protection, and they could also contribute to this knowledge pool.

However the project initially experienced some troubles: bureaucratic red tape, a general lack of ICT awareness and the potential of ICT-based projects, an unstable power supply and an expensive, unreliable internet connection. Having a champion in high places, and the ability to implement alternative technologies can make or break a project facing external challenges.

## **Project Rollout Best Practices**

### **1. Avoid duplication of efforts**

For some reason, perhaps because ICT4D generally do not operate on capitalist principles, such projects often don't conduct initial market or 'competitor' research. Implementing best practice in ICT4D projects means doing thorough research first so that work is not duplicated. While every ICT4D project is unique in some way, the developmental problems they seek to address are common around the world. A successful telecentre project in India will have some lessons for a similar project in South Africa.

By studying the efforts and lessons of similar initiatives projects, teams can avoid reinventing the wheel. For example, Geekcorps studied other volunteer projects when putting together their strategy and the Environmental Information Network project found that it could partly build on an existing United Nations Environment Programme bibliographic database.

## **2. Take small achievable steps and stay focused**

Taking small achievable steps is the best way to keep a project team motivated and to sustain buy-in from locals or sponsors. The sooner a beneficiary can see tangible results, the better.

A useful example is Dr David Green's Tuberculosis (TB) Compliance service, which uses cellphone text messages to alert TB patients to take their medication. Dr Green first tested the reminder on his mother and realised it's value, as the TB treatment regime must be strictly followed for the medication to work. The initiative has since led to a significant increase in the recovery rate of patients and now has major stakeholders and partners.

When planning a project, identify the 'low-hanging fruit', those quick wins that help to create momentum. For example, to develop a human rights web portal might take 6 months, but within two months 60% of the site can be developed and made live on the internet. It will be good to follow this approach: it helps to attract users early on, who will be impressed when the remaining sections of the site are developed, and it provides tangible evidence to begin further fundraising efforts.

## **3. Stay Focused**

There is a tendency in ICT4D projects to be over-ambitious, to try to change the world. While it is important to think big it is equally important to not try to be "everything to everybody". Every project should focus on developing organically with small, achievable steps. Following good project management principles will help to achieve the baby-steps, a concise vision statement or project goal will help to stay focussed.

This was the case for the owners of the Kubatana.net portal. [Kubatana.net](http://Kubatana.net) is a website portal that provides Zimbabwean civil society organisations with an online presence and a platform to voice their concerns about human rights abuses in their country. The project also offers courses that teach civil society organisations to use ICTs to further their goals.

The Kubatana Project team, who manage Kubatana.net believe that the greatest success of the project is its sole focus on Zimbabwe. The site's content is specific to that country and not an aggregation of readily available content from other countries. The tagline that constantly helps to keep the project's direction is 'an online community for Zimbabwean activists'.

## **4. Critically evaluate efforts and adapt as needed**

On the other hand, a vision cannot be set in stone. Given that ICT4D projects are mostly rolled-out in developing countries and often as pilot projects, it is inevitable that changes and unforeseen outcomes occur. Perhaps new external challenges are discovered or initial assumptions are proved wrong. A good way of identifying these issues is to conduct mid-term project evaluations and to issue regular project updates. SATELLIFE successfully did this as a way to get an objective view of the project and to keep clients and supporters up-to-date and involved. It's always good to foster a culture of giving feedback from within the project team and from the beneficiaries. By constantly engaging with end-users through interviews, surveys or focus groups, their needs, user satisfaction, and any required changes in a project can be identified early on.

## **Post-project best practices**

Actual implementation is not the end of a project; there are a number of important activities that must be carried out to successfully close it.

### **1. Final project evaluation**

Once a project has been implemented a final evaluation needs to be conducted. The evaluation, which should result in a report, can be done by the project team or by an independent third party.

## 2. Disseminate information

The final project evaluation provides the input for dissemination of the lessons learned. It is absolutely vital that all ICT4D project teams contribute their experiences into the growing body of knowledge, both locally and internationally. This makes it easier for others to replicate successes, and not to duplicate efforts or mistakes. It also provides publicity for the project, which might result in new partnerships forming, or renewed funding being secured. **John Daly**, a consultant for the World Bank's Development Gateway, suggests ways to disseminate information: participate in internet fora, for example, listservs, chat rooms and bulletin boards; post materials onto the internet; contribute to formal publications such as books and journals; give classes in a college or university; give on-site demonstrations to visitors or present papers in conferences, meetings, and seminars. Of course, disseminating content under a Creative Commons licence would be advisable, as it would allow for the more viral sharing, use and implementation of information.

## 3. Make it sustainable

Sustainability is the key to continued project benefits. Successful projects do not simply use this popular buzzword to attract funding, but take the necessary actions to ensure that when a project ends the beneficiaries are not left dependent and, ultimately, powerless. Sustainability is about more than just the continued financing of an initiative, it should also result in the empowerment and enablement of the project beneficiaries. But be warned, because many ICT4D initiatives are not for profit, achieving a sustainable business is often the most difficult aspect of the project.

ICT4D projects often require substantial financial investment, and time and people resources. Despite technology changing at a rapid rate, ICT4D projects usually involve a long-term commitment. Why? Because they're more about people than technology. And whenever people have to change because of the introduction of a new technology, time and effort are needed to make it happen. But the rewards are great and very satisfying.

## Resources Pages

After studying a number of effective ICT projects, Bridges.org has produced the **[12 Habits of Highly Effective ICT-Enabled Development Initiatives](#)**.

ICT4D portals and knowledge bases to find and post projects include:

• **[Bridges.org case studies](#)**

• **[Development Gateway](#)**

• **[Digital Dividend Project Case Studies](#)**

• **[International Institute for Communication and Development \(IICD\)](#)**

• **[Digital Opportunities: ICT Case Studies](#)**

• **[Next Billion's Activity Database](#)**

• **[Stockholm Challenge projects](#)**

• **[World Summit Awards: the Best in e-Content and Creativity](#)**

• **[i4d: The first monthly magazine on ICT4D](#)**

• **[The Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme \(APDIP\)](#)** has a range of ICT4D resources

tags: **[education](#)**

***extracted from: <http://archive.iccommons.org/articles/a-quick-guide-to-implementing-ict-for-development-projects>***

## Amy Hill is not just telling stories

[Steve Vosloo](#) · San Francisco (United States) · 16/11/2006 13:07 · 24 votes

*In the second part of the Digital Hero Book Project series, Steve explores the use of digital storytelling for advocacy and as a democratising agent in a world where dominant media giants often portray only half the story. He speaks to Amy Hill, Director of Community Projects at the Center for Digital Storytelling, the birthplace of this modern twist on the age-old art of telling stories.*

### **icommons.org: What do you do at the Center?**

Amy: I oversee our various initiatives done in partnership with grassroots groups, nonprofit organizations, health and social services agencies ' all for purposes of integrating digital storytelling practices into efforts to promote individual and community health and well-being, and support campaigns for social, environmental, and economic justice. This involves developing collaborative relationships, training 'trainers' to do community work, and serving as lead facilitator in a variety of digital storytelling workshops.

The core focus of our community work is to elevate the voices and images of those who are typically under- or mis-represented in mainstream media. We offer the equipment, teaching, and a safe environment for them to explore their stories and those of their communities. The digital stories that emerge from these workshops are used in a variety of ways ' as public education tools, to mobilize communities to take action on critical social or political issues, for policy advocacy and much more.

### **icommons.org: How did you get involved in digital storytelling?**

Amy: I worked in community-based women's health for about ten years prior to learning about digital storytelling. I was coordinating a number of projects to build local capacity for addressing and preventing gender-based violence, and I grew discouraged with the lack of relevant and realistic visual media to use in educating and motivating people to get involved. I stumbled across digital storytelling and connected with the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley. I worked with them to co-found a project called **Silence Speaks**, which adapts digital storytelling methodology in a way that supports survivors and witnesses of violence and trauma, in sharing their stories. I fell in love with the process because of its dual focus on individual voice and narrative, and on producing truly compelling media pieces that can make a difference in the world.

### **icommons.org: What is your definition of digital storytelling?**

Amy: People in a variety of sectors use the term 'digital storytelling' these days to mean a number of different things, ranging from community photography initiatives that are showcased online in digital format, to short-form highly professional documentaries. Because my introduction to digital storytelling was through the work of the Center in Berkeley, which essentially coined the term way back in the early 1990s, I define it as a workshop process in which small groups of people come together to share stories and develop them into short digital videos. You can read about the **history** of the Center and the **'what is'** of digital storytelling on our site.

In my opinion, an important aspect of digital storytelling is the group process element, in terms of the ways in which interaction and dialogue within the group supports each individual in framing, shaping and developing their story. The other important aspect is the participatory production approach, which allows the members of the group to have control over not only the content of the story, but also the editing decisions. This means we teach people how to edit - we don't generally do it for them, unless someone is really resistant or is having a lot of difficulty with the technology. We value this aspect deeply, because for us it's a way of promoting skills transfer and leaving something behind with individuals and in communities.

We try as far as possible to prioritise approaches that institutionalize the teaching, facilitation skills and technology within local communities. This is very different from other more traditional forms of media production, which involve trained professionals 'dropping' into communities, shooting interviews and footage, and then taking that material outside of the community to do the editing, which has

everything to do with how stories are ultimately framed and shaped. It's more aligned with pioneering facilitative filmmaking approaches and activist video production strategies.

**icommons.org: Have you noticed any changes in this space over the last few years?**

Amy: The most significant change that I've noticed in this space has been the absolute explosion of short form video content on the web. This has opened up important possibilities for the distribution of digital stories. It has also opened up a number of thorny ethical issues.

With some of our work on more sensitive topics, the push by our partners to come away with pieces that can be shown broadly has meant that we've had to pay much closer attention to informed consent in recruitment processes, and to ways of protecting privacy, if this is desired by storytellers. Related to this has been the gradual incursion of documentary filmmakers and commercial media producers and broadcasters into the space of personal storytelling in a digital environment. The proliferation of blogs, homemade videos on [YouTube](#) and other distribution channels, for example, has led professionals to see the commercial possibilities that lie in what is typically referred to as 'user generated content', or 'citizen journalism'. I think it's incumbent upon those who are trying to implement very thoughtful community processes, to be clear on their agendas and to be focused on protecting the value of process, instead of jumping ahead to the excitement of opportunities to spread content far and wide. While there are great possibilities for distributing amazing stories, there's also great possibilities of the same kinds of media exploitation that have plagued communities of colour and the global South since the advent of filmmaking and photography.

Another interesting and exciting shift has been the need to develop models for digital storytelling which don't rely on written narrative, or which assumes high levels of literacy. As we move into doing work in multiple languages, in areas where a community's first language perhaps doesn't exist in written form, we are moving into workshops and production processes which preserve the core of what we do ' sharing stories verbally, in a group 'Story Circle' ' and coming up with alternatives to writing and recording a script. This may involve short interviews followed by joint audio-editing, to zero in on the core of a given story. We're also challenged to work with our community participants to generate original still images and video clips with which to illustrate their pieces.

**icommons.org: What do you think about Creative Commons and digital storytelling?**

Amy: [Creative Commons](#) is a wonderful resource. A Creative Commons licence was used for the website of our pilot South Africa project [Men as Partners](#). We regularly promote Creative Commons as a good resource for folks interested in ways to protect their work *and* make it available on a wide scale for activists and community groups to use. I'm really interested in connecting with Creative Commons to get some fairly detailed answers about the best options for my various partners, I just haven't had the time to attend one of the local meetings yet.

The biggest issue that we confront around copyright is that of music rights. People have very particular notions about the music they are drawn to for use in their stories. If there's a plan for broad distribution, they often can't use popular music. So we really steer people towards using copyright-free music or encourage them to compose their own. We also steer people away from downloading random images off the internet, but I must say this can be tricky, again, when working with groups who don't possess lots of original visual material. I'd love to see a huge, collective source of copyright free images. The [Internet Archive](#) can be useful, but it's not too user-friendly for beginners, and most of our community work is done with people who don't have much, if any, prior media-making experience.

**icommons.org: Does everyone have a story to tell?**

Amy: Yes. We believe everyone has a story to tell. In fact, that everyone has multiple stories to tell. To draw out these stories, we have developed a core curriculum called 'The 7 Elements of Digital Storytelling' [Cookbook](#). In our workshops, we share examples of other participants' work, and we talk about issues like point of view, narrative structure, emotional content, pacing, and judicious decisions about images and editing. Of course we tailor this aspect of the workshop to the needs of specific groups, in terms of the level of detail we go into.

One thing I love about our approach to personal voice is that it really allows people to focus on their own experiences. And whether you're working with youth who've never been heard, or survivors of trauma whose stories have been exploited or silenced - this is very powerful. I also love the emphasis on meaningful content. People often speak about how accessible the tools of media production are. This may be true, at least in some sectors of the population - for those people who can afford to buy these tools, but the fact is that many more can't. But simply having access to a camera or a computer does not mean you have something meaningful to say. There are lots of great videos up on [Google video](#) and YouTube and the other user-generated content sites, but there is also a lot of offensive and insipid stuff. This doesn't surprise me, it mirrors our reality as human beings. Some people want to get involved in making change, and some people have bought into the dominant ideologies.

**icommons.org: What do you find fulfilling about digital storytelling?**

Amy: It's an incredible honor and privilege to be offered a window into people's lives. What gets shared in our workshops can include the most intimate details of someone's experience, and to be able to hold that with care, and follow the participant's lead in terms of offering help with shaping it into a story, is a beautiful thing. It doesn't feel like work at all, it feels like a very basic form of human connection. Which is what it is. So the blend of the formation of such a relationship with the development of a piece of art, which is quite often shaped to contribute to a much larger dialogue or campaign to address many of the looming social, economic and human rights issues of our time. That's very fulfilling.

**icommons.org: Do you have any thoughts on where digital storytelling is going in the future?**

Amy: I can't speak for some monolithic field of 'digital storytelling' because our work at the Center is quite specific, in terms of the emphasis on personal voice and participatory production processes. But within that sector, I see a continued expansion and adoption of the work in public health, social services, economic development and environmental justice sectors. I also see a huge expansion of the work internationally, particularly in the global South, where we have colleagues who are initiating projects in India and China, and where we're supporting efforts in various countries in Africa. I think that as access to technology continues to spread, these kinds of content-based, social-issue focused projects will follow. Certainly digital storytelling isn't a panacea for the world's problems, but as long as the element of human connection and group sharing isn't lost, it has a lot to contribute.

tags: [United States](#) [education](#) [digita-story-telling](#) [copyright](#)

**extracted from: <http://archive.icommons.org/articles/amy-hill-is-not-just-telling-stories>**

# The Internet Governance Forum: A step in the right direction

[Steve Vosloo](#) · San Francisco (United States) · 15/11/2006 14:53 · 28 votes

From 31 October to 2 November, I attended the inaugural United Nations **Internet Governance Forum** (IGF) in **Athens**, Greece. The forum stems from the **World Summit on the Information Society** (WSIS), a global effort to address how information and communication technologies (ICTs) can be used for development.

Being a UN summit, its format was based on the creation of texts: the 2003 Geneva **Declaration of Principles** and **Plan of Action** and the 2005 Tunis **Commitment** and **Agenda for the Information Society**. But this Summit was also different: it took a multi-stakeholder approach, allowing business and non-governmental voices into the sessions where the texts were being thrashed out by governments, and it was held in two phases. Despite a two year period for activities between Geneva and Tunis, the summit still ended with many unresolved issues related to ICTs, including intellectual property rights, censorship, freedom of expression, human rights, funding obligations and the debate over control of the internet root servers and domain name system. More discussions were needed, and so was born the idea of an Internet Governance Forum. But was this to be just another UN talk shop for the dominant powers, the usual suspects increasingly entrenched in governing the internet?

The event at the beginning of this month suggested the answer to be 'No'. The approach and feeling was very different to WSIS. Here's why: WSIS was top-down, with decisions ultimately being made by governments, even within the multi-stakeholder sentiment. The IGF, where no binding decisions can be made, offered representatives from governments, civil society, business and academia the chance to discuss unresolved WSIS issues on an equal footing. According to Jeanette Hofmann, a researcher from the Social Science Research Center in Berlin and a member of the IGF Advisory Group, the fact that the forum has no mandate to make binding decisions is the 'very pre-condition for equity among all stakeholders who attend.'

Being predicated on discussion alone is significant. It facilitates the development of a common language for these diverse stakeholders, with different agendas and interests, to effectively communicate and continue the process towards a broader consensus. It reduces the usual power structures. Practically this meant no official seating order in the halls, no tables for delegations indicated with name plates. In the workshops, panels were made up of representatives from government, civil society, business and academia, to discuss open-ended topics that didn't represent any particular point of view, e.g. content regulation and access to knowledge. The intention for the IGF format is that if, during the discussions, consensus builds between participants around an issue, these like-minded groups are able to form 'dynamic coalitions'. The coalitions will allow for the groups to formalize particular positions and agree to take collective action. In the event, there were **voluntary proposals to form dynamic coalitions** on internet governance, open standards and gender.

Of course, for any particular group wanting to make an impact, the workshops' relatively unsupervised, democratic and bottom-up discussion format presents a challenge, as discussed by Heather Ford in **The Internet Governance Forum: A story in its beginning, middle or end?** Heather offers some advice from the iCommons approach, because in its daily operations it is often the practical expression of the multi-stakeholder alliances the IGF wants to foster.

So, given the opportunity for talking openly and equally, what was up for discussion? The four main themes for which the main sessions have transcripts were **Openness** (freedom of expression, free flow of information, ideas and knowledge), **Security, Diversity** (promoting multilingualism and local content) and **Access**. Under these themes, 36 parallel workshops were held, with lively and fascinating debates. Brief **reports** are available for some of these workshops.

On the last day, the event's activities were summed up by a presentation titled **Taking Stock: The**

**Way Forward**, and followed by an **Emerging Issues from a Youth Perspective** panel discussion. I was on the panel with representatives from Brazil, Canada, Greece, India, Nigeria, Mauritius and Turkey, whose collective experience is in a range of fields, such as sustainable development, media, ICT access, internet law, child safety and e-government. The panelists represented governments, civil society, business and academia. The key issues that emerged were related to safety for youth online, physical access to ICTs, access to access, in other words, the capacity and freedom to make use of physical access, online rights and responsibilities, capacity building and copyright. The last issue was explored throughout the forum, portrayed as the tension between protecting copyright and access to knowledge. Key messages that stood out were the call to make intellectual property rights more flexible to allow innovations to occur, to release scientific research under **Creative Commons** licences and to disinhibit the 'completely new type of free speech' facilitated by the internet. There's no doubt that the Creative Commons groundswell is gaining momentum and making waves at the highest international level.

In her speech in the closing ceremony, Hoffman said that the IGF 'offers the great opportunity to experiment with new formats of communication and consensus building across all sorts of geographical, cultural, sexual and political boundaries.' This open structure made for a unique and innovative event, which was 'a new vehicle for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue, bringing together these different parties that meet separately, but rarely together', according to Nitin Desai, the Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General for Internet Governance. All of this may sound over-enthusiastic, but one must remember that the UN system moves slowly. For civil society and business to be given equal status to government is indeed a revolution in this system. According to **Murali Shanmugavelan**, an IGF panelist and head of the Information Society project at **Panos London**, 'It's conceivable that the UN may be forced to apply a similar approach to other global policy discussions.'

At the start of the IGF, Markus Kummer, the Executive Coordinator of the UN Secretariat on Internet Governance, was asked what he expected from the forum. He answered: 'The value of the meeting is the meeting itself. There will be no negotiated outcome. How will it go further? To be frank, we don't know yet.'

Given that the forum is not designed to take decisions but rather to identify issues that need to be tackled through formal intergovernmental channels, some people may be cynical about the efficacy of the effort. But the fundamental shift towards multi-stakeholderism cannot simply be dismissed by this cynicism. Launching into these uncharted waters is a step in the right direction and I look forward to seeing where this will lead at the annual IGF meetings that have been planned for Rio de Janeiro next November, and India and Egypt for the two years after that.

tags: **[Greece policy-law igf internet-policy wsis un youth](#)**

***extracted from: <http://archive.icommons.org/articles/the-internet-governance-forum-a-step-in-the-right-direction>***

# The Power of Digital Storytelling

[Steve Vosloo](#) · San Francisco (United States) · 23/10/2006 12:27 · 20 votes

Storytelling is as old as humankind. The oldest stories, predating even oral history, were about great hunting feats. In his [study of myths](#), Joseph Campbell describes the tales of animals killed and the afterworld to where their spirits departed, as 'a cacophonous chorus'. Later, our ancestors would paint on cave walls, still using narratives to celebrate rituals and ceremonies. Stories recorded important events, expressed commonly held values and were used to pass on wisdom from elders to community members. Ultimately, storytelling was a way to record and make sense of the human experience.

Fast-forward a few thousand years to 1994 in the United States of America. A man is sitting on a log, next to a campfire under a full moon, telling stories to a small group of attentive listeners. But this is not your ordinary fireside setting. The crackling 'fire' is actually virtual, being shown on a PC monitor nestled into a pile of wood; the moon is an image projected onto a background screen. Dana Atchley, the pioneer of multimedia interactive theatre, is on a small stage, spinning a yarn about family, friends and interesting people he met while touring America in a beat-up van, armed with a video camera. As the performance unfolds, he interacts with the audience to select and play home movies that display on another screen behind him, taking the crowd on a trip along the lesser-traveled highways of Middle America. Sadly, he has passed away, but his production company and collection of stories are still available at [Next Exit](#).

The [Digital Storytelling Association](#) defines this relatively new art form as 'the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling — using digital media to create media-rich stories to tell, to share, and to preserve. Digital stories derive their power through weaving images, music, narrative and voice together, thereby giving deep dimension and vivid color to characters, situations, and insights.'

In the early 1990s, Atchley along with Nina Mullen and Joe Lambert, established the [Center for Digital Storytelling](#). Since then, the Center has helped over 6 000 people, from the techno-phobic, to use multimedia technology to tell their own digital stories, although these are hosted online instead of presented in person. During a 3-day workshop, students design and produce a short digital story. To illustrate their pieces, they record first-person audio narratives, collect and scan still images and find music for the soundtrack. Of course these story elements can be sourced from [Creative Commons](#). Using editing software, the instructors help them to weave the pieces together and edit their own, personal stories.

Digital stories are used for personal self-expression, such as the [Digital Hero Book Project](#), or to preserve oral and local history like the [Capture Wales](#) project. Digital stories can be used for advocacy such as ending gender-based violence and preventing HIV/AIDS in South Africa, [corporate knowledge sharing, involving customer stories as a form of marketing](#), and increasingly, for [educational purposes](#). In America, where some classrooms have access to computers, digital video cameras, digital cameras, audio recorders and editing software, students are creating stories about almost anything, from the tough [life choices facing teenagers today](#) to physical places in their lives.

Before this [Place Project](#), each of the fifth-graders at Maria Hastings School, Massachusetts, was asked, "Are you a writer?" Sixty percent responded 'yes'. When asked the same question after the project, ninety-nine percent said 'yes'. Digital storytelling isn't just a way to help students to find their inner writer, but is shown to develop communication and critical thinking skills.

Today, all people still have a [basic need to share stories](#). With more powerful multimedia tools in the hands of the general public, we are seeing the tables turn on the traditional media producer-public consumer role. In 2004, Chris Anderson wrote an article called [The Long Tail](#), which expands on this role reversal and its effects on traditional media dynamics. It is clear from sites such as [Jumpcut](#) and [Ourmedia](#) that the power to create content is increasingly in the hands of the people. Through video blogging, or vlogging, it is possible to keep an online diary, produce a story to

raise awareness around a particular issue, or just have some fun.

But this proliferation of user created content, hosted on sites such as [YouTube](#) and [Google Video](#), is not all good. Not all of this content constitutes digital storytelling -even though much of it claims to be - or has value for society. In our next article we will profile Amy Hill of the Center for Digital Storytelling to hear her views on why it's important to keep up the quality and focus of traditional digital storytelling. She will describe ways to ensure that when you get into the director's chair, you produce a quality, compelling story and make your voice heard above the din. In the meantime, the extensive list of digital storytelling links on [Tech Head Stories](#) is a good place to find out more about this empowering practice.

While we no longer paint pictures on cave walls, the value in using stories to make sense of our lives and the lives of others is still the same. Digital storytelling uses today's multimedia tools to create powerful and intimate stories that still move us. Just listen to [Thembi's Diary](#), a perfect example of how digital storytelling provides a cathartic healing experience for those who tell their stories, but also empowers the voiceless by offering a tool for activism.

*This article is the first of the Digital Hero series which will be published on [icommons.org](#) until May next year. [Steve](#) is developing the Digital Hero Book Project as a fellow of the [Reuters Digital Vision Program at Stanford University](#). Some of the stories he'll be writing will be about the use of CC licences in the project, best practice advice for ICT4D projects and profiles on key people in the field. The Digital Hero Book Project still needs added funding to cover their shortfall for the pilot. For more information and to donate to the project, visit [Molotech's site](#).*

tags: [education](#) [digital-heros](#) [digital-books](#) [psychosocial-support](#) [hiv-aids](#) [heros](#)

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