



We live in a world of stories.

Our brains are hardwired to process and store information in the form of stories. Stories allow us to connect with each other

#TheRestlessForest was a Greening the Rubble project launched in December 2015 - a transitional native garden that told its own story.

Restless Forest combined landscape and art, story telling and natural history, using plants native to Christchurch. The forest moved around the city changing in form, and at each new site, a new chapter of its story was posted on a blog at restlessforest.com.

It also included a podocarp tree stump complete with a fairy door geocache, created by set designer Julian Southgate. Artist Lynnette Hartley designed an intricate colouring-in page of native plants and animals, available as a free downloadable pdf from restlessforest.com.

Each new chapter included a new illustration, highlighting different plants of the forest as it changes and evolves.

Immerse your **audience** in the story

*"I am going to take you on a journey. Back to
'once upon a time' when Canterbury was green
and full of promise."*



Remember to:

Immerse your audience in the story. How you start your story can be important – sometimes starting in the middle of the action can be a way to grab attention right away. The beginning needs to grab the heart not just their head and taken them on a journey. Now I have cheated a bit here in that I have used that phrase “once upon a time”... that’s a very big clue that this piece is going to be a story – many fables or fairytales started as a fact and overtime became fiction through the retelling. Audience is a key word here too – whom are you talking to? Keep them in mind. This project had too key audiences – families and young adult tourists.

Make / keep it personal



2. Tell a personal story. All storytellers share a story from a particular point of view. Anytime you give a presentation, you are presenting your point of view. So make it personal. Why are you here? Why do you do, what you do?
People = passion – this affects your whole tone of voice. Be human.
My most successful story was a piece I ghostwrote for a colleague. At a staff meeting he had responded with passion to an opinion piece about Te Waihora being dead. His passion was so infectious that I started taking notes and said afterwards – you need to write a rebuttal. But as soon as sat down to write his “planner hat” came down over his passion and the piece he drafted was dry, factual and full of jargon. The passion was gone. So I threw it out, grabbed my notes and redrafted a piece from his very own words. That piece, when published prompted the then CEO of ECAN to ring him up and say “we need to work together.”
Once we become “experts” in something, we often forget the passion that drove us to become experts in the first place. I often say to people explain it to me as if we were sitting in the pub together to get that personal tone of voice right.

Create suspense



3. Create suspense. All compelling stories have conflict. We often struggle to get attention for “good news” stories - only bad news sells. But we can often be reluctant to tell the story of when things go wrong... It is a risk to appear vulnerable. But instead of thinking about them as “mistakes” call them stories of “change and learning” and share them with authenticity and humility.

A recent example of how conflict was used effectively recently was Roimata Commons tree vandalism – and the timing of it as trees are beginning to grow fruit.

Bring characters to life – know your hero



4. Bring characters to life. Every story needs a hero – and you need to know who your hero is. It could be human - a person or your community – but also maybe not. It could be the organisation or environment.

In the Restless Forest example the Forest itself is the hero. We could have approached the narration of this in several ways – having it in the first person voice. Every community group here as a hero and you can tell many stories with each individual at the heart... “who we are” connects people to your identity and your culture.

Build up to a S.T.A.R moment

Something

They will

Always

Remember



6. Build up to S.T.A.R. moment. Something they'll always remember.

This could be the shocking truth of a future if we do nothing – it could be in the way you present your story – e.g. with provocative images, or shocking statistics.

Tell a story of the future – what would be different if you achieved what you set out to do? What would the world look like? How would it feel? When you present your **vision** as a story – it comes to life and invites people to engage.

Restless forest aimed to do this with emotional descriptive language. But then we also included “souvenirs” of their engagement with the story – stickers in the geocache, and the colour in images.

End with a positive takeaway or call to action



Members of the community had since visited the garden and helped graft the broken trees back to their original roots.

"It feels really good to reconnect those trees back with their roots," Reynolds said.

Those wanting to support the Roimata Food Commons can make donations on the group's [PledgeMe page](#).

"This is my dream... can you see it too?"

7. End with a positive takeaway and a call to action.

This key takeaway message could be a "spark," a key piece of wisdom or advice that helped you overcome obstacles and change for the better.

The key thing I think in our field of work would be to tell people who have stopped to listen to our story exactly what we expect of them now. You've hopefully inspired them to action with your story – now tell them where to direct that action.

Key calls to action would be 'Join our group' support our cause with time or resources, change your purchasing habits.

Six elements of a good story

1. Immerse your audience in the story
2. Tell a personal story
3. Create suspense
4. Bring characters (heroes) to life
5. Build up to a STAR moment
6. End with a positive takeaway / call to action

