

Knowledge Marketing: The Role of Interactive Narratives

Mahboob Mahmood
*Chief Executive Officer
Knowledge Platform
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“Interactive narratives are informational and storytelling experiences designed and produced for the web. They leverage great design, visual journalism and rich-media content.”

source: interactivenarratives.org

We are repeatedly reminded that the goal of Knowledge Management is to capture, classify and make available organizational knowledge. But even if we achieve this difficult task, to what extent will we have succeeded in enhancing the *knowledge quotient* of an organization? Just as the *availability* of a lime soda drink does not assure that people will drink it in droves, the availability of knowledge assets does not assure that people will actually utilize such assets.

Any marketing maven worth her stripes will be happy to confirm that the old saw - *You can bring a horse to water, but you can't make it drink* - is actual only half a saw. The other half is - *To even have a chance to get the horse to drink, you need to bring the horse to the water*. Our marketing maven could then reel off her favourite bag of tricks calculated to make this happen - reach out to your target audience, entice your audience, speak to your audience's desires and fears, make it easy for your audience to adopt your offering, and give your audience a taste of what's to come. Could these tactics have a role to play in the august world of Knowledge Management?

As we think about Knowledge Management, we would do well to devote some thought to 'Knowledge Marketing' as well. And when we do, we will realize that our marketing maven's trusty tactics come very handy! If we can create small, attractive nuggets of knowledge, that can easily be pushed out and absorbed, that evoke curiosity and inspire our audience to learn more, then we will be on our way to being effective knowledge marketers. While doing so, we can remind ourselves that Newton was inspired by an *apple* falling on his head, not an *apple tree*!

This is where *interactive narratives* come in. As in the case of many new and marginal events, there is no general recognition of the genre, let alone an agreed definition. Typically, an interactive narrative is an online experience in which a small, contained story is unfolded. Typically, the story is carried forward by a set of photographs or, on occasion, a set of diagrams or short video clips. Each visual element is accompanied by an audio voice-over or a small amount of text. The experience involves a small amount of interactivity, often not more than choices for the learner to click from episode to episode. Typically, the entire experience takes no more than 5 minutes.

Newspapers and magazines are leading the charge in packaging small nuggets of content into interactive narratives. The New York Times and Washington Post websites regularly put forward great little interactive narratives. Ones from The New York Times that I have particularly liked over the past few months include a vignette on life of the columnist William Safire, an analysis of Arnold Schwarzenegger's landslide electoral victory in California and a description of a journey through the Arctic national wildlife refuge. www.interactivenarratives.org is a great site which pulls together neat interactive narratives from all around the world.

Interactive narratives are an excellent way to package and convey a perspective, a finite amount of information or a ‘big picture’ story. They are easy to construct and easy to navigate. The ones using audio and video enable the user to absorb the content while multitasking. They can be accessed through a web site or intranet or can be pushed out through e-mail or even a PDA. In a world replete with information and, indeed ‘knowledge’, interactive narratives can help us by providing summaries, contextualizing situations and orienting our thinking and, moreover, inspiring us to greater feats of knowledge.

*Here's to the effective marketing of knowledge -
here's to the interactive narrative!*

About the author

In addition to leading the Knowledge Platform team, Mahboob is a senior content developer and leads the company's work in developing compliance and risk management training content for the financial services industry. Formerly a partner at the international law firm of Sidley, Austin Brown & Wood, Mahboob spent 11 years handling corporate finance transactions in the firm's New York office, before establishing the firm's Singapore office in 1997 and managing it through its successful start-up period. Mahboob has broad industry experience and has been lead counsel for many complex transactions in the high-tech, financial services, media, utilities and transportation sectors. He has worked with major clients (including AT&T, General Electric, CSFB, Citibank, Lucent, NTT and Singapore Technologies) in implementing their business strategies in the United States and many countries of Asia and has also handled a number of privatization assignments for The World Bank. In 1998 and 1999, the International Financial Law Review (IFLR) selected Mahboob as one of Asia's leading lawyers. Mahboob also serves as Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the Singapore campus of INSEAD, the international business school.

Mahboob received his J.D. from Columbia Law School in 1986, his M.A. in Political Science from The Johns Hopkins University in 1987 and B.A. in Politics from Princeton University in 1981. He was admitted to the New York State Bar in 1987. Mahboob is a citizen of the United States of America.
mmahmood@knowledgeplatform.com

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Knowledge Platform
19 China Street
03-02 Far East Square
Singapore 049561
Tel : 65-6236 7681
Fax: 65-6220 7031