



# Social Good Storytelling That Generates ROI

On April 1st, we hosted the [Seenit Storytelling Summit 2021](#).

What we thought would be a small, intimate summit with a handful of passionate storytellers, saw attendees join from across the world. Over the course of 3 hours, we brought together 316 attendees who shared 925 messages across 11 sessions.

With some remarkable conversations around the ROI of social good storytelling, we wanted to explore what the future looks like. For many of us, the pandemic has forced us to rethink what is important, what stories we tell, and the impact that these stories have in our society. As we fight through the current crisis, what does the future hold for social good storytelling?

Brand trust now lives at the intersection where personal and societal issues converge, and where words are backed by action. As we explore the key themes and take-aways from the summit, a powerful quote stood out to us that was shared at the start of the summit;

**When we go to film something, we don't go in with, 'this is the story, let's go get it.' We say, 'let's go in there and find people with stories to share.'**

When we explore the future of social good storytelling, we want to do a similar thing. It's easy to assume that we know what the future holds, but the truth is rarely found through assumptions. Instead, we sought to uncover insights by inviting members of our community to talk to us about how they use storytelling for social good within their organisation.

# A word on the Storytelling Summit 2021

The stories we tell matter. They have the power to shape opinions, inspire action, and create awareness of important causes.

Whether you work for a non-for-profit organisation or a thriving business in the private sector, you have the power to join the conversation and start making an impact.

But what does storytelling for social good look like in practice, how can stories about social good be shaped in a way that generates value (which can be turned into even more social good), and how can brands leverage storytelling with their communities to make a difference? These are the questions that inspired us to host the Seenit Storytelling Summit 2021 and cast the lens on the ROI of social good storytelling

Even over the course of a decade, the business landscape has changed so much. Today, the need to champion sustainable business growth is more apparent than ever. Beyond stock prices and company size, people seek to align themselves with brands who use their platform to drive social good. Trust has become one of the most influential factors driving buying behaviour - but trust can't be bought with marketing gimmicks. Instead, it is earned through a brand's commitment to driving positive change.



# People-powered storytelling

Photo by Belinda Walshe

It's proving to be one of the most effective tools in bringing about long-awaited change.

Of course, it won't happen overnight. But, the more we seek to challenge societal issues and keep the conversation alive through authentic storytelling, the more the message filters through.

With **14 power talks**, an interactive workshop and virtual networking opportunities, the Seenit Storytelling Summit delved into the value of storytelling for social good in business. As with all storytelling projects, we started by getting great people in the room. The speaker list for the summit comprised a diverse collection of leaders in this space, including **Amazon, Appear Here, RELX, ViacomCBS, TIME'S UP UK, Crisis, and Made In Her Image.**

Rather than telling them what we wanted to hear, we did as we would with any crowd-sourced campaign: we let the people tell us their story. The result outstripped expectations: more than a series of talks, the summit was a vibrant collage of insights, advice, and examples of storytelling for social good.


Below, we explore the key themes and takeaways from the summit.



Photo by Charlotte Emms


# From storytelling to storymaking

Authentic stories are born from community-powered storytelling. Unlike marketing campaigns where the narrative is carefully crafted to meet the needs of their audience, social good storytelling needs to be honest. When you're involved in a CSR initiative, you have to be willing to tell the whole story: the good, the bad, and the ugly. The people who are best-equipped to tell the story, warts and all, are the people at the heart of your campaign.



To highlight the role of community in storytelling, we spoke to Aimée Bryan, Venture Studio and Partnerships Manager at **Crisis**. Aimée shared with us how important it was to put the spotlight on the charity's community to get buy-in from potential investors. When told authentically, a genuine story can be pivotal in helping people to understand why you're doing what you do. When you let that message come from your community first, the power of the story is amplified.

Gaston Tourn, the CMO at Appear Here, applied the same logic in his dedicated power talk on storytelling. Although the brand has a reputation for high-quality photography, their #SaveTheStreets campaign prioritised authenticity. By giving retailers the opportunity to film themselves speaking about their struggles during the lockdown, an authentic call to action was communicated. Had the story come from anyone else, it simply wouldn't have had the same impact.



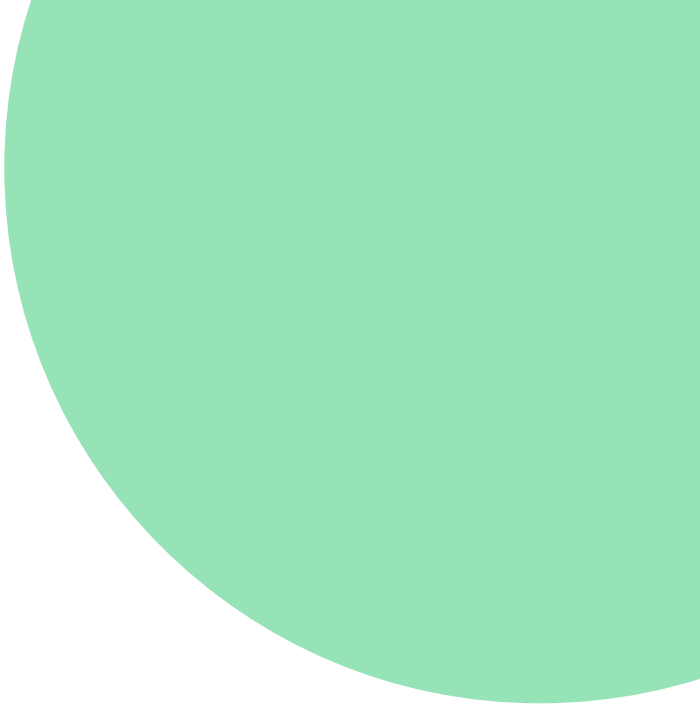


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**We need to move  
from Storytelling  
to Storymaking  
and enable our  
community to  
tell the stories  
themselves.**

Gaston Tourn






# The power of community and sharing

We've seen through countless social media campaigns the power that community has in enacting change. In the words of Rebecca Ladbury, Communications Specialist at **TIME'S UP UK**, the power of a story grows the more voices are involved and perspectives are heard. It's such a simple idea, and yet such a breakthrough in the world of storytelling in business. For TIME'S UP, partnering activists with celebrities at the BAFTAs was a powerful way to put the spotlight on the issue of sexual harassment.






To illustrate this point, Maxwell Zorick, Director of Social Impact at **MTV**, shared with us his story of **'Vote Early Day', a campaign that brought together companies like Snapchat and Twitter** to encourage people to turn up to vote in the U.S. He told us about how MTV had moved their audience to action on civic engagement with the help of over 2,700 partners who rallied around the cause.

The strategy is simple: the more visibility on your cause, the better. The more involvement from key figures and companies across the spectrum, the louder the conversation becomes until it permeates through culture and starts to move the needle.



**2,700** MTV moved their audience to action on civic engagement with the help of over 2,700 partners who rallied around the cause



# Changing the narrative one story at a time

Which stories predominate and which go untold is a question of power and authority. Fortunately, we're beginning to see a shift in the world of storytelling.

The 2021 Oscars are a great example of this. For the first time in Academy Awards history, almost half the nominees in the acting categories were performers of colour, and more women were nominated throughout the 23 categories than in any previous year. These talented film-makers and actors are, through their work, beginning to change the narrative. The same is possible in business.

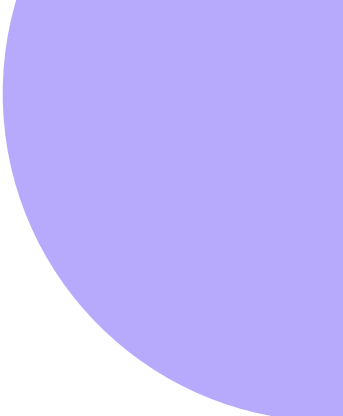
Although your stories should never seek to shy away from the difficult truths, it's important to think about the future and how the narrative in your stories will shape it. Each story is a building block in creating a new narrative - within your company, and within the world.

Malakai, founder of **Made In Her Image**, shared with us her thoughts on changing the **narrative to empower an audience**:

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**We have to look at what kind of narratives are being put out there about people of colour. It's always a sob story; people are seen as inferior, which makes people feel smaller.**

Malakai



Storytelling is about educating, but that doesn't always mean educating one group about another. In some cases, it's about re-educating an audience on the power they hold within themselves. An authentic story can reinstall the self-belief that may have been eroded from a lack of representation or incomplete narrative in the stories told before.

We have a responsibility as storytellers to show each and every member of our audience that they are worthy and deserving of success, no matter their race, gender, or background. This isn't just the duty of professionals in film and television, but of organisations across every sector.

An impactful story can be the catalyst in creating a sense of solidarity - but consistency is key. Keep encouraging your people to tell their story; keep empowering them with the tools to have their voice heard; keep building confidence in your community through a sustained commitment to hearing their truth. Slowly, but surely, perceptions are changed - be it perceptions about yourself or about others around you.

**83%**

**of millennials say that it's  
important for the companies  
they buy from to align with their  
beliefs and values**



# The role of User-Generated Video in social good storytelling

User-generated video is a vehicle for authenticity. It empowers people to tell a story in their own words, to speak honestly and freely on a subject close to their heart. Production value is a wonderful thing to have, but it isn't essential in making an impact. The beauty of UGV lies within its simplicity.

3.8 billion people in the world own smartphones, and many of them are already using their devices to create content for social media. UGV leverages the technology that already exists within your business and invites your community to be part of a cause that's bigger than one person, or one company.

In their first ever Virtual Community Day, **ViacomCBS** handed the control over to their employees to pour their talents and energy into raising awareness of social justice causes. Kavell Brown, Senior Coordinator of Community Investment and Corporate Social Responsibility at **ViacomCBS** explained to us how storytelling through UGV had helped ViacomCBS' globally dispersed team feel connected in the spirit of giving back to the community.

**“People want to respond to the moment;  
people want to be a part of the movement;  
they may not be able to be a part of it on the  
streets, but they can be a part of it in their  
homes.”**

With traditional video, the final output is a filtered experience. But when you empower your community to film themselves speaking openly about a cause, you give the audience direct access to the raw and honest emotion fuelling their passion. For a brand to give their employees a platform to be part of the solution shows a lot about the culture, and the DNA of the company

**76%**



**of 18-34 year-olds like when  
the CEOs of companies  
they buy from speak out on  
issues they care for**

# Aligning social good with business goals

As with any initiative, leadership will want to see the ROI that your campaign will bring to the business. Marrying the performance of a social good campaign with the business' bottom-line isn't always easy to do, because it may not be a direct link.

However, the more awareness your campaign generates around a particular cause, the more cut-through you will see among members of your audience who are socially-conscious and care about these issues. Adopting this narrative in your internal comms can be incredibly powerful in achieving business-wide support for your initiative.

As Paul Abrahams, Head of Corporate Communications at **RELX**, shared with us, achieving real impact from social good storytelling comes from the same kind of goals, tactics, and tools you would apply to a marketing campaign. Investment in the right technology is a good starting point, but **there also needs to be a willingness to dedicate resources towards targeting and distribution.**

If your story doesn't reach its intended audience, it's a wasted opportunity. By using metrics to measure reach and engagement, you have tangible data to present to leadership as a means of getting buy-in for future initiatives.





# Where do we go from here?

Photo by Belinda Walshe

## Inclusiveness

One of the core pillars of authenticity is inclusiveness. For a social good story to make an impact, it must include and amplify the voices of those closest to the cause. It seems obvious, but inclusiveness needs to be a fundamental element and not an after-thought in the planning of a CSR campaign.

The words “Nothing About Us Without Us” speak volumes in this context: no story should be told about a group without the full and direct participation of that group.

In other words, the right people need to be involved from the beginning, because it is they who are the most passionate and to whom the outcome affects the most. When the words come from the heart, the story is authentic. The result is a powerful piece of content that evokes emotion and builds that all-important trust.

## Ownership


Social good storytelling can fall to the wayside when it isn't aligned with business goals. Recognising the link between success and sustainability is the first step in your socially responsible journey - but that's just the beginning. For brands to make a difference, there needs to be an ongoing commitment from at least one individual to keep pushing for and prioritising positive change.

In a small company, social good can often be put on the shelf in favour of business-critical activities. But if it is to be woven into the DNA of your business, it needs to be prioritised from day one. Even if you don't have the resource to hire a CSR specialist, assigning ownership of social good initiatives will make sure you maintain momentum.

At the same time, social good needs to be a priority across the organisation. CSR teams should lead the way, but it is their responsibility to achieve buy-in from people throughout the organisation.

## Partnership

A story told by one brand has the ability to drive awareness around a particular cause. A coalition of partners convening around an idea has the power to influence culture. As we saw with the **#MeToo** movement and the **TIME'S UP** campaign, the secret to widespread awareness and long-term impact lies in community. This could mean partnering with brands in the same space, it could mean working with celebrities or social media influencers.



Rather than competing with others who are sharing similar stories, your aim is to create a united front. From a business perspective, this can seem counter-intuitive. However, if your goal is to truly bring about change, there is strength in numbers. Coordinating around an idea or cause will open up the floor to people from across the world and expand your reach exponentially.

## People

People should always be the starting point of any storytelling project. For that reason, investing in your employees is essential in enabling them to tell their stories. Employee Resource Groups can be incredibly useful in broadening horizons, building skills, and empowering your people to find a higher purpose in their work.

The more confident they feel in their ability to make a difference through storytelling, the more they will be willing to get involved. On a personal level, this could transform the perspectives of your employees; it could open the doors to new opportunities and present career paths they hadn't previously seen for themselves. If you've already got people within your organisation who are passionate about a particular cause, start by giving these people the platform and the tools to make a difference.



# The future of social

Photo by Belinda Walshe

# good storytelling

As human beings, we communicate through stories. It's how we make sense of the world, but it's also how we change it. To move the needle, we need to appeal at an emotional level and get buy-in from people at every level of the business and beyond.

Social good storytelling is an opportunity to create a space for communities to come together and discuss social justice. Whether those communities are employees, volunteers, advocates, stakeholders, or other groups altogether - it's an opportunity to build a shared understanding and achieve solidarity across all identities. But that opportunity has to be rooted in authenticity, and authenticity starts with inclusion.

Authenticity lies beyond a carefully crafted comms strategy. It comes from listening to your people and a desire to amplify the stories that exist within your community. **Thank you to all of you who came together to make our Storytelling Summit bigger than we could have imagined.**

# About Seenit

When it comes to creating authentic, inclusive content easily at scale, we believe User Generated Video is an invaluable tool. It's a vehicle for empathy and a format that is proving revolutionary in uniting people from across the world on social justice and positive change. In fact, we were founded on a moment of UGV and social action. You can [read about it here](#).



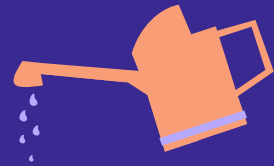
## Simplify

Simplify and diversify your video content



## Engage

Engage and encourage your people to be at the forefront



## Grow

Grow, foster, and enhance productivity and engagement

## A special thanks to Matchbox

Special thanks to our friends at the virtual event production company Matchbox Virtual Media for hosting the 2021 Summit. They're a fantastic team who share our commitment to bringing diverse voices and perspectives together. Working on your own virtual event? [Check them out!](#)