

## The past and present of data storytelling

Hey, everyone, and welcome back to Module 6.

This is video two. In the first video we gave in you an introduction to what data storytelling is and what we do at The Pudding and then how that fits into a larger kind of storytelling landscape. And in this video, we go through a brief history lesson, an accelerated timeline of data storytelling and get you caught up to the present day.

First, let's take a step back. How did we get to where we are today? I'm going to show you some of the classics or the titans, the pioneers of data storytelling. First, there's John Snow's cholera map where we mapped out incidences of the disease and kind of matched them around the central pump house in London.

Then there's Florence Nightingale's rose chart, where she looked at the cyclical relationship of army deaths during the Korean War. And finally, Charles Joseph Menards' march, Napoleon's march that looks at the troop numbers by kind of this differing width on this diagram. And the reason I show you guys these is, one so I can geek out with you and tell you how cool they are. but two, that we stand on the shoulders of giants, as overly dramatic as that is. It's important to acknowledge where we've come from, but also where we're going, because the field of data journalism and data storytelling is continually building and perfecting on previous work.

So we're going to jump forward a little bit, way forward, to somewhere where a lot of us can trace our kind of first mainstream modern experience with data storytelling on the Web. And this is to those super long, eye-catching single image infographics. They were modeled after full-space, full-page spreads in newspapers where the space to design was more vertical than horizontal. And after I transitioned to newspaper pagination, I even designed a bunch of these. So full disclosure on that one.

Here's one that I did while at The Huffington Post. And the reason that these things, these longform infographics started to fall out of favor was, one, the Web just wasn't print. Long images weren't the best way to communicate information. Text didn't scale and it became illegible, especially when I shifted from desktop to mobile. The second thing that happened was the form was kind of co-opted by marketing companies and the data became obscured by illustrations or misrepresented entirely.

So the field of data storytelling, which is rooted in truthfulness, moved away from this type of presentation, of course. Then came Snowfall. It was a beast of a visual project by The New York Times in 2012, and it was one of the first times that photos, text and graphics were seamlessly and elegantly integrated into the web. You can see it here as we scroll down. It's just a marvelous piece of journalism and it still holds up to this day.

But for as engaging and innovative as Snowfall was, the majority of New York Times readers didn't even make their way through it. And that's why visual storytelling had to keep evolving. We have to operate on the principle of, if a tree falls in the forest and no one's around to hear it, does it make a sound? It's not just enough to produce a quality data story. We have to make sure that we're meeting our audience where they are.

Post Snowfall, data storytelling pushed the boundaries of tech. We made all the things -- all the things interactive and hoverable and clickable and filterable and animated. In 2017, Gregor Aisch, formerly of The New York Times interactive team and now a data rapper, revealed that 85 percent of the Times page visitors online simply ignored interactive infographics altogether. Now, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't make interactive graphics and in fact, I'll talk about that in a later video. But again, it just means that we have to evolve and meet our audience where they are.

The biggest takeaway here is that we shouldn't make the audience work too hard. We shouldn't hide important information behind a click. And we should make sure that their experience is as seamless as possible.

So what does a data story look like now? Well, there's no magic formula. Visually, data stories can look very different, but at their core, the most successful ones often start with a question. We're gonna take a look at a few overarching categories of data stories and see how they each present themselves. These are by no means the only way to present and tell the data story, but they're just some of the most recognizable patterns that we're seeing out there today. So the first type of data story we're going to talk about is something known as scrollytelling and at The Pudding this is something that we're known for. It's a technique where the story unfolds linearly with animations as the reader scrolls down the page. And instead of alternating between text graphic, text graphic, the two are layered and integrated. And scrollytelling tries to bring the story straight to the reader. Often we're handholding them through a step by step process, and because the readers are scrolling instead of clicking, it's a little bit more frictionless.

First, we'll take a look at a project that Russell Goldenberg did with The Pudding about the NBA and how the league would look if you redrafted everyone. And here's the scrollytelling part. He walks you through all the picks and then kind of where they actually ended up in their career. The second example is from Reuters. It looks at the aging population of Japan, and as you scroll, different points in the line are highlighted and match with the annotations that come up on the left side of your screen. The reason I really, really love this one is those little bitty lines look like wire hairs and they remind me of an aging person themselves.

The second type of overarching kind of grouping that we're gonna look at in data stories is sometime is something we call micro stories. If scrollytelling takes that high-tech approach to data storytelling, micro stories has more of a stripped down analog approach, often with a hyper focused storyline. Here's one great example from Mona Chalabi. She's an illustrator who uses Instagram as her platform to tell data. This looks at the number of measles cases that are on the rise and she's drawn a dot on a little baby for each kind of case. And we can obviously see that 2014 is a huge year for measles.

Another great kind of data analog micro stories is a project called Dear Data, where a Giorgia Lupi and Stephanie Posavec wrote postcards back and forth to each other and illustrated their day to day lives. This is a little bit more in that data art realm, but it's still very, very hyper-focused, and each one of these postcards contains its own micro story.

The next overarching category that we want to look at in. data stories is something that we're broadly terming nontraditional. It's stories that don't look like traditional data stories at all. They're completely void of traditional charts and instead use images, videos and

emerging tech like AR and VR to tell the story. Here's one from The New York Times that looks at the photographs that were taken during the moon mission of Apollo 11.

And this is the money part of the piece. It's again, scrollytelling, but in this instance, the data is actually where these photos were taken. And the piece itself guides you through each photo and you can see in space exactly what the astronauts saw in space. Another great example of this nontraditional data storytelling bit is a video by Josh Begley called Concussion Protocol. This video takes a look at every single concussion in the NFL from 2017 2018. We'll take a quick look at the video now. Again, the video doesn't have a chart in it at all and it doesn't look like what you'd expect in a data story, but at its core it's still data, just the presentation is different.

The last broad category of data stories that we're going to look at is something we're calling explainers, and it's something that people might not term as data stories at all because of that. But just like a good data story, these too start with the question. This time, that question is just often a how instead of a why. Here's one of the best examples of. an explainer piece. It's called The Parable of the Polygons by Vi Hart and Nicky Case -- your guide through the topic of segregation by these adorable and relatable little squares and triangles. And they make a very complex topic and often heated topic, way more relatable.

The next example we'll look at is How to Tune a Guitar by Matthew Conlan and Alex Kale. This takes page out of those kind of guitar tab liner books that you used when you were a teenager trying to learn how to play Green Day and instead teaches you how to tune the guitar interactively. And you can interact with this guitar and actually tune it yourself. Click on all the chords. So while it's not telling a completely linear story, it is telling a very specific one and it is teaching you something in the process. So now you've seen some examples of what types of data stories are out there. In the next video, we'll take a look at what makes a good data story.