Harnessing the Magic of Storytelling in Accommodation Facilities

The experience of traversing the globe is truly astonishing, embracing its beauty and serenity while unravelling untold stories, shattering revolutionary barriers, and igniting our creative minds through the profound power of storytelling. As the phenomenon Dr Kahumbu expresses her thorough insights, she states that the wildlife film industry holds untapped opportunities referring to them as an ‘untapped Goldmine’. She is a Kenyan conservationist who leverages the power of storytelling by advocating for Elephant protection, ‘Secrets of Elephants’ which is documented as a book, film, photos and journals inspires generations to champion conservation works. This demonstrates the significant role of storytelling in propelling the tourism industry when fully harnessed.

The use of storytelling in tourist destinations has become a powerful tool to offer guests an engaging and memorable experience. Facilities can leverage various storytelling channels such as writing, photography, videography, and filmmaking, to establish a stronger connection with their guest, and immerse them in their cultural norms and those of the communities, showcasing the best practices and a marketing strategy to increase their global visibility.

Below are feasible strategies that facilities can embrace.

a) Photography

A single photograph holds the power to convey a myriad of tales showing beauty, character, emotions, attitude and other traits. The camera lens captures images in diverse angles, dimensions, and shadows in different lighting igniting curiosity and prompting a person to be keener to details in their surroundings. This is because it transcends the limitation of human eyes, elevating what we see and inspiring newfound perspectives.
Facilities can exhibit photos in galleries or photo studios. It will enable them to share past memories that guests might not experience during their stay creating a deeper connection to the facility and its surroundings.

Titling photos creates a new meaning and perspective and, at the same time very informative. A one-word title can tell a whole story that might take a year to study. It's just about incorporating the element of creativity in titling.

This is a photograph by Felixie kipng’etich exhibited at Alliance Francaise.

It is titled ‘Better Together - It’s a Girl’s World’
Its brief description is: Elephants are intrinsically feminists. The herd is usually led by an older female known as the matriarch. The title and description inform a lot about the elephants' character and behaviour.

Facilities can also organize photo residences such as Governor's camp, whereby they host a photographer resident for a whole year. It has numerous benefits to the photographer and facility in meeting their major objective, guest satisfaction, culture preservation, and many other benefits to both parties.

b) Videography and Filmmaking

Facilities can depict the breathtaking Kenyan landscape, culture, culinary art and diverse ecosystem such as wildlife, and convey their commitment to sustainability and conservation through short videos and films. They may collaborate with experienced professional filmmakers and offer resident programs. This will enable them to produce authentic, high-quality videos that communicate their desired output. For instance, Elephant Pepper camp works with professional filmmakers to capture the unique stories of Masai Mara’s wildlife and showcase them to their guests while Mara Plains camp has its own filmmakers who document the wildlife experiences and create compelling videos. These videos can be shared on websites, social media, and in-room television giving guests a taste of what to expect during
their visit. The films can be screened at an on-site theatre in the evenings after safaris, shared through online platforms, or even submitted to film festivals, attracting a wider audience and garnering recognition for the facility.

**c) Writing**

Writing possesses the extraordinary power to shape people’s perceptions and leave an indelible mark in the minds of the readers. It is very diverse, leaving room for the authors to shape the message they aspire to deliver. The intention can be to inspire, document memories, educate or inform the public. For instance, the renowned Jessica Nabongo writer of ‘The Catch Me If You Can’ documented in her book that as humans our similarities are more, compared to our differences. This was her discovery after travelling to 195 UN member countries. The statement evokes different meanings such as recognizing the unity in diversity, it fosters empathy and compassion, shared humanity and a sense of belonging. From this, it is undeniable that written words are stunning.

Facilities can creatively write stories that talk about their amenities, and their surroundings. For instance, a facility in Masai Mara can write about the great wildebeest migration, this will capture the spirit of adventure and instill a sense of wanderlust to guests inspiring them to visit their locations during this period. They can also create a platform whereby guests share their individual blogs on experiences during their stay. This will create a sense of community and spark conversations among guests. It will also be effective in collecting feedback on their services from the guests.

**d) Fine art and sculpture**

Facilities may plan for an art residence, whereby they come up with the theme of arts to be produced, for instance, Tafaria ya Castle ‘Center for the Arts’ hosts art residences and during the artist's stay they produce exemplary works, some displayed in their art galleries. The sculptures constructed during the residency have improved the aesthetic of the facility and its surroundings. This has greatly contributed to its recognition as a multidisciplinary center due to its impact on the art industry.

Fine artists and sculptors are creative professionals who employ their artistic skills to create visual works of art. They express their ideas, emotions, and concepts through various mediums, whether it be two-dimensional paintings, drawings, or three-dimensional sculptures.
Lake Elementeita Serena camp, an ecoreated facility, has constructed a sculpture of a flamingo in their facilities. The art communicates to guests that they are in the land of flamingoes.

Facilities can incorporate the above strategies which will earn them a higher competitive ground and aid in building an authentic brand identity. They can also invest in local guides that have mastered the art of storytelling as we always say ‘Local people know best, ask them!’

The art of storytelling in the tourism industry allows us to form deep connections with the destinations. It inspires, educates and ignites a passion for exploration and conservation hence it’s important for Africans to map and paint their stories creating a futuristic world they envision.