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DIGITAL HEALTH

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Unleashing the Power of Storytelling in Healthcare Design

Joanna Domagalska
Senior UX Designer and Researcher
@ **Roche**

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digitalhealth.garajedeideas.com

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Nonconformist Digital Company

We are a Design, Technology, Data and Growth agency founded in 2015. Our perspective is focused on people, we work in a multidisciplinary way along the value creation process, taking advantage of the potential of data to make decisions and make the most of technology to deliver end-to-end technology.

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Unleashing the Power of Storytelling in Healthcare Design

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This document is extracted from the Garaje Digital Health talk, “Unleashing the Power of Storytelling in Healthcare Design.”

In this takeaway, Joanna Domagalska takes us through the role storytelling plays in building digital products. What are the building blocks of the perfect story? And how do we, as designers, integrate these elements into our toolkits? Domagalska reveals all the answers from her time as a senior UX designer with Roche, one of the world’s largest healthcare companies.

→ You can watch the full talk here

JOANNA DOMAGALSKA SENIOR UX DESIGNER AND RESEARCHER @ ROCHE

The Power of a Story

Before the world discovered paper or figured out ways to preserve written documents, humans shared knowledge through stories.

Not much has changed since. Even with all the technology and tools we have today, storytelling still plays a vital role.

People have always been naturally attracted to stories. They are more engaging and help us retain information better than dry data. Everyone remembers the last Netflix show they watched, but very few remember the last Excel Spreadsheet they viewed, for instance.

These days, storytelling elements are seen across fields — TV shows, podcasts, gaming, and so much more. So why shouldn't we utilise it in software development?

Storytelling and Software

Let’s take a closer look at how storytelling techniques apply to software.

Presenting Use-Cases to a Wide Audience

Designers who use storytelling elements in their work — such as well-known structures or familiar patterns — help audiences better understand and navigate the use cases of a digital product.

Presenting Findings to Development Teams

Working on digital products is all about teamwork. It isn’t enough for designers to just do individual research; they must also be able to share their findings with the team. This is where storytelling comes into play.
When teams have access to the big picture and better understand what they are building and why they are building it, they contribute with insights and ideas they would have otherwise kept to themselves.

Communicating with Stakeholders

Stories help communicate to stakeholders why you’re working on specific projects. It also helps them understand what tools are necessary for you to complete a task and why you need them.

Communicating with Users

No matter how good a product is, it will fail if the message doesn’t hit the mark. Good stories build rapport, trust, and loyalty among users. It also helps grab attention in a highly competitive market.
Design offers all the tools needed to create stories. But these tools are often mistreated. Consider this example of a user story that doesn’t hit the mark.

User Story

As a user of WellCare I want to be able to conveniently add data points to the table so I can keep them in one place.

What are the problems we can identify with this message?

The biggest flaw is that there is really no point to this story. We’re not told why you want to keep data or what its purpose is.

When you examine your stories, you realise what you’re missing. You can think about what elements make your product more meaningful

JOANNA DOMAGALSKA SENIOR UX DESIGNER AND RESEARCHER @ ROCHE

Storytelling in Digital Healthcare

Trust is a crucial factor of storytelling in healthcare, as this is the sector where we deal with people at their most vulnerable points.

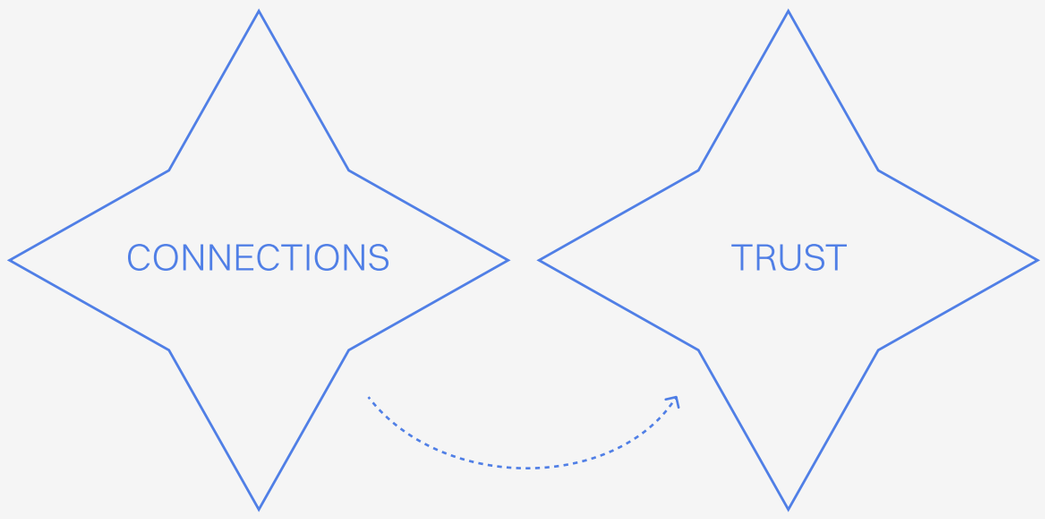
Patients need products that are reliable and those they can trust. On the other hand, designers are expected to build products that don't just grab attention but offer solutions. This is where storytelling comes in. It can be used to:

Build Empathy

In healthcare, empathy is possibly the most crucial aspect of user experience and design. When you create products without empathy, you think of them as any other tool.
You make concessions and compromises, which could cost a person their health.

Reduce Fear in Users

A good story can build connections with users, helping them trust your product. On the flip side, a bad story discourages people from using it. Designers fail if they don't consider users' situations and needs and make products they expect users to adjust to.



How to Build a Story

All stories, of course, have a beginning, a middle, and an end. But if we look deeper into the classic story arc, we discover that much more goes into it.

Stories are usually constructed with five elements:

EXPOSITION

RISING ACTION

CRISIS

CLIMAX

FALLING ACTION

In between each of these elements, we have various smaller arcs — made up of side plots or stories within a story. These arcs are presented through a hero given a mission they must achieve and a journey they go through.

Meanwhile, the elements mentioned above help drive the story to its conclusion. How can we understand these elements in design terms? Let's take a closer look.

The Heroes

Personas represent the heroes in a software development story. Who are the different users that might need to use a service or product? Personas help us understand each of their needs, experiences, behaviours and goals.

To be effective, personas must be based on deep research. Research is the foundation of both design and storytelling, as well as a crucial ethical consideration in healthcare. Don't invent personas. Make sure data is gathered and communicated accurately.

The Mission

The actual product that you're working on can be understood as the mission. Elements of design like colour, layout and fonts play a big role in describing a mission to the user.

The Journey

Similar to the journey in the classical story arc, User Journey Maps tell us about the user's experience. What actions do they take? What emotions did it evoke? User journey maps acquaint you with what's working, as well as areas of missed opportunity.

The Side Plots

The small arcs are represented by miscellaneous micro-interactions. This could be in the form of a tool a doctor uses to look up a patient or the act of writing a prescription. For the patient, it could be logging updates on a health app or changing settings.

Building Context

Storytelling isn't just about the plot but also the context.
This context could emerge in the setting of a story — which part of the world does it take place in? In what year was it written?

It could also emerge through a specific narrative style that the author has employed or how they describe characters and situations.

This context building is also crucial in digital product design:

Layout and hierarchy

Even spacing, alignment, and consistency between pages all play a crucial role in helping users follow a story. Hierarchy tells users what content is most important and designers what elements should draw the eye.

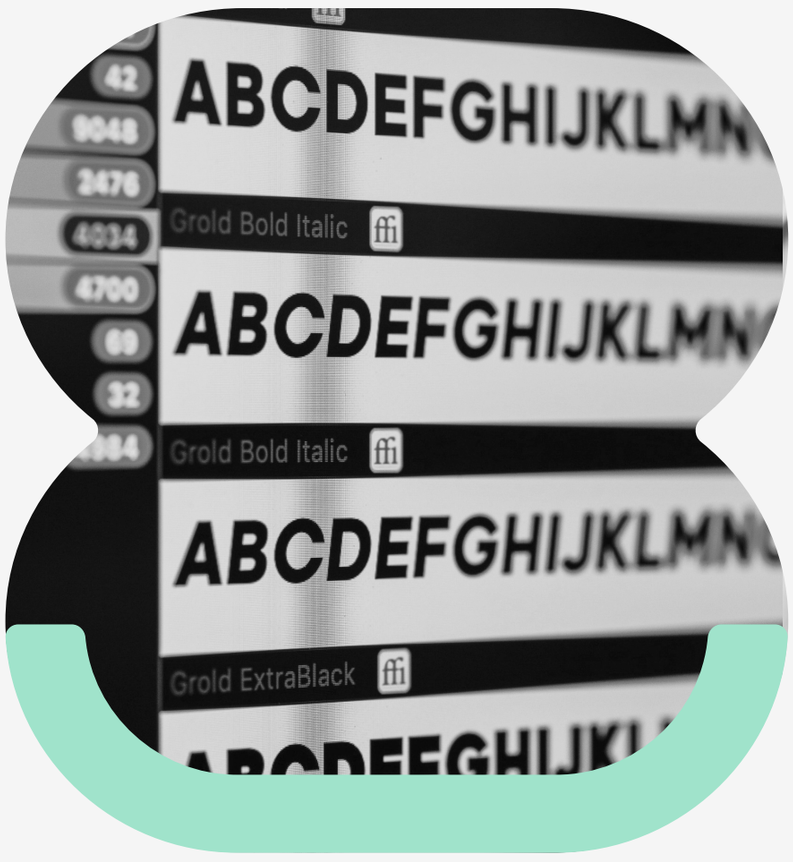
To be effective, personas must be based on deep research. Research is the foundation of both design and storytelling, as well as a crucial ethical consideration in healthcare. Don't invent personas. Make sure data is gathered and communicated accurately.

Colours

Is the colour coding easy to understand? Consistent? Does it convey the right message? Colours play an crucial role in telling users how to feel — using a bright red colour in a meditation app, for example, will confuse users.

Fonts

Our choice of fonts should make it easy for users to distinguish between pages and the importance of the information they're reading. Also, consider if the fonts are big and clear enough to be accessible to users of all backgrounds.



Wording

The tone must be consistent and speak directly to our audience. For instance, don't sound too formal when addressing a young user base. Similarly, don't sound too familiar when addressing serious healthcare professionals.

Final Thoughts

Whether we realise it or not, all our products tell a story. The first thing we must do as designers is identify what story our product is telling. Do we like this story? If not, we need to think harder about what to change. With this in mind, here are some final thoughts to consider.

Use storytelling to find loopholes and inconsistencies

Consider your product as a narrative, and see what makes sense and what should be removed or altered.

Keep learning

Don’t be restricted to design resources, but extend your research to creative writing resources or learn from podcasts you like.

Make sure all elements serve your hero

Consider your product as a narrative, and see what makes sense and what should be removed or altered.

Don’t leave anyone behind!

Don’t just take a broad view of personas, but look into more specific insights to make a product more inclusive and accessible.

Communicate the story to your team

If you don’t share your vision, they won’t be able to share inputs and insights.

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