



ONCE UPON A TIME SERIES

WHY DATA STORYTELLING
IS IMPORTANT



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1

WHAT IS DATA STORYTELLING?

STORYTELLING IS A SKILL INNATE IN ALL HUMANS

.... and yet data storytelling is still an emerging concept!

By 2025, Gartner predicts data stories will be the most widespread way of consuming analytics. It's a key part of modern analytics your business cannot afford to overlook.

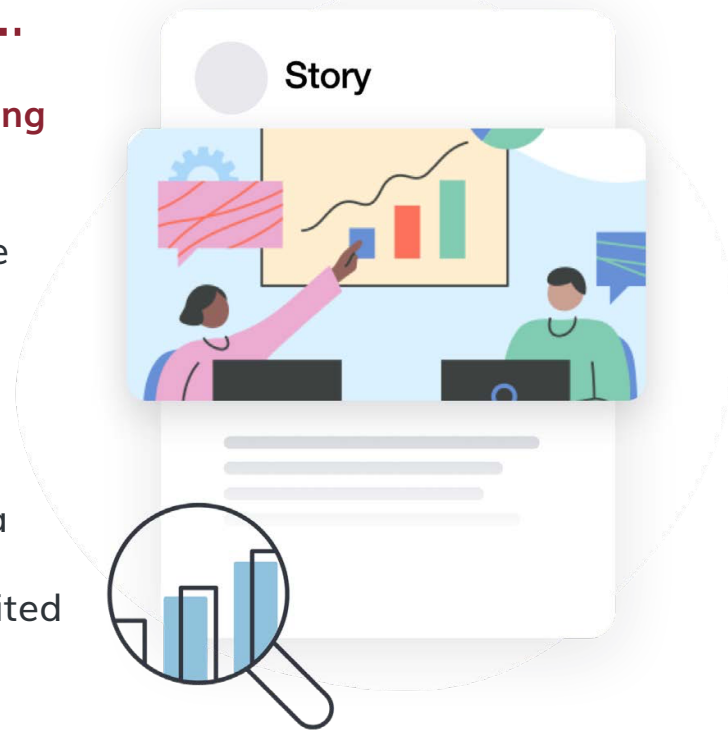
Data storytelling is a method for communicating analytical information with a compelling narrative. Offering consumers valuable context which is memorable. It's suited to all knowledge levels - business users and subject matter experts alike.

Rather than a spreadsheet full of key metrics, and static dashboard charts to dissect and understand. Data stories provide meaningful insights with detailed interpretations of what the numbers mean and how this could impact the business. Helping users to make more informed decisions.

For example, take a typical retail dashboard that presents annual sales revenue for stores worldwide. Ordinarily it would be left to the individual to glean their own interpretations. However, with storytelling to explain the nuances, it reveals that one region's spike in sales was attributable to seasonal factors. Automatically, there is a greatly enhanced depth of understanding and more people able to derive the intended value from the data.

As the adoption and interest in data storytelling increases, it's important to distinguish the narrative techniques used. Today, there are two types of approaches:

1. **Traditional Reporting** - a formal packaging of data on a regular basis (daily, monthly, quarterly). Figures presenting what happened, how and why. Highlighting work completed and planning for next period. Can be complex or add further workload if they are a non-technical user unfamiliar with analysis.
2. **Influencing Story** - text focused styles of reporting (presentations, informal emails, including images/video) helping to persuade people to make certain decisions. Long-form narrative providing a holistic overview and wider context to justify the next action.





2

WHO IS DATA STORYTELLING FOR?

MEANINGFUL NARRATIVE IS VALUABLE TO EVERYONE

Typically, it's left to the experts to contextualise the numbers, and explain why they are important.

One of the main challenges of analytics is making it accessible to more than just trained experts within an organisation. Not everyone is data literate to the degree they need to be able to consume and understand data on a dashboard, or to synthesise multiple data points across multiple reports into a meaningful narrative about the business without guidance.

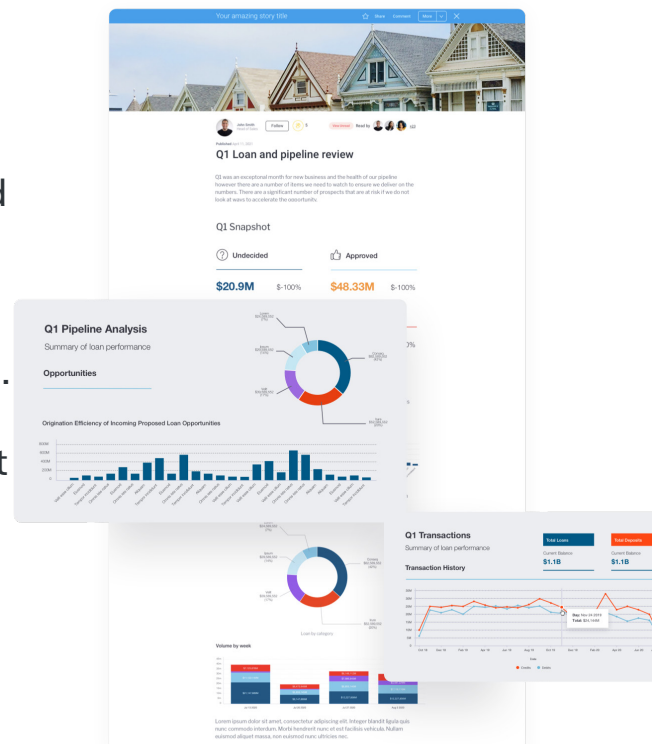
Just like how visualisations made data more digestible in the past, today augmented tools are now making analytics platforms easier for untrained users to navigate. Data storytelling can put business intelligence (BI) and insights into the hands of a broader, non-technical audience.

With data storytelling all users can:

- Provide context and relevance around the numbers
- Inspire discoveries in data with meaningful purpose
- Make information much more memorable and comprehensive for everyone

The text becomes priority with embedded reports and snapshots only used to support the narrative. Dashboards on their own are very data rich. Charts, graphs and augmented tools help present this data in an eye-catching way. However, neither tell the full story behind the data. Many critical events are not captured, and actions taken are simply not reportable.

Narrative is a more natural way for humans to absorb information, so by giving all users access to specialised storytelling tools, everyone can give data meaning in a richer context.





3

WHAT DATA STORIES DO

STORIES ARE MORE THAN JUST A DATA DESCRIPTION



Data acts as the trigger for creating a story, narrative is an anchor, but context is the magic ingredient to develop understanding.

Context around the data transforms the narrative from being a collection of metrics into a valuable decision-making tool. A data story that adds expert opinion, past-experience and insight is what motivates the audience to take-action.

As business leaders you need to base your strategic goals on more than just numbers. You require a holistic viewpoint, interpretations that make sense and an extra layer of detail to draw upon.

Context adds the human element to a narrative. It brings the story to life with emotion.



The aim might be to surprise, delight or even alarm. In any case, bringing 'big picture' information to the forefront of your reporting is key to fully engaging your decision-makers.

For many users, storytelling with context might not come naturally to mind in their day-to-day reporting. If you want to reap the benefits of this approach, it's important to continually take steps to improve data literacy across your organisation.

HOW DATA STORYTELLING TOOLS WORK



Built-in analytics features enable end-users to create and share knowledge and insights using long-form narrative. Augmenting their story with rich data (charts, reports) and non-data content (text, images, videos).

As already discussed, rather than looking at dashboards, users find stories easier to consume because data is explained and interpreted for them. Modern embedded analytics platforms offer several narrative-building features which combine real-time data with rich information presentation options, without having to switch to using other tools.

This area of analytics is core to the [Yellowfin](#) suite, providing two useful products - **Stories and Present** - where users can build narrative-based reports and presentations within the same interface they build dashboards.

Yellowfin Stories

Narratives in Stories are built in a blog-style format and can be presented as a written report or more in-depth journalistic piece. All Stories can be shared, commented on and read while using Yellowfin, and multiple users can collaborate on a single Story, with all contributors being acknowledged in the credits. This adds transparency, credibility and trust to each story, encouraging more user adoption overall.



Story content can be easily added – either as a live view of the data, a snapshot (preserving a point in time) or a bookmark (report with predefined filters). Users can embed reports and visualisations from other reporting tools such as Tableau, Qlik, and Power BI onto any web and intranet page. Complex data with full context is presented in an engaging way and can be shared with a broader audience onsite or remotely. Full data security is maintained at all times with specific access rights set. Simple to create with business users in mind - because everyone has a story to tell!

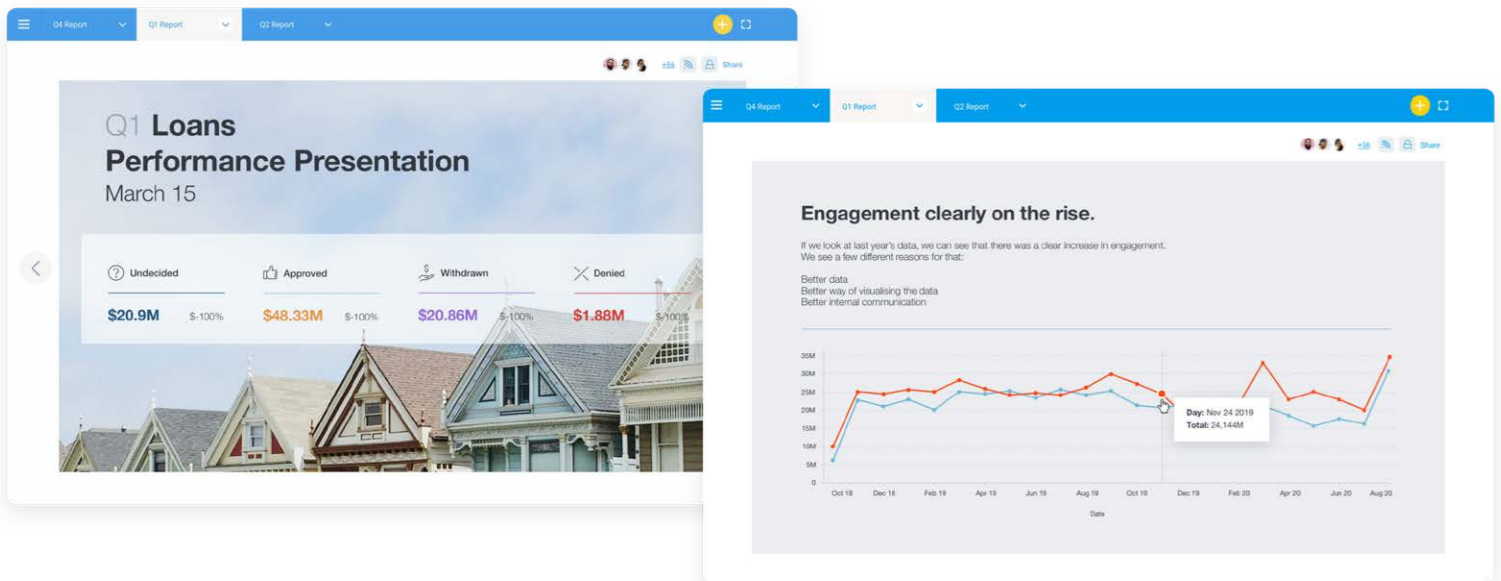
Yellowfin Present

Present is a fully integrated presentation module in Yellowfin that allows end-users to share and communicate important data and insights with the wider business. At RhinoIT we often describe it as 'PowerPoint on steroids.' It comes as part of a slide deck complete with interactive widgets, live reports, images, text, shapes, icons, filters and actions.

Containing similar functionality to the Yellowfin dashboard canvas, it is easy and seamless to build management, financial reports, and presentations. Bringing them to life by leveraging a familiar interface with the same set of graphic and editing tools.

Reports and visualisations from Yellowfin and other external tools can be embedded into a presentation. Users can present with confidence because data can be dynamically refreshed, constantly remaining accurate and up-to-date.

Present is great for when you need to take an executive boardroom or department through key data and help them better understand the context behind the numbers with a relatable story.





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HOW TO MAKE STORIES COMPELLING

KEY TIPS ON CREATING DATA INSIGHTS THAT ARE MEMORABLE

Obviously you want to ensure that your data discoveries are remembered and acted upon. Before adopting a storytelling analytic solution, here's what to consider when forming your narrative:

- **What does the data tell you?**
- **Is it a noteworthy change, pattern or trend over time?**
- **Is it a lesson in what 'not' to do?**
- **Is it a fact not widely known but one that people should be aware of?**

The primary aim of any data-driven narrative is to move people emotionally, and then back up their understanding with the facts. It reveals a truth that you need to communicate.

It could be in one long story format providing an overview, or multiple shorter snippets as you make your way through a set of facts. The point is to make it memorable and personal so that it resonates with your audience.

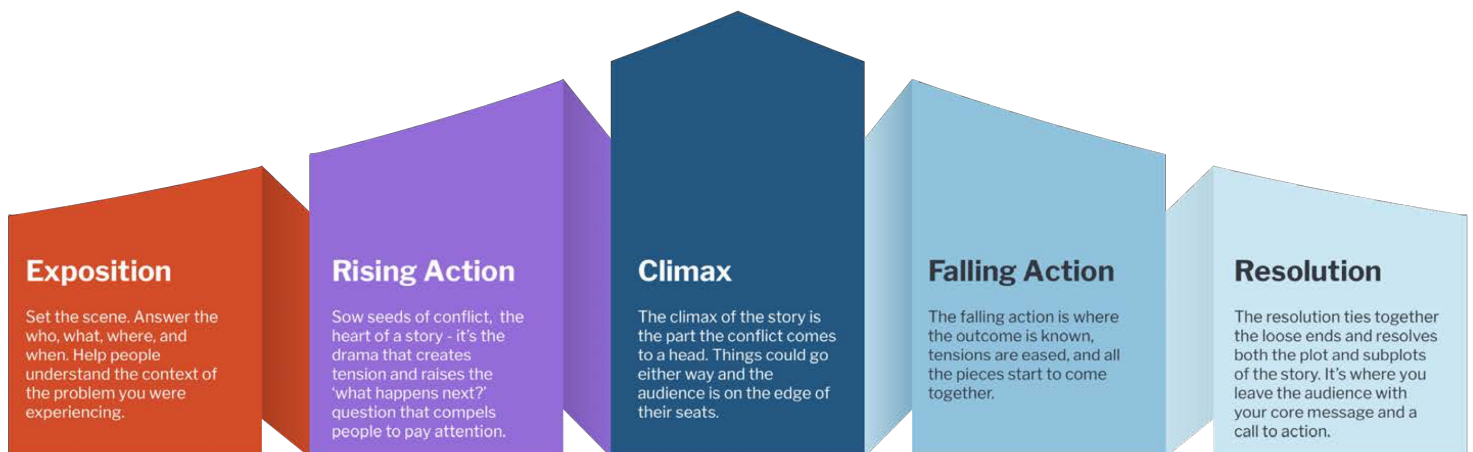
Tell a powerful story with a clear structure

The foundation of every great and memorable story is the 'dramatic story arc.' This is a literary term for the path a story follows. Providing a backbone with a clear beginning, middle and end. It helps to move a character/situation from one state to another.

1. First, pinpoint the climax of your data story. It's probably the discovery of the data insight, and how that conflicted with previous beliefs or behaviour patterns.
2. What was it that first put you on the path of uncovering the insight? Did you set out to find a solution to a problem that couldn't be solved.

3. Perhaps you wanted to see the effects of one variable on another, or how frequently a certain pattern occurred. Use this to set the scene and help your audience experience what you did.
4. Then build the action by sharing the struggles and trials faced in your search for the solution, or share the ever-growing nature of the problem, which initially led you to search for insights.
5. Finally, you reach the climax of your data storytelling – the do or die moment – which then led to everything finally resolving and falling into place.

Following this arc is where you need to leave your audience with your core message and a call to action.





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KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

PITCH YOUR DATA STORY AT THE RIGHT LEVEL



Take time to consider the different types of people consuming your data and it's context. Empathise with your audience and tailor the narrative and presentation according to their needs and understanding.

Novice

This is likely to be their first exposure to the subject you are about to communicate. You need to guide them through the data but without oversimplification. Slowly build their understanding as the story unfolds.

Generalist

Someone already aware of the topic with a grasp of the basics. They want an overview of major themes. You can briefly dip into detail but don't delve too much into technical jargon.

Manager

Normally more hands on and require the full picture. You can present an in-depth, actionable understanding of intricacies and interrelationships. Get right into the nitty-gritty with comprehensive data stories.

Expert

Those with a thorough understanding of the topic and want to explore it more themselves. You can afford to get very technical, providing interactive data for them to check the validity of your statements and interpretations.

Executive

Time is a precious commodity, so they just want to glean the significance of weighted probabilities to make high level decisions. Only provide short, punchy stories backed up with data that point to definitive conclusions.

DATA-LED CULTURES REQUIRE INSPIRING ROLE MODELS

To successfully cultivate a data culture, leadership teams need to 'walk the talk'.

As a leader it is your responsibility to become a data storytelling role model. By taking time to build a story and invite people on that journey with you, it empowers everyone in the business to start telling and sharing great stories. Together you can create a vision for the future, backed up by data that explains the strategy to achieving it including the what, why and how.

Encourage people by being specific about the data you want to see and the actions you want to know about. Guide them on content ideas and how to back up their arguments with facts, rather than just offering up opinions.

The storytelling components of analytic tools like Yellowfin Stories and Present will help you build credible stories that are well structured. People will love to read them but more importantly they will be influenced by the message you share, which is incredibly powerful!

Here's how to successfully deliver your data story:

- Start with the story first then weave in statistics later - this way your audience will remain entertained without being put off by the numbers
- When delivering the core message get to the heart of the matter
- Speak from personal experience and tell the truth
- Make the central message obvious
- Pitch at the right level for your audience
- Use external, reputable data to support your insights
- Maintain a logical flow, and avoid overwhelming your audience with too many details
- Be honest about your shortcomings, but celebrate your victories as you overcome adversities
- Be patient with your ability to tell a story - it takes practice!





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WHY DATA STORYTELLING IS IMPORTANT

INSIGHTFUL DISCOVERIES DRIVE MEANINGFUL ACTION

For your business

Traditional reports and dashboards simply don't provide the full context for the data they share, leading to misinterpretation of the facts.

By contrast, data storytelling tools provided by analytics platforms such as Yellowfin Stories and Present, help users to package the information in one place. They are tailored to build narrative around data so that people can agree on its meaning and draw the correct conclusions. As a result, the appropriate business decisions are made.

When an insightful discovery comes to light you want to share it in the most engaging way possible and facilitate the best course of action. That's why adopting the right analytics solution that provides you with storytelling capability is very important.

For your people

Stories are incredibly powerful because they can evoke emotion and inspire a person to take action!

When you discover a data insight, be clear about what you want your audience to do as a result and approach it like a presenter. Map out the story arc, build the narrative, formulate the conclusions and highlight the action points. People will remember the core message and engage with the information much better than they would with a standard dashboard.

Are you ready to start telling your data stories?! Choose the right analytics tool and before long you will be quickly persuading people to act on the insights you have discovered.

As with all things it takes time to master the art of data storytelling, but when everyone understands challenges better and they can clearly identify opportunities for change, then business decision making becomes much easier.

**Decide on
needed action**



**Create an
emotive story**



**Data
insight**



**Back it up
with data**



**Call to
action**

LEARN MORE

Find out why data storytelling is important to your business decision making capabilities.

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