

The Five Things That Every Proposal Manager Should Know About Graphics

By Mike Parkinson

1. **Judge a book by its cover.** Proposals have been won and lost because of covers. A well-designed cover that focuses on the potential/current customer's benefits or addresses key issues plays a significant role in the final decision. If you are resource starved, focus the design time on your cover and, if possible, a few key graphics that illustrate benefits and discriminators.
2. **Benefits, benefits, benefits!** Use "benefits boxes" or "takeaways" on your pages or slides to list the benefits to your potential/current customers. Do not assume they know the reasons why your new "six sigma process" will benefit them. Make it obvious. Spell it out. Prioritize the benefits. The best-case scenario is to tie the benefit to a portion of an image since words are processed by our short-term memory and images go directly into our long-term memory. Put them in order of value with #1 being the most significant. Do not list too many. The rule of thumb is to use **no more than** five to nine. (We can only retain about 7 bits of information—plus or minus 2. This is why we have 7-digit phone numbers.)
3. **Color influences.** Color quickly affects our emotions (red = excited and blue = calm). It increases the audience's willingness to read by 80%, improves retention and comprehension by 75%, and increases motivation and participation by up to 80%. To play it safe, use blues and greens. (Of course, this is culturally dependent. For most Western cultures blue and green have been voted the most appealing colors.) If your goal is to ramp up sales, use your potential/current customer's colors. Your customer wants to see themselves in your proposals. If your goal is to increase mindshare, use your company's colors.
4. **Low on time and money?** Evolve the concept before rendering the final graphic. Ask the authors to do rough sketches of their ideas on paper or a white board and explain it to their team. Typically, the team will have constructive input and the graphic will evolve real-time. You can even submit the rough sketches for early reviews as long as the text is legible and the reviewer understands the basic concept or direction. Once everyone agrees on the rough graphic, ask the designer to render it on the computer for inclusion in the proposal.
5. **Need graphics fast?** Use iStockPhoto.com, Dreamstime.com, BigStockPhoto.com, and BillionDollarGraphics.com (*editable* proposal graphics) for royalty-free, print resolution, professional graphics for about \$4 each! For free, public domain US Armed Forces images visit army.mil, navy.mil, af.mil, marines.mil, uscg.mil, arng.army.mil. Check the copyright information on each site. Be sure the photographs you choose are available for use in proposals and attribution is given when requested. Although the images might not be as perfect as custom designed graphics, in a pinch the visuals can help take your proposal to the next level, reinforce key concepts, provide a break from pages of text, and help highlight your benefits and discriminators.

Mike Parkinson has spearheaded multi-billion dollar projects and created thousands of graphics resulting in billions of dollars in increased revenue for his clients. Mike has supported trial attorneys and created ad campaigns, tutorials, corporate briefings, Web portals, medical training software, and more. In 1999, he became part owner of 24 Hour Company (www.24hrco.com). Mike leveraged his design experience to help his partners transform the company into an industry leader. He is often requested to speak at national conferences, large and small companies, and graphic industry events. Recently, Mike wrote the first and only book that teaches busy business professionals to conceptualize communicative, persuasive graphics (www.BillionDollarGraphics.com).