

# Visual Marketing Matters

by Michael Parkinson

I eat bad food, buy crappy cars, wear “fashionable” clothes, and watch ridiculous television shows. Why? The answer is in part due to marketing. So what’s wrong with me? Why can’t I stop myself? I know better than to fall prey to advertisements that promise happiness if I buy that new product or service.

Turns out, I’m normal. There’s nothing wrong with me. I’m just like everyone else. All of us are hard-wired to be influenced by visual marketing. That’s good news for the good guys like you and me who want to use marketing to be more successful.

I spent the last two years writing two books about how to influence and motivate people when promoting a product or service. The independent research available on the topic is amazing and eye opening. In a nutshell, I found that using imagery is one of the fastest, least expensive, most effective ways to up the success rate of my business.

Psychologist Albert Mehrabian demonstrated that 93% of communication is nonverbal. Research at 3M Corporation concluded that we process visuals 60,000 times faster than text. In 1986, a 3M-sponsored study at the University of Minnesota School of Management found that presenters who use visual aids are 43% more effective in persuading audience members to take a desired course of action than presenters who don’t use visuals. University of Wisconsin found that visuals improved learning by 200%. Independent research discovered that using imagery took 40% less time to explain complex ideas. Harvard University concluded that visual communication improved retention by 38%.

Companies and organizations use these findings to their advantage. Look around you. Advertisements do it all the time. They show us happy, pretty people. Why? Because, seeing attractive people stimulates the same part of our brain activated by cocaine use. It makes us feel good. We cannot help but be influenced!

The United States government isn’t immune. Larry Tracy, who now trains corporate executives to make oral presentations for government contracts, headed the Pentagon’s top briefing team and worked for years with the Department of State. He was aware that graphics were so influential in the government’s decision to purchase goods and services that bad buying decisions were made based on the quality of the visuals in the presented materials. This has in turn led to the government, at times, putting constraints on presented graphics by requiring black and white submissions, or even requiring that no graphics be used in a presentation in order to reduce the likelihood of high-quality, polished graphics unfairly persuading evaluators.

I spent many years analyzing how the proposal industry works (an industry that focuses on the submission of written and oral presentations to secure work that will increase or maintain a company’s revenue). I found that the priority of graphic development

**FAST FACT**

Manipulating visual design factors could induce a target emotion such as trustworthiness.

(Kim J and Moon J Y, "Designing towards emotional usability in customer interfaces--trustworthiness of cyber-banking system interfaces," *Interacting with Computers*, [Volume 10, Issue 1: March] 1-29)

increases as award value rises. The industry understands the influence that visual communication has on their audience. Based on a formal poll I conducted, it is common knowledge to companies like Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, Boeing, and Lockheed Martin that graphics are an essential part of winning new government business.

Flags, eagles, and other symbols of patriotism are often included on proposal covers simply because of the positive emotional influence patriotic imagery has on government evaluators. Part of the cover's goal is to instantly establish that the presenter is a supportive, trustworthy, reliable patriot. As a result, the government evaluator is more likely to be in a positive, agreeable state of mind when reading the proposal. Emotions influence the very mechanisms of rational thinking, so if the evaluator's mood is elevated by the visuals, the more likely he or she is to agree with the presenter.

"So what?" you may ask. I use my understanding of how graphics influence and motivate an audience to increase my success rate. I make sure my marketing materials use imagery to effectively communicate my ideas and convey a positive emotional response towards my product or service. In the end, I don't need to write paragraphs of text to explain why my product/service is the best, I just show a graphic—it makes my job so much easier.

## As an example, based on what you see which is the better lawn care service company?

