

Why Use Graphics

by Michael Parkinson



Have you ever struggled with an explanation? Did you say...

- *They just don't understand.*
- *I explain things over and over again.*
- *I can't get buy-in from my boss.*
- *It's so obvious, why doesn't everyone see it?*
- *My solution is too complex to understand. How am I going to communicate this?*
- *My company is the best for the job but the client doesn't see it.*

Have you ever lost a client? Have you ever lost a sale? Did you ever say...

- *I'm not meeting my sales numbers.*
- *I'm not winning enough contracts.*
- *My presentation needs to be better.*
- *My proposals need to be more competitive.*
- *My marketing materials need to improve.*
- *We are small company that wants to look big.*
- *We are a big company that looks small.*
- *What am I missing?*

Have you argued with office mates? Did you think...

- *My team isn't on the same page.*
- *Everyone is going in different directions.*
- *What will it take for everyone to agree?*
- *How will we pull this off?*

Have you ever been told...

- *I can't remember.*
- *I forgot what you said.*
- *You didn't say that.*

- *What am I supposed to be doing?*
- *I don't understand.*
- *I'm not sure I follow you.*
- *We chose another company.*
- *Someone else got the job.*
- *We lost the account.*

How did you feel at the time? Frustrated? Stressed? Discouraged? Depressed? You are not alone. Around the world, millions of professionals, managers, technicians, entrepreneurs, consultants, sales people, and executives struggle with these same challenges. What we say is failing to deliver the results we need. Too much of our time is spent over explaining and over selling. We work so hard to communicate important thoughts and ideas only to have the final outcomes crush our hopes of success.

Why do so many professionals struggle with basic communication? And what can be done to solve this disconnect? The source of the problem is found in your daily life.

You are fractured. Your attention span is finite. Your time is limited so you are forced to pick and choose what you focus on. You are pulled in several directions at once. You switch focus from home to work to kids to friends to acquaintances. One second you are concentrating on driving, the next you are looking for your ringing cell phone, and a minute later you are listening attentively to the breaking news on your radio. At work you are typing a report, then answering the phone, surfing the Internet, solving another problem, looking for your pen, chatting with a coworker, attending meetings, and thinking about how tired you are. Everywhere you go, you are presented with an increasing amount of stimuli: friends, family, coworkers, sales people, telemarketers, television advertisements and shows, news, movies, magazines, billboards, radio spots, and web sites all competing for your attention. It is amazing that we accomplish anything at all!

Studies show that exposure to this increasing din of stimuli shrinks our attention spans. And it's happening to everyone all over the world. Just like you, everyone else is distracted. Information comes at us so fast. We have come to expect this pace. So what can you do about it?

Do what other successful people and businesses have done to become winners in whatever they did. They saw that our communication paradigm was evolving and used it to their advantage. Advertisers are experts at it. Lawyers use it to win cases. Sales people rely on it to make a living.

To be successful, you need to stand out. You need to grab your audience's attention and quickly communicate what they want to hear. You need to motivate them to take action. You are competing with slick ads, smooth talkers, and an audience's ever shrinking attention span. You need an edge. Using visuals like the pros guarantees you that edge.

We are visual thinkers. Because of an increased understanding of how humans think and communicate and the proliferation of books and printed material, advertisements, television, the Internet, and personal computers the role that visuals play in our lives is quickly

evolving. What was once the exception is now the norm. What was once an added value is now expected. People expect to see graphics. They expect visual communication. Based on recent research, **those who learn how to speak the visual language will succeed and those who don't will fail.**

In *A Primer of Visual Literacy*, Donis A. Dondis explains:

In print, language is the primary element, while visual factors, such as the physical setting or design format and illustration, are secondary or supportive. In the modern media, just the reverse is true. The visual dominates; the verbal augments. Print is not dead yet, nor will it ever be, but nevertheless, our language-dominated culture has moved perceptibly toward the iconic. Most of what we know and learn, what we buy and believe, what we recognize and desire, is determined by the domination of the human psyche by the photograph. And it will be more so in the future.

That is wonderful news for you because graphics are proven to motivate more effectively than text. Using graphics greatly increases the odds that you will achieve your goals. If you want to convince others that you have the answers, talk with graphics.

Products that sell the most are usually those accompanied by pictures of the offerings in question. Do people judge a book by its cover? Amazon thinks so. That's why they put the images of covers on their site. eBay sellers who use pictures to sell their products command higher prices. UCLA showed in a study that people are persuaded only 7% by the words in a presentation, 38% by the verbal presentation, and 55% by the visual presentation.

Using visuals in a presentation...

- improved learning 200%
- *University of Wisconsin*
- took 40% less time to explain complex ideas
- *Wharton School*
- improved retention 38%
- *Harvard University*

It doesn't matter what you're communicating, tangible or not, there is always a visual you can use that will get people to **pay attention, understand, remember, and agree** with you.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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