



THE VALUE OF VISUAL PR

How To Tell Better Stories Through Visual Content

Mynewsdesk PR Academy

Study Guide | 5 of 5

mynewsdesk™

WHY VISUAL CONTENT?

The people you want to reach – be they journalists, influencers, or customers – aren't going to visit your website each morning to see what you're up to. Instead, they will open up Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram (among others) to stay connected with friends, and to fill up on interesting stories.

They will also check emails and other news sources they subscribe to – what we sometimes call 'appointment reading'.

These channels are where you're going to find and engage with your audience.

Getting attention on social media or via email isn't easy.

You'll be competing for attention with a massive group of others: Your competitors, completely unrelated brands, posts and news on social media, and emails from friends and family, etc...

Plus, you're trying to win the attention of people who are, frankly, attention impaired. Recent research shows 81 percent of people are only skimming the content they read online.

One way to cut through the clutter is to make your posts, press releases, newsletters, and websites more visually appealing. And research bears this out.



Brand-created Facebook posts that include images earn **87%** of all engagement.



The average video post generates **135%** greater organic reach compared to photo posts.



Tweets with images earn nearly **20%** more clicks, nearly **90%** more favorites, and **150%** more retweets.



Press releases with links to videos and embedded pictures are a must, because it increases overall engagement by **18%** with photos and **55%** with videos.

Formats & Tactics

Imagery

Using imagery – whether photography, illustration, or some other graphic – helps make your news releases and articles more engaging and memorable. Plus, imagery drives your content to be more searchable online. Social posts that include images are 650 percent more likely to engage than text-only posts.

Some pointers to get you thinking:



1. Seek out authenticity

Above all, avoid images that feel commercial or ‘smarmy’. You know the ones: The actors all look posed and curiously happy to be sitting around a conference table, or overly pleased with their green salad.

Instead of the two images above, the two below cover the same subject matter, but have a more updated look and feel.

- a) *Featuring people who are actors can be a tricky choice, because too often the image looks posed. Whenever possible, choose a realistic setting (or, even better, a genuinely real one), rather than somewhere perfectly presented, but oddly fake looking. Sometimes taking people out of the photo is the best choice to ensure the image doesn't look staged.*

Formats & Tactics | Imagery

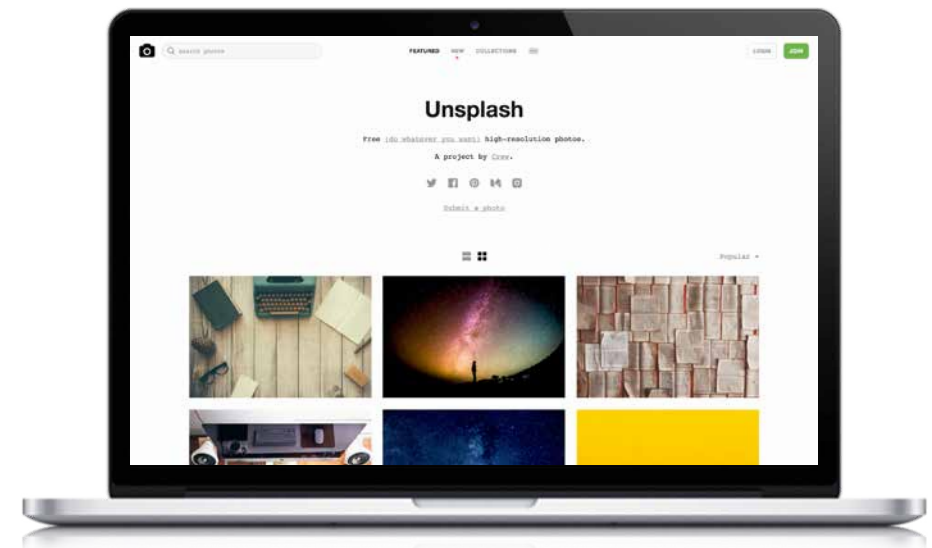
- b) *To capture realism, some designers may even choose to use what's called a 'glitch aesthetic'. It's a photo that's intentionally imperfect and used to make the image appear more realistic.*

Formats & Tactics | Imagery

2. Plan to pay for quality

The quality of the image is often directly proportional to the amount you're willing to pay for it.

- a) Free images do exist, from sites like [Creative Commons](#), but you'll spend a lot of time finding the right image and quality to fit your needs, because these are huge, open-source libraries. Recently, niche photo sites have sprouted up that promise quality in a free package (such as [Unsplash](#) and [Negative Space](#)). Still, these are small portfolios compared to the big stock photo libraries. If you choose this route, always do your research to ensure you have permission to use what you find.
- b) Tried and true stock photo sites, such as **Getty Images**, **BigStockPhoto** and **iStock**, have good search functions and transparent pricing ladders. Plus, bigger sites offer curated collections, so you'll spend less time wading through choices.
- c) Finally, for very important, high-visibility projects, consider original or custom artwork. Hiring a professional photographer, illustrator, or designer can pay big dividends for critical content projects.



Formats & Tactics | Imagery

3. Add attractants

Once you've chosen your main images, consider adding overlays to make those images more recognizable and shareable.



a) *If you are publishing original artwork (whether it's custom photos, illustrations, or data graphics), add your logo or mark to identify it as yours.*



b) *Particularly for images you'll share through social channels, consider adding a title, quote, or other text that attracts attention.*

Infographics

We've reviewed the whys and hows of images. Infographics go one step further. They visualize complex information in a digestible, visual format. And, like plain images, they increase the chance your message will be read and shared.

The most interesting infographics contain some or all of these ingredients:

- They untangle a complex topic and distill it into key parts.
- The subject matter lends itself to a modular layout. In other words, it can be presented in pieces and parts that add up to an interesting story.
- The story is often bolstered by data. (Always be sure, by the way, to cite your sources.)
- And the design uses a visual metaphor or consistent theme throughout.



See the full infographic [HERE](#).

Want an example of a good infographic?



WVO provides A/B testing software for marketers. It aimed to teach marketers in the ecommerce industry how to improve conversions after someone puts products into their online cart. It's infographic, Anatomy of a Perfect Checkout Page, details the hurdles customers encounter while trying to buy something, and how online retailers can minimize them.

To the left is an abbreviated version of the whole. The entire infographic is three times longer. Why is this a standout example? It takes a complex topic, crystalizes it into its most critical components, then offers prescriptive advice to solve the problem.

See the full infographic [HERE](#).

Formats & Tactics | Infographics

Anatomy of a Winning TED Talk

● **1%**

Sophisticated Visual Aids

We're not sure who puts the D in TED—most of the best presentations favor rapid PowerPoint slide shows (sorry, Brené Brown), Fictionary-quality drawings (really, Simon Sinek?), or no props at all.

● **5%**

Opening Joke

Remember the one about the shoe salesman who went to Africa in the 1900s? That's how Benjamin Zander opened his talk—which turned out to be about classical music.

● **5%**

Spontaneous Moment

Don't overprepare. Tease the guy in the front row ("You could light up a village with this guy's eyes"). Commend the stagehand who handles the human brain you brought.

● **5%**

Statement of Utter Certainty

People come for answers—give 'em what they want, as Shawn Achor did: "By training your brain ... we can reverse the formula for happiness and success."

● **12%**

Snappy Refrain

The TED equivalent of "I have a dream." Example: "People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it." Repeat 7x.

● **23%**

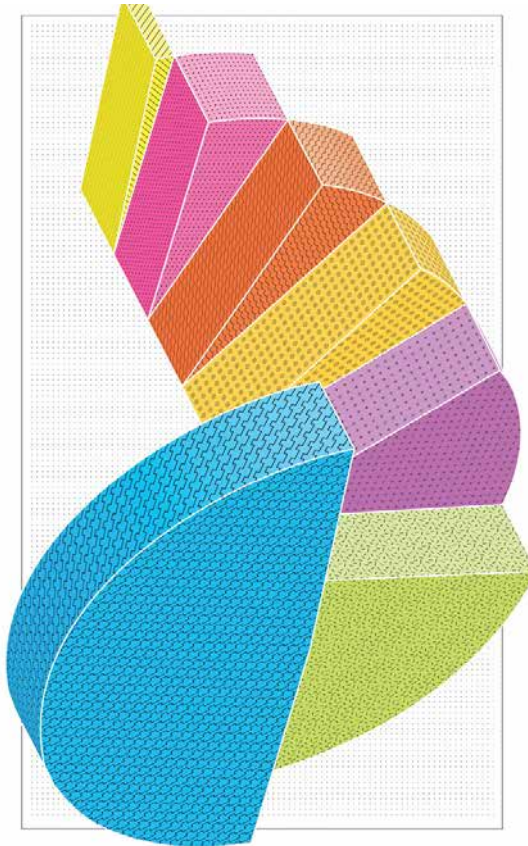
Personal Failure

Be relatable. We want to know about that nervous breakdown. Or at least the time you didn't fit in at summer camp.

● **49%**

Contrarian Thesis

Wait a sec—we should be playing more videogames? The more choices we have, the worse off we are? TED is where conventional wisdom goes to die.



Think “Anatomy of ...” Infographics are a good idea based on the previous example? Not always. We’re not sure what this infographic from *Wired* about winning TED talks intends to say—and the way it illustrates the data only confounds the information presented. The subject is interesting—how to develop a winning presentation—but the delivery offers no prescriptive advice.

See the full infographic [HERE](#).

Once you’ve designed your infographic, the asset will live on your website, but you’ll also publish it through social channels. If your infographic is large in scale, consider creating a smaller version for promoting online that fits within the parameters of each social network. Then link to the entire version on your site.

You also want to increase the chances that digital media companies will pick up your infographic for republishing. Reach out to journalists and influencers in your network to see if they are interested in sharing the graphic with their audiences.

Presentations

While they may seem old-school, online presentations are another great way to unpack complex topics and offer prescriptive advice. Plus, if done well, you can ‘gate’ your presentation, so users must share contact information in order to watch the presentation or download it.

- a) **Static presentations**, such as those you might find on SlideShare. These are slide decks in which the reader controls page turns. They are the simplest format, but not always an effective way to convey complex information
- b) **On-demand presentations** (or on-demand webinars). These include narration and are available for viewing at any time. Usually a company will gate on-demand content so that the viewer must submit contact information to watch the webinar.
- c) **Live presentations**. In a live presentation, individuals register in advance and the format feels more like a classroom or seminar setting. (As with on-demand webinars, users will share their contact information in order to participate.) Depending on the technology you work with, users can ask questions of presenters, or participate in live polls and quizzes. (Interactive features like these are available as plug-ins from webinar companies.)



Formats & Tactics | Presentations

Whether you decide to prerecord a presentation or host something live, you'll need to choose a platform to help you host and distribute it.

There are dozens of cloud-based solutions, such as GoToMeeting, Capterra and Brightcove. These allow you to access the hosting platform through your own website, and brand the 'channel' with your company's look and feel.

More and more companies offer live streaming options. YouTube Live is the biggest player in the market, others are jumping in quickly. These usually offer fewer options for contact-capture than the paid versions above.

If you think an educational series, or even a single webinar class, is a good fit for your PR needs, there's a good bit of work to do to, including:

1. Defining your agenda
2. Choosing the ideal format (for example, will you have a single talking head, or will you host a panel discussion?)
3. Promoting your event
4. Rehearsing for a live show
5. Executing the event on the big day
6. Creating a portfolio of follow-up content to keep participants engaged



Video

Video is the ultimate visual format to drive a desired action – whether it’s eliciting an emotional response, conveying information, or simplifying complex information. Plus, research shows videos *work*.



Brand-created Facebook posts that include images earn **87%** of all engagement.



Tweets with images earn nearly **20%** more clicks, nearly **90%** more favorites, and **150%** more retweets.



Most incredible of all: Researchers estimate that by 2018, **79%** of internet traffic will be video content.

For PR professionals, video content can also help your media company stakeholders by offering ready-made content for sharing. Rather than just pitching stories, you’ll be pitching pre-packaged video stories, ready for distribution.

The subjects you can cover with video are truly endless, but some good entry-level projects include:

- **Customer success stories.** *Profile an interesting customer, the challenges they face, and how your product fits in to the solution.*
- **Corporate social responsibility stories.** *Show a day-in-the-life of an issue your company cares about and underwrites in some fashion.*

Formats & Tactics | Video

Creating effective videos often requires outside help... but not always.

- First, think about (a) your budget and (b) your video ambitions. What is a reasonable scope of work for your first project, and how much are you willing to pay?
- Next, canvass your internal resources. Does anyone on the team have video production and editing skills? How about experience overseeing a video project? Ensure you involve internal players who can help bring the project to fruition.
- Unless you have experienced videographers and video editors, assume you'll be hiring an agency or freelancer. The ideal agency or individual will help you think through your idea, develop a storyboard, help choose filming locations, and translate your idea into an edited, finished product. You want someone who will test your concepts and advise you about how to improve them.
- To save money, consider investing in a series rather than a one-off video project because the cost-per-video will be lower.



mynewsdesk™