

PRINT MATTERS

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Infographic courtesy of Lokesh Dhakar • lokeshdhakar.com

Every picture tells a story

Why is a picture worth 1,000 words? Because our brains love visual stimulation. Recent research by NeoMam Studios shows that about 50 percent of our brain is involved in visual processing. The research also reveals that our brains only need one-tenth of a second to understand a visual scene.

Most publishers are aware of this fact and have been using photos and illustrations in their magazines since the beginning of time. However, fewer designers are using infographics, which is a shame, because infographics are incredibly adept at illustrating all manner of ideas and concepts.



Infographic courtesy of Prism Design • www.prismdesigninc.com

“Infographics combine words and pictures together that tell a story,” says Susan Reeves, principal of Houston-based Prism Design. “When you put them together, you have a powerful message that helps a reader understand something better.”

The wow factor

The best infographics are creative and custom designed for the message they’re attempting to convey. “There’s sort of a novelty aspect of it,” says Houston designer Michael Clarke, owner of Blue C Studios. “There’s a wow factor that makes it ‘sticky’ for the reader.”

Our brain’s fondness for all things visual has not gone unnoticed by the media, writes Pete Schauer in “The Science Behind Why We Love Infographics,” a blog about NeoMam’s research published by *Social Media Today* in 2015. “Visual information has increased across all channels, with the Internet being the largest at a 9,900 percent increase since 2007, and even newspapers made the jump, increasing the visuals in their content by 142 percent between 1985 and 1994.”

So it looks like infographics are here to stay. And there is no time like the present to incorporate them into your publication. It’s not as challenging as it may seem.

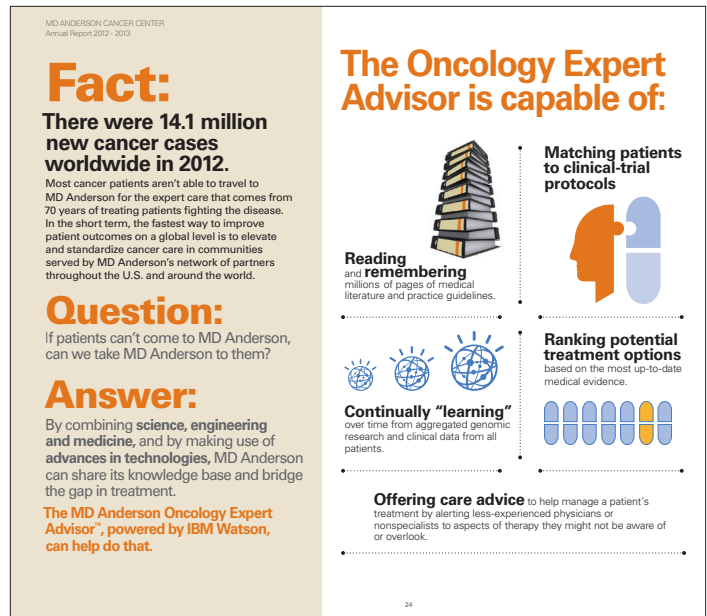
When it comes to magazines, infographics help fulfill a common goal for publishers, editorial teams and designers, says Clarke, who works primarily on editorial projects. “You want your readers to have the best possible experience. You want to give them a little surprise, that ‘Oh, I hadn’t thought about it that way’ moment.”

Ok, so you’re in. But where do you begin?

Reeves suggests starting the process with the editor and/or writer you’re working with. “I always ask my customers, ‘When it’s all said and done, what is it you want your reader to understand?’”

Creative and coherent

After the focus is established, start researching it. Once you have enough knowledge and understanding, you can conceptualize your infographic, select appropriate images, and create something that will fit well with the editorial content.



Infographics courtesy of MD Anderson Cancer Center

“Your piece should make a coherent statement and leave a singular impression that breaks down into smaller, more digestible pieces, as opposed to presenting a bunch of pieces that hope to add up to a complete statement,” Clarke says. “Determine what elements should be dominant and establish a clear hierarchy for the information to follow.”

“Remember that the point of creating an infographic is to make information easy to access, effortless to understand and compelling to look at.”

If you can accomplish all of that while working a surprise or two into your infographic, the impact on your readers will be even stronger. “Make your work relevant but unexpected, in that order. Don’t use obscure elements just for visual impact. Meaning trumps all. That said, look for solutions that might show the familiar from a different angle. Aim to make the reader curious about the information at first glance, then back it up with clarity in your execution.”

Investing time and resources into this process sends a message to your readers, Reeves says. It shows that you appreciate them and want them to get the most out of the information you present. At the same time, infographics help lure people to the articles you’ve devoted considerable time and effort into delivering.

And when infographics deliver, they also help establish a closer bond with your readers. In today’s harried and increasingly digitized world, any tool that cements the publisher/reader bond is a good tool to have.