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Infographics on the Brain

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COMPUTERS .ᴵᴺ LIBRARIES

ENTERPRISE INFR
IT SECURITY | 63%
NETWORK INFRAST
TELEPHONE SERVICE
ADMIN SYSTEMS | 56

❹ DOMAINS OWNERSHIP

END-USER TRAINING 30%
INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY 22%
LIBRARY SYSTEMS 60%
PHOTOCOPIER SERVICES 15%
WEB SERVICES 20%

IQ 2015, universities are in charge of maintaining the technology platforms and in
while their libraries are responsible for content and service oriented functions.

2015 2010

THUMBS UP

Infographics on the Brain

BY RACHEL EVANS

ILLUSTRATION BY GRANT EVANS

Infographics are on the rise as a communication medium in libraries. We live in a visual world, and we are visual creatures who are naturally drawn to graphical representations. Using free web applications, librarians and support staffers can now easily create beautiful and compelling infographics that can serve multiple purposes in the library environment. For use in community outreach, marketing programs, in collections, internally as a presentation aid, and more, infographics can help us relay important information in an attractive way for little-to-no-cost. In this article, you will find out why infographics are more advantageous than text alone. There are guidelines for creating strong infographics, examples of library-specific infographics, and recommendations for a slew of web applications you can use to create infographics for free.

Infographics and Our Minds

Traditionally, libraries have been early adopters of emerging technologies. It is no surprise that some libraries have been using infographics in various ways, both internally and externally, for many years. Why infographics? What is it that draws the human eye toward this medium of communication? The answer is simple—our brains have changed. As humans, we are constantly evolving to adapt to our increasingly technologically centered environments.

On a daily basis, an individual is bombarded with five times more information than he or she was 30 years ago—be it from social media, work and personal emails, television and radio, or advertisements streaming in from all platforms. That is a lot of information. With our brains processing visuals 60,000 times faster than text, it is no surprise that text doesn't capture our attention the way that images do. Here are some factors that contribute to how fast we process visuals versus text: 90% of the information transmitted to our brains is visual; 70% of our visual receptors are located in our eyes; and 50% of the brain is active in visual processing. Of course, images by themselves can seldom convey the full message, since context and details would be lost, at least, confused. These facts, in addition to the attention spans for most people sitting at 7 seconds, make the combination of text and images a much more advantageous approach than text alone.

The Anatomy of an Infographic

In a nutshell, an infographic combines images, text, and data to creatively communicate about one specific subject. Four important factors contribute to a good infographic, and the key is to get all four to overlap in such a way that you avoid some common pitfalls:

1. **Data**—Visualize interesting data that is both reliable and timely.
2. **Design**—Use a theme with complimentary fonts and colors that is readable.
3. **Story**—Deliver a single message or explain a problem and solution cleverly.
4. **Visibility**—If on the web, consider social exposure and SEO; if in print, consider location.

EVEN WITH LITTLE OR NO EXPERIENCE

WORKING WITH GRAPHICS, LAYOUT, OR DESIGN,

YOU CAN STILL CREATE COMPELLING

INFOGRAPHICS FOR YOUR LIBRARY.

The wrong combination of the aforementioned factors, or missing one altogether, could result in an infographic that underachieves or goes unseen. It may also be amateur, boring, embarrassing, or damaging to your library's public image.

A Librarian's Infographic Toolbox: Applications for Creation

Even with little or no experience working with graphics, layout, or design, you can still create compelling infographics for your library. Web applications designed specifically for creating infographics are an excellent starting point. They

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EIGHT TIPS FOR MAKING A STRONG INFOGRAPHIC

A strong infographic does all or most of the following:

1. **Serves a clear purpose—**
Stick to one topic or tell one story.

2. **Uses space effectively—**
Be aware of white space, and use it to your advantage.

3. **Leads the viewer in a specific direction—**
Think about the direction a person's eye will take as he or she reads the infographic, and be strategic about what direction that is.

4. **Highlights important facts visually—**
Give the most important content on the page a visual cue, so the reader's eye is drawn to it more than content of a lesser value.

5. **Uses sections to divide content—**
Think of your infographic in sections, such as thirds or fourths. Some infographic programs allow you to use sections to easily rearrange content.

6. **Shows data clearly—**
Highlight the data in a way that easily illustrates it to someone who may be unfamiliar with the subject matter. Use charts or graphs; these tools are built in to many infographic programs, allowing you to easily import data in spreadsheet form and visualize it graphically.

7. **Encourages the eye to compare data—**
If your data allows it, visually line up or arrange it in such a way that is easy for the reader to compare.

8. **Uses examples and/or templates—**
Search for examples of infographics that appeal to you visually or start with a template in an infographic program that has a layout, icons, or color scheme that you enjoy.
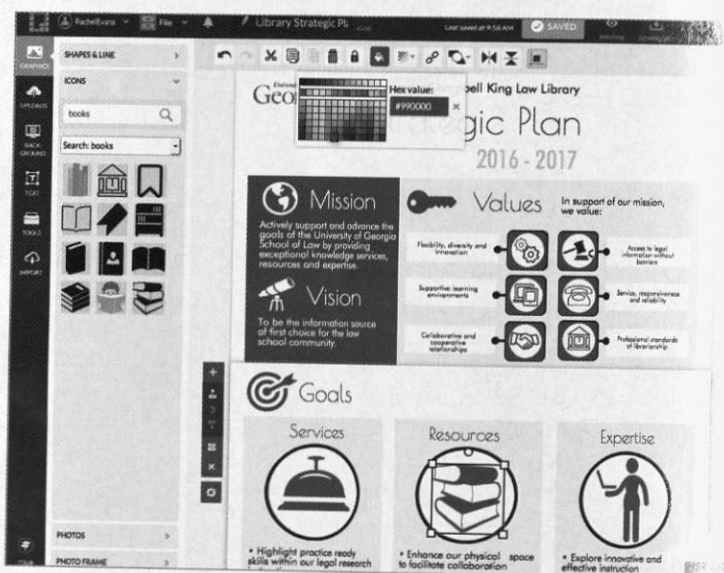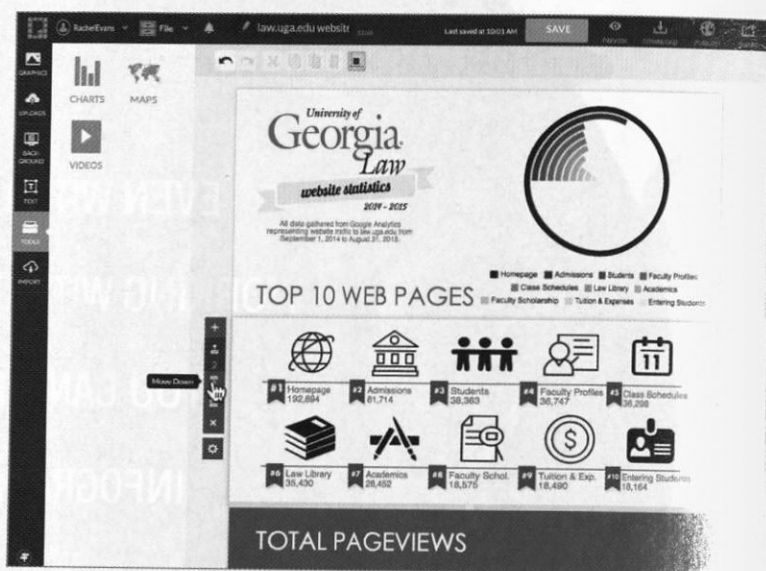
Piktochart's editor is one of many programs you can use to create dazzling infographics.

provide templates that serve as an excellent guide for strong layouts, fonts that complement one another, and more. Most web applications feature icon libraries, which provide vector graphics in addition to allowing for uploading your own icons and other image files. Another great feature of infographic-specific web applications is their built-in tools for interactive data visualization. Here are five recommended infographic applications that you can try for free:

1. **Piktochart** (piktochart.com)—My personal favorite, Piktochart, has a vast icon and image library, tons of beautiful fonts and text banners to choose from, a background library, map and chart tools, and more than 400 templates to help you get started. Templates are categorized by type of infographic project, including traditional infographic designs, posters, reports, and presentations. Your primary tools are across the top, with the image library located on the left. With a Pro account, you can choose between image and PDF downloads, customize the size of your project, select HD, and remove the Piktochart footer.

2. **Venngage** (venngage.com)—Similar to Piktochart, the primary difference is the location of the tools. They can be found on both the right and left of your screen. Venngage also includes templates that, in style, are slightly flatter than Piktochart's. It also features streamlined options for publishing your final infographic to social media (Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, and LinkedIn) in addition to sharing, by linking or embedding, and downloading to your desktop.

3. **Canva** (canva.com)—Canva is similar to Piktochart and Venngage, but it has added educational features, such as Design School; it includes helpful guides, such as Visual Design and Composition Lessons From 30 Beautiful Maps; The ABCs of Facebook Marketing; The Pros, Cons and Future of Flat Design; and 100 Stunning Picture Quotes That Will Supercharge Your Creativity.

4. **easel.ly** (easel.ly)—easel.ly's tools are all located across the top of the screen. You can also easily switch templates—or, as easel.ly calls them, "vhemes"—while working, allowing you to change your mind about your theme even after you have started working with another one. This is different from Piktochart and Venngage, in which you choose the template first and must save or start

over to choose another one. Additionally, easel.ly only gives three options for downloading your finished product: low quality, high quality, and PDF.

5. **Infogr.am** (infogr.am)—Infogr.am has more of a data visualization focus than the previous four programs, which are more all-encompassing for visuals, text, and design. If your infographic is data-heavy, this may be the best option for you. The three options you get when you begin creating are 1) infographic or report, 2) chart or graph, and 3) maps. You can also choose to begin by importing your data with many options for import format: .xls, .xlsx, .csv, Google Drive spreadsheet, OneDrive, or Dropbox.

Although each of these applications can be tried for free, they have different limitations. Of course, you do not have to use these types of web apps to create an infographic. You can create them using any program that allows for image, text, and graphically representing data (such as Word, Photoshop, and Illustrator). However, if you are new to creating infographics, one of the aforementioned web applications may have less of a learning curve and yield quicker and easier results in addition to being more cost-effective.

Thinking Outside the Box: Alternative Uses for Infographics Web Applications

If you enjoy using web applications, get creative with them. Apply infographic principles to other design projects for your library. Here are a few ideas for alternative
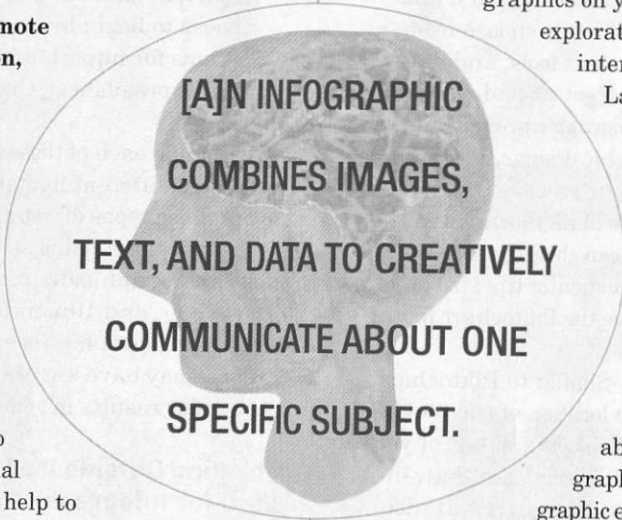

Infographics can spice up your library signage and displays.

uses that we have employed at the University of Georgia's (UGA) law library:

- **Library newsletter**—At UGA's law library, our monthly newsletter, *Amicus Briefs*, has a print version in addition to the electronic version, thanks to Piktochart. Since the newsletter is a recurring publication, we use the "save a copy" feature to save each previous issue as a custom template that can serve as a starting point for the next month's edition.

- **Posters and fliers to promote library events, instruction, and resources**—Some instruction offered by libraries can require more information on a flier than others, and infographic applications are a great way to create print materials that include lots of information in a way that is easier to read and remember. Promoting resources can also be a challenge for a traditional poster. Infographic icons can help to visually highlight aspects of a library's online resource without being overly wordy and intimidating or putting off your community.

- **Visual aid for internal use or meetings**—You can use an infographic for an interoffice audience as well. Many libraries are adopting a more graphical approach for their strategic plans. They are extremely helpful in data-heavy presentations, such as attractively displaying website statistics.

- **Large-scale visual aids for professional conferences or other large events**—Because most infographic programs use vector graphics and allow you to save and export your creations in HD formats, you can easily print the finished products on large sizes. At UGA's law library, international law librarian Anne Burnett has used Piktochart to create a poster that she printed on fabric for a national conference display. For law school events geared toward alumni, we have also printed and foam-board-mounted posters to promote resources specifically for them.

- **Classroom instruction**—Whether your library is offering instruction in the classroom, or your staff is supporting other instructors in classroom settings, infographics can make teaching materials easier to digest, particularly if your audience falls into the Millennial generation. Convert your syllabus or handouts into an infographic style, so information is clearer and more memorable. Use infographic-like layouts and graphics in your slide presentations, including them in your PowerPoint or Prezi. Prezi makes this incredibly easy by providing a very nice icon library of its own.

- **Website interactive charts**—Infographics can also be embedded into webpages as you would a video. Live graphics on your webpage can encourage exploration and discovery through interactivity. At UGA's School of Law, the law school fund webpage uses a Piktochart-generated interactive pie chart embed that allows data figures to "pop" when the computer mouse scrolls over a section of the chart.

[A]N INFOGRAPHIC COMBINES IMAGES, TEXT, AND DATA TO CREATIVELY COMMUNICATE ABOUT ONE SPECIFIC SUBJECT.

Further Reading

For more compelling data about why our brains crave infographics, check out this excellent info graphic example, 13 Reasons, by NeoMam Studios (neomam.com/interactive/13reasons). If you want library-specific infographics in addition to those presented in this article, check out Ebook Friendly's 11 Fantastic Library Infographics (ebookfriendly.com/libraries-matter-library-infographics) and Urban Libraries Council examples (urbanlibraries.org/library-infographics-pages-202.php).

Acknowledgements

I owe thanks to my law library director, Carol Watson, for turning me on to infographics, and specifically Piktochart, in 2012. Thank you, Carol, for always encouraging my exploration of tech tools such as infographic web applications by assigning me projects (such as the library's strategic plan) that allow me to find new ways to combine my love of design and technology with my job in the library. 👤

ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

Rachel Evans is a web coordinator and digital media specialist at the Alexander Campbell King Law Library at the University of Georgia School of Law. She received her M.L.I.S. from Florida State University and holds a B.A. in art and music. Evans has worked in both academic and public libraries since 2008 and is interested in the intersecting relationships of librarianship, digital media, technology, and web design.

Grant Evans is a freelance artist, designer, and photographer working in Athens, Ga. He holds degrees in art and digital media.