First impressions

Tips and design principles for crafting eye-catching messages

QUEBEC ANGLOPHONE
HERITAGE NETWORK
QAHN

RÉSEAU DU PATRIMOINE
ANGLOPHONE DU QUÉBEC
RPAQ

Whether you have an event to publicize, services to promote,

or seek support for a cause you hold dear, the way your message looks will largely determine how it is received. People get much of their information today from image-rich social media, websites and email. Organizations must adapt their methods and style of communication to fit these channels, or risk not being heard at all.

The good news is most groups can improve their marketing and publicity efforts simply by paying more attention to the appearance of the messaging they create. What's more, you don't have to be a professional graphic designer to make attractive and effective social-media posts, email invitations, web advertisements, posters or newsletters.

Visual communication technology is constantly evolving. You may have noticed the variety of forms in use by your peers and other organizations: infographics, text-over-image, GIFs, beautiful email news layouts, and more. Don't stress! Many easy-to-learn graphic-design tools, templates, and resources are available online for free or at low cost. These tools can save us time and help us focus on what matters — communicating to our audience.

THE RIGHT TOOL, NOT EVERY TOOL

In an era where marketers generally tell everyone to stand out, community organizations would be better off trying a different approach. You have limited time and resources, and a niche audience to serve. So, keep things simple. You can't be everything to everybody — it's a waste of time and resources trying. But, you can easily be something to somebody.

DO NOT assume that you need to use every possible communications channel and/or visual content feature to get your message out, either. What works for others might not work for you.

DO ask yourself: How can I create more impactful messages that suit my community? Focus on the tool or technique that's right for you.

EVERYONE LOVES PICTURES

Real-life photography continues to be persuasive. It is widely known that in media, viewers are drawn to images of human faces, especially eyes. But, it doesn't all need to be professional. In the social-media age, do-it-yourself photography is acceptable, expected, and trusted by viewers. It's considered honest. Don't be shy to use your own photography for websites, social-media posts, email flyers or other publicity you create for your organization.

Examples of photos you can consider adding to the visual content of all your digital communications: pictures of community activities your group is involved in; behind-the-scenes photos of staff and volunteers; pictures sent to you by other community members.

INFOGRAPHICS

An infographic combines visual information and minimal text to give an overview of a given topic. Infographics may be designed to explain facts or tell a story. For example, an organization's annual report can be a one-page brochure with graphs and symbols instead of a text-only booklet. Key milestones in the history of a community or neighbourhood might likewise be presented by a series of archival images juxtaposed with dates. Eye-tracking research shows that online readers pay more attention to information-carrying images and that readers spend more time looking at data-related images than they do reading text (Nielsen Norman Group, 2010). People remember things better when technical information connects to imagery.

Examples of the types of information commonly presented using infographics include: social or industry statistics, opinion-survey research, reports, chronological timelines.

INFO/QUOTE CARDS

This might be the most efficient graphic one can create due to its simplicity and consistency. An info card (or quote card) is simply words positioned over an image. Info cards tend to be square for ease of posting to multiple social-media platforms. This straightforward

425 VARIETIES OF SCONES — **32x** AVERAGE GROWTH — **47%** CATS USING BIG DATA

graphic is one of the fastest ways to convey a message. Text gives them information while consistent graphic elements tell them who it's from. Repetition and consistency will help your viewer recall who this info card is from instantly.

Examples of the types of information commonly presented using Info/quote cards include: publicity for events, awareness campaigns, product or services marketing, fundraising appeals, inspirational messages, announcements and testimonials.

VIDEOS
Video is currently the most in-demand visual marketing tool available. Because smart-phones and other popular communication devices come with video-capture technology, more social-media users share video clips online. Video can be a powerful attention-grabber, combining sound, imagery, text and movement. But the ability to hold that attention and convey useful information is another matter. Writing and editing impactful video requires substantial commitments of time and expertise that may be out of reach for smaller non-profit groups.

The principles of great design in any form of visual communication, whether print or digital, are really very simple and may be summarized as follows:

CONSISTENCY
Keep your messaging designs consistent. Consistency saves you time because it is a repeatable process. Consistency also helps your audience get familiar with you and receive your communication regularly without hesitation. You can achieve consistency by using the same fonts, colours, and logo on every piece of content.
You can further achieve consistency by sticking to one format and posting frequently

3

73%

of content creators
plan to prioritize
creating more
engaging content
in 2016

Source: Content Marketing Institute

LESS IS MORE

A minimal design boosts message clarity. Consider the following
ways to minimize the design:

- **Fewer words.** Keep it short. Imagine your reader is in a
  hurry and you have one second to tell them something
  important.

- **Less clutter.** If it's not necessary, leave it out. Sometimes
  one puppy is as effective as 10 puppies in an image. Almost
  always, one exclamation point is more effective than three.

- **Negative space.** Empty space around your subject or text
  defines and outlines it. It gives a spotlight and much needed
  breathing space.

- **Contrast and complement.** Placing opposing or complemen-
  tary colours together can create more definition. For example,
  white text stands out against all-black backgrounds.

CLARITY ABOVE ALL

Your goal is to be understood. Weak design can block your reader
from receiving your message. Weak design wastes your time.
Prioritize consistency, clear messaging, and minimal design.
To be understandable is a service to your audience — it respects
your reader.

Get a peer review. Ask your peers if they understand your
message. If they don't understand, that's great! It means you
have a chance to make it clearer before you publish.

ONLINE TOOLS

If the services of a professional graphic designer are beyond your
means right now, consider taking advantage of the many do-it-
yourself resources and tools that are available online. Here are
few to get you started.

Canva. Provides many free graphic-design elements, such as logos, posters and infographics; templates for flyers and invitations; photos and social-media icons. Users must register.
Paid subscription unlocks more features. https://www.canva.com

Hubspot. Offers digital tools for social-media marketing and sales, including free templates to create your own infographics.
https://www.hubspot.com/resources

PicMonkey. Access to customizable templates, photo-editing and design tools. Low monthly or annual paid subscription required.
https://www.picmonkey.com/features

MS Office 365. Microsoft's line of communication products, including selection of newsletter templates. Monthly or annual paid subscription required. https://products.office.com/en-ca/products

STOCK IMAGES

Trying to find that perfect photo or illustration for a poster, flyer, advertisement or your next social-media post? The internet is full of searchable collections. Here are three that offer free access to stock photos:

ProPixabay: https://pixabay.com

Pexels: https://www.pexels.com

Creative Commons: https://creativecommons.org

References

Centre for Community Organizations (COCo), Social Media Workbook. https://coco-net.org/social-media-workbook-community-organizations-nonprofits/

For more information visit:

Imagine Canada: http://www.imaginecanada.ca/
Idealware: https://www.idealware.org/
Nonprofit Marketing Guide.Com: https://www.nonprofitmarketing-guide.com/blog/

Other Publications

Titles below are included in the *Communication Matters* series:

1. Networking for Change: A practical guide for non-profits using social media
2. Pick your platforms: Four of the world's most popular networking sites, at a glance

3. Less is more: A guide to content style and strategy in the age of online marketing
4. Youth appeal: What volunteer groups need to know about reaching out to young people
5. First impressions: Tips and design principles for crafting eye-catching messages

The Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN) also produces the following educational resources:

Cemetery Heritage in Quebec: A Handbook
Why and how to care properly for early burial grounds.

Oral History Guide
Offers tips on preparing for, setting up and conducting interviews.

Heritage Field Guide Series: Security for Heritage vols. 1-10
Series of bilingual guides highlights best-practices to ensure the security of heritage resources.

Organized Planning and Emergency Response Assistant (OPERA): Your Guide to Emergency Planning (CD)
An interactive tool for storing and retrieving emergency contact information, procedures for managing a variety of threats, a resources guide and an extensive reading list devoted to emergency management.

Heritage Field Guide Series: Volunteering Matters vols. 1-8
Series of bilingual guides highlights topics that will help and interest those working in non-profit organizations that depend upon volunteers.

To order any of these titles, or to start your magazine subscription today, please call 819 564-9595
Toll free: 1-877-964-0409.