

A BRIEF GUIDE TO INFOGRAPHICS FOR LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS

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Abstract

Visual representation of information is as old as human existence. The earliest cave dwellers had tried it and the most modern tech savvy corporate people have no life without it. Information when combined with graphics is more appealing and more comprehensible than in its pure form and this has given birth to 'infographics'. This paper gives a brief overview of infographics, and potential areas in library where they could be deployed. This paper also introduces a few websites providing tools for creation of infographics.

Key Words: Infographics, Visual Representation

1.0 Introduction

The early civilizations like Indus Valley Civilization, Sumerian Civilization, and Egyptian Civilizations etc. extensively used pictographs for recording and conveying information. Written form of languages was not well developed in those days and hence these civilizations were rather compelled to represent information by the way of images scripted on rocks, mud tablets, inner walls of caves etc. This visual representation of information was slowly sidelined due to its many inherent shortcomings and writing took its place. With the invention of printing machine by Guttenberg, writing became more prevalent. However, visual representation of information did not completely vanish as it had its own advantages.

Advances in information and communication technologies have raised new digital literacy challenges, including a pressing need for visual communication skills (Osterman, 2013). In what some have called the rise of the visual culture of the web, images, photos and videos are becoming a form of social currency to be shared and curated (Verma, 2013). The idiom "A picture is worth a thousand words" holds good for all times and recently a renewed interest in visual representation of information has given birth to a new area called Infographics. Infographics have rich potential uses for libraries and this paper attempts to explore the possible uses that Infographics could be put into and a few online platforms where Infographics could be freely created.

1.1 A Brief Overview of Infographics

It is an undeniable fact that information is being created at an explosive rate that is difficult to measure. Only rough estimations born out of some theories are being made and even the lowest estimation depicts a sorry state of affairs wherein humans are in an unenviable position of not being able to consume a tiny fraction of information created

and supplied. In an environment crowded with information, an attractive visual representation of information or data stands much better chances of being consumed by humans. This is where Infographics come into picture.

As already noted in the introduction, ancient civilizations had used some rudiment form of Infographics for recording and conveying information. In modern times, around 1970s, newspapers and magazines began to use infographics — charts, maps, and diagrams — to illustrate and illuminate news stories (Beegel, J., 2014). Later on, with the availability of powerful computers, sophisticated image editing softwares and Internet, use of Infographic exploded with all conceivable domains making use of this incredible tool. Developers of websites made extensive use of infographic for making their sites more attractive. Digital contents in CD/DVD format were enriched with Infographics. Textbooks, business reports, political agendas, reference works, periodicals etc. saw a freehand use of infographics. Today, infographics are under a transition from static form to a more captivating and interactive form with the use of animations, videos, navigable links etc.

1.2 Definition of Infographics:

A few definitions given below give out the meaning, scope and purpose of Infographic:

Smiciklas (2012) defines Infographics as a visualization of data or ideas that tries to convey complex information to an audience in a manner that can be quickly consumed and easily understood.

The Online Oxford Dictionary defines Infographics as a visual image such as a chart or diagram used to represent information or data.

Infographics attempt to visualize a set of data and complex information by utilizing visual elements such as images, graphs, maps, and diagrams so that messages will be presented in a fast and understandable way (Shafipoor, M., Sarayloo, R., & Shafipoor, A. 2016).

An infographic is information arranged visually. It minimizes text by combining text and images such as drawings, charts, arrows, with use of color and ‘white space’, to help the learner grasp essential ideas and content (Janalta Interactive Inc, 2014).

A due consideration of these definitions brings out that Infographics essentially contain the following three components:

Visualization: Visualization is here a pre-plan or an outlay of presenting the information or the data that is needed to be conveyed to the audience. It is the blueprint on which an infographic is built.

Data Elements: Flowcharts, images, photographs, bulleted lists, graphics, charts etc. make data elements which are carefully chosen, usually in a combination, to transmission of information or data.

Presentation: Though not explicit in the definitions, infographics need to be presented in a format which could be a physical one in the form of handouts, bills, posters or it could be electronically presented on websites or social media platforms.

2.0. Use of Infographics in Library Scenario

Generally, Infographics could be used for the following purposes:

- Comparison of two or more entities, ideas, facts or figures.
- Branching out actions and different possibilities in the form of Flow chart
- Chronological arrangement of events or information in the form of time line
- Numbered or bulleted steps, processes or stages
- Explanation or description using images, photographs or graphics
- Visual representation of Data, Statistics, charts, graphs, numbers, etc.
- Narration of text rich content

However, the above list is not an end in itself. Today, the applications of Infographics for information and marketing purposes are virtually limitless (Beegel, 2014). Libraries and Information Centres could use Infographics to achieve

their communication goals of explaining different resources, product features, benefits and processes to their readers. Also Infographics can help libraries and information centres to communicate ideas and policies to their staff. They could also use infographics to explain library philosophy, strategies and statistics to the management. In this way Infographics can help Libraries and Information Centres to more effectively explain significant information to both internal and external stakeholders.

Some practical ways of employing infographics in library atmosphere could be:

- Handouts for marketing products and services
- Posters and other announcements for promotional purposes
- Books list in infographic format for arousing reading interest
- Displaying thought provoking quotes about libraries and reading habit in library halls
- Presenting library statistics, quantitative data about revenue and expenditure
- Increasing visibility on social media platforms and library website
- User education

Given these possibilities, it is needless to emphasize the fact that today's librarians need to possess visual literacy skills to harness the potentials of Infographics. Though Infographics can be constructed manually, computer softwares make this job less cumbersome and more attractive with lots of options. Using softwares for creating infographics also provides a faster way.

But this does not mean that a librarian should be an efficient or excellent handler of graphic tools or image editing suites. A good number of websites exist where free infographic templates are available and these could be used for creating infographics with little expertise. A brief overview of such sites are given in the ensuing paragraph.

3.0 A Few Free Online Platforms for Creating Infographics:

Creating infographics using online tools has become an easy task. Of late a good number of websites with such tools have appeared offering an opportunity to create appealing visual content. These websites offer readymade templates or basic templates which could be improved upon by effective designs for creation of infographics and other visual information.

The following six such websites are selected for a brief review here. Each one has different capabilities and different tools. Their template libraries, image libraries, stock of charts and fonts are also different and hence no website is complete in itself. However they are adequate enough to create a simple infographic and this is also to be noted that all these websites constantly undergo changes and evolve to higher degree of capability.

3.1 Venngage.com (<https://venngage.com>)

Venngage is an easy-to-use website featuring both free and paid contents. It has different templates and designs under the following heads:

- Infographics
- Reports
- Posters
- Promotion
- Social

Each heading contains sub topics which display both free and paid templates and designs. It has a wide range of topics that could meet needs of any situation. Using its features like themes, charts, timelines, icons, etc., one could easily create an attractive and stylish infographics on any topic.

3.2 Infogr.am.com (<https://infogr.am>)

This site is an ideal place for creating an infographic based on graphs, charts and maps. It also has provision for uploading of pictures and videos. It uses an excel spreadsheet format for inputting data. This makes editing or adding information quite easy. It has basic module, which is free and also pro, business and enterprise paid modules. It has some cool features like Interactive Data Visualizations, Animated GIF Charts and Interactive Maps,

3.3 Piktochart.com (<https://piktochart.com>)

Piktochart is a good choice when it comes to creating a good graphic with attractive colour schemes and fonts. Basic shapes and images can be customized to turn the infographic an attractive one. Its templates are in grid format which makes resizing and positioning of shapes and images an easy task. New templates are added regularly. It offers a free life time account for individuals as well as paid account with enhanced features.

3.4 Canva.com (<http://canva.com>)

Canva has a large library of images, fonts, icons and shapes. It has a stock of over one million photos which could be accessed for any design task. It also offers online photo editing tools and filters. For most design tasks such as brochures, presentations, Canva is the right choice. Though it has free and premium versions, its free version has sufficient features to create a professional grade infographic. It also has an ipad app version.

3.5 easel.ly (<http://www.easel.ly>)

As its name suggests, it is one of the easiest platforms to create infographics. It offers readymade templates which could be selected for specific needs. Its features are also less when compared to other platforms. Basic tools such as arrows, shapes and connector lines, fonts, colours, text styles and sizes are only available besides an option for uploading of graphics and customizing it. The most annoying drawback is the fact that when one could not find a suitable template for a specific need, template design becomes difficult.

3.6 genial.ly (<https://www.genial.ly>)

This is a great platform for creating attractive catalogues, presentations, infographics and enriching them with animation and interactive effects. Interactivity is its hall-mark.

Following features put this platform in a class apart:

- Provision to share creations via social media websites, e-mail, or just embedding them into websites, blogs etc.
- Provision to enrich the content with inputs from external providers such as Google Maps, Amazon, YouTube etc.
- Provision to real time monitoring of the creations like number of users, number of page views, number of clicks etc.

4.0 A Few Tips for Infographic Creation

When it comes to creation of an infographic, a primary requirement is that library professionals should possess at least minimal knowledge of communicating visually. Any visual creation is an art and is more often guided by inborn qualities like innovation, creation, experimentation etc. However, by following certain well laid out general principles such as these, one could turn data or information into visually appealing graphics that is easy to grasp:

- Collecting data and information and finalizing content
- Developing ideas and concepts

- Giving a cohesive look to ideas and concepts
- Creating a prototype using a computer or by drawing by hand.
- Enriching by charts, graphs, maps, life cycles, timelines, and flowcharts
- Applying design elements such as connecting lines, color, shape, texture, space and form

5.0 Conclusion

Infographic has made a powerful impact on the way we communicate information and data - which are exploding at an unprecedented speed. It has made it possible to transform complex and boring of information into easily comprehensible visual structures. Interactivity features, thanks to technology, have made infographic more attractive than ever. It has emerged as a highly influential and potent tool of information dissemination. Obviously libraries and library professionals cannot overlook such an amazing tool which could positively impact their relevance and importance.

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