

## 4.7.21: Using Visual Media Resources

### Learning Outcome

- Describe professional standards for using visual media resources for business purposes

As we learned in Module 1: Communicating in Business, in all business communications, we should have:

- Clarity
- Conciseness
- Objectivity
- Consistency
- Completeness
- Relevancy
- Understanding of audience knowledge

If you keep these seven communication principles in mind when you're crafting your message, you improve the chances that your message will be effective. Now we are going to add visual media to our communication toolbox; visual media increases your message's impact.

How does a visual element give your message more impact? Think about the last time you asked directions to a friend's house. If you are one of those "direction-impaired" people whose eyes glaze over at the first "go north" or "head east," then you know how helpful it is when someone draws you a map. It's a simple visual aid that takes the place of all of those words you're not quite sure what to do with. That map has made your friend's communication of directions easier to remember. There are examples of this all around you. The word "STOP" is a fairly easy word, but a red light or octagonal sign removes the need of any words at all. The weather report shows you a rain cloud, and you grab your umbrella without a second thought.

If your message can be more clearly understood by incorporating visual media, then by all means, you should do it. And to incorporate visuals effectively, you should understand that you're going to heed all seven principles of communication, particularly these:

- **Clarity:** your visuals should be clear, clean, and simple
- **Consistency:** your visuals should all maintain a uniform look and feel
- **Relevancy:** your visuals should make sense as a part of the whole communication and be on-brand

And then we're going to add a whole new principle to the mix, that your visuals should be **persuasive**: your visuals should inspire an emotional bond or a new level of understanding.

Let's look at each one of these principles separately.

### Clarity

When considering the use of visual media, make sure that it's easy for the reader to glean the information he needs. Some general rules we'll keep in mind as we go through this module include,

- **Use bold, contrasting colors.** If you have a pie chart or a graph, it helps to make one piece red, another yellow, and yet another blue. This makes the chart easier to read than if each piece is a different shade of green. Make sure your chart pops with color, and there will be no question which piece is which.
- **Use easy-to-read fonts.** Loopy letters and heavy calligraphy strokes slow your reader down. Choose a font that's easy to read, like one of the many discussed by author [John Wood in his blog for the American Writers & Artists, Inc.](#) website.
- **Use only pertinent information.** If the point of your communication is to show that sales have gone up 22 percent over last year, your graph should feature that information—and nothing else. If you throw expenses, employee turnover and gross margin on that same chart, your reader will miss your message. Point out the information you need to highlight, and let everything else fade into the background.

### Consistency

This module on visual media looks a lot like the other modules in this business communication course, doesn't it? Same kind of headers, same colors. Uniformity helps the reader understand what to expect and better prepares them to take in your message.

Here are a few things we'll try to do in this module as we study different types of visual media:

- **Stick to the format of your charts and graphs wherever you're able.** If you start out with that bar chart showing annual sales, don't make it a line graph in the next section and a stacked bar chart in the section after that. Using different charts to show the same information slows your reader down unnecessarily. Keep in mind that if you found the best visual scheme to explain the data in the first place, there's no reason to change it to a less-effective one just for the sake of variety.
- **Stick to the color scheme and fonts you've already established.** If you show sales on your graphs in red, always show them in red. If you've chosen one easy-to-read font for all your tables, or a similar style of photo for all the sections of your annual report, there's no need to deviate.
- **Use pictures that are visually similar.** If you're using a series of head shots, the heads should all be about the same size. If four of the pictures show a person's head and shoulders, the fifth one should not be showing a person from the waist up.

## Relevancy

If your message is communicating annual sales, your charts and graphs shouldn't be dealing with employee turnover rates. If your message is about your company's efforts to reduce waste, that message should not feature a photo of a cute puppy. That's relevancy at a very basic level.

Keeping communication "on brand" takes relevancy to a whole new level. Companies rely on visual media as much as the written word to deliver their brand message, and as a communicator, you need to keep your choices in visual media relevant to your company's mission and promise to its customers.

### ✓ Colors in Branding: Target and Disney

If you ever visit [Target's website](#), you may notice there's a whole lot of red. That didn't happen by accident. Target has a series of colors and images that coincide with the way they identify themselves as a company and the promises they make to their customers. You see a lot of crisp clean backgrounds with vivid pictures showing style and value—and a lot of red fonts and bulls eyes.

Conversely, Disney's main color is blue, but Sleeping Beauty's castle and that cartoon mouse are even more closely associated with the company's mission and promise to customers. Disney photos always depict happy families interacting with characters and enjoying the entertainment.

Large companies usually have a set of brand guidelines or a brand "style guide" that communicators can consult to familiarize themselves with the company's preferred color palette, fonts and image standards. All of your business communications represent an opportunity to reinforce and reflect your company's brand, and it's your duty as a communicator to do so.

## Persuasive

Your visual media choice should help you tell your story. Even if your data is perfect, it's no guarantee your audience is going to jump on board with you. Your use of image, chart, or video should indicate it is from a reliable source, be simple to read, and allow you to show the audience exactly how you drew the conclusion you've drawn. If you're communicating in aid of a cause, it doesn't hurt to choose an image that invokes a little emotion.

This doesn't mean that you should sacrifice the principle of objectivity when you employ persuasiveness in your visual media. But your communication strategy on the whole is an engagement tool, and your choice of visuals should strengthen that engagement.

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