

4.7.13: Visuals in a Report

Learning Outcome

- Identify appropriate and professional visual representations of information for a business report

Reports don't end in high school, unfortunately. In fact, businesses that are publicly traded usually prepare an annual report each year for their stockholders and investors. That annual report might be a hundred or more pages of highly detailed information, including strategic plans and financial data, and will certainly include visuals.

Let's take a look at a few annual reports from well-known companies. We're going to study what they've written, the visual media they've chosen to use to support their written word, and if that choice of visual media meets our visual media standards of clarity, consistency, relevancy and persuasion.

✓ Nestle Global: Images in Reports

Nestle is the world's largest food and beverage company, and their mission of "Good Food, Good Life" is to provide consumers with the best tasting, most nutritious choices in a wide range of food and beverage categories and eating occasions, from morning to night.

The cover of Nestle's 2017 Annual Review is subtitled, "Nestle. Enhancing quality of life and contributing to a healthier future." Do the images they choose convey that idea? Here are examples from several pages of the report:



Are these images clean, clear, and simple? They are simple images, with very little to look at except the young people or the products themselves, so we can say they are clean, clear, and simple.

Are they uniform? The two larger shots feature the children shot from about the knees up, with only a small amount of background around them. The smaller group of four images on the middle page feature three products shot at about the same distance, with similar shot compositions (the product and other items used with that product). The fourth picture breaks that pattern—and draws your attention—by showing some young people enjoying a fourth product. Finally, all four images are square with two curved corners on the right and 90 degree corners on the left. These images are consistent and uniform.

Are they on brand and relevant? These images show a series of products and happy young people. If they're trying to convey a good quality of life, they seem to have done so. These children are well dressed, playing sports, enjoying the benefits of friendship. And the fact that these subjects are all young people drives home the idea that Nestle is contributing to the future. So we can say these images are relevant and on brand.

Are they persuasive? We can decide that by measuring how the image supports the message in the text. Let's look at the first one, "Our Strategy." The text says,

Through enhancing quality of life and contributing to a healthier future, we aim to deliver sustainable, industry leading financial performance and earn trust...

In the photo we see two young girls, a symbol of our future. They're worry free and having a great time. One of them is carrying a Nestle product. Does the image help us feel what Nestle is saying in the text? Yes. This image is persuasive.

The second large photo talks about innovation for a changing world. The text reads,

At Nestle, continuous innovation is part of our DNA. Our success is founded on over 150 years of anticipating trends and understanding consumers' needs.

Here again, the future is represented by two young people enjoying a healthy lifestyle of sports and sampling a Nestle product. They're looking at a cell phone, a symbol of modern innovation. Does this image help us feel what Nestle is saying in the text? Yes.

Nestle does an excellent job of incorporating images into their reports.

✓ Target: Charts, Graphs and Tables

"Expect more. Pay less." That's Target's brand promise to its customers. Target is one of the most identifiable brands in the world, and you don't need to look past the cover of Target's 2016 annual report to know exactly what it is and who made it.

Let's take a look page 2 of their report to see how their clean, crisp style is translated into their report's charts and graphs.

The first set of charts shows their financial highlights in a set of four bar graphs that compare five years of sales, EBIT (that's 'earnings before interest and taxes'), net earnings, and diluted EPS (that's 'earnings per share'). The chart is simply labeled, captioned appropriately with earnings and CAGR (that's 'compound annual growth rate'). You can see at a glance that Target's 2016 wasn't quite as profitable as the prior four years. And according to the footnote at the bottom, that's because of the pharmacy sale to CVS.

The second set of charts shows their total segment sales. They've chosen a composition chart to display this information, because they're showing what portion of total sales each department has contributed. Notice that this is actually one pie chart shown five times, each with a different department highlighted.

- **Are these charts clean, clear, and simple?** Very much so. They feature only the information we need to see. The font they chose is easy to read, and the colors stand out.
- **Are they uniform?** Definitely. The styles of the bar charts and the pie charts are the same size, they use the same colors.
- **Are they on brand and relevant?** Most certainly. Target has used their brand colors, they've maintained their clean, crisp style, and their pie charts are the outside ring of the bulls eye. The information is relevant in that, here on page two of the report, they've shown you all the financial data that 90% of readers open the report to find.
- **Are they persuasive?** Yes. This is a display of information, and because it's captioned and footnoted, there's no reason to question it. But where did these numbers come from, and how did they determine which ones to show in the graph? As it turns out, a more in-depth look at their financials is featured on a table on page 4.

All of the information in the financial highlights bar charts on page 2 is featured here in this table, too. This table, which is on brand with its easy to read font and its Target red headers, allows the audience to dig in and really understand the numbers they saw on page 2 of the report. Again, this table follows our visual media standards in that it's clear, consistent, relevant and persuasive.

Target does an excellent job incorporating charts, graphs and tables into its reports.

✓ Microsoft: Video

Technology giant Microsoft's mission is to empower every person and every business on the planet to achieve more. [Microsoft's 2017 annual report](#) is online, and because that communication method is so flexible, it allows them to include video right in their letter to shareholders.

The letter opens with a reminder of their mission and proceeds to highlight a variety of businesses, from Boeing to Land o' Lakes to Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Clinic. Please try to watch at least three of these videos—they're less than a minute each.

Did you see a few of them? Okay, let's determine if these videos fit in with our visual media standards.

- **Were they uniform?** Each of the videos starts with a picture of the planet and then zooms in on an area. From there, you get a series of visuals that show people interacting with Microsoft products to achieve innovative results. The uniformity of these videos is actually the foundation of their communication effectiveness. Every other element falls in place because of it.

- **Were they clear and simple?** Yes. Videos add a level of complexity by their very nature—there’s so much to see! The uniformity of these videos adds an element of predictability, so by the second one, you know right away what to expect and what to look for. That makes the video simple. Add to that the simple audio; no verbal communication is added to these videos, it’s just a series of visuals.
- **Were they on brand?** The first image of the planet, followed by the zoom in to the people and businesses using their product, is a visual translation of their mission statement: to empower every person and every business on the planet to achieve more. Their technology is featured throughout, and each video ends with a logo. This is very much on brand and relevant.
- **Were they persuasive?** Absolutely. They visited companies all over the world and showed us amazing things without using one spoken word. Planes were built. Human lives were saved. They have delivered a lot of emotional punch with this series of videos.

Microsoft made terrific use of video in their report and incorporated it very skillfully with the text.

Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Screenshot of Strategy Visual from Nestle Global. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Screenshot of Products from Nestle Global. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Screenshot of Innovation Message from Nestle Global. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Screenshot of Target Annual Report. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Screenshot of Target Annual Report Numbers. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
- Screenshot of Target Annual Report Financial Summary. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution

4.7.13: [Visuals in a Report](#) is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **5.13: Visuals in a Report** by Freedom Learning Group is licensed CC BY 4.0. Original source: <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wm-businesscommunicationmgrs>.