



## **How to Win Business with Proposal Infographics**

By Cliff Atkinson (published March 19, 2002 at [www.MarketingProfs.com](http://www.MarketingProfs.com))

If a picture is worth a thousand words, that explains why savvy marketers are beginning to pay much more attention to the graphical presentation of their business proposals.

Prospective clients facing the prospect of wading through stacks of proposals filled with hundreds of thousands of words usually welcome efforts designed to make their lives easier.

But are all graphics created equally? Are there any risks involved in proposal graphics? And how do you find someone to do them well?

Proposal graphics break out into two categories, according to the response they generate from the viewer. "Decorative" graphics add style to a proposal, but not necessarily substance. They include formatting, borders, typestyles, headers and footers, company logos, and clip art. Decorative graphics make proposals pleasant to look at, and easier to read. When viewers see good examples of them, their reaction is, "That's nice."

"Information" graphics, on the other hand, add substance as well as style. They are the graphs, charts, diagrams, organizational charts and conceptual overviews that help make your proposal easier to understand. They liberate the powerful knowledge locked in the text of your proposal. When viewers see good examples of infographics, their reaction is, "That's meaningful."

The varieties of infographics run across a spectrum, from a USA Today-style chart illustrating a single point, to a sophisticated "visual executive summary" that distills your entire proposal in a single image. The type of infographic you choose depends on your goals, budget, timeframe and available graphical talent.

But using proposal infographics is not risk-free. People look at images first, before they look at text, so graphics that are confusing, cliché, meaningless, unreadable, or possibly offensive, can quickly raise issues of credibility and unwanted questions and discussions. Some proposal managers are hesitant to use graphics because of this risk, but their risk-aversion minimizes the potential for a big payoff, if infographics are done well.

Designed and used properly, proposal infographics can:

- Help a prospective client understand a concept quickly.
- Show respect for the viewer's visual sophistication.
- Serve as an elegant visual interface to your quality content.
- Motivate readers to dive into the text to find out more.
- Help your proposal stand out from the rest.
- Complement a clean, uncluttered style.
- Show you care to craft a compelling visual story out of your content, rather than use a cookie cutter approach.
- Help you refine your executive summary and proposal content.

If you choose to use infographics, they should be part of your strategic proposal planning from the beginning. As a guideline, you should exercise the same care and guidelines you use when crafting

the most important text in your proposal -- your executive summary. You should therefore allocate the time and financial resources to ensure that infographics are produced properly. Considerations include:

1. Are there any guidelines or restrictions about the use of graphics?
2. Where does it make sense to use infographics?
3. Is the right person available to produce the infographics?
4. Are the finished products professional quality?
5. Do they have proper placement, in appropriate moderation?
6. Do they enhance understanding, or detract from it?
7. Do the infographics help a viewer understand the information better?

If graphic design is not your specialty, it makes sense to hire a professional to help you. Searching for freelance graphical illustrators is easy on the Internet: a recent search on Aquent.com, a site that lists freelance graphic designers, listed over 4,000 graphic designers; and Guru.com listed more than 500.

Since graphical talent and experience vary widely, you should carefully review portfolios, looking for examples of infographics that are clean, elegant, and add informational value. An infographic designer's marketing materials should be presented in graphical format to prove they can deliver what their marketing language describes.

When you interview a designer, ask questions about their visual thinking skills: In their previous work, what problem were they presented with, and what graphical solution did they provide? What are the best examples of infographics that they've seen? How can they help you liberate your content into compelling visual form?

When you find the right match for your proposal project, you'll find that creating proposal infographics is fun. It stretches your thinking because you have to start using the creative side of your brain to see your proposal from a new perspective. It challenges you to determine what's the most important message you want to communicate, and to distill that down to a few elegant visuals.

That is the compelling secret of good proposal infographics: They make the entire proposal management process more enjoyable -- for you, your team, the illustrator, and most importantly, your future client.

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