

The 3 Secret Steps to Turn Your Text and Ideas into Billion Dollar Graphics (Jun 08)

By Mike Parkinson

The bad news: To be competitive and successful, you need graphics in your presentations. Today, audiences expect you to use clear, compelling visuals to share your solution. Your audience wants to know why they should care and how you can help them—quickly. You need your presentation to be unforgettable and communicate that your solution is best of the best.

Unfortunately, all you have are slide after slide of bullets with low-quality, overused clip art, cartoons, and photographs. It's not good enough. You need to do better. If you can show your solution or idea graphically, your audience will quickly understand your solution, and you will be far more successful. But can you do it and how do you do it?

The good news: You can do it. Over the last 20 years I have developed a repeatable process for making graphics that consistently sell ideas, solutions, products, and services. I found that there are secrets to turning your text and ideas into compelling graphics. My latest book, *Do-It-Yourself Billion Dollar Business Graphics* shares these secrets. Secrets that helped companies make billions of dollars, academics secure the highest grants, educators achieve break through success, sales professionals make million dollar sales, and they will help you reach your goals.

This article focuses on conceptualization secrets. I cannot stress enough the importance and value of this process when developing presentations of any kind. It will save you time, money, headache, hassles, and increase your success rate by 43%. This is an overview of the process that my clients use to turn their words into persuasive graphics. Use this introduction to the three-step process to turn your presentations into powerful tools that make you uber-successful and a star among stars.



Step 1—Mind Your PAQs.

Know the primary objective, audience, questions to which the audience wants answered to achieve the primary objective, and subject matter.

First, know what you wish to accomplish. What is your primary objective (P)? In a perfect world, what would the audience do or think after viewing your graphic? What is the goal of your graphic? Is your goal to show your new process? Explain how your solution works? Clarify what makes your idea superior to your competition. Determine your primary objective in the very beginning.

Second, know your audience (A). Know who they are, what they want to see, and why they should care. Learn what your audience truly desires. Your target audience is the sole reason why you are creating your visual. Tailor your graphic to your target audience. Make sure your audience can see themselves in your graphic. Connect with their world.

Third, know (and answer) the questions (Q) to which your audience needs answers so that your graphic can achieve its primary objective. Put yourself in their shoes. What would you want to know to move forward? What is it about your graphic that helps your audience? Make it obvious. Highlight your

features, benefits, and discriminators. Focus on the audience's wants and needs.

Fourth, know the subject matter (S). How could you answer the audience's questions without an understanding of the presented topic? The more you understand about your subject matter, the more likely your graphic will be successful.

Knowing your P.A.Q.S. is vital to the success of your graphic. Finding this information is 50% of the conceptualization process. Without it, you are conceptualizing your graphic in the dark.

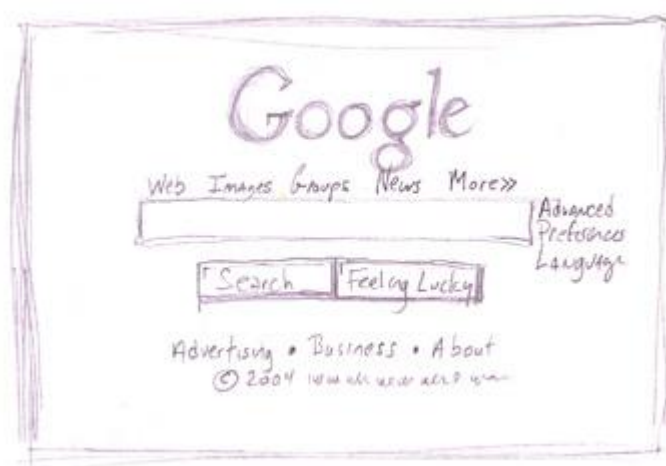
Step 2—Conceptualize Your Graphic. Use the following Five Methods to quickly transform PAQs into powerful visuals. Once you know them, the processes are intuitive and can be used independently or in conjunction with one another.

The Five (easy-to-use) Methods are as follows: Literal Method, Substitution Method, Assembly Method, Hyperbole Method, and Quantitative Method.

All successful presentation graphics use these Five Methods to transform text and ideas into graphics. (At this stage you are sketching ideas. You do not have to be Michelangelo to visualize and capture your graphic on paper. Your goal is to make it good enough for you to understand or to explain to your team. A box can be a computer, building, or book. It's up to you.) Let's take a high-level look at three of these Five Methods:

1. Literal Method: Show exactly what is being described. Show the object, event, location, or process. If "seeing is believing" and "a picture is worth a thousand words," then the Literal Method is the pinnacle. Your resulting graphic is the equivalent of saying, "This is exactly what I mean."

Use the Literal Method to communicate what an object looks like, how to find your way, describe actions, and how a product operates or is assembled. You can also use it to provide evidence of a stated attribute. For example, if the intent is to demonstrate a new Web portal's ease-of-use, show the new Web portal. It is a very effective way to substantiate the claim.



Most weight-loss sales campaigns use the familiar "before and after" graphic. They show the results you could have if you used their product or service. Seeing real people, objects, situations, events, locations, and results establishes credibility and builds trust while communicating the information.

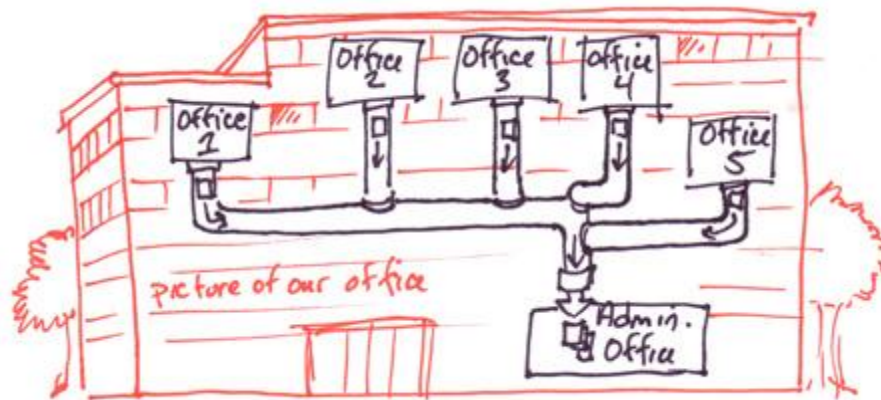
Other examples of the Literal Method include cutaway diagrams, cross section diagrams, exploded diagrams, maps, and photographs or renderings that stay true to reality.

The audience wants to see it before they buy it. Brian Tracy, a leading authority on the development of human potential and personal effectiveness, said on his CD *The Psychology of Selling*, "People ... make

decisions based on stories and word pictures.” He goes on to say, “People think in terms of pictures not in terms of statistics.” In his book, *Advanced Selling Strategies*, he notes, “Human beings are intensely visual. What a customer sees has 22 times the impact of something he hears.” If you are selling lawn furniture, show the lawn furniture. If you are selling home restoration services, show before and after pictures. The same is true for most graphics. If you are selling a new idea, product or service, show it to the audience. If you are trying to get “buy in” on an innovative new gear assembly, show the new gear assembly and point out the innovations. You could even show the old gear assembly for comparison.

2. Substitution Method: Substitute an image of one action, concept, or entity for another (this includes symbols). Your goal is to communicate information about your topic that may otherwise be more confusing or time consuming to present as it is (such as complex, technical solutions). Think of the Substitution Method as a visual metaphor, simile, or analogy that makes implicit comparisons that help your audience relate to and understand the relevance and value of your solution.

For example, water flowing through a pipe can be a visual metaphor for the path paperwork takes in an organization because both share the same characteristics. By showing the paperwork in a pipe, the audience understands that the paperwork is flowing (moving from one point to another) through the organization along a specific path. Use the communicative and easily digested characteristics of one action, concept, or entity (water flowing through a pipe) to help clarify and/or explain another (the path paperwork takes in an organization).



Almost all concepts contain elements that can be filtered down into basic visual metaphors, similes, or analogies. Recognizable imagery aids in the definition of the subject. Always choose recognizable imagery that is relevant to or best describes the action, concept, or entity. Use your insight into your target audience to guarantee clear communication.

3. Hyperbole Method: Simply exaggerate your claim and show it. For example, if your primary objective is to tout a car’s spaciousness, you could show elephants, giraffes, basketball players, and other oversized objects entering the vehicle. Your graphic is visually overstating a claim to make a memorable point. What if your goal is to get you team excited about the upcoming move to new office space? Use unforgettable imagery that amplifies the benefits of your new offices.

Old Office



New Office



Step 3—Render Your Graphic (or direct the rendering of your graphic). Be sure your image is rendered the right way. Your graphic should be clean, concise, aesthetically appealing, error-free, and rendered in a style faithful to the subject matter and your audience.

If you have the luxury of using a professional designer, do it. When your design needs are unique and nothing on the market will suffice, use a professional, experienced designer. Be sure to communicate the P.A.Q.S. to the designer and explain your sketched concept. They may have suggestions for improvement. If you are working with a team on your project, make the designer part of your team as early as possible. Everyone should share the same vision, mission, and goals for the presentation from the start.

Unfortunately, many busy business, technical, and presentation professionals are forced to render their own graphics without the support of a trained and experienced graphic designer. If you lack the time, skill, or resources to render your graphics professionally, there are solutions and strategies at your disposal.

For professional graphics and photographs try the following:

- BillionDollarGraphics.com
- iStockPhoto.com
- Dreamstime.com
- BigStockPhoto.com
- StockXpert.com
- GettyImages.com

Another option is to visit government-owned websites like Army.mil. Verify that the image you are using is cleared for release and is considered public domain. This information is usually posted on the same page as their image library or on their "Privacy" or "Security" pages. Be sure to give attribution.

Here are four strategies to ensure you complete your final design quickly and easily—with or without a design background.

1. Keep Your Graphics Clean and Simple

You may not be a superstar designer but clean, simple graphics can make you look like a professional. Non-designers often fall prey to the "more is better" syndrome. Reviewing the graphics they made, they think this doesn't "pop" or that doesn't look "good enough." That's okay. Great visual communicators know when and why to add visually appealing accents. They also know their limitations, and you should know your own. Poor visual communicators unnecessarily add distracting gradients and colors, intersecting and angled lines, bevels, shadows, text effects, 3D effects, clip art, and other over-the-top

embellishments in the hope that their graphic will look better. Trust me, they are wrong. More often, the graphic looks too busy, confusing, and not professional.



2. Leverage Existing Graphics

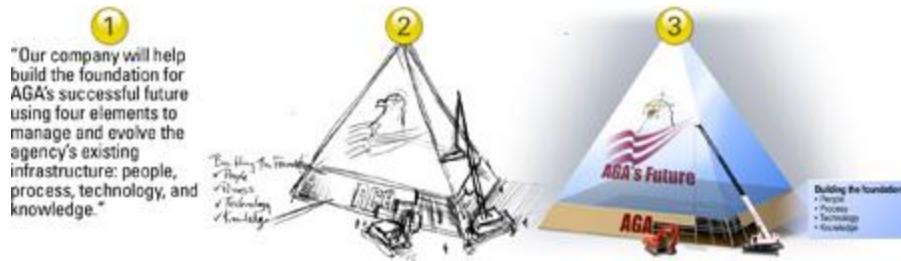
The second strategy is leveraging existing graphics to create new, project-specific visuals. Your company or organization probably has existing graphics for standardized processes, often used tools, and/or frequently needed solutions to reoccurring tasks and issues. Start there. Aspects will need to be tailored for each project but referencing or starting with a depiction that has worked in the past is a smart move. Most authors struggle with thinking graphically. Attempting to develop the solution with no more than a blank sheet of paper or screen is unnecessarily challenging and time consuming. Instead, start with an existing image of a solution that worked in the past. This step will save hours and reduce stress, and the solution will be more thoughtful (benefiting from the evolution of the ideas/images as it is passed from one person or project to the next).

Picasso once said, “good artists copy but great artists steal.” I am not advocating the theft of other copyrighted graphics. Instead, be smart and leverage what others before you have learned. See what works and imitate it.

Use the graphics in my book, a design book, or magazine to discover applicable concepts and styles. These visuals have proven to be successful.

3. Evolve Your Concepts Before Rendering the Final Graphic

If you are low on time or money, make sure your concept is as far along as possible before rendering it (or assigning it to a designer). Sketch the solution first and, if applicable, present it to other subject matter experts for input. If everyone agrees that this is the best concept, the graphic can be rendered. If not, tweak the graphic on paper until everyone agrees. The graphic is then ready to be rendered on the computer.



4. Use a Template

A template is a key ingredient to quickly developing quality graphics and helps guarantee consistency. Consistency breeds trust. A template also eliminates the risk of a lengthy formatting pass on large projects. When you are working with a team, your template ensures that all graphics look as if one person or company created them. Follow your template. Choose a color palette, graphic style, arrow style, font, line spacing, and capitalization and stick with it.

It is imperative that your graphics are understandable. When choosing or creating your template, be aware of the variables that affect the clarity of communication and those you need to bear in mind, like the following:

- * The distance the audience is from the presentation
- * The knowledge of the audience regarding the topic
- * Special considerations (vision-impaired audience, graphics will be duplicated in black and white for review, etc.)

These variables determine what should be included and how to develop your template. For example, if your graphics are being projected onto a 10' screen using PowerPoint, size the graphic elements and text so your audience can easily read them from a distance. If graphic elements or labels are too small, your graphic may fail to accomplish its objective. Imagine spending countless hours or thousands of dollars conceptualizing and rendering a graphic only to have your audience complain that they couldn't understand it because the text was too small to read. Use a template to determine what works best to quickly render successful graphics.

Title Placement
Subtitle

Font List:
 Arial Black
 Arial Narrow Bold
 Arial Narrow Bold Italic
 Arial Narrow
 Arial Narrow Italic

Categories	Progress	Description
Category I	☆☆	Things it covers and does
Category II	☆☆	Things it covers and does
Category III	☆☆	Things it covers and does
Category IV	☆☆	Things it covers and does

Special Use Boxes:

- Fake Data:** Sample text, Sample text 2
- Decision:** Decision
- Highlight:** Fake Data, Sample text, Sample text 2

Tagline/Bumper/Takeaway

Use or disclosure of data contained on this sheet is subject to the restriction on the title page of this proposal in quotation.

Ignore these steps and I guarantee that you will work harder and longer, spend more money, and lose much of the success that could have been yours. These secrets absolutely work. This overview starts you on your path of success. Follow these steps or give your competition the advantage.

Mike Parkinson is an internationally recognized visual communication expert and multi-published author. He recently completed his third book titled *Do-It-Yourself Billion Dollar Business Graphics: 3 Fast and Easy Steps to Turn Your Text and Ideas Into Graphics That Sell*. Mike is a partner at 24 Hour Company.

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