Infographics: An Innovative Tool to Capture Consumers" Attention

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Abstract

Using infographics as educational tools has emerged as a strategy to reach consumers in today's information-saturated environment. Through the use of engaging and informative graphics, educators can deliver meaningful messages tailored to targeted audiences. Varying types of effectively designed infographics can be used to capture the attention of consumers by: telling a story, clarifying complex information with evidence-based information or research findings, using innovative design, and reaching targeted audiences in easily accessible places. Combining innovative infographic design and targeted dissemination strategies, Extension educators can capture consumers' attention and deliver clear messages to improve communication with consumers.

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Introduction

Today, society is embedded within an information-saturated environment, thus developing educational materials that capture consumers" attention is an ever-growing challenge for Extension educators. This is due in a large part to the amount of media consumers are exposed to on a daily basis. On average, adults consume an astounding 13.6 hour of media each day (Short, 2013). Accompanying this upsurge in media consumption, is a deterioration in consumers" attention spans, with the average length for adults a mere eight seconds (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2014). The implications of increased media exposure and reduced attention span have led to a high prevalence of information overload (Pew Research Center, 2014), reducing consumers' ability to process complex information (Edmunds & Morris, 2000).

To effectively communicate with information-overloaded consumers, Extension educators need new tools. A rising trend in the use of infographics as educational tools has emerged in a variety of content areas. Infographics, through the use of engaging visuals, can deliver meaningful messages

tailored to the shorter attention span of today's consumers—a strategy that can be a driving force for improving communication with Extension audiences.

What Are Infographics?

Infographics are visual representations of information, data, or knowledge that are often accompanied by text (Mol, 2011). They are designed to present complex information more clearly than through text alone. Using words, numbers, symbols, colors, and pictures, infographics communicate a key message to the reader by telling a story.

Effectively designed infographics can improve communication with consumers by:

- Capturing complex ideas, behaviors, or knowledge in an easily digestible visual format;

- Delivering maximum information in a minimum amount of time and space; and

- Combining pictures and words to increase consumer comprehension and retention.

To develop engaging and informative infographics, increasing consumer knowledge on a specific topic, educators can use the key characteristics of effective infographic design.

Key Characteristics of an Effective Infographic Design

While infographic design and style can vary widely, effective infographics accomplish the following.

1. Tell a **story** with a meaningful message.

   - The message is relevant to the target audience's needs.

   - The idea is actionable.

   - The presentation is in narrative form, telling a story.

   - The narrative answers the "what," "where," "why," "who," "when," and "how" of a story.

2. Present complex information clearly using **evidence-based information or research findings**.

   - Ideas are supported by reputable organizations or findings presented in academic publications.

   - References are the most recent research findings.

   - A list of reference materials at the end of the infographic gives credit to resources used to develop the infographic (including pictures, websites, journal articles, books, videos, etc.)

3. Capture consumers' attention with **innovative design**.

   - Use an **eye-catching layout**

- Data are grouped in meaningful ways allowing the reader to discover patterns, trends to understand the story.

- Display the most important information in the top left hand corner and the least important information in the bottom right hand corner to appeal to Western reading style.

  o Use **informational illustrations**.

    - Pictures, graphs, and charts are designed to clarify the readers" understanding of the topic.

    - Illustrations support the story rather than detract from it.

    - The message is the focal point.

4. **Reach** the target audience.

  o The infographic is made easily available to the target audience in an easily accessible place in print or online.

Types of Infographics

Educators can develop a wide variety of infographics depending on the information or message they want to convey to the consumer. Examples of the types and usage of educational infographics are listed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Types of Infographics

Type	Description	When to Use
Visualized Article	Summarizes the main points of a text-heavy article with a visual representation	• Delivering information quickly to consumer • Introducing an article topic • Communicating with low-literate audiences
Procedural	Provides "how-to" information, increasing consumers" knowledge of the sequence of events that can be taken to perform an action	• Enhancing consumers" process understanding • Reinforcing learning of a sequence of events

Research/Statistical	Condenses scientific data into a numerical graphic to increase consumers" knowledge of research findings	• Summarizing research findings • Describing prevalence rates
Comparison	Compares two or more concepts side-by-side, highlighting similarities/differences	• Differentiating two similar entities • Assisting consumers in making a choice • Providing a cost/benefit analysis
Timeline	Graphically displays a list of important events in chronological order	• Presenting order of historical events • Informing consumers of project timelines
Flow Chart	Guides the consumer through a series of questions to determine an answer	• Answering a question • Identifying an object based on defining characteristics

Infographic Examples

After selecting a type of infographic, educators can use a wide variety of free and user-friendly Web-based programs that provide templates, graphics, and tools for designing engaging infographics. Examples of a visualized article infographic (Figure 1) and a research/statistical infographic (Figure 2) were developed using the Piktochart website that can be accessed online at: http://piktochart.com. The Colorado Live Eat Play website also uses the Canva website for infographic development, which can be accessed online at https://www.canva.com. Several other user-friendly infographic programs, with tutorials, are available online for free or low-cost to support educators in designing infographics.

The infographic in Figure 1 was developed from Colorado State University Extension resources on the DASH diet published on the Colorado Live Eat Play website (www.liveeatplay.colostate.edu). It is designed to capture the attention of consumers with an eye-catching layout and inform them of the definition, benefits, and instructions for following the DASH diet. Educators can develop visualized article infographics such as this, to quickly summarize article information and deliver key messages to consumers.

The infographic in Figure 2 was designed to summarize a component of the Colorado LEAP Study, a school-based obesity prevention intervention, by reporting the number of direct contacts,

programming activities, and the key findings of the study. Educators can use research/statistical infographics such as this, to provide community stakeholders (e.g. county commissioners) and participants with a brief overview of study details and key findings.

Figure 1.

Visualized Article Infographic: Following the DASH Diet

Figure 2.

Research/Statistical Infographic: The Colorado LEAP Study's Super Tasters & Mighty Movers Elementary School Program

Note: Full size infographics for Figures 1 and 2 can be found at:
 http://www.liveeatplay.colostate.edu/eat/healthy-diet/dash-diet/dash-diet-info.jpg
http://www.liveeatplay.colostate.edu/research/leap-study.jpg

Conclusion

Concurrently with developing engaging infographics, Extension educators should determine
 dissemination strategies that best complement their educational setting and effectively reach their
 target audience. Educators can design infographics that are uploaded as Web-based content or

pushed through social media outlets for online consumers (Schuster, 2012; Typhina, Bardon, & Gharis, 2015). In classroom or community settings, print-based infographics (PDF file formats) can be used for posters and handouts to reinforce consumer learning, address current issues, and report research findings. By combining targeted dissemination methods with innovative infographic design, educators can capture the attention of consumers and deliver meaningful educational messages designed to demystify complex information and enhance programmatic outcomes.

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