

## Marketing engagement through visual content

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**Abstract:** *Engaging visual is a must in the modern marketing world. Wide access to mass communication devices, with extended visuals enhancements, made visual content an important point of interest for any publisher, on all media channels. The decreasing costs and huge variety of types are premises for an easy and effective marketing investment, with strong benefits for any company and its brands. Loyal customers are achieved and kept through visual content; the lack of it in the general marketing strategy of any producer is a question mark that can lead to a diminishing market share.*

**Key-words:** *visual content, marketing engagement, video, photo, brand image*

### 1. Introduction

Human perception is mostly visual. Over 90% of the daily processed information comes from visual receptors. The written language started and probably will end with pictures: drawings, hieroglyphs, icons, symbols. (No wonder that the word of these days is “selfie”!)

There are several factors that have made visual content so important in present days:

- It is easier to understand, often beyond the cultural and linguistic barriers.
- It is shorter - and 95% of the B2B clients prefer short, visual, mobile-optimized content (Taylor 2014). Users have now the shortest attention span of all times (probably the proper name for this era is the light-speed century!).
- Most people remember 80% of what they see and only 20% of what they read.
- Visual content is more likely to be shared across the respective platform, between friends, family and business partners. It is eye-catching and has a direct effect on human emotions.
- Last, but not least, the affordability of the needed hardware (by technological progress) and proliferation of the necessary software (very

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easy to use nowadays, even by the newcomers of the field) made the production of visual content much easier and a lot cheaper.

In conclusion, visual content is an important and valuable tool for modern marketing.

## 2. Types of visual content

There are three major types of visual content:

- 1) Illustrations, as any message conveyed by a static visual composition; this can consist of drawings, photos and, as a newer development, memes. In all of these the main part is the picture, accompanied by one or more pieces of text, all with great responsibilities in terms of marketing.
- 2) Comics, as collections of images and text, structured in a certain order and with a clear storyline. A special, modern, kind consists of infographics, which present large amounts of information in a graphical structure, sometimes with a visual “story” from the beginning to the end.
- 3) Videos, moving images in form of clips, short films which can tell a story or convey a certain message, preferably both. Important subtypes are vines (looping videos up to 6 seconds long) and gifs (looping slideshows of images, packed in a single file).

From the marketing point of view, all of these have benefits:

- Illustrations are short, easy to comprehend (usually in seconds) and, of course, simple as production process.
- Comics are good storytellers and more easily remembered.
- Videos are powerful through the dynamic of movement and good conveyers of human emotions.

Using imagery of all sorts, companies can:

- Prove their expertise in the field;
- Develop a visual demonstration of the product;
- Present testimonials from current users;
- Tell little success stories, with the product as the main character;
- Transmit installation instructions and how-to manuals;
- Organize training sessions for the professionals.

For the content consumer or, in other words, the so-much-wanted client of the publisher, marketing engagement is raised through visual content:

- Visual information is processed much faster than the one presented in the form of text.

- Almost half of the viewers (46%) say the website design is the primary criteria for establishing the credibility of the site (according to a Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab with 2,440 participants).
- Visual content is inspiring, with ideas on how to use the products, and improves social engagement. Visitors stay longer if the message is presented with compelling visuals.

From the publisher point of view, visual content is an important marketing tool:

- The time needed for the comprehension of a visual ad is sensibly shorter than the one necessary for a message consisting mainly of text.
- Visual ads are more effective in convincing an audience to make a certain decision (43% more, according to a 3M-sponsored study at the University of Minnesota School of Management).
- Visual content conveys emotions more easily and rapidly: very useful as long as time is either not available (in case of highway ads, for example) or very expensive (for television commercials).
- Viewers are 85% more likely to purchase a product after watching a product video (source: Internet Retailer).
- Through visual content, the brand is “humanized” and easier to relate with.
- As a consequence of the broad understanding of a visual message, marketing costs for multinational companies are kept at lower levels.

On Twitter platform, the effect on retweets of an inclusion (versus otherwise text only) is as follows:

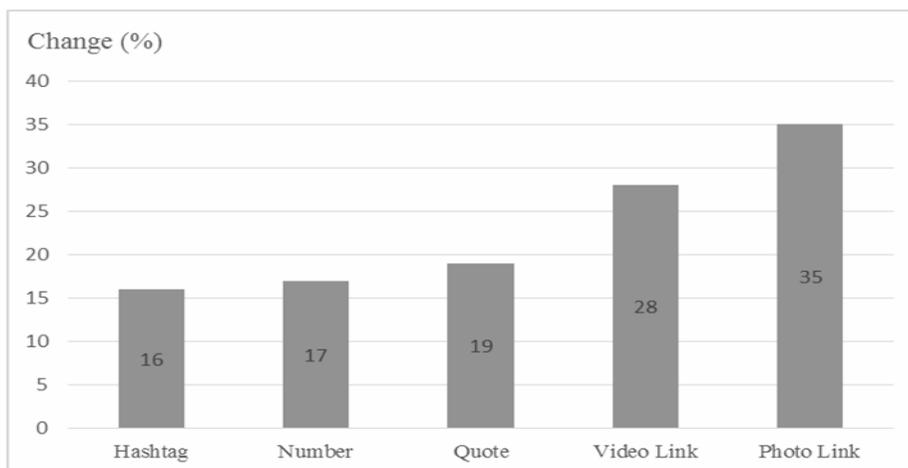


Fig. 1. *Change in retweets by inclusion* (Roger 2014)

In a study on the impact of the Facebook timeline (Schoenfeld 2012), the comparison between the engagement rates before and after the implementation of the timeline showed that the brands gained:

- 14% in fan engagement;
- 46% increase in content engagement and
- 65% more in interactive content engagement, especially for the photo and video posts.

In another study (Sutton 2011) concerning pages with videos (and pages without), the researchers concluded the following:

- Pages with videos attracted 2 to 3 times more monthly unique visitors;
- The average time-on-site spend per visitor was double.

In the 18 months period after the introduction of videos on site pages, the publishers achieved:

- 157% more search engine traffic;
- 100% increase in unique visitors and
- 63% more page views.

### 3. Visual content in action

There are many examples of successful applications of this visual content strategy across the markets, as it can be seen in the following.

For the “Death of the Office” presentation from **Intuit**, the infographic is drawn in real time, as soon as the visitor scrolls down the page. Rows of data are revealing right in front of the viewer’s eyes, almost like the movement along the page is essentially creating the presentation.

Instead of simply describing the technology, **Volvo Trucks** opted to show it in action through one of the most memorable demonstration. They employed a celebrity (Jean-Claude Van Damme) to do one of his famous splits with the soles of his feet on the mirrors of two Volvo trucks driving backwards. This clever ad was viewed for more than 80 million times (half of the views of the channel itself) and raised the number of subscribers to over 126 thousand.

Equally impressive is the Hybrid Graphic Novel on **Peugeot** website, where the new HYbrid4 technology features are explained throughout a visual, fast-paced, graphic novel style adventure. The main character has to escape from different dangerous situations, using various styles of movement; every step of the way was transformed into an opportunity for the producer to describe, through an analogy, the functionality of a specific feature.

The **Old Spice** campaign “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like” consisted in a series of clips shot in one take in an amazing (almost magical!) over-the-top style, with the help of the charming personality (and voice) of Isaiah Mustafa. The

ads had up to 51 million views and pushed the number of channel subscribers to almost 500 thousand. The series was cleverly followed by another series of 185 video responses to the viewers questions, all made in only 48 hours, a marketing strategy that had huge benefits for the brand, in terms of notoriety and goodwill.

In a similar manner, **BMW** promoted the products of the brand through an 8 parts mini-series, starring Hollywood star Clive Owen, in which an important part was played by the company cars. Each part was enjoyed by more than 2,5 million viewers, resulting in a very efficient exposure with positive consequences for the brand.

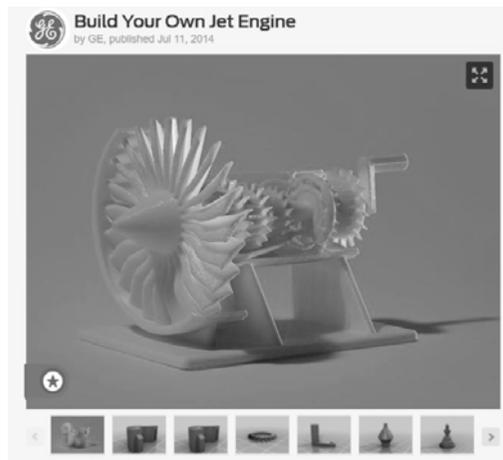


Fig. 2. *Build Your Own Engine* (GE 2014)

With a brilliant marketing move, **General Electric** took the visual content strategy even further, publishing at Thingiverse the 3D printing schematics for a jet engine (scaled, of course). Using that, anyone could make, in the comfort of their own home and with the help of a 3D printer, a functional mini-model of a real jet engine; the so-called “toy” gave the users a feeling of the real-life engineering and was a surprisingly good recruitment tool.

#### 4. The Future of Visual Content

Due to its importance, visual content receives a lot of attention from marketers worldwide. According to the researchers (King 2015), the main trends concerning this area of communication are the following:

- Video becomes the content of choice, already dominating the social media content.

- As a result of the introduction of their own video sharing platforms (or services), YouTube will lose the first place in this field, but it could retain the position if all devices are taken into consideration (aggregate views).
- Technical innovations will change marketing (for example, there are already available 360 degrees videos, which allow the user to change the viewing angle of a video clip in real time, while watching).
- Campaigns will change the focus from the information to the experience of the customer.
- Visual marketing will reach new heights, across old and new platforms.
- Direct buying (from almost all platforms) could become the norm: therefore, visual content will have much bigger role in marketing, because will be directly linked with a potential purchase.

## 5. Conclusions

Visual content has to be a focal point in any marketing strategy, because of its strong relation with the human nature. The important impact of images and videos, along with the ease of today's production of graphical content, are critical factors in favour of marketing engagement through visual content. With the help of images, in any form they present themselves, brands can achieve the desired reach and recognition, making marketing investments more efficient.

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