# A Guide to Infographics

*Getting the Most Out of Search Media*

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<td><img src="infographics.png" alt="Infographics Icon" /></td>
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INTRODUCTION

Infographics are pretty. But what lies beneath? As the world of search evolves, Digital Relevance™ strives to use this specific digital content to its fullest because producing strategic content with social intent builds digital relevance for deserving brands. The following is a guide for building infographics that are more than dressed up data.

THE VALUE OF INFOGRAPHICS

Infographics increase online visibility and brand awareness. Because infographics have aesthetic appeal and simplify large amounts of data, they are highly attractive to online communities. In this way, infographics have the potential to “go viral.” When infographics are reposted on various sites, it creates an organic SEO benefit: naturally acquired links. But to go viral, the message must be strategically crafted, the appropriate demographic must be targeted and the piece must be released within a relevant community using the proper channels.

If infographics are positioned on the owner’s website ([sometimes referred to as self-hosted strategic promotion]), they can result in an increase in direct traffic from a diverse audience. If hosted on a third party domain, the referral traffic potential is great. Social networks are great traffic drivers as outlined in the following referral traffic snapshot from January 2012.

In addition to the marketing benefits previously mentioned, a properly optimized infographic post placed on an owner’s website reinforces the brand by providing keyword relevance, category relevance and ultimately domain relevance. By the inclusion of co-occurrence terms in the paragraph that should accompany an infographic post, through strategic choosing of titles, image description information, and other considerations, the post has a greater discovery probability. That is, if someone searches for a relevant phrase not specifically used in the post, the post has a greater chance of showing up in the Search Engine Results Page and being discovered. This helps the hosting domain expand its visibility to a new audience.
IDENTIFY THE CONVERSATION

There are a few approaches when determining the right message, placement and distribution strategy for infographics. It all starts with identifying the conversations that you want to join by providing appropriate information through your infographic.

COMPETITOR RESEARCH

Competitor research will identify existing industry conversations surrounding a product category/industry. Identify the popular graphics based on their search rankings, social shares, level of engagement, link profile and comments. Once the top competing pieces are identified, investigate the message, the audience sharing the composition and the placement. Use this information to inspire your own creation, but always make sure you approach the message from a fresh angle or put a new spin on a previously released topic.

SOCIAL RESEARCH

Another approach is initiating social research that gives insight into real time conversations about any keyword or phrase. Identify hot topics and learn what information the target audience is seeking by searching for social posts by way of Facebook posts and tweets that include the relevant term. Some tools used for conducting social research include:

» www.trendsbuzz.com
» www.kurrently.com
» www.topsy.com

Other tools that help to identify the volume of monthly searches for a phrase, and the best months for releasing a certain topic are Google AdWords and SEM Rush.

DEVELOP THE INFOGRAPHIC

Create a research outline, including the focal point and subcategories of the infographic concept. Do more research than needed so that the designer has options when creating the visual story. Choose sources that are credible and recognizable. If possible, use .gov, .edu or .org sites. Specialty industry resources are also encouraged.

Here are some additional tips from SEOmoz for consideration while building research:

1» Find information that can be organized.
2» Find information that can be visually represented.
3» Data does better than just information.
4» Focus on verifiable statistics.
5» Focus on chunkable, tweetable statements.
6» Focus on content that triggers an emotional response.

1 http://www.seomoz.org/blog/how-to-build-links-with-infographics
Following finalization of the research, visual design begins. Provide a creative brief to the designer, including the brand releasing the message, the intent of the infographic, the hosting domain, style preferences, language considerations, theme preferences, color, typography preferences, etc.

The designer provides a mood board and wireframe to the client, who then provides feedback for further development.

WHAT IS A MOOD BOARD?

“Things that can be explored in the mood board include photography style, color palettes, typography, patterns, and the overall look and feel of the site. Soft or hard? Grungy or clean? Dark or light? A rough collage of colors, textures and pictures is all it takes to evoke a specific style or feeling.”

WHAT IS A WIREFRAME?

A wireframe, also known as a page schematic or screen blueprint, is a visual guide that represents the skeletal framework. The wireframe depicts the layout or arrangement of the content.

The designer continues development and when all information has been included, the client checks for accuracy and compliance.

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2 http://www.webdesignerdepot.com/2008/12/why-mood-boards-matter/
3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Website_wireframe
INVOKE THE CLIENT

The client knows the brand and industry best. They may also have proprietary information that can be considered for inclusion in the graphic, so giving them various opportunities to provide feedback and gain approvals from their team ensures that the message being created speaks clearly on the client’s behalf, and is appropriate for the intent of the release. Intent means whether the infographic is informational, entertaining, a support for a marketing campaign, and so forth. It’s up to the designer and the promoter to make sure the piece appeals to the masses and gets positioned and promoted strategically to attain the most visibility and engagement.

BRAND IT

Infographics may be branded with a logo that is conservatively positioned within the sources section of the piece. Full disclosure is best. It shows end users who is providing the information; and if the message is well received, the brand is highlighted for thought leadership. This is especially important if the infographic is posted on a third party site. As long as the infographic includes useful information that people want to read, and is appropriately placed and promoted to an audience that welcomes the information, branding should not make end users uneasy. If the message is promotional in nature (generally not a good use of infographics), then branding further discourages the viewers from receiving and sharing the infographic message.

Sometimes, if the hosting site is less accepting of “promotional” posts, a branded infographic may have reduced opportunity for acceptance. It is important to understand the hosting site, and the preferences of the community. An alternative to branding the infographic may be an endorsement citation within the body of the accompanying text.

PLACE IT

Infographics are considered “earned media” if positioned and released on a third-party site, or “owned media” or “self hosted” if hosted on the client’s domain. The benefits and behavior of both placement options vary.

Placement Options » CONSIDER SOCIAL SHARING, TRAFFIC AND LINKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SELF HOSTED</th>
<th>3rd PARTY</th>
<th>BOTH</th>
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[Images of infographic placement options]
SOCIAL
If the infographic is hosted on a third party site, social buzz is not directed to the brand’s domain (i.e. the company releasing the message). Still, social signals around the message itself are an indication that the message is being well received, and therefore putting the provider/brand in a good light.

TRAFFIC
One of the benefits of self-hosting the infographic is that you achieve direct traffic. If it’s hosted by a third party, you’ll be receiving referral traffic. Usually this means you won’t get as much traffic initially as you would if self-hosted. Of course there are exceptions to the rule depending on the size and engagement of the third party site. As an example, if you landed placement on a site like Huffington Post or Mashable, the traffic potential is great because of the size of these communities and the level of engagement. More than likely, the traffic earned through such placement will be greater than the traffic potential of a self-hosted infographic.

LINKS
Third party hosting brings in second level links that are not as strong as direct links, although they add link diversity.

You can have the best of both worlds by doing both types of releases consecutively. One consideration is avoiding duplicate content by creating two considerably different articles, highlighting different things about the graphic relevant to each online community being targeted to accompany the posts.

The layout of the landing page should maximize the performance of the release. The image below shows the functionality of various page components. After spending so much time and effort creating the best message and identifying the target audience, making sure the content/infographic is search ready is crucial because it increases the discovery potential of the message.

Building for Virality » SOCIAL SHARING BUTTONS

Including social buttons on the page is a necessity. Using the buttons with the counter is better, as it allows the popularity or reputation of the graphic to follow the piece wherever it goes.
Building for Virality » ANCHOR TEXT LINK

The anchor text link is placed within the short paragraph that precedes the graphic. The link should point to the page that you are trying to rank. In addition, contextual relevance is further supported by the inclusion of co-occurrence terms within the paragraph.

Building for Virality » ALT IMAGE TEXT

The alt image tag or image description describes what the image is about, important for both search engines and enhancing user experience.
Building for Virality » EMBED CODE

Finally, the embed code increases the sharing potential of the post by allowing people to share the image on their own sites. It also gives you an opportunity to include a branded link in the embed code (which is, of course, a value add) so that people will know who provided the graphic.

There is one more thing that is quite important in the landing page set up, and that is including proper meta description, which will be pulled by social networks if others post the release on their profile pages or walls. It’s also a good idea to include references to a thumbnail sized image within the code, so that these social platforms can locate and pull an attractive visual preview and description when posted.

Building for Virality » GOOD SOCIAL OPTIMIZATION

Schema and open graph markup are now of great importance. Both enable web pages to become rich objects in a social graph, enhancing user experience within social platforms, and maximizing engagement potential. Here’s an example of what a web-page-share on a social network looks like with proper social markup.
An SEOmoz post pointed out some landing page necessities:

**FEATURES:**

- Infographic with good file name and alt attribute
- Share buttons
- Embed code box, with JavaScript to auto select all *([will show, one second]*)
- Embed code with good image name and alt attribute
- Embed code links image to post and has a secondary branded link after the graphic

**THERE ARE THREE GOALS:**

1. ease sharing
2. ease embedding
3. ensuring the embed code gives good links

**PROMOTE IT**

Once the post is live, promoting the infographic on appropriate online communities will amplify the message, increase visibility, and encourage engagement.

*Suggested promotional tactics include the following:*

1. Write a press release that showcases the contextual relevance to the target audience. Place an image link within the release back to the initial post to increase traffic and discovery of the infographic post.

2. Get the message in front of bloggers and journalists. Submit the infographic to publishers with whom the owner has procured relationships, facilitating syndication of the release, again increasing exposure.

3. Share the infographic with existing audiences by sending an email newsletter to the existing brand community. Host it on the owner’s blog, allowing community engagement and response. Put a thumbnail on the most visited page of the brand’s domain, linking back to the original post.

4. Share the infographic on social media channels using the following guidelines:
   - Identify the networks that are best for sharing the message.
   - Identify the best time of day to share on such channels.
   - Target influencers on the social media channels who are interested in the topic.
   - Promote using the owner’s branded social media accounts.

5. Reach out to partners and affiliates for re-posting opportunities. This allows further amplification of the message to an industry audience.

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ENJOY IT

1» Metrics and reporting allow the producer of the infographic to determine the success of the release. Once you have identified the key performance indicators, taking a monthly read allows you to see the initial impact of the infographic, as well as its growth pattern. Digital Relevance™ measures the direct traffic, referral traffic, social shares and links attained with every infographic. We take metrics every month, and have noticed that the results continue to improve slowly and steadily for up to 6 months following the initial release of a graphic.

   Social shares » Track the number of social shares the initial post received using Open Site Explorer, Google Analytics, and other web sources such as Tweet Reach, Social Mention and Shared Count. Another way of collecting social performance information is by searching for the infographic on every social network and recording the number of shares, likes, etc. Increased social activity suggests that the content was well received, which means the message was right, released at the right time to the right audience and promoted the right way!

   Shared Count » Lists the number of social shares attained for a specific URL on various social networks.

   Social Mention » Lists the posts including a specific infographic found on various social networks, giving insight into the sentiment, relevancy, and perception of the message as well as helping in identifying key conversationists surrounding the graphic.

   Tweet Reach » Lists the number of tweets, impressions, and total reach for a specific infographic. It also shows the influence and level of engagement around each tweet, identifying influencers and the impact of a release.

2» Traffic » Track all traffic to the dedicated landing page using analytics to determine the most effective sources of traffic, and the volume of search and referral traffic gained from the release.

3» On-site activity » Look at the click pattern of the visitors to your site to determine the success of the various call-to-actions included on the landing page, and to estimate the level of interest from the site visitors reached with the post.

4» Backlinks » Several weeks following the initial release and promotion, backlinks can be reported using Open Site Explorer or Majestic SEO. Significant backlinks suggest that the graphic was well received and shared on multiple sites.

Note: It is recommended that you cross check all metrics collected around an infographic due to the discrepancy in the results from different sources that you may experience periodically.

SUMMARY

When executed strategically, an infographic can accomplish the mission for which it was originally designed — to visually and effectively tell a story to a targeted audience, thereby boosting online visibility and brand awareness for its host. Unlike many other forms of media, it has greater potential for discovery and shareability. It also contributes to the conversion funnel by the inclusion of appropriate call-to-actions on hosting landing pages on the brand’s domain. To get the most out of an infographic, it’s important to take a cohesive approach that includes indepth research, appropriate aesthetics, and strategic placement and promotion.
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