



Not every article needs a picture

It is dumb to keep forcing images into every story online.



By Hanson O'Haver

Pictures and text often pair nicely together. You have an article about a thing, and the picture illustrates that thing, which in many cases helps you understand the thing better. But on the web, this logic no longer holds, because at some point it was decided that all texts demand a picture. It may be of a tangentially related celeb. It may be a stock photo of a person making a face. It may be a Sony logo, which is just the word SONY. I have been thinking about this for a long time and I think it is stupid. I understand that images → clicks is industry gospel, but it seems like many publishers have forgotten their sense of pride. If a picture is worth a thousand words, it's hard for me to imagine there'll be much value in the text of an article illustrated by a generic stock image.

As with so many problems, social media seems to deserve much of the blame for this. Until the mid-to-late '00s, a publication's homepage played a dominant role in driving people to individual articles. Homepages mostly mimicked the front pages of newspapers, where major stories—things that warranted investment in original art—had images. Other stories just got a headline. Over time, the endless space of the internet lowered the standard for which articles needed art, but still, not everything got an image.

Then Facebook and Twitter disrupted, in the traditional “made things worse” sense, the biz. Now when a user shares an article on their sites, a thumbnail