

Visual Communication Trends

Visual communication has gained deep traction within the communications realm, causing implications on how technical, marketing, and internal communicators conceptualize, design, and cultivate the user experience to deliver tactical and strategic business information. Visual communication conveys *effective* information and improves adoption by leveraging our cognitive ability to visually learn and engage faster and at the same time eliminate cultural, geographic, language, or ethnicity barriers associated with text-heavy content.

Heavy engineering and manufacturing organizations have deployed standard operating procedures and practices to ensure adherence to checks and balances as well as hazard handling for designing and servicing tools and assets. The next wave would be deploying visual communication alongside existing text-based content. This shift to visual communication drives effective consumption of content on shop floors and repair centers, in addition to the quick wins in the sales and training arenas.

In software organizations, visual media has been employed extensively for training and marketing needs for a while now. There has been a gradual shift while approaching communication needs for customers from the plain graphic design to a more comprehensive and visual strategy. Visual communication aids such as maps, graphs, charts, interactive visual inputs, and design thinking assets have led to better adoption of end-user content. Organizations are now *repositioning* visual communication to drive strategic differentiation for products and services offerings. Visual communication has also become interloped with user experience design with the customers increasingly preferring mobile and light-weight web applications.

For technical communicators who are currently focusing on intelligent content for design and maintenance, visual communication introduces another complexity. Given the reality of shrinking budgets on top, it's imperative that technical communicators develop visual design competencies *internally* rather than rely on visual communication experts only. For many organizations, this means re-skilling communicators to think and act in the new way – while still retaining the focus on providing minimalistic and usable help and support information.

The big push for adopting visual communication is driven by the ability of new age content management systems to connect *existing* design and documentation assets. This change enables communicators to create dynamic animations and other visual content - with *minimal* human intervention. For organizations looking to adopt and deploy connected content, industrializing visual content delivery within the digital landscape is a huge win. Orchestrating a business workflow that triggers notifications and generates basic animations and visuals from existing design and text-based content assets, results in lesser costs to sustain visual media assets. Such visual media assets can also be embellished in virtual and augmented reality platforms – which is an additional win.

Albeit the obvious benefits, adoption of dynamic visual content depends on the existing IT ecosystem and the organizations' ability to drive this change within the user community.

The demand for consumption of visual communication is here to stay – and it would be worthwhile for every communication professional to embrace this change – while keeping the end user needs in perspective.