

fig. 3.1-3.11

THE VISUAL STORYTELLING SPECTRUM: AN OBJECTIVE APPROACH

- UNDERSTANDING THE VISUAL STORYTELLING SPECTRUM

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Every brand is different. Therefore, the way your brand should communicate—both internally and externally—will be unique. It will be based on your communication objectives, or your goals. These goals are determined by two very distinct inputs.

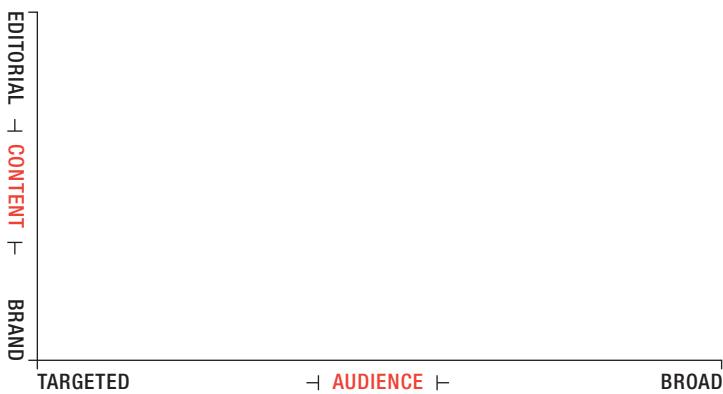
- Who is your audience?
- What are you communicating to them?

UNDERSTANDING THE VISUAL STORYTELLING SPECTRUM

We can assume a format-agnostic approach for now, and focus on illustrating the concept above (Figure 3.1). To better understand this concept, let's think of the *Who* as being the label for the *x-axis*, and the *What* as being represented along the *y-axis*.

1. *Audience (x-axis)*—two ends of the axis represented by *targeted* and *broad* audiences.
2. *Content (y-axis)*—two ends of the axis represented by *brand-centric* and *editorial* content.

Figure 3.1: The Visual Storytelling Spectrum



The quality of an application of infographics is largely measured by how it is leveraged to reach its specific objectives. Simply, popularity—or broad reach—should not be misinterpreted as a litmus test for quality, as reaching a large audience is not always the goal. For instance, if you are creating an internal (brand-centric) report for shareholders, it likely will not be interesting to an audience larger than who it was intended for: the shareholders. However, if someone is trying to create a really fun editorial piece, that *they* think will have broad appeal, but in the end it falls on deaf ears, then that my friend is a failure.

You should also think of each application along the visual storytelling spectrum as occupying a territory or range, rather than as a single point. And for each brand, these ranges will have different levels of overlap. For instance, an extremely brand-centric graphic for Facebook will probably have more broad appeal than the same for Joey Donut's donuts.

The more editorial the content is, the more broad its audience tends to be. Conversely, the more brand-centric the content, the more targeted its audience usually is. This is the case for most brands, and as we have mentioned, the individual ranges and the degrees of their overlap vary by company. Essentially, targeted audiences can range in size from very small to very large. While imperfect, this spectrum is a useful visual guide for helping people select each application and understand how it can be useful.

TARGETED AUDIENCE

A targeted audience tends to differentiate between a broader audience's members. For instance, all Internet users constitute a broad audience, whereas all male Internet users in the United States between the ages 18–25 is still a large subset, but it is more targeted. Any brand attempting to reach only this audience can tailor their messaging accordingly, and say, not worry so much

about the female non-Internet users aged 65+. A more targeted audience will find more specific information more interesting or more useful, on average, than a broader audience. Thus, how and what you should communicate to them will be different. Typically, you would use brand-centric content to communicate with a targeted audience, especially if the common thread among this targeted audience is based on a shared relationship with your brand.

BROAD AUDIENCE

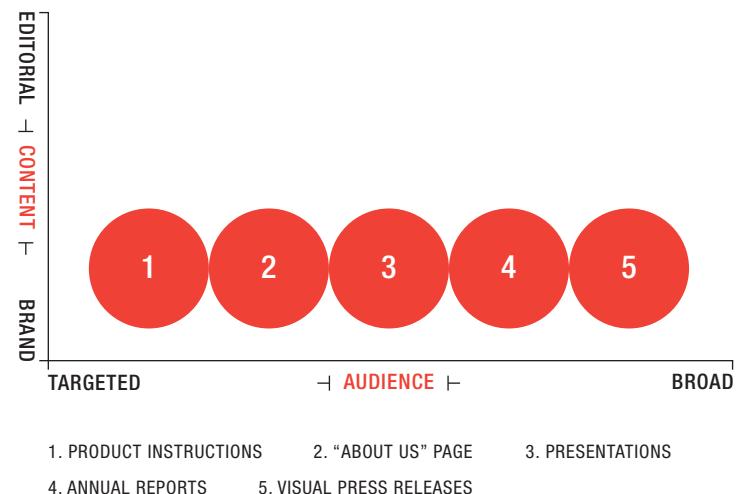
A broad audience does not differentiate between audience members. Instead, they treat all members as equal, regardless if they are existing customers, or if they've never heard of your brand before. Since this group is larger than a targeted audience, there is more information that this audience will find interesting or useful. Accordingly, your methods of communicating among them will be different than how you would communicate with a targeted audience. Typically you would use editorial content to communicate to a broad audience, as a relationship with the brand won't likely be a common thread among members.

BRAND-CENTRIC CONTENT

Brand-centric content is defined as explanations of your business and/or a communication of its values. Common examples of this include:

1. *"About Us" Pages*
2. *Visual Press Releases*
3. *Product Instructions*
4. *Presentations*
5. *Annual Reports*

Figure 3.2: a plotting of brand-centric applications.



As mentioned above, there tends to be some overlap among the applications within the spectrum. There are some—especially at the far end of brand-centric content—that tend to be more laser-targeted (Figure 3.2). These are typically product instructions, or "About Us" pages—applications with very utilitarian purposes that can often be made more visual. Understandably, this information is typically designed and shared to inform interested readers or even existing customers. Sometimes, because of the design of an application, or because of the size of the company, these targeted applications will reach an audience larger than originally intended.

However, there are some brand-centric applications that have substantially broader appeal than others. The Visual Storytelling Spectrum starts to get interesting with presentations and annual reports, because the content itself can be newsworthy. When the content consists of information that many people find popular for business or personal reasons, journalists will also have an incentive for distributing it. For instance, if the head of

a large social networking site were to announce the decision to join the private-sector space tourism industry, there would be a broad audience that would find this information interesting. Journalists who caught wind of such news could base a story around it.

Visual press releases typically have the most mass appeal out of all applications of brand-centric infographic content. By its very nature, a press release is a company's attempt to generate a buzz about something newsworthy that happened to their brand. However, press releases frequently tend to be rather dull, either because the company milestone is boring to anyone outside the company, the company itself is boring, or just because most readers would find the content too niche. Sometimes, however, this type of content can become popular.

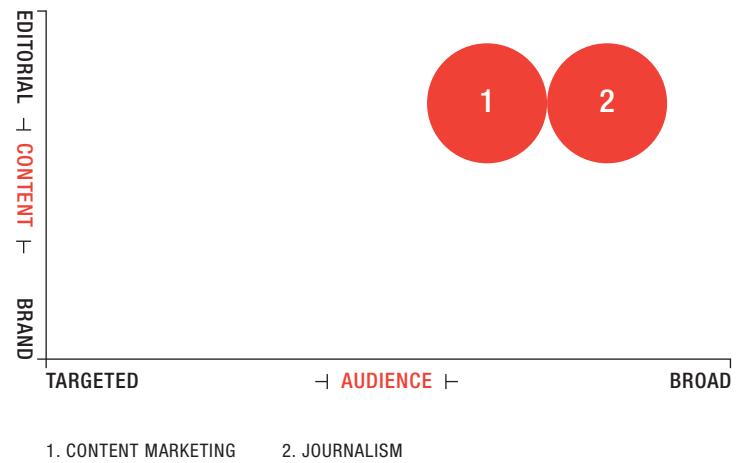
The most common instances in which a visual press release can generate mass appeal is when brands choose to visualize findings within their proprietary data. As we've previously mentioned, Mint tracks and anonymously aggregates its users' data. And within this data, they often find newsworthy stories. In these types of situations, a visual press release can generate a lot of attention.

EDITORIAL CONTENT

Editorial content would represent the top half of the y-axis, and it can be defined as the material that's used to tell a story, typically via a company blog treated as a brand's publication. It is very similar to the type of content publications produce. Editorial content does not include messaging about the brand, but it can include messaging about the industry within which the brand operates (Figure 3.3). Within this range, there is one type of content (editorial) but two objectives: thought leadership and virality. Thought leadership content is created with the intention of being recognized as an expert in one's industry, and tends to

be less editorial, and consequently more targeted. Viral content is created with the intention of reaching as broad an audience as possible, and tends to have the most appeal, and consequently is less targeted.

Figure 3.3: A plotting of editorial infographic applications.



When it comes to editorial content, it is difficult for your brand to serve two masters. Because it is intended to appeal to a more targeted audience, content for thought leadership can rarely have viral potential. Frankly, if your goal is to reach as broad of an audience as possible, create content that is capable of doing so. Think of the people that you meet at a party that only want to talk about themselves or their jobs. How many times have you found yourself in this situation, then pretended that you needed a refill on your beer as an excuse to talk to someone else? You don't want people to think of your blog, or your content in this same manner.

Again, this thought leadership content can vary tremendously in terms of audience appeal, based on the size of the brand, its industry, and the nature of the content.

One good example of an editorial infographic that uses proprietary data would be an infographic we created for the recommendation engine, Hunch. The data for this infographic (Figure 3.4) was aggregated from its customers, and they used this data to tell a story about how liberals and conservatives tend to prefer different foods. The content itself had nothing to do with Hunch, or their industry; rather it was simply an interesting story that they were able to generate from their own data.

Many brands produce thought leadership content in order to engage their readers and provide them with something of value. This type of content (as you might guess from its name) typically involves someone at the company speaking on its behalf, sharing their expertise through commentary, or offering analysis of high-level topics relating to the company's industry. In the case of the Hunch graphic, it garnered a much broader audience than we had initially imagined.



*Figure 3.4
The Food Profiles of Self-Described Liberals vs. Conservatives.
Column Five for Hunch.com.*

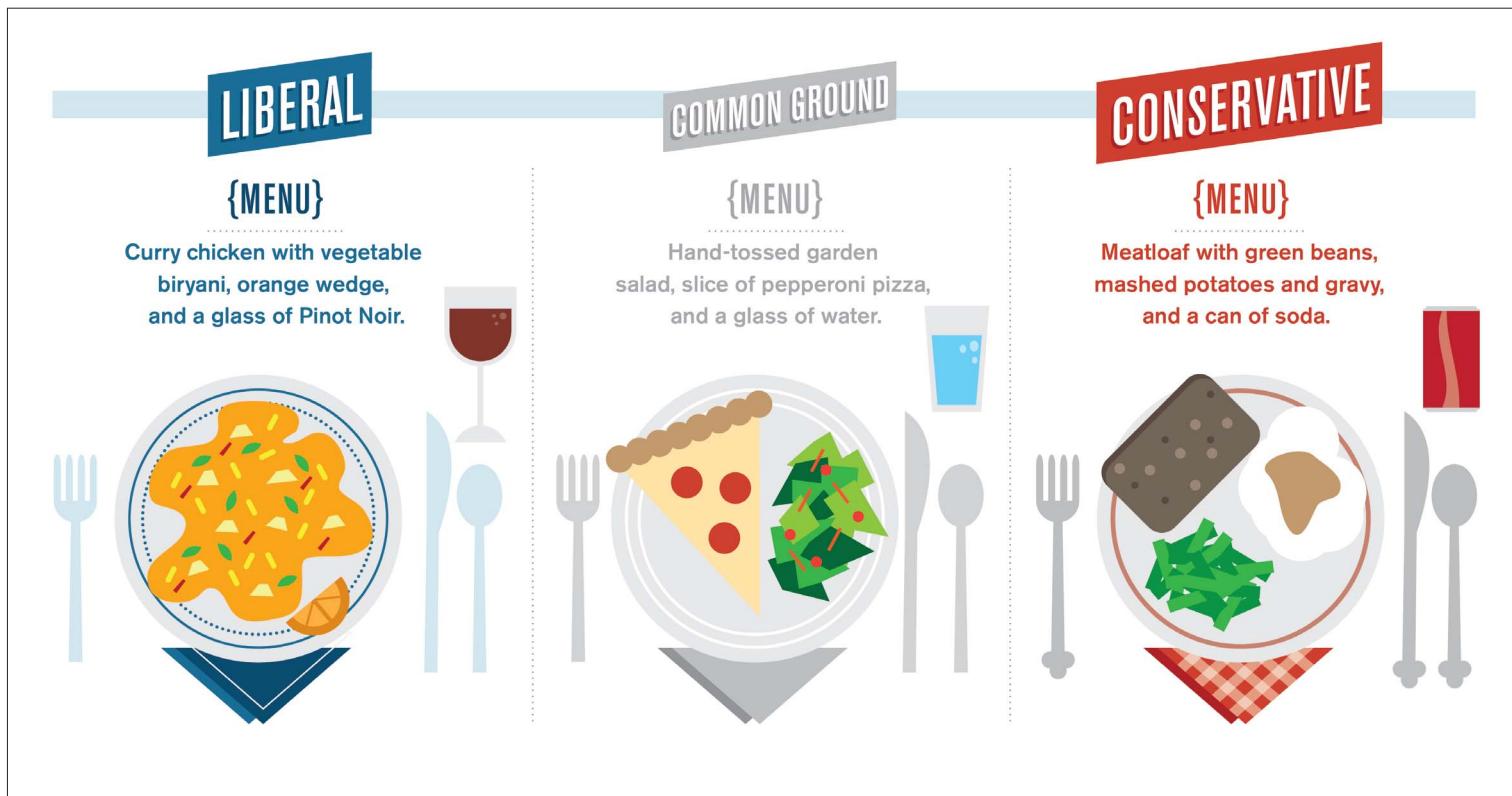


Figure 3.4
(Continued on pages 96-97)



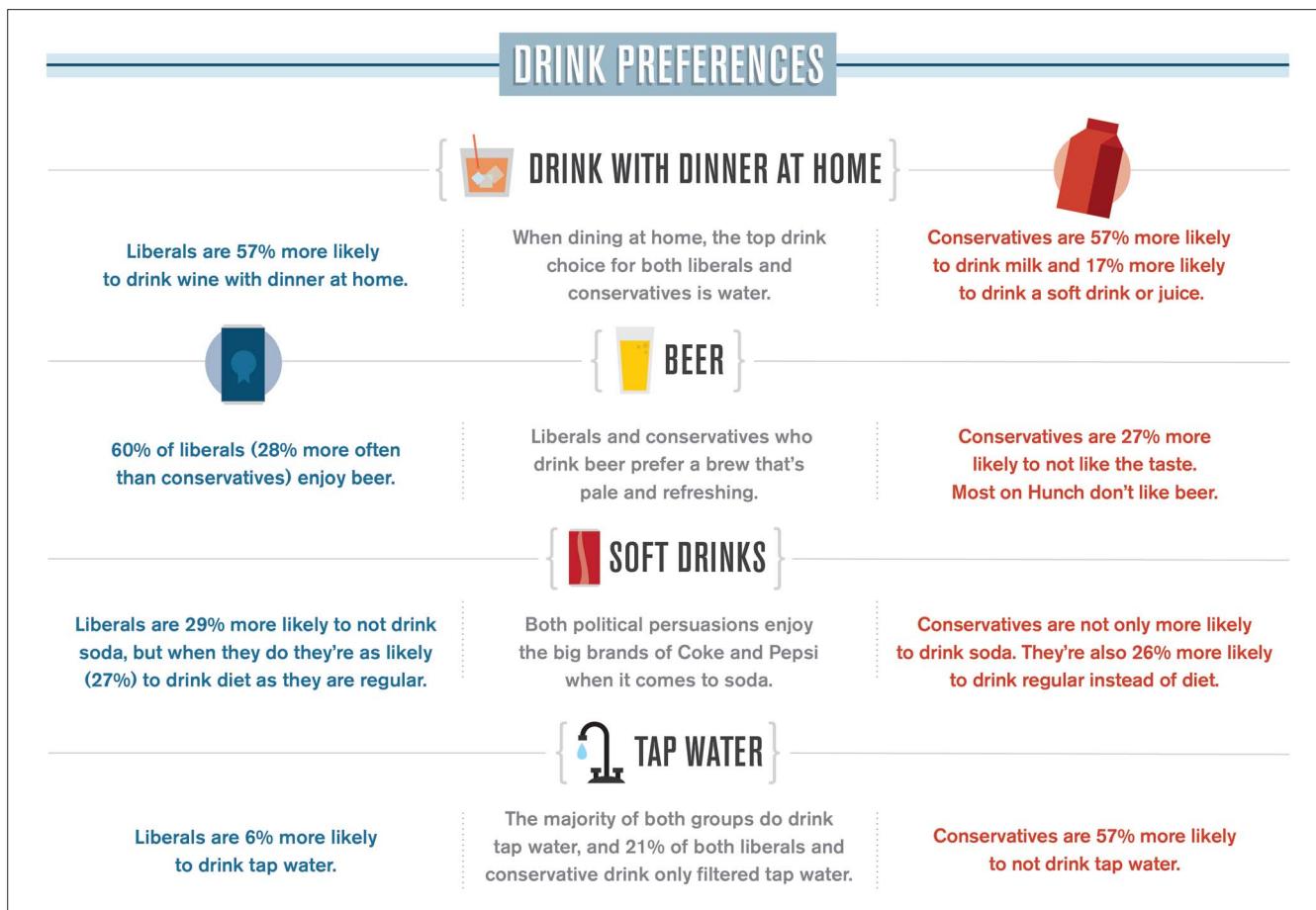
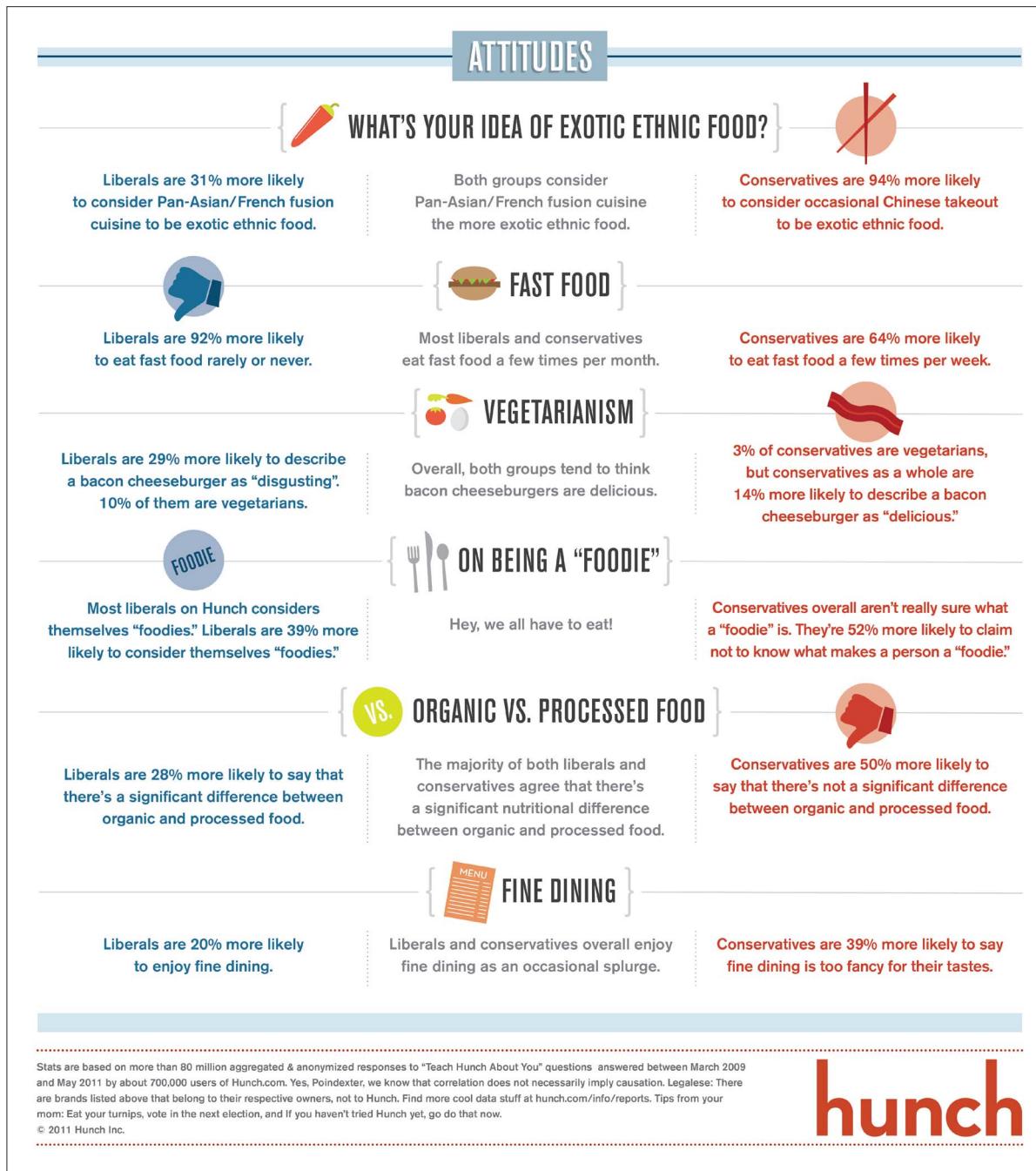
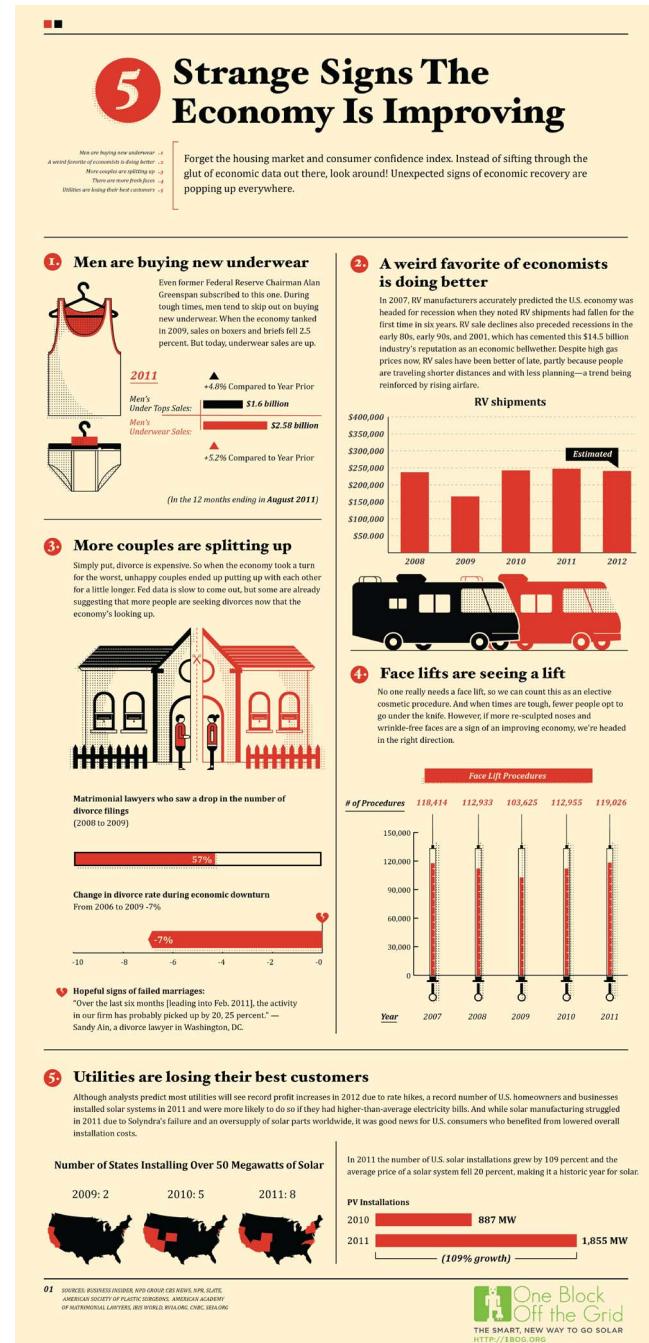


Figure 3.4
Continued.



Figures 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7 provide other examples of editorial content developed with the intention of establishing thought leadership.

*Figure 3.5
5 Strange Signs That the Economy is Improving.
Column Five for One Block Off the Grid.*



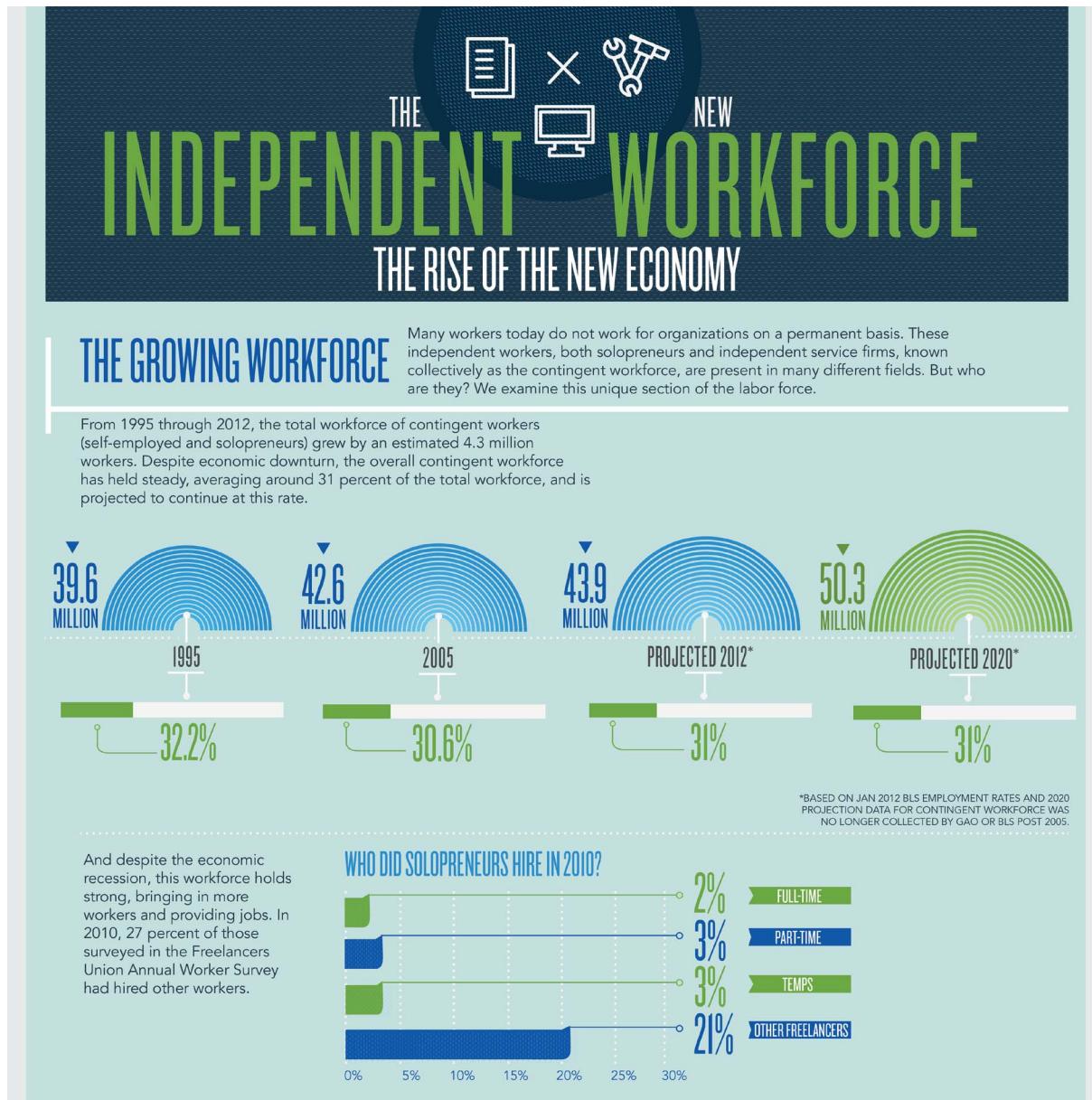


Figure 3.6

The New Independent Workforce. Column Five for Mavenlink.
(Continued on pages 100-101)

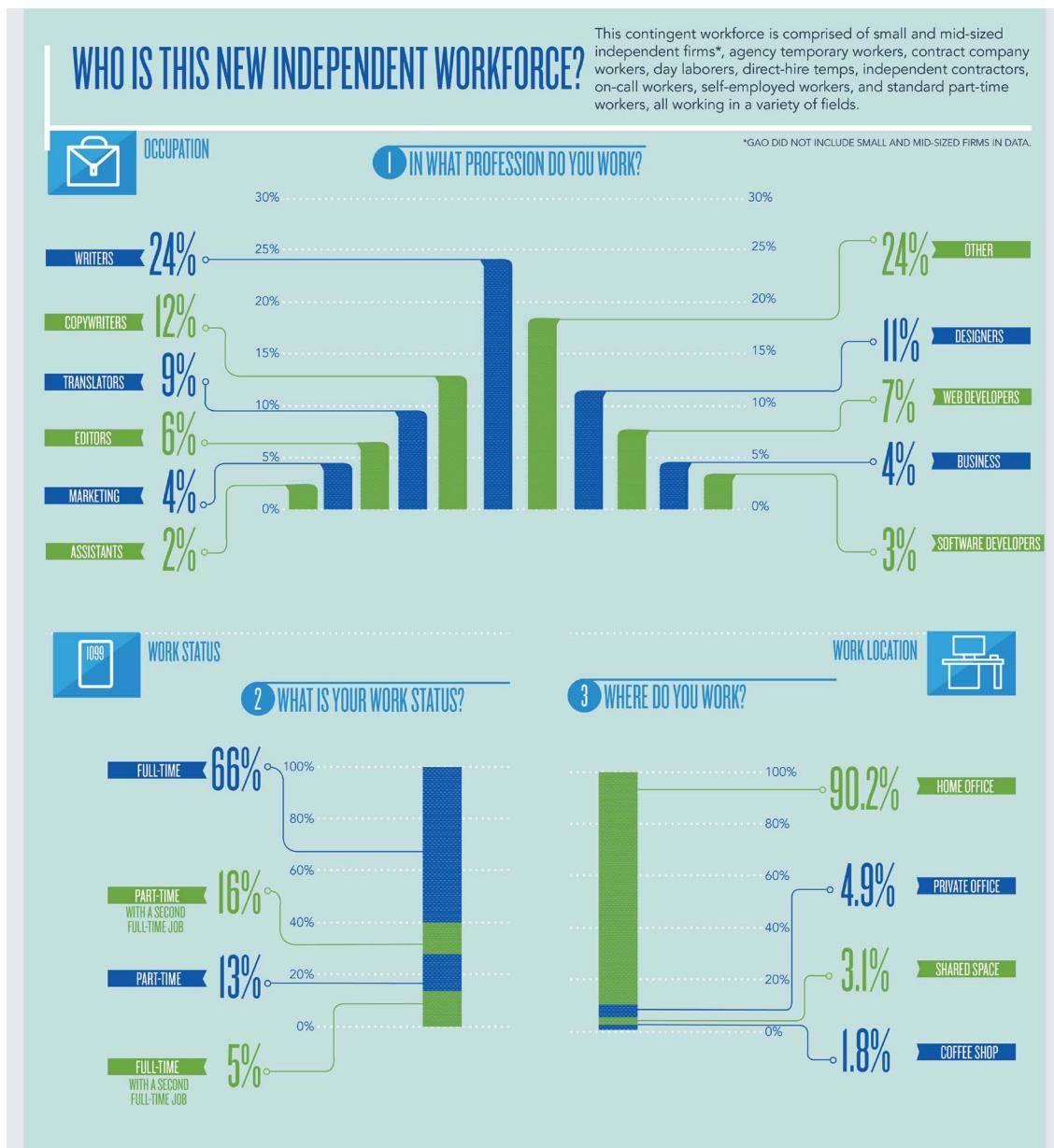
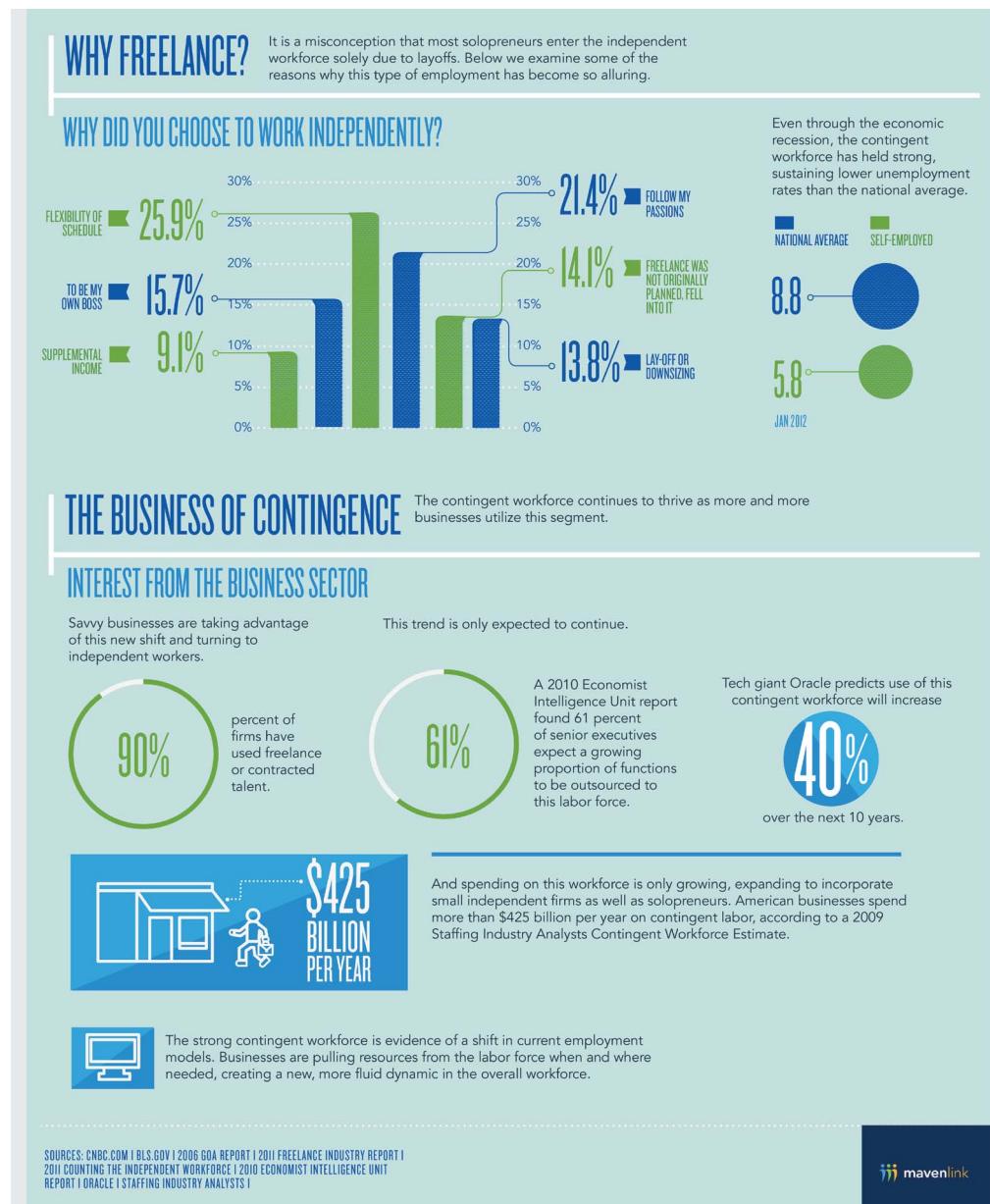


Figure 3.6
Continued.



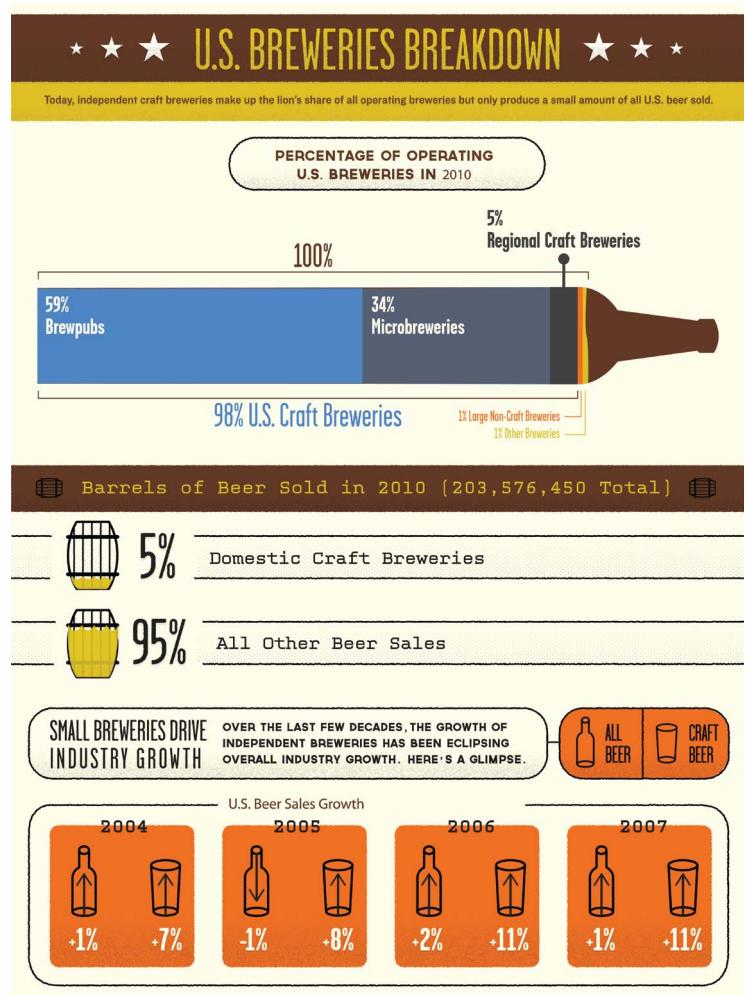
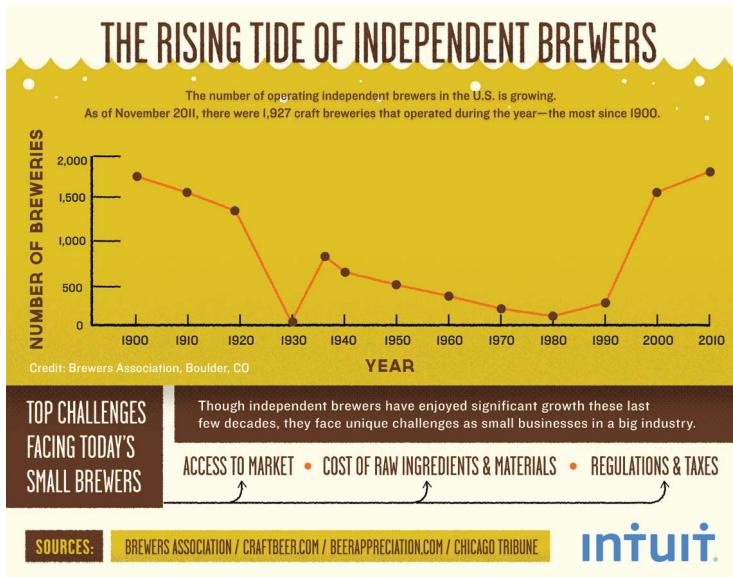


Figure 3.7

*One Nation Under Hops.**Column Five for Intuit.*



We produced a piece titled “If Social Media Were a High School” for Flowntown that is a good example of viral content in Figure 3.8 on the following page. We developed the idea in an effort to create an infographic with as much broad appeal as possible. Some of the key metrics for this piece included nearly 4,000 tweets and over 7,000 Facebook shares. Thankfully, the client in this case entrusted us with their objectives, and allowed us to create content with these in mind. The result was a wildly popular infographic that generated a good amount of attention for our client.

SOCIAL MEDIA HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK 2011

CLASS of **2011**

What if social media were a highschool?

FROM THE JOCKS TO THE GEEKS, EVEN THE VAST WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMES WITH ITS OWN STEREOTYPES AND TEENAGE ANGST.

The infographic is a high school yearbook page for the Class of 2011. It features a central title 'CLASS of 2011' and a subtitle 'What if social media were a highschool?'. Below this is a descriptive text: 'FROM THE JOCKS TO THE GEEKS, EVEN THE VAST WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMES WITH ITS OWN STEREOTYPES AND TEENAGE ANGST.' The page is divided into eight sections, each representing a different social media platform with its own unique stereotype:

- JOCK:** Facebook. Club: Varsity Football, Varsity Angel Funding, Homepage King. Quote: "Veni, Vidi, Vici." -Some Italian Dude.
- NERD:** Wikipedia. Club: Science Club, Math Club, History Club, Computer Club, Star Trek Club, IQ Above 180 Club. Quote: "Better know nothing than half-know many things." -Friedrich Nietzsche.
- BAND GEEK:** Last.fm. Club: Band Pep Club, Battle of the Garage Bands Founder. Quote: "If it's illegal to rock and roll, throw my ass in jail!" -Kurt Cobain.
- PREP:** Twitter. Club: President of Gossip Girl, Celebrity Awareness Club, Homepage Queen. Quote: "Everyone is entitled to my opinion." -@madonna
- GOOGLE:** YouTube. Club: Future Investors of America, Yacht Club, International Billionaires Club. Quote: "Money makes the world go round" -Liza Minnelli.
- TWITTER:** Gossip Girl. Club: President of Gossip Girl, Celebrity Awareness Club, Homepage Queen.
- WIKIPEDIA:** The Nerd.
- LAST.FM:** Band Name.
- YOUTUBE:** You Tube.

Figure 3.8
What if Social Media Were a High School?
 Column Five for Flownow. (Continued on page 106)

FLICKR

Clubs: Art Club, Photography Club, Creative Commons Club, Hipster Club

Quote: "Look, I'm not an intellectual - I just take pictures."
-Helmut Newton

REDDIT

Clubs: Editor of School Newspaper, Rock the Vote Club

Quote: "I can't prove it, but I can say it."
-Stephen Colbert

MYSPACE

Clubs: Former Member of: Band Club, Photography Club, Pep Club

Quote: "The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about."
-Oscar Wilde

WIKILEAKS

Clubs: Lenin Love Club, Freedom of Information Club, Youth Anarchists League

Quote: "I feel your scorn and I accept it."
-Jon Stewart

YELP

Clubs: President of the Debate Club, Culinary Club, Future Better Business Bureau Club

Quote: "There has never been a statue erected to honor a critic."
-Zig Ziglar

ORKUT

Clubs: ESL Club, Foreigners in a Foreign Land Club

Quote: そこに行くあなたは関係なく、覚えておいてください。
-孔子

LIVE JOURNAL

Clubs: Evanescence Fan Club

Quote: "I hurt myself, so I can feel alive."
-Bill Kaulitz

LINKEDIN

Clubs: Class President, President of the 2010 Alumni Club

Quote: "It's not what you know but who you know that makes the difference."
-Anonymous



Figure 3.8
Continued.

As you can imagine, there's room for maneuvering within the realm of editorial content, and sometimes the outcome can prove interesting or unexpected. Other examples of editorial content developed with the intention of virality: follow in Figures 3.9-3.10.

*Figure 3.9
How to Spot a Yelp! User.
Column Five for Flotown.*





Figure 3.10

The World's Most Demanding Concert Rider.

Column Five for Sonos.

(Continued on page 110)

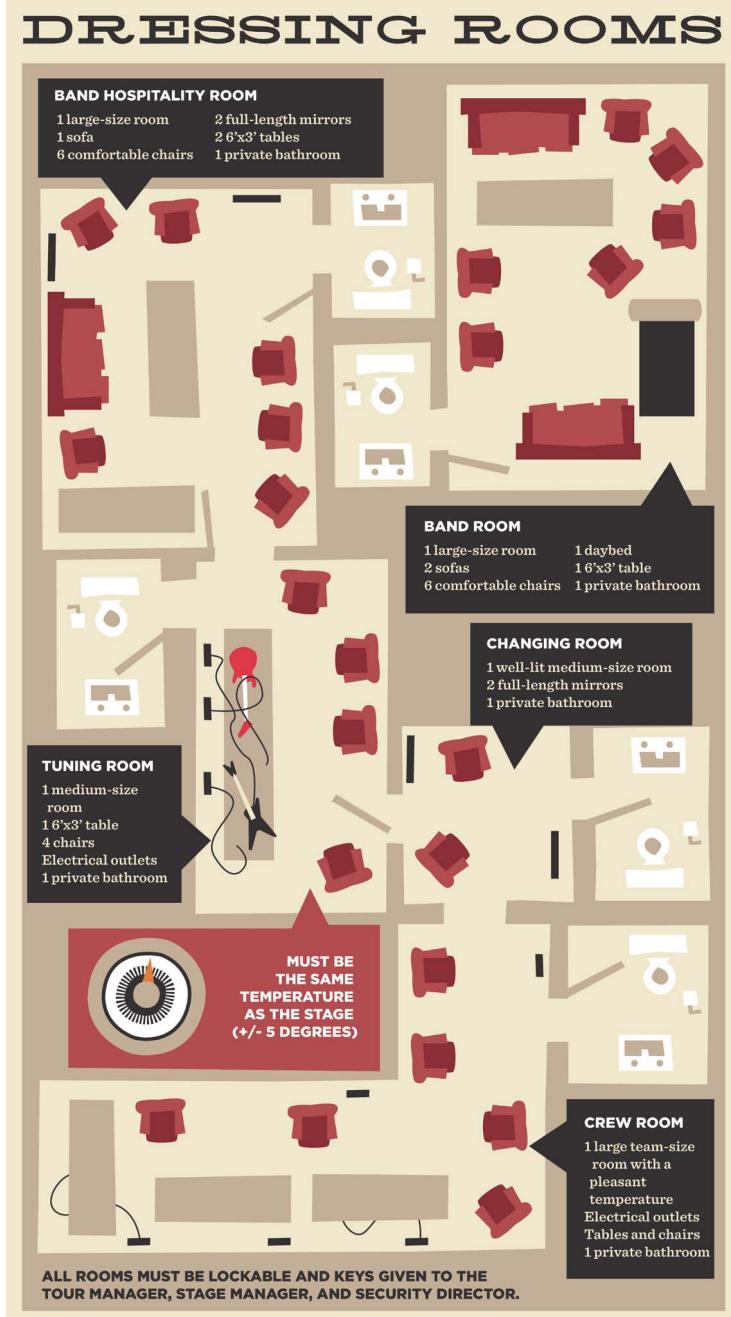
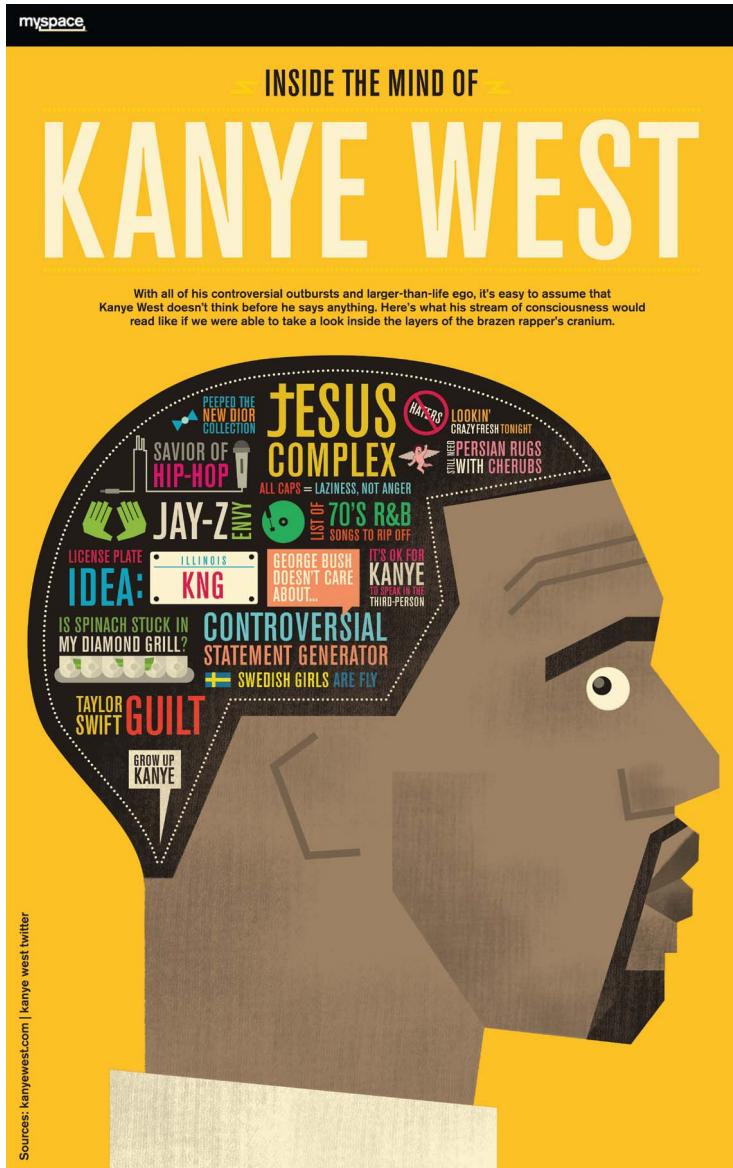




Figure 3.10
Continued.



It's important to note that viral content has its limitations too, in so far as they are not as useful in reaching targeted audience who may in fact be looking for content relating to the brand, or even expert-level content. So as with any decision, you must identify your objectives before you identify your methodology.

In this chapter we illustrated the differences between brand-centric and editorial content and explained how each type has its place, but also its limitations. It is necessary to understand how each content type relates to and should be used to reach various audience sizes and types. At this point you should have a better understanding of the methodology by which you can reach your communication objectives. In the following four chapters we will go into detail about the applications of these content types, as well as how to share your story with the world.

Figure 3.11

*Inside the Mind of Kanye West.
Column Five for Myspace.*