

LET'S GET

VISUAL

VISUAL!



How to Incorporate Visual Content
into Your Overall Strategy

By Heidi Cohen & Marketo

INTRODUCTION

We're now in the age of visual content. Over 758 million photographs are shared on social media every day. Images define brands and companies on social media, through content marketing, and on mobile. Buyer attention spans continue to shrink, and marketers increasingly rely on visuals to share their message in an engaging, eye-catching way.

But how can we account for the sky-rocketing importance of visual content? Here are three factors that have contributed to the visual explosion:

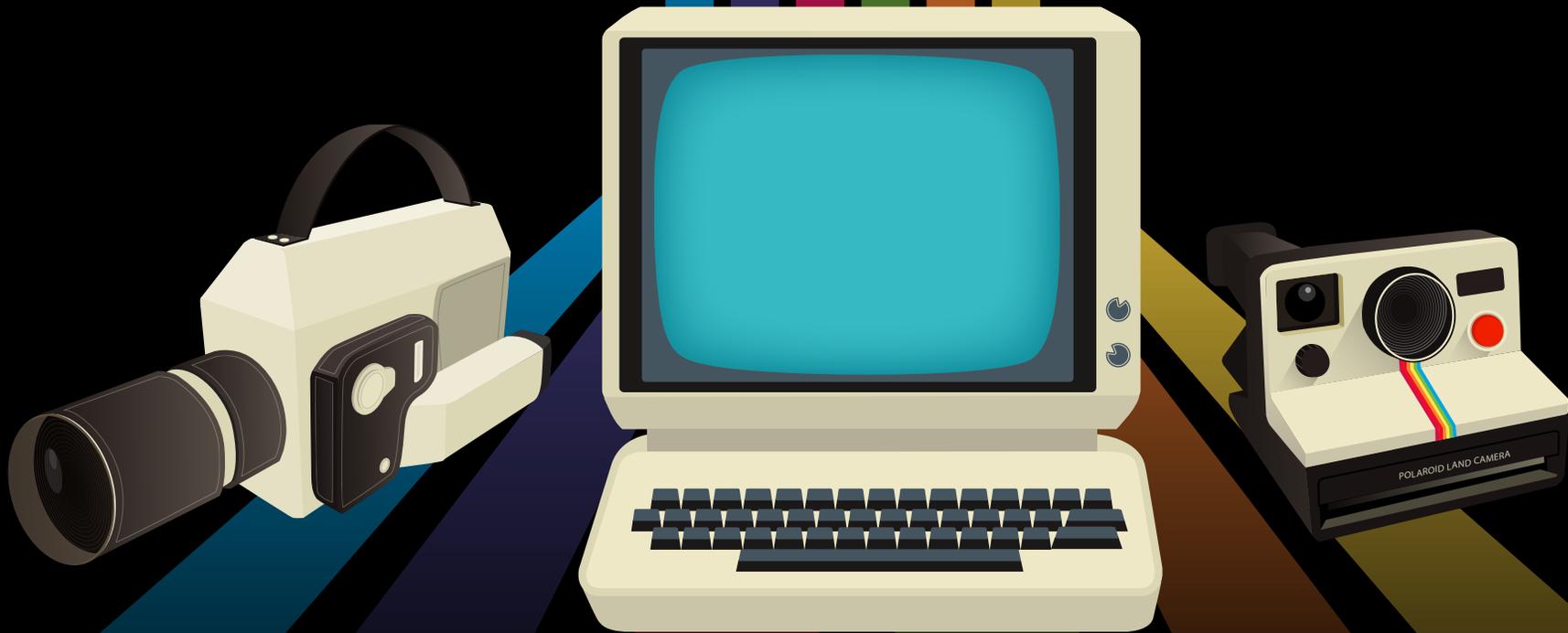
1. **Everyone's a photographer.** Taking photographs and videos has never been easier or cheaper, due to expanded ownership and use of smartphones, tablets, and digital cameras. These devices contain free or low cost applications to enhance and/or modify content quickly, without any special training.
2. **Photographs and videos can be shared with a broad social media audience.** With a few swipes, your photos are posted on social media. While Facebook is the largest photograph repository, there's also Pinterest, Instagram, Vine, and Snapchat.
3. **Visual content attracts attention.** Humans process images 60,000 times faster than text, which makes it more memorable than audio information. Therefore, when images are broken down into small, easy-to-consume content, they break through the information clutter.

To take advantage of visual content's appeal, marketers should learn to think visually about their social media, content marketing, and demand generation mix. But what mix is the right one for your business? How can you make your content more visual? Read on to learn about the pillars of visually appealing (and effective) content, the many forms visual content can take, and some stellar examples of visual content in action.



YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

Visual content comes in many forms. Feel free to use a mix of visual content types, as long as they're helping you achieve your marketing objectives. Always ask yourself: is this type of visual content appropriate for the platform you're sharing it on? How will it look on a computer, a tablet, or a mobile phone?



YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

Photos

Photographs can be used as-is, or modified to enhance other content and emphasize your message. With widely available, easy-to-use cameras on mobile devices, anyone can create, edit, and share great photographs.

Try adding a funny caption to your photograph, especially if you can tap into a pre-existing meme (Google “Grumpy Cat meme” or “Willy Wonka meme” if you aren’t sure what we mean).

Photobombs, in which other people/animals unexpectedly “bomb” your photograph, are also popular and easy to create. In general, photos can increase engagement across social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter.

For maximum appeal, use photos of people—we are naturally drawn to photos of other humans. Skip landscapes, which tend to be unmemorable.



YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

Let's take a look at some examples of photographs in action!

Ford Motor Company

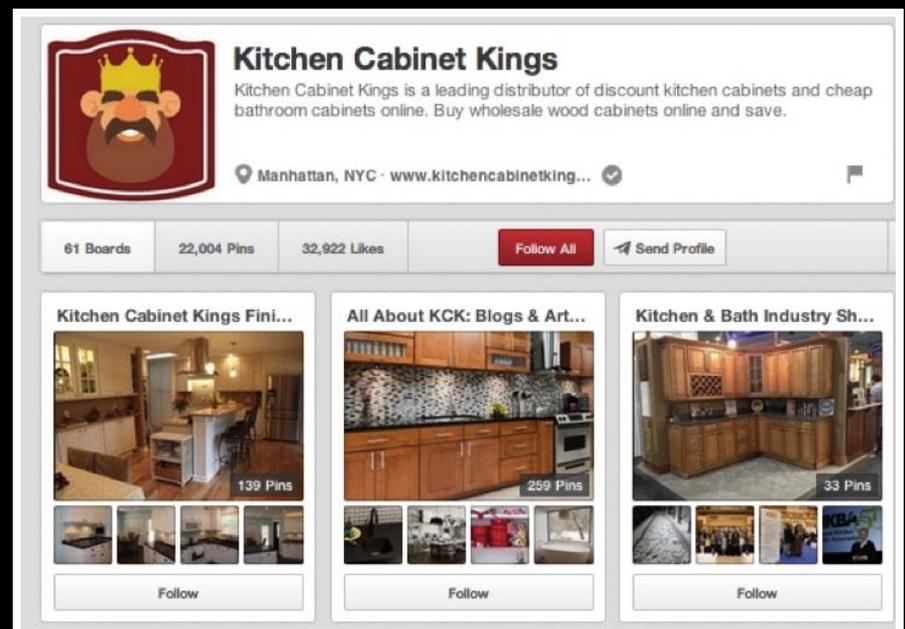
A B2C and B2B firm, **Ford Motor Company's** Facebook timeline photograph is great branding, showing their human side (literally) and incorporating their logo.

TIP: Have your employees and customers take photographs of themselves using your product. Remember to get their permission to share the photographs.



Cabinet Kings

Cabinet Kings, a kitchen cabinet distributor, uses Pinterest to show photos of their product in action to contractors, designers, and customers.



YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

Videos

As we've discussed, increased access to mobile phone cameras means everyone's a videographer today. More importantly, video is increasingly consumed on mobile devices. There are three approaches you can take:

1. **High quality, professional videos** with a high price tag.
2. **Amateur low-budget footage** captured via a mobile device, computer, or camera.
3. **Enhanced slideshows or webinars** augmented with audio.

Videos can achieve many objectives—they can improve branding, explain how-to's, answer questions, provide customer reviews, and/or entertain your audience. Videos can be a big investment, so maximize your time and money by integrating the footage with the rest of your marketing plans. This usually involves developing all of your content at the same time, so think ahead.

If you place a video on YouTube, it becomes easily searchable and improves your SEO. But don't limit your video distribution—videos can also be posted on blogs and your website. You can create and post videos on Twitter (Vine) and Instagram.

Test different approaches and placement to find out what resonates best with your audience. Remember that video is increasingly consumed on mobile devices, so keep optimization in mind. If you have multiple videos to share, make them all available in one place so that viewers can watch several in a row.



YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

MidAtlantic Concrete

MidAtlantic Concrete's Owen Blevins developed a video for fellow "Creteheads"—people who are interested in concrete. Concrete can be a boring topic, but Blevins makes it fun by answering customer questions with low-budget videos, posted on the firm's blog and YouTube.

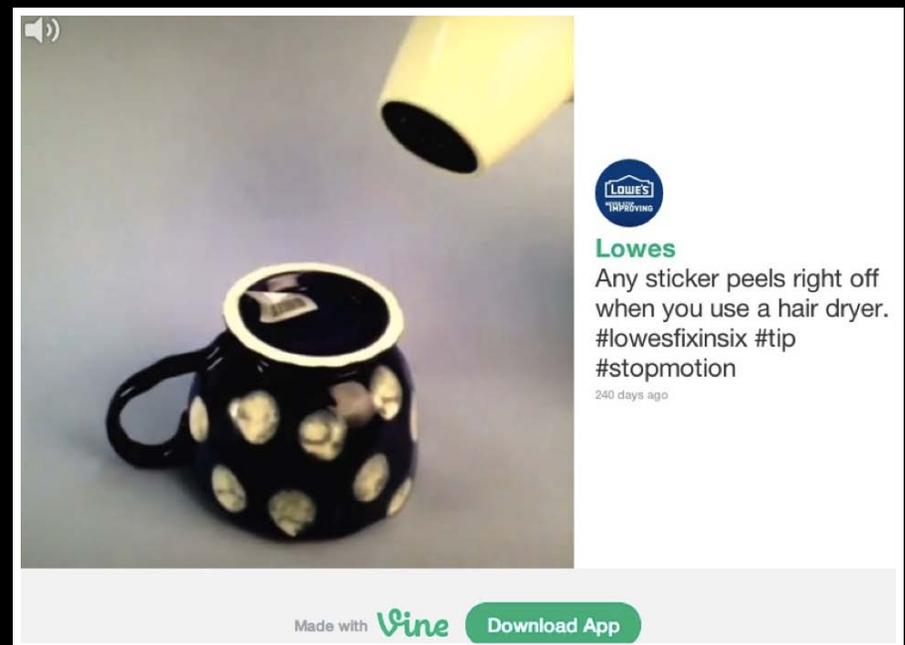
TIP: Ask your sales and customer service teams for the most frequently asked those questions, and answer customer questions via videos. Be sure to make it fun!



Lowes

Lowes uses Twitter's short form video platform, Vine, to create fun how-to videos. These are full of information customers can use, before *and* after purchase. To extend their reach, Lowes posts these Vines on Tumblr and uses hashtags.

TIP: Think of fun, useful, and educational videos. These don't have to specifically involve your product, as long as your customer base would enjoy them or find them useful. Vine is great for sharing short-form videos on social channels, and since they are so easy to produce you can get creative.



YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

Comics and Cartoons

Comics and cartoons aren't just for kids. Because they're easy to consume and share, they can break through the noise and attract a broader audience.

If your brand doesn't already have a visual artist on-staff, you can license cartoons from The Cartoonbank, Gapping Void or Marketoon.

Gapping Void & Brian Solis

Cartoonist **Gapping Void** and social media expert **Brian Solis** created *17 Cartoons That Will Change Your Business* to promote Solis's new book. They used SlideShare to expand the audience for their fun, viral cartoons.

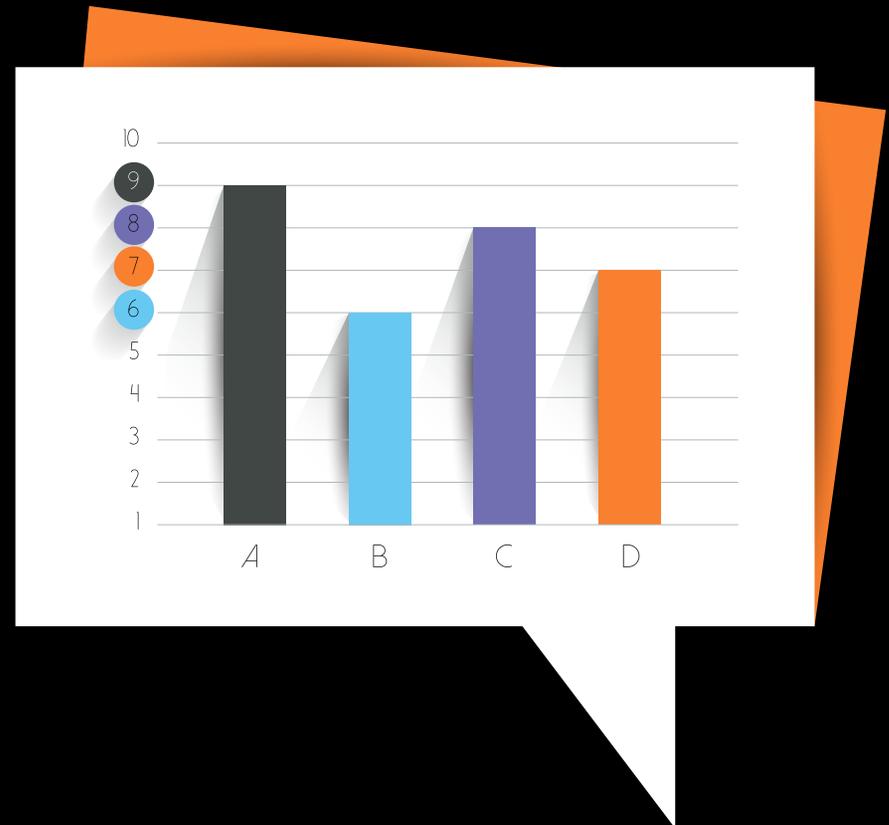
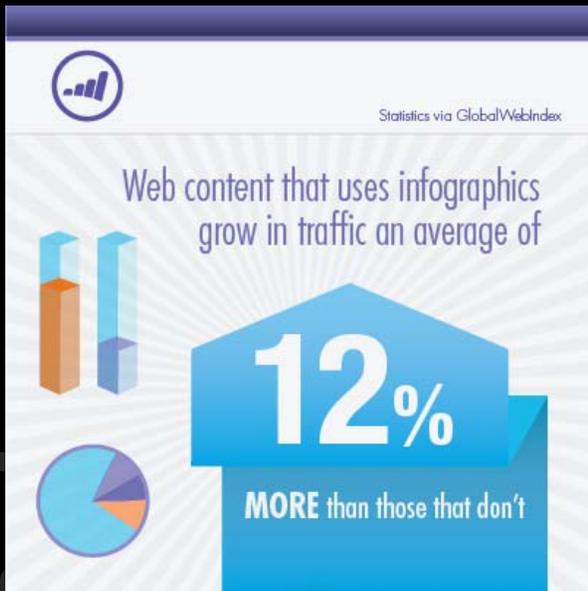


YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

Infographics

These graphics present complex information using a combination of images and text to simplify core concepts. Data graphics, which are a sub-category of infographics, illustrate a single data point.

More frequently used by B2B organizations, infographics attract backlinks and add visual interest to dense material. B2C firms can use infographics to attract consumer attention and simplify complicated information, like warnings and instructions. Any organization can use infographics to present facts and data that is too complex for a single graph or chart.

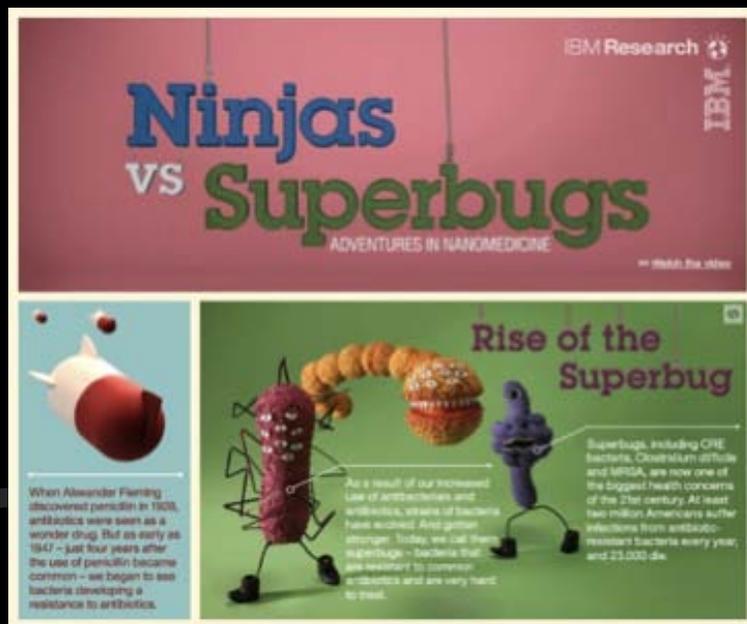


YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

IBM Research

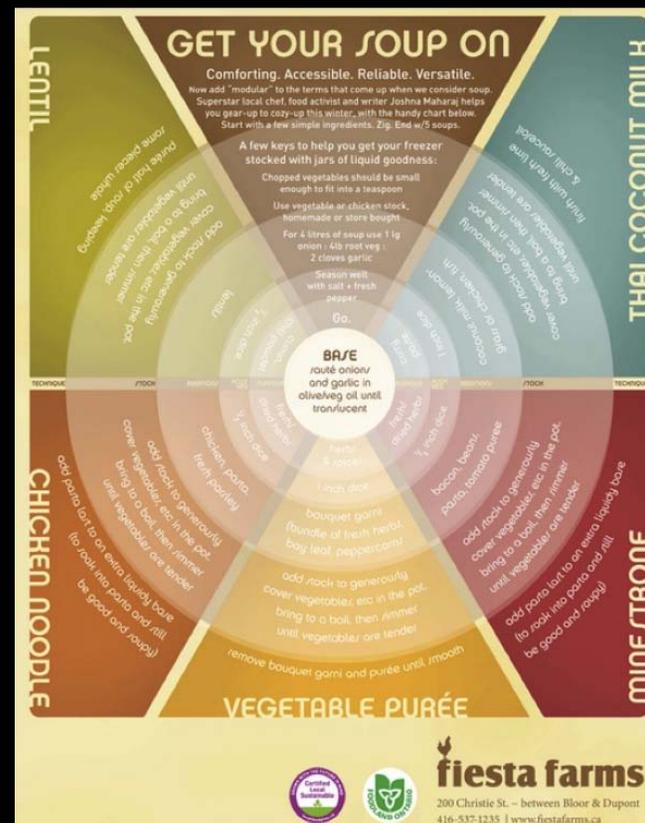
IBM Research created a fun, animated infographic explaining the threat of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, known as “superbugs”. This infographic illustrates how complex concepts can be broken into digestible, bite-sized chunks. In this example, viewers can choose to share a single section of the infographic.

TIP: For wider distribution, give your audience the option of using/sharing individual sections of your infographic. Do this by making sure that the infographic you create has clear, delineated sections.



Fiesta Farms

Toronto’s largest independent grocery store—a garden center, **Fiesta Farms**—created an infographic explaining how to make soup. Unlike the IBM Research infographic, which uses images, Fiesta Farms simply presents their information with dynamic colors, fonts, and shapes.



YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

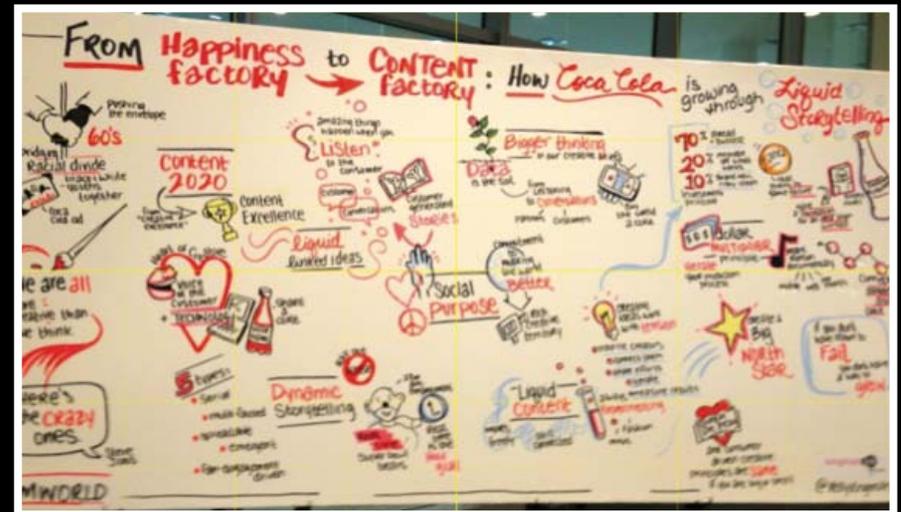
Visual Note-Taking

With a combination of pictures and text, visual note-taking represents, summarizes, and organizes concepts to make information easier to digest and share. Like other types of note-taking, this visual format is used most frequently to record live events or brainstorming sessions. It can also be used to simplify complex content, such as instructions and FAQs.

If you're planning to create visual notes, you'll need a creative person who can convert information into this format on the fly. It also helps to have large-format writing materials, or a projector that displays your notes on a wall or screen, so that your audience can watch the visual note-taking in real time.

Content Marketing World

Content Marketing World captured its main sessions with visual note-taking. Using a large sheet of paper and colored markers, the note-taker organized the talks with cartoon images, graphic data presentation, and text. The visual notes were posted where attendees could examine and share them.



TIP: Use visual note-taking to encapsulate conference presentations and team brainstorms. Extend information reach by sharing photos of your notes on your blog and social profiles.



YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

Other Types of Images

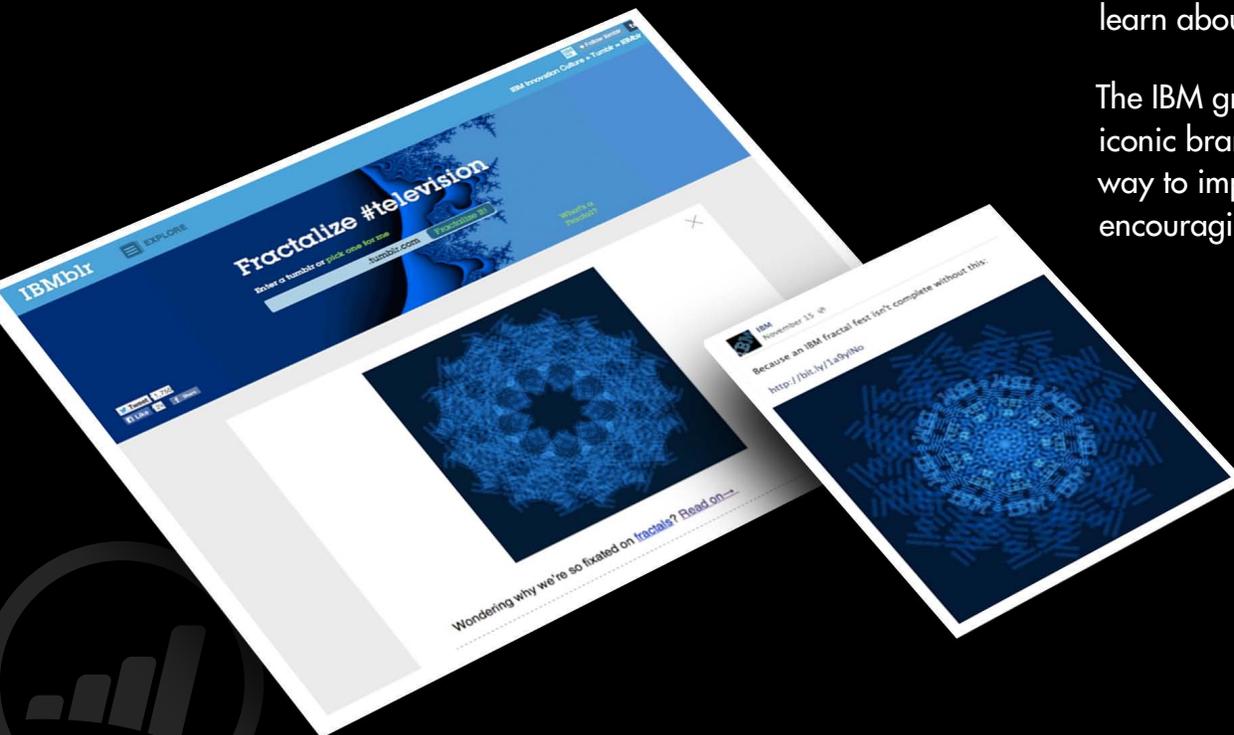
Other types of images, which facilitate information consumption with graphic/design elements, include charts, graphics, illustrations, diagrams and/or animated GIFs.

Other visuals can be created using computer-based tools so designers and/or special talent may not be needed. Encourage employees across your organization to present information in a graphic way.

IBM & Benoit Mandelbrot

Former IBM employee Benoit Mandelbrot, a mathematician, created computer-generated visuals based on fractal geometric images. To celebrate Mandelbrot's birthday, **IBM** posted a number of graphics and a fractal generator on Tumblr, where users could learn about and create fractals.

The IBM graphic shared on Facebook transformed IBM's iconic branded name into a fractal. Not only was this a neat way to impart information, but it also engaged the viewer by encouraging participation.



YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

Presentations

Presentations, including slide decks, are another way to convey and share information.

Presentations can be a by-product of a live talk or event, or they can be created specifically to share on social media.

1. **Pick images** that convey your message and connect emotionally with your audience. Consider using imagery with high contrast and texture, to further reel in your audience.
2. **Skip the dense text in live presentations.** During a live presentation, you don't need to put everything on your slides—the speaker can fill in the blanks. Associate a few keywords with each image to increase your message's memorability.

(Note: If you want the slides to stand on their own after the event, the slides may need additional text.)

Share your presentations on targeted slide sites like SlideShare, as well as broader sharing sites like your blog and Pinterest.

SAP

Inspired by an executive's talk, **SAP** created a presentation called "SAP: 99 Facts on the Future of Business" specifically for SlideShare. This presentation garnered over 160,000 shares using images, related hashtags, and ClickToTweet, which can be created by adding a pre-written tweet with a clickable, custom URL. All your viewer has to do is click on your link. The tweet is automatically populated for easy sharing.



YOUR VISUAL CONTENT TOOLBOX

Ebooks

Ebooks are written, digital assets that are consumed on a computer, e-reader, tablet or smartphone. While not inherently visual, ebooks should incorporate visual elements. At minimum, ebooks should have a visually appealing design, break up information for easy consumption, and attract readers.

Include photographs, charts, videos and other online components to enhance your audience's experience. Also include links to external content.

Ebooks tends to be used more by B2B marketers than B2C marketers, often as an incentive to audience members in exchange for lead data. Ebooks can enhance the value of your product or service with useful and relevant information.

The Definitive Guide to Marketing Automation

Marketo creates pillars of information around its cornerstone topics, like *The Definitive Guide to Marketing Automation*. This guide, available in both digital and print, offers 100 pages of content, including interviews and quotes from industry thought leaders. The ebook uses a wide array of typefaces, graphics, photographs and charts; it also leverages checklists, bullet points, and callouts to facilitate comprehension.

TIP: Don't limit yourself to boring images within written assets. Add visual interest with an appealing layout, colors, bullets, and typeface.



CREATING VISUAL CONTENT THAT WORKS

Now that we've talked about the kinds of visual content you might create, let's talk about making that content as engaging and sharable as possible. For both B2B and B2C marketers, visual content is key to attracting a broader audience, building your brand, driving sales, and engaging with prospects, customers, fans, and the public.



CREATING VISUAL CONTENT THAT WORKS

Tell a Compelling Story

Each piece of visual content must tell a story—without context, people won't remember it.

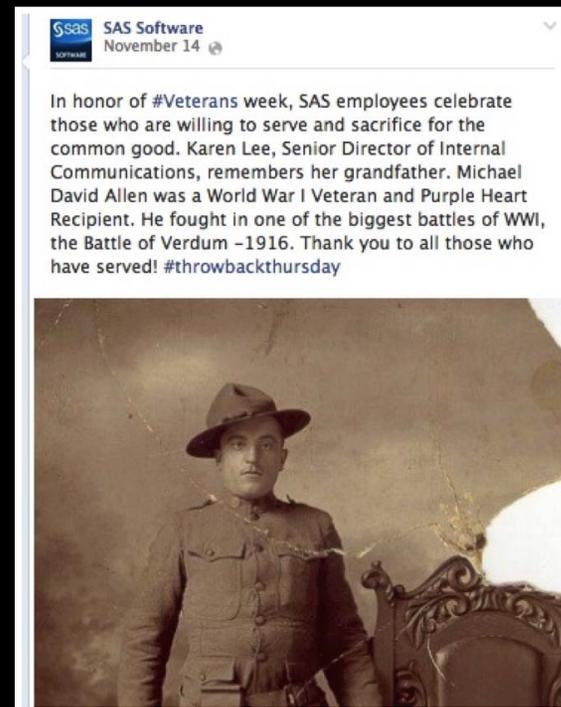
Stories also can help your audience form an emotional connection with your company, brand, or product.

1. **Choose an easy-to-recognize structure.** Use a basic plot and archetypes.
2. **Develop a strong hero.** Make it easy for your audience to identify with your principal character.
3. **Add details to make your story real.** The more specific you are, the more universal your story becomes. Images help provide richness of detail.

Visual Content in Action

To present detailed, relatable stories, use images from your archives, your employees, or your customers to tell an emotional story. In the below example, **SAS Software** sourced photographs of veterans from their employees to honor Veteran's Day. The company used the popular hashtag #ThrowBackThursday (or #tbt).

TIP: Brainstorm business-related story themes to gather employee and customer photos. Leveraging employees' personal experiences adds character and humanity to your visual content.



CREATING VISUAL CONTENT THAT WORKS

Integrate 360° Branding

Your brand is more than a logo—it must be visually recognizable and consistently presented, regardless of where it appears. Create a style guide that is owned by your design team and make sure that your visual content adheres to it.

Consider these visual elements of any image you share, as they pertain to your brand:

1. **Image subject.** The image's focus should be in line with your brand—it might be your products, employees, customers, or mascot.
2. **Image presentation.** Be consistent in your use of color, type, and other details.
3. **Brand appearance.** Determine how your logo and other brand elements will be presented visually on content that you share.
4. **Visual cues.** Consistently use brand-related details in your photographs and/or video to communicate your brand message.
5. **Content authorship.** Consider how you'll use images generated by your social and marketing teams, employees, and customers.

A stylized logo for '360°' where the numbers are composed of multiple concentric white outlines. The degree symbol is a simple circle with a dot in the center. The logo is positioned on the right side of the page, partially overlapping a large, curved purple graphic element that resembles a stylized 'C' or a partial circle.

CREATING VISUAL CONTENT THAT WORKS

Patagonia and “Worn Wear”

Patagonia created a Tumblr called “Worn Wear”, highlighting “then and now” photographs of their customers wearing long-lasting Patagonia clothes.

Below is a photograph of a Patagonia garment that passed from mother to daughter, clearly telling the story of cross-generational bonding through Patagonia’s clothing.



Style Runs in the Family
Anna Rennich, Knoxville, Tennessee

Dear Patagonia,

When shopping for their honeymoon lingerie, I imagine most women gravitate towards the small and lacy. My mom, however, opted for a pair of bright red Patagonia Capilene bottoms and a matching long sleeve zip-neck. Of course, my parents’ 1989 honeymoon included a Mt. Rainier climb. In the words of my father, “Why waste a good trip?”

Disney’s Mickey Logo

With this simple Instagram photo, **Disney** creatively captured its hashtag and a highly recognizable brand symbol—the Mickey logo. Because Disney’s Mickey logo is so iconic, this image has almost 19k likes and a plethora of comments.

TIP: Challenge your team to find creative ways to incorporate your most iconic images and logo.



CREATING VISUAL CONTENT THAT WORKS

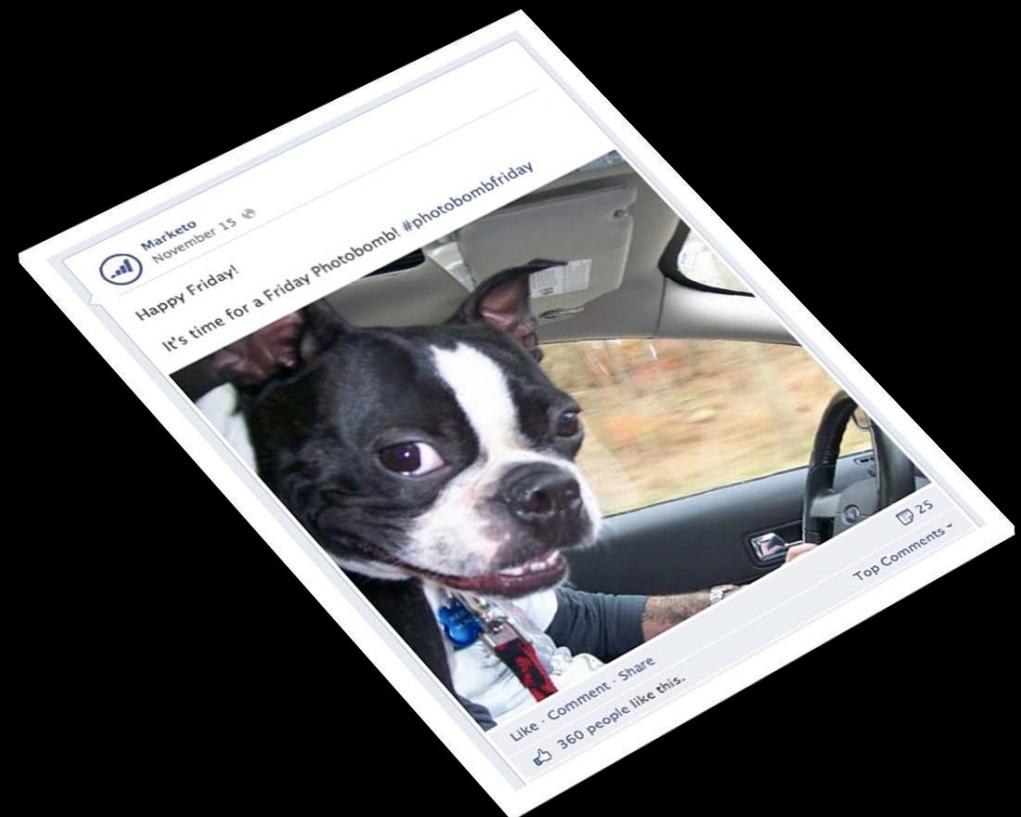
Consider the Context

If you're going to use visual content, you'll want to engage with your audience across every platform. Use a mix of visuals, employing a combination of fun pieces (like photo memes and photobombs) with more serious pieces (like presentations and infographics). Through testing, you can see what your audience engages with the most on each social channel.

Different social platforms have different requirements when it comes to size, image quality, and use of text. You'll want to keep tabs on each social channel, as these requirements often change.

Marketo's Photobomb Friday

Marketo lightens up the marketing automation space with fun images like this photobomb on Facebook. While the image isn't directly about Marketo, it's fun, highly sharable, and engages Marketo's audience. On social sites where most users engage on a personal level, like Facebook, think about *engaging* your followers instead of shoving sales messages in their faces. Marketo uses "Photobomb Friday" to show its sense of humor and engage its fans. Why? Well, photobombs are fun and prompt sharing!



CREATING VISUAL CONTENT THAT WORKS

Optimize for Search

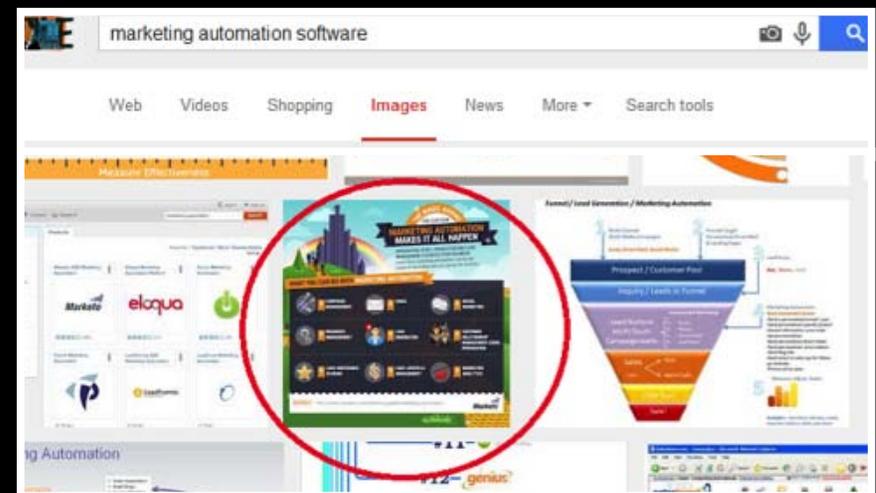
Ensure your visual content feeds both people and search robots.

Don't discount the importance of Google Images in your SEO, especially when it comes to making your brand findable on highly visual social sites (such as Pinterest and Visual.ly).

1. **Add metadata.** Search engines may not detect visual content unless it's accompanied by relevant text. Add relevant keyword text to each image or video that you post.
2. **Use titles, captions, and alternate text.** Where appropriate, provide text that gives your image context.
3. **Include links where appropriate.** In addition to providing additional content and context, links encourage viewers to visit your site.

Visual Content in Action

Marketo pays close attention to visual search engine results, so they carefully consider image titles and image tags, and accompany images with keyword-rich text. In a Google Image search for "marketing automation software", an image from Marketo is one of the first results. The image links to a press release for Marketo's *Definitive Guide to Marketing Automation*.



CREATING VISUAL CONTENT THAT WORKS

Distribute Content Effectively

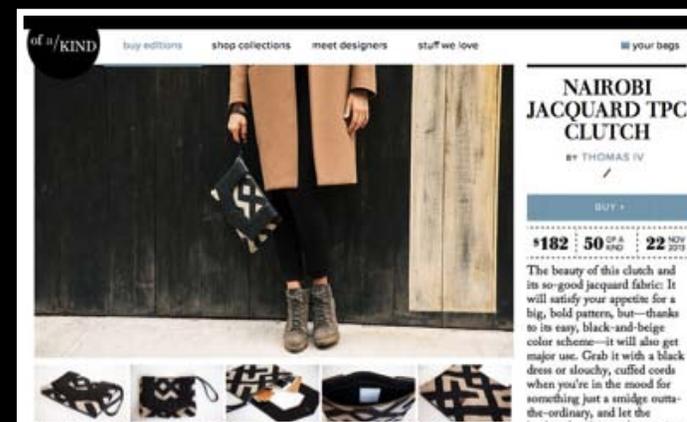
You've worked hard to create your content—support it with a solid distribution strategy.

1. **Plan multi-channel distribution.** Distribute visual content across a variety of channels. Even if you've created a piece of content for a specific social platform, you might find that it's easily repurposed for another platform.
2. **Cross-promote visual content.** Use existing content to promote new, related content by including related links and calls-to-action.
3. **Use owned media.** Distribute your content on your website and blog, and to your email list. Consider offline options like direct mail, or display your content on physical signage.
4. **Utilize third-party media.** Use PR, area experts, and/or paid methods to place your content on third-party media entities. Infographics are a great content option for these sites.

Of A Kind on Tumblr

As an Example, **Of A Kind**, the first Tumblr-based ecommerce site, showcases up-and-coming fashion designers' limited edition products and stories. Of A Kind leverages visual merchandising on Tumblr, where over 80% of posts are photos.

TIP: Create a Tumblr account to share your visual offering. A significant portion of Tumblr activity is reblogging and sharing. Tumblr is popular among the under-30 crowd.



CREATING VISUAL CONTENT THAT WORKS

Some Words of Wisdom

Now that you know how to make your visual content engaging and sharable, use these high-level tips to make your content shine.

1. **Align your goals.** Your goals for visual content should align with your larger marketing plans and business objectives. Think about big picture objectives, such as to improve branding, attract new prospects and leads, help close sales, and drive additional sales.
2. **Know your audience.** Create and use buyer personas, which should include each persona's behavior on social media platforms. This will help you form precise goals for your images.
3. **Measure results.** Constantly test the results of your visual content marketing. Repeat what works, augment what doesn't, and don't be afraid to try new things—as long as you're measuring results, no experiment will be wasted.



CONCLUSION

Every marketer needs visual content because it's easily consumed, remembered, and shared. When planning your editorial calendar, experiment with all visual content formats: photographs, videos, comics/cartoons, infographics, visual note taking, presentations, ebooks, activity books, and others.

Whether you're a B2C or B2B organization, you can use visual content to provide product information, answer to audience questions, demonstrate how-to's, or share ratings and reviews.

Because the social media ecosystem is dynamic, platforms and apps will continue to emerge and evolve. So monitor the space for the platforms that best suit your visual content, particularly if you serve a local or niche audience.





Heidi Cohen,
Chief Content Officer,
Actionable Marketing Guide

As the Chief Content Officer of the award-winning [Actionable Marketing Guide](#), **Heidi Cohen** simplifies the complex concepts behind today's evolving marketing challenges.

Heidi built her marketing career at well-known brands for major international corporations including Citibank, Bertelsmann and *The Economist*. At her consultancy, Riverside Marketing Strategies, Heidi brings a combination of creativity and analytics to established firms like *The New York Times* as well as startups and not-for-profit organizations.



Marketing Software. Easy, Powerful, Complete.

Marketo (NASDAQ: MKTO) provides the leading cloud-based marketing software platform for companies of all sizes to build and sustain engaging customer relationships. Spanning today's digital, social, mobile and offline channels, the Marketo® svolution includes a complete suite of applications that help organizations acquire new customers more efficiently, maximize customer loyalty and lifetime value, improve sales effectiveness, and provide analytical insight into marketing's contribution to revenue growth. Marketo's applications are known for their breakthrough ease-of-use, and are complemented by the Marketing Nation™, a thriving network of more than 190 LaunchPoint™ ecosystem partners and over 40,000 marketers who share and learn from each other to grow their collective marketing expertise. The result for modern marketers is unprecedented agility and superior results.

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