What Can Infographics Do for You?

Using infographics to advocate for and market your library

By Ellen Qualey

When conveying your library's value, visuals matter. Librarians are rightfully proud of the resources and services they offer and often boast impressive outcomes with limited resources. Communicating these successes is important in marketing services to patrons as well as communicating our worth to administrators. However, the information we share with our target audience might be dense, confusing, or, frankly, not that interesting to readers with differing viewpoints or interests. Even the most supportive administrators or engaged patrons do not have the time or information to properly understand all the facets of our work or services. These constraints, coupled with the population's arguably decreasing attention span, require librarians to present information in a quick and easy-to-understand medium.

With these considerations in mind, consider using infographics to help visually communicate your library's message. An infographic is a visual representation of information used to convey complex data or knowledge quickly. Infographics usually contain illustrations, some short written explanations, and data visualizations such as charts or graphs. Creating infographics helps a library market its services: infographics are not only eye-catching but also require librarians to think strategically about what information and detail to communicate. With a clear, concise message in a visually interesting package, even the most distracted student or practitioner may remember what you have to say.

In addition to being easy to understand, infographics are currently a popular way to display information, appearing everywhere from newspapers and blogs to social sites such as Pinterest and even in satirical articles in *The Onion*. Consequently, using infographics could be a nice way to test out a more modern tool for marketing your library.

You can use infographics on your website, social media platforms, or even in print materials. Institutions use infographics in a variety of ways, including for advocacy, for marketing, and for data.

Infographics for Advocacy

Organizations use infographics to convey important information about a particular issue to generate awareness. For example, the American Library Association (ALA) and the Information Policy and Access Center at the University of Maryland published an infographic titled "Weather the Storm" to bring attention to the increased use and reliance on public libraries despite stagnant budgets (see image below). The Association of Research Libraries (ARL), in conjunction with other interested organizations, created an infographic to highlight the importance of the Fair Use exemption in copyright law (see image to the right). Outside of the library world, many institutions or individuals create infographics to highlight issues such as health care, environmental policies, and education. If you are interested in advocating for a cause, you could share some interesting data about your topic with an infographic.

Infographics for Marketing

Libraries can use infographics to market their collections or services. An infographic might help clarify what a librarian does or highlight unique items in your collection. As is the case with all infographics, these are usually supported with statistics to set them apart from a traditional graphic used in a poster or flier. Consider creating an infographic to illustrate data on your databases,
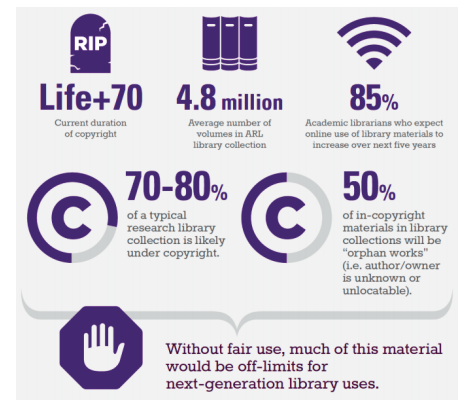
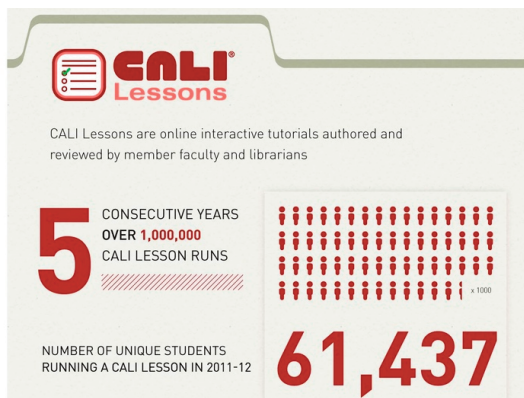An excerpt from ARL's infographic to raise awareness about Fair Use
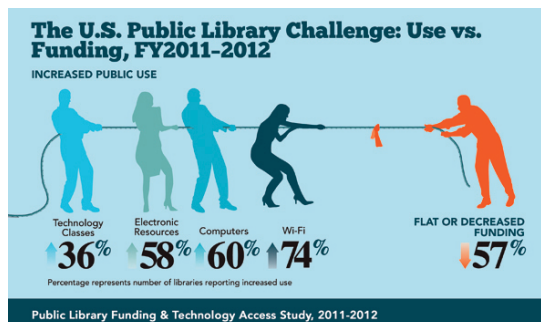
An excerpt from ALA's infographic, "Weather the Storm." This infographic takes data from the Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study conducted by ALA to provide an easy-to-understand graphic to introduce the study's findings.

circulation or reference statistics, or even library events or instructional opportunities.

Infographics for Data

Using an infographic to market your library might very well overlap with using an infographic to illustrate data, as the hallmark of an infographic is to present data in an interesting way. Most infographics include some statistics on the selected topic, but infographics can also be used to communicate

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The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction markets its online lessons through data visualizations in this infographic excerpt.

large amounts of data for readers who may not need detailed information but who would rather benefit from a broad overview.

For example, if you collect statistics on reference and research transactions, you could compile these numbers and select highlights to communicate visually in an infographic. Surveys of your patrons might give you interesting information to communicate with an infographic as well. These can be shared with administrators or used in both marketing and advocacy efforts to raise awareness about the services provided and used at your library.

Getting Started with Infographics

If you're ready to try creating an infographic for your library, take some time to think strategically about what information you want to convey. Make sure your topic is a good fit: just because infographics are a popular way to communicate information does not mean they are always right for your library. When you need to communicate a great amount of detail an infographic can work against you, as a large amount of text in an infographic is often overwhelming to a reader. Additionally, if you have data you would like to incorporate into your infographic, make sure your statistics are relevant and not misleading.

After selecting a topic and gathering relevant data to share, you can begin designing an infographic in a variety of ways. Professionals often create infographics using Photoshop and other graphic design software. However, thanks to a variety of free web-based tools, you no longer need to be a graphic designer to create an engaging and useful infographic. You can quickly make infographics for your website, blog, or even print materials with the help of many websites. Here's a sampling:

- **Raw**, **app.raw.densitydesign.org**
  Raw creates interesting visuals from your data using a web interface. It's a great way to generate interesting visualizations, such as charts or word clouds, to plug into a larger infographic. It's free, simple, and your visuals can be downloaded or embedded into a website to use as you please.

- **Infogr.am**, **https://infogr.am**
  Infogr.am lets you create a variety of eye-catching, interactive charts to share via social media, embed on your website, or share publically with a link. You can upload your data to Infogr.am or use a built-in spreadsheet to enter it manually. A Pro version is available for additional features and sharing options.

- **Easel.ly**, **www.easel.ly**
 Easel.ly is a great resource for a complete beginner at infographics.
  You can plug your own information into a template or select or upload your own images to create a compelling graphic. Easel.ly is not the best for data-driven infographics, but it is great at creating slick headers and visuals to accompany data charts or other visuals created using another tool.

- **Piktochart**, **piktochart.com**
  Piktochart is another free online infographic editor. Customizable templates are available to plug in your own information and data, and Piktochart has a variety of tools to create or input your own charts and graphics. Completed infographics may be downloaded and shared, but a watermark is only removed for Pro members.

Share Your Work

Infographics are meant to be shared. Publish them to your website, share via social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter, and link and share your work on relevant blogs. Many infographic creators choose to share their work under a Creative Commons license, so if you locate useful infographics elsewhere you may be able to reuse the infographic with your own patrons. The more you share these infographics, the more your work supports your intended goals of advocacy, marketing, or simply engaging with your patrons.

To see a collection of library-related infographics, visit **www.pinterest.com/ellenqualey/library-infographics**. ∎
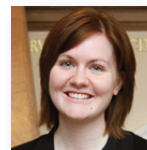
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