How to Write a Compelling Infographic Story in 5 Steps

columnfivemedia.com/crafting-an-infographic-narrative

By Katy French

December 18, 2018

< Back

Infographics are great communication tools because they deliver information quickly, efficiently, and in an aesthetically pleasing package. A truly great infographic piques the readers' interest from the jump, tells a strong story, and presents content in a way that makes it easier to consume, synthesize, and ultimately recall.

However, just because you make an infographic doesn't mean you're communicating well. Too many marketers think slapping together words and pictures will suffice. Hence, the Internet is littered with lengthy, dull, and poorly designed infographics that contain zero story (but sure do waste a lot of time).

We hate when bad infographics happen to good people, so we're here to help you. Having created infographics for over a decade, we've picked up a few tips and easy tricks that will make your infographic far more engaging, interesting, and effective.

5 Ways to Tell a Stronger Infographic Story

In an effective infographic, every data point, piece of copy, and design element supports the core story. Here's how to make sure your story stays front and center—and keeps your viewers' attention along the way.
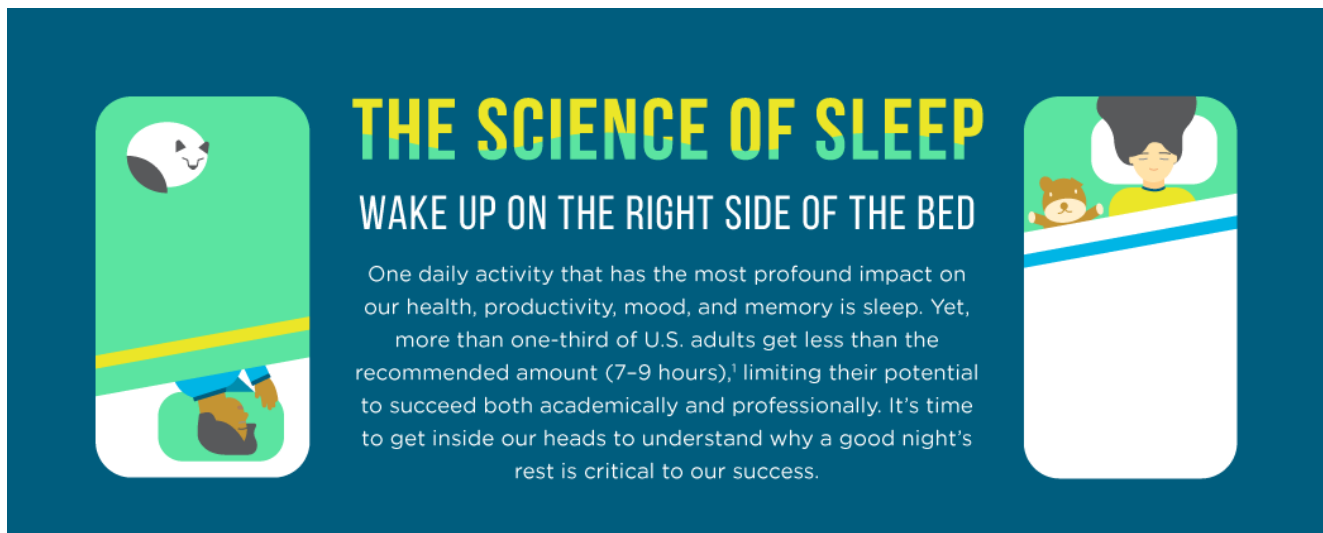
Step 1: Hook the Reader with an Interesting Title and Subtitles

Titles and subtitles are easy ways to draw the viewer in, as they're what people tend to scan first. This is a prime opportunity to capture attention, so it's important to generate interest and stay on story.

Make sure your titling is relevant to the subject and fits the story. Sometimes the titling will come naturally (before you even write the bulk of the story), but other times you'll need to spend some time on it.

Note: While there are plenty of opportunities to use creativity in your titling, clarity and specificity are always important. A punchy title is key for drawing in viewers, yes, but going overboard with alliteration or puns can be tiring and sometimes totally distracting.

Example: This infographic by <u>*Learning House*</u> *uses simple, intuitive titling to communicate the infographic theme and lead the viewer through the content.*

THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP
WAKE UP ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE BED

One daily activity that has the most profound impact on our health, productivity, mood, and memory is sleep. Yet, more than one-third of U.S. adults get less than the recommended amount (7–9 hours),[1] limiting their potential to succeed both academically and professionally. It's time to get inside our heads to understand why a good night's rest is critical to our success.
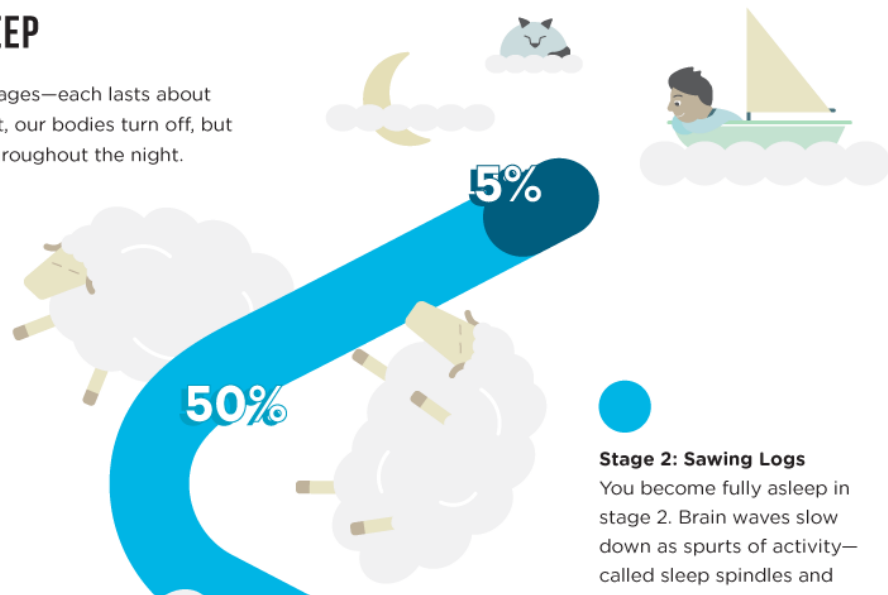
YOUR BRAIN ON SLEEP

Sleep is made up of several stages—each lasts about 90–110 minutes.[2] While we rest, our bodies turn off, but our brains continue to work throughout the night.

5%

50%

Stage 1: Just Drifting
Stage 1 is a period of light sleep. In these first few moments of dozing off, many people experience the falling sensation and involuntary muscle jerks.
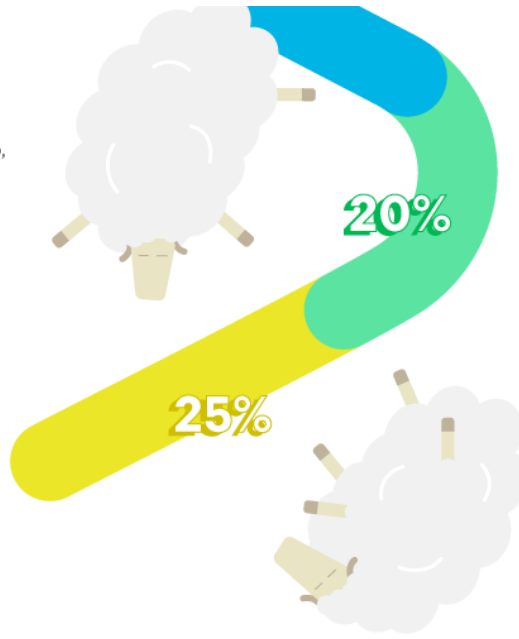
Stage 2: Sawing Logs
You become fully asleep in stage 2. Brain waves slow down as spurts of activity—called sleep spindles and

Stage 3: Total Relaxation
During this restorative period of slow-wave sleep, your breathing rate, heart rate, and blood pressure reach their lowest levels. Memory consolidation of facts and events also takes place.

K-complexes—help suppress any response to outside stimuli.

20%

25%

REM: Deep in Dreamland
During rapid eye movement sleep (REM), your muscles become paralyzed while your brain works overtime. This period involves intense brain activity, such as dreaming, memory consolidation, and information processing.

Source: "The Sleep Disorders," 2016, National Sleep Foundation

IF YOU DON'T SNOOZE, YOU LOSE

It's easy to push aside sleep in favor of school or work commitments, but it may end up causing more harm than good. 45% of Americans say that poor or insufficient sleep negatively affected their daily activities at least once in the past week.[3] And when a lack of sleep or disruptive sleep becomes habitual, it can have even longer-lasting effects.

POOR PERFORMANCE
Sleep problems is one of the **top 3 factors** that negatively impacted college students' academic performance.[4]

Fail?

SLEEP BAD, FEEL BAD
67% of Americans who reported "less than good" sleep quality also reported "poor" or "only fair" health.[3]

STRESSED OUT
91% of Americans report that too little sleep is a stress trigger.[5]

Cognitive Ability
Sleep deprivation can impact learning, attention, decision-making, and memory, especially if you're not getting enough slow-wave or REM sleep.[6]

Mood
Sleep quantity and quality have a huge impact on mood. When you're not feeling well-rested, you can be more irritable, angry, overwhelmed, and stressed.

Health
Since sleep contributes to our health and well-being, a lack of it is correlated with problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, and depression.[7]

THE REMEDY TO YOUR SLEEP PROBLEMS

You owe it to yourself to get the right amount of sleep each night. Now that you understand why sleep is so important,

here are some tips from the National Sleep Foundation on how you can catch some of those precious z's.
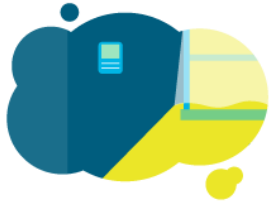
Create the Ideal Environment

Set the scene for a good night's sleep. In the evening, keep the room dark and set your thermostat to a cooler temperature. In the morning, let natural light come in to help signal when it's time to wake.

Avoid Electronics

Working late on your computer or texting on your iPhone may be keeping you up. Blue-light screens can suppress the hormone (melatonin) that helps regulate your sleep patterns. Be sure to set aside enough time to turn off before you turn in.

Stick to a Schedule

When the weekend comes, it may be tempting to stay up late or sleep in. But this can disrupt your natural sleep cycle and make you feel like you're experiencing jet lag. When planning your weekend activities, try to stick to your weekday sleep schedule.

Sleep is more than just letting our bodies rest; it's about making sure we feel great, think clearly, and perform to the best of our abilities. So turn off the lights, hit the hay, and start slumbering.

Sources:
1 "Prevalence of Healthy Sleep Duration Among Adults – United States," 2014, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report/CDC
2 "Brain Basics: Understanding Sleep," 2014, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
3 "The Sleep Health Index," 2014, National Sleep Foundation
4 "Reference Group Executive Summary," 2015, ACHA-NCHA II
5 "National Sleep Survey," 2013, Huffington Post
6 "Later School Start Times," National Sleep Foundation
7 "Sleep Studies," National Sleep Foundation

Concordia
UNIVERSITY·SAINT PAUL

Step 2: Provide Context for the Data

Data is a great storytelling tool, but sometimes you need to do the heavy lifting by highlighting the significance and meaning of the data they're looking at. Consider who will be reading your infographic, what their knowledge level is, and if additional content can make the data visualization impactful.

Additionally, if you have multiple data visualizations, use copy to tell that story clearly and draw the connection between them. In the case of a single dataset, one explanatory paragraph is typically all you need. (If you're having trouble finding the story in your data, here are 5 easy ways to uncover it.)

Example: This <u>Newscred infographic</u> effectively calls out and summarizes data findings to communicate the significance of the data.

how MARKETERS CREATE + CONSUME CONTENT

There's a surprising disconnect between how marketers spend their valuable time, budgets, and resources creating content versus what consumers crave. While content marketing has evolved greatly over the past few years, marketers still are trying to figure out how to produce content that resonates with consumers – and themselves. **NewsCred surveyed hundreds of Fortune 1000 marketers at their 2016 #ThinkContent Summit, including IBM, Verizon, JPMorgan Chase, MasterCard, and Intel** to examine the behavioral differences between the marketing and consumer mindset.

MARKETERS ARE CONSUMERS TOO

ASKING THE AUDIENCE: GETTING A SECOND (AND THIRD) OPINION

Although 17% of marketers check out a brand's website before making a purchase decision, two-thirds (64%) check out non-branded, unbiased content (such as user review websites) more than anything else. This means marketers should focus on high-quality content that is less like a sales pitch and provide consumers with informative and actionable insights.

USER REVIEW WEBSITES
64%

BRAND WEBSITES
17%

SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS
10%

MEDIA + PUBLICATIONS
5%

BLOGS
4%

RESEARCHING BEFORE MAKING A BIG PURCHASE (E.G., BOOKING A VACATION)

Amidst marketers' busy schedules, a whopping 97% will spend more than an hour researching before making a big purchase. Half (51%) spend more than 4 hours researching.

2-4 HOURS
46%

5-7 HOURS
22%

11+ HOURS
15%

8-10 HOURS
14%

1 HOUR OR LESS

MAKING THE BUY: 7 CONTENT TYPES THAT INFORM MARKETERS' OWN PURCHASE DECISIONS

When it comes to what type of content resonates the most, the overwhelming majority of marketers (70%) turn to user reviews while only 13% say that product demos inform their purchasing decisions.

USER REVIEWS
70%

PRODUCT DEMOS
13%

USER REVIEW WEBSITES
7%

HOW-TO INFORMATIVE CONTENT
4%

CASE STUDIES
2%

BLOGS
2%

NEWS CONTENT (E.G., THE NEW YORK TIMES)
2%

BUT MARKETERS WILL BE MARKETERS

GETTING OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW – ALMOST

While we've all heard, "Content is king," Fortune 1000 marketers still allocate most of their budget to traditional advertising. However, when acting as consumers, marketers seek out unbiased, unbranded content – in other words, the opposite of advertising. Thankfully, 27% of marketers allocate the majority of their budgets to content marketing, and this number is expected to keep growing in 2017.

TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING
45%

CONTENT
27%

SEM/SEO
14%

SOCIAL
10%

DISPLAY
4%

CHANNELING THE HIGHEST ROI FOR THE MARKETERS' BUDGETS

While marketers are constantly searching for more efficient tactics, email marketing blows all other channels out of the water in terms of delivering the most ROI. However, as we saw from above, 45% of marketers still allocate most of their budget to traditional advertising – yet only 5% say traditional advertising yields the highest ROI.

EMAIL
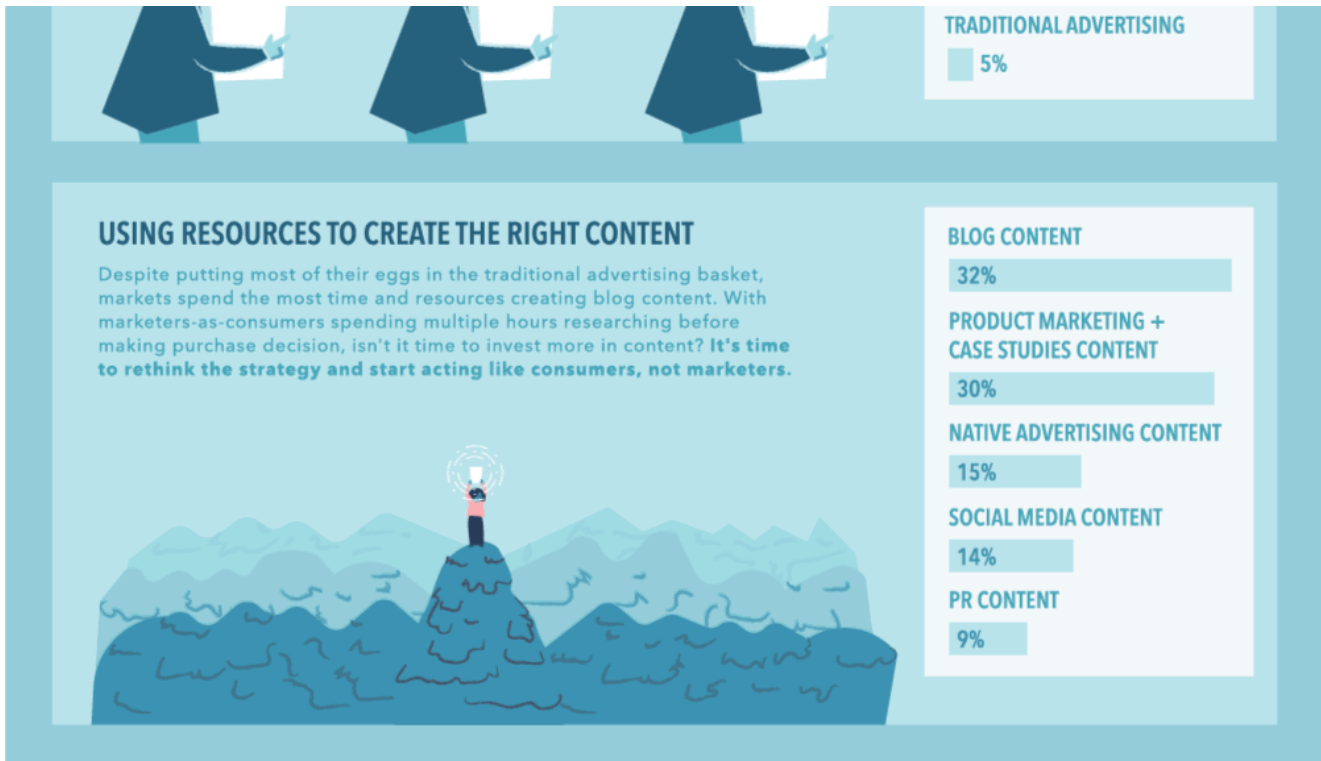54%

SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING
21%

CONTENT MARKETING
14%

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING
5%

USING RESOURCES TO CREATE THE RIGHT CONTENT

Despite putting most of their eggs in the traditional advertising basket, markets spend the most time and resources creating blog content. With marketers-as-consumers spending multiple hours researching before making purchase decision, isn't it time to invest more in content? **It's time to rethink the strategy and start acting like consumers, not marketers.**

TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING
5%

BLOG CONTENT
32%

PRODUCT MARKETING + CASE STUDIES CONTENT
30%

NATIVE ADVERTISING CONTENT
15%

SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT
14%

PR CONTENT
9%

KEEP THE CONSUMER FIRST

At the end of the day, marketers are consumers and marketing efforts need to match what consumers demand. With hours spent researching products, it's no wonder that consumers want informative, relevant, and timely content to help inform their decisions. The brands that will ultimately succeed are the ones that understand that sales pitches don't work and content comes first.

Source: NewsCred 2016 #ThinkContent Marketing Summit Survey

CREATED BY COLUMN FIVE — NewsCred

Step 3: Guide the Reader through in a Logical Hierarchy

Ordering your content in a logical and concise way is essential. As a general rule, an infographic should start with any necessary background information to give context to the content, then move through the story (and/or data) intuitively. We recommend a 2- to 3-sentence introduction to the whole graphic and 1 to 2 sentences per sub-header.

It's also helpful to structure (and design) content modularly. This helps you organize your thinking (e.g., if this, then this, then this…) and makes it easy to extract single panels to accompany other relevant content (e.g., blogs) or promote on social.

Example: This Upwork infographic uses clear section headers and modular design to guide readers through the hierarchy.

HOW TO

Find and Attract the Best Remote Development Talent

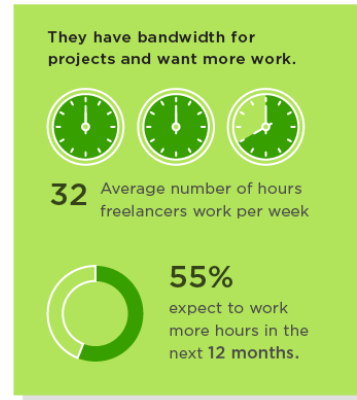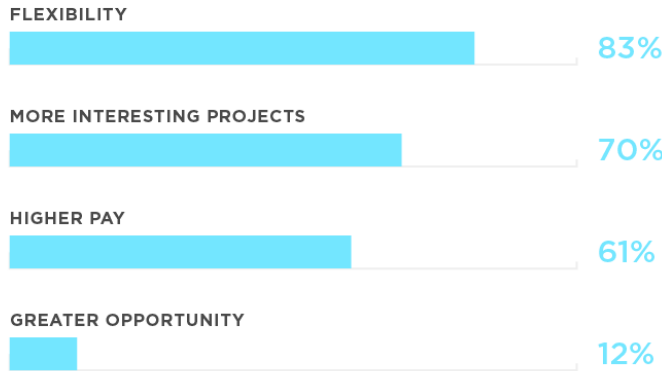Tap into the vast network of skilled freelance Web and mobile programmers available online.

▶ The programming industry is experiencing a skills shortage. **The good news?** Through online talent platforms, you can find and work with world-class developers around the globe who are actively seeking interesting projects.

Here's how to reach them.

What Motivates Freelance Devs

Developers prefer freelancing vs. traditional jobs for:

FLEXIBILITY
83%

MORE INTERESTING PROJECTS
70%

HIGHER PAY
61%

GREATER OPPORTUNITY
12%

They have bandwidth for projects and want more work.

32 Average number of hours freelancers work per week

55% expect to work more hours in the next **12 months**.

THE HIRING MANAGER'S CHECKLIST

To hook the best developers, focus on what they care about when looking for projects.

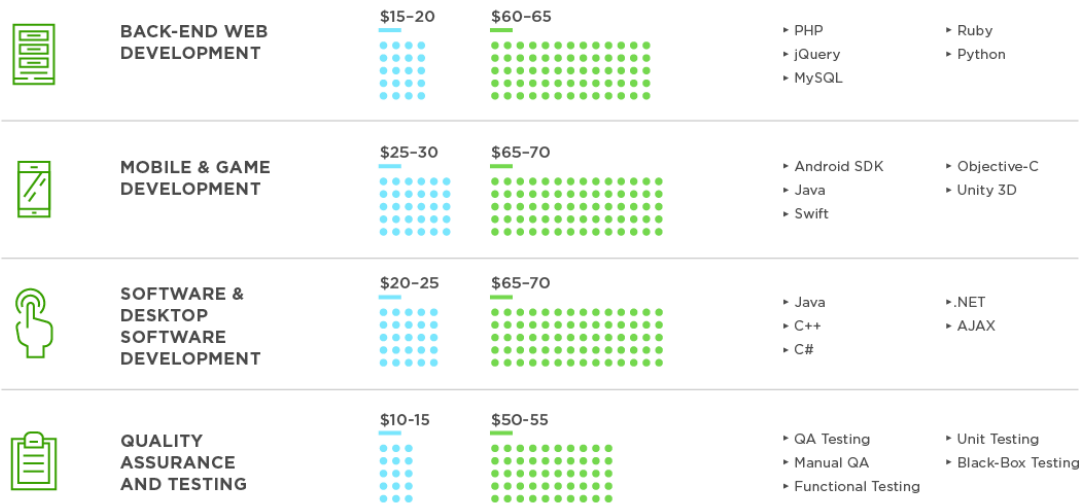| CLEAR AND DETAILED WORK DESCRIPTION	CLIENT REPUTATION	POTENTIAL EARNINGS	TIMELINESS
☐ **Be specific** about the project, technical skill requirements, and deliverables.	☐ **Handle each interaction with care;** your feedback, total spend, and hire rate are visible.	☐ **Do your research;** proposing unreasonable rates will exclude top talent.	☐ **Act quickly;** the majority of online jobs fill within **the first 24 hours.**
☐ **Consult a technical product manager** and **create a product development doc.**	☐ **Build trust** with your devs and proactively collect feedback.	☐ **Be clear** about expected project length and the possibility of future engagements.	☐ **Iterate and repost** if you haven't found your developer within **2 weeks.**

Get More Work Done

Know the skills you can find and how much they cost.

COMMON PROJECT TYPES	AVERAGE HOURLY RATES		TOP 5 SKILLS IN DEMAND	
	● Top-Rated Developers (as rated by clients) ● Top 1% of Developers (based on hourly rates)			
FRONT-END WEB DEVELOPMENT	$20–25	$50–55	▸ JavaScript ▸ WordPress ▸ CSS	▸ HTML5 ▸ AngularJS

BACK-END WEB DEVELOPMENT	$15–20	$60–65	‣ PHP ‣ jQuery ‣ MySQL	‣ Ruby ‣ Python
MOBILE & GAME DEVELOPMENT	$25–30	$65–70	‣ Android SDK ‣ Java ‣ Swift	‣ Objective-C ‣ Unity 3D
SOFTWARE & DESKTOP SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT	$20–25	$65–70	‣ Java ‣ C++ ‣ C#	‣ .NET ‣ AJAX
QUALITY ASSURANCE AND TESTING	$10-15	$50-55	‣ QA Testing ‣ Manual QA ‣ Functional Testing	‣ Unit Testing ‣ Black-Box Testing

Step 4: Highlight Notable Story Findings/Insights

When your objective is to convey a clear and specific story (rather than a more explorative experience), it's important to directly call out key takeaways.

While you may have a clearly defined story or message, your tone should remain analytical, not opinionated. (The interjection of opinion makes for a clear bias, which calls into question the integrity of the data being presented. This includes any biases that may come from mentioning a brand or sales messaging in the copy.)

Example: This Digit infographic makes good use of callouts, drawing readers to the most significant content.

Let's Do Brunch
(Forever and Ever and Ever)

FOR A GENERATION THAT NEVER UNPLUGS, ONE EVENT REMAINS SACRED: BRUNCH.
Millennials have taken to heaping all their passions for food, drink, and social interaction into one delicious

occasion. One day, brunch may even rival the student loan crisis as the most damaging financial issue they face. So, let's take a look at Gen-Y's most revered holiday.

Social Foodies

As our grandparents can attest, brunch isn't new. It's joyously tugged at our wallets and purse strings since the 19th century. The term was coined in an 1895 essay titled "Brunch: A Plea," noting the meal as the cure for "Saturday-night carousers." With millennial spending on the rise, the ante has risen.

By 2017, the millennial generation will outspend boomers. With food on the brain and technology at their fingertips, millennials are devoting more time, effort, and money to drinking and dining with friends.

INDIVIDUAL MILLENNIAL VS. AVERAGE AMERICAN SPENDING

eating out increased
+84%

alcohol consumption increased
+96%

43%
of every dollar millennials spend on food is outside the home.

POPULAR INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS FOR BRUNCH-RELATED INSTAGRAM POSTS

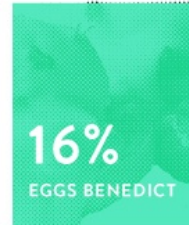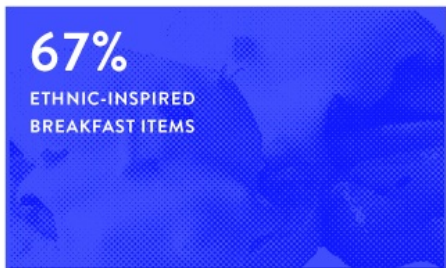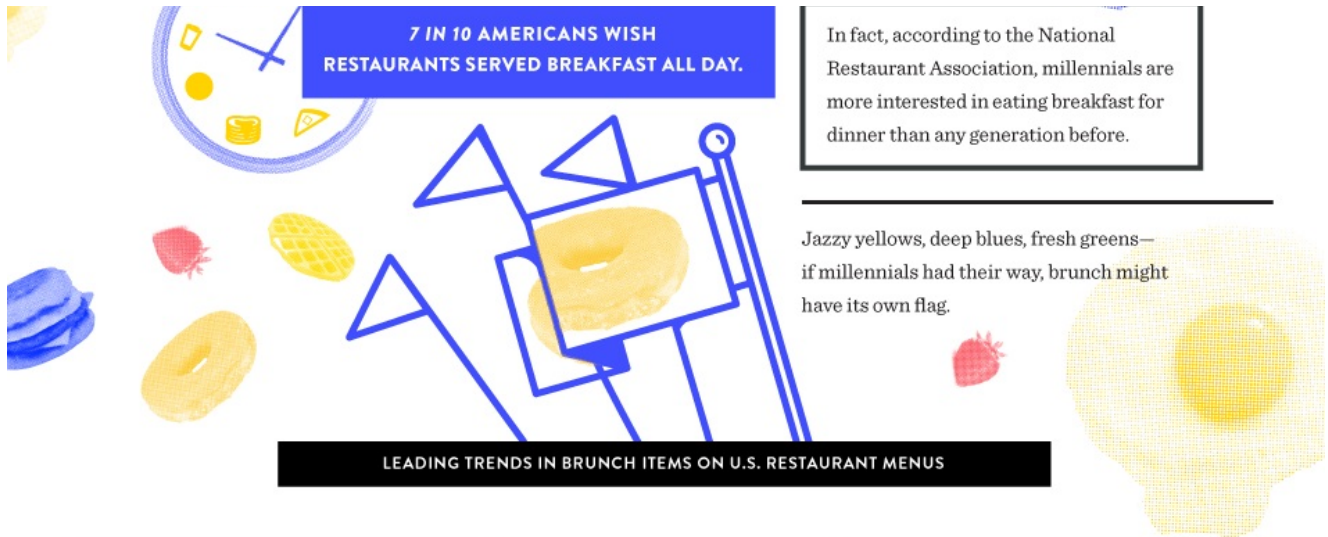| 13M+	5M+	65K+	29K+
#sundayfunday	#brunch	#brunchtime	#sundayfundays

A Generation of Tastemakers

Long gone are the days of classic Americana paintings depicting large families gathered around beautiful home dinners, heaping monstrous amounts of heavy, dark-colored food.

In fact, according to the National Restaurant Association, millennials are more interested in eating breakfast for dinner than any generation before.

Jazzy yellows, deep blues, fresh greens— if millennials had their way, brunch might have its own flag.

LEADING TRENDS IN BRUNCH ITEMS ON U.S. RESTAURANT MENUS

67% ETHNIC-INSPIRED BREAKFAST ITEMS	**35%** EGG-WHITE OMELETTES/SANDWICHES
18% DONUTS	**18%** OATMEAL
43% TRADITIONAL ETHNIC BREAKFAST ITEMS	**32%** PRIX-FIXE BRUNCHES
18% FRENCH TOAST	**16%** EGGS BENEDICT

To wash it down, millennials are actively changing the beverage game, too. Brunch's common reliance on plentiful champagne, wine, and cocktails suits this generation's decreasing interest in beer.

- Beer
- Spirits
- Wine

1992   2013

Why You'll Never Stop Brunching

Despite the cost and regardless of lost time, brunch is now a key component of your existence. You're in it. This thing is yours. You'll likely go to jail for arson before you give up brunch. And why? Here's why.

Honestly, you haven't

You can eat all of your Saturday feelings.

posted anything good on Instagram since last Sunday.

For once, the word "bottomless" actually sounds elegant. It rolls off the tongue as you charmingly slur out, "Sure, another mimosa sounds divine." In contrast, see bottomless pit and/or fries.

It's the closest thing you have to time travel. One moment, you're eating eggs benedict on a bright, cheerful morning; next thing you know, it's nearly sundown, and you're facedown on the couch.

By adulthood, brunch might be the only time you ever see your married friends again. They have kids, they stay in at night, and you're not Netflix.

You can drink before noon without anyone yelling about how you're "ruining everyone's time."

It's a relatively easy way to prove you're not a vampire.

Nobody ever looks bad at brunch. Even if you're hungover, you still look like you're laughing with your friends in a commercial.

AS THEY SAY, YOU'VE GOTTA BRUNCH LIKE NOBODY'S WATCHING, BRUNCH LIKE YOU'LL NEVER BE HURT, BRUNCH LIKE THERE'S NOBODY LISTENING, AND LIVE LIKE IT'S BOTTOMLESS BRUNCH FOREVER.

Sources: millennialmarketing.com | liquorlicensenews.com | marketwatch.com | jwtintelligence.com
2015 Restaurant Industry Forecast, National Restaurant Association

digit

Step 5: Provide a Sound Conclusion

Once you've presented your story, you want to lead your viewer to a desired conclusion without spelling it out for them. This can sometimes be a delicate balance between making a strong statement that clinches the narrative for readers and one that allows them to form their own opinions. Most importantly, it's important to offer some sort of solution or recommendation that speaks to any challenges or hypotheses introduced in the opening paragraph.

Example: This Lucidworks infographic makes a strong statement, emphasizing collaborative tools as the solution to a CIO's biggest challenges.

FREE THE CIO

The Chief Information Officer position has emerged as the most sought-after role in IT organizations. But according to recent data, these leaders are constantly bogged down in details that keep them and their organizations from succeeding. Let's examine what's holding CIOs back from their highest-value activities and what they can do about it.

THE INNOVATION PROCLAMATION

CIOs play a huge role in modern businesses. In fact, **25%** of CIOs are solely responsible for leading tech-driven innovation at their organizations. But CIOs are finding their time consumed with problem solving and troubleshooting, preventing them from addressing higher-level business needs.

CIO Role: Real vs. Ideal* According to Business Leaders

CURRENT ROLE
- 12%
- 18%
- 70%

IDEAL ROLE*
- 6%
- 37%
- 57%
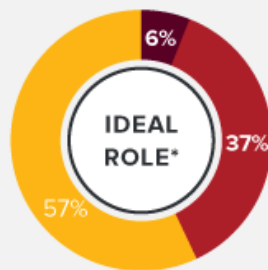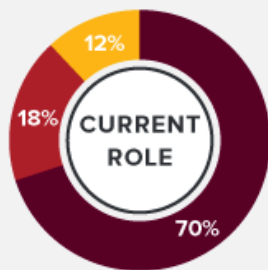
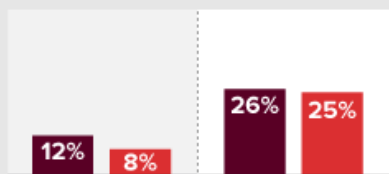*Ideal, meaning it fulfills the responsibility of leading tech-driven innovation

- ■ Runs the IT function in support of business operations
- ■ Leads business/technology transformation as the company changes
- ■ Drives technology-driven business innovation and strategies

IN DEFENSE OF YOUR TIME

Business leaders and CIOs alike acknowledge that technology leaders are not providing as much value to the company as possible.
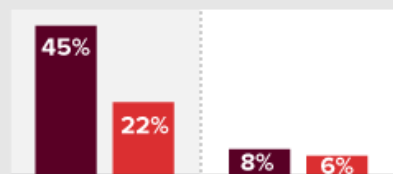
Day-to-Day CIO Responsibilities

■ Business leader opinion   ■ CIO opinion

Studying the market trends to identify opportunities
- 12%
- 8%
- 26%
- 25%

Managing IT crises
- 45%
- 22%
- 8%
- 6%

	TODAY	WOULD ADD MOST VALUE
Driving business innovation	16% / 18%	46% / 41%
Identifying opportunities for competitive differentiation	13% / 15%	40% / 43%

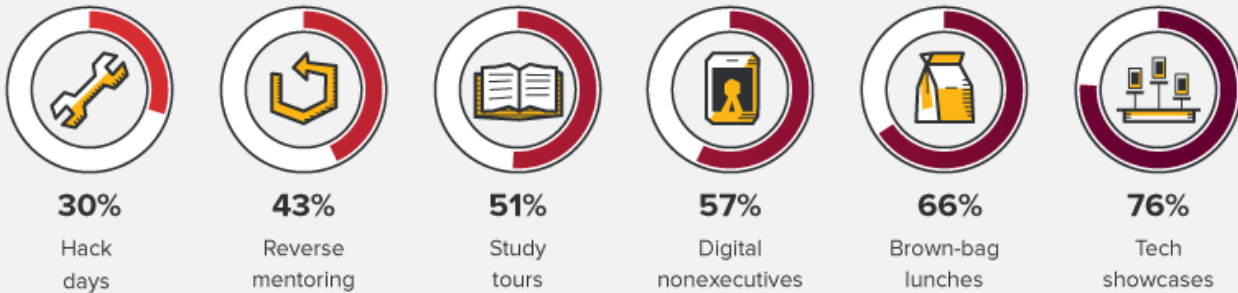|	TODAY	WOULD ADD MOST VALUE
Security management	41% / 29%	16% / 13%
Cost control / expense management	49% / 35%	16% / 16%

THE CHIEF TECHNOLOGIST MANIFESTO

Recent studies suggest a CIO can become more vision-oriented, and thus provide more value to the company, through a combination of leadership and technology investment re-allocations.

1. Free your staff, and innovation will follow.

CIOs are spicing up day-to-day IT work with the following activities to stimulate a culture of excellence and innovation.

30%	43%	51%	57%	66%	76%
Hack days	Reverse mentoring	Study tours	Digital nonexecutives	Brown-bag lunches	Tech showcases

•••••• Simply increasing headcount can also take pressure off the department head. ••••••

87% of CIOs surveyed by Robert Half Technology say they will add more staff (both expand and fill positions) in the coming year.

Appointing a deputy ("COO of IT") can reduce CIO busywork by **5%**—freeing up roughly 1 day per month.

CULTURAL PARADIGM FLIPS

Use the rhetoric of "vision first" rather than "control first"
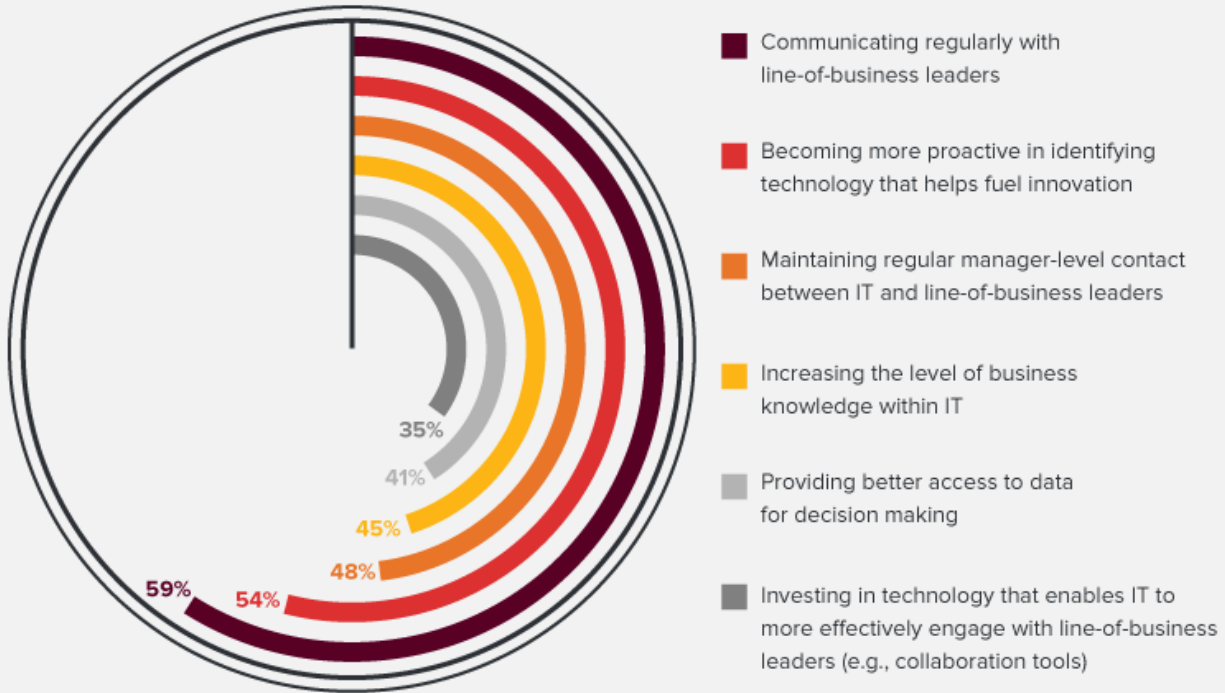
Promote "digital culture" instead of "corporate culture"
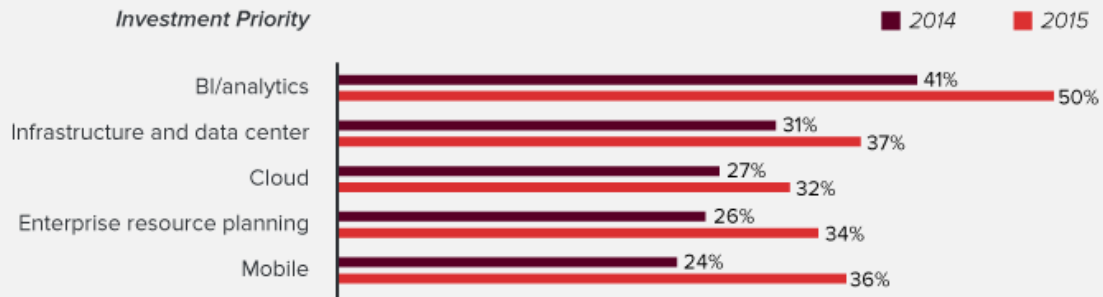
Speak of "digital inspiration" instead of "IT management"

2. Knock on doors to make opportunities knock.

How Digital Leaders Foster Forward Thinking

- **Communicating regularly with line-of-business leaders** — 59%
- **Becoming more proactive in identifying technology that helps fuel innovation** — 54%
- **Maintaining regular manager-level contact between IT and line-of-business leaders** — 48%
- **Increasing the level of business knowledge within IT** — 45%
- **Providing better access to data for decision making** — 41%
- **Investing in technology that enables IT to more effectively engage with line-of-business leaders (e.g., collaboration tools)** — 35%

3. Retool your tech arsenal.

CIOs are beefing up investments in tools to empower individuals at all levels.

Investment Priority

Legend: ■ 2014 ■ 2015

Investment Priority	2014	2015
BI/analytics	41%	50%
Infrastructure and data center	31%	37%
Cloud	27%	32%
Enterprise resource planning	26%	34%
Mobile	24%	36%

Business leaders and CIOs agree that technology leaders are most valuable in positions of high-leverage responsibility. The trouble is that they're hindered by low-level minutiae. Focusing on departmental attitude, enabling cross-departmental collaboration, and bolstering technological tools will set modern CIOs up for nimble leadership.

Lucidworks

The most impactful editorial infographics have narratives that are focused and direct as they communicate sometimes complex ideas and information. In order to give your infographic the greatest opportunity for success, spend time refining the story you want to tell before you begin, and make sure every piece of copy you write plays an essential role in its unfolding.

7 More Ways to Make Sure Your Infographic is a Success

Remember that everything from copy, to design, to distribution influences whether or not you get eyes on your content. To make sure your infographic gets the traction you want:

1. **Choose the right format for your story.** Here's how to figure out if an infographic is the right choice.
2. **Follow best practices for infographic design.** Use this creative brief template to keep everyone on the same page, experiment with different infographic design styles, and find how to avoid (and fix) the most common infographic design mistakes.
3. **Use your visual language.** A strong brand identity is crucial to create consistent, cohesive infographics. If you don't have a visual identity, here's everything you need to include in one, plus a few tips to incorporate your visual language into your infographics.
4. **Get inspired by the pros.** Check out these 75 examples of beautifully designed infographics.
5. **Use better tools.** Here are 101+ tools, tips, and tricks to make the process easier.
6. **Optimize it for SEO.** Here's our handy guide if you're not sure what to do.
7. **Repurpose your infographics once they're live.** There are plenty of ways to repurpose, reuse, and remix your old content. Learn how to bring yours alive through motion.
8. **Call in re-enforcements if you need.** There's no shame in getting a little expert help. If you're on the hunt for an infographic design agency, ask these 10 questions to vet them and try these tips to work together more effectively.

For even more, here's a roundup of our best tips for every stage of the infographic creation process. And if you need a little help with your infographics, let's talk it out.

Sign up for our weekly newsletter to get the best content marketing tips, tools, and resources.

This field is for validation purposes and should be left unchanged.