

# THE SIZE OF THREE FOOTBALL PITCHES!

OR

## Does your charity's annual report work for you?

Why is it, when describing size or distance, television shows or articles always talk in terms relative to the number of football pitches, elephants or how many times to the moon and back it is. I mean, really, how far is it to the moon? Are we talking five-a-side pitches or premiere league? African or Asian elephant?

Well, despite my own pedantic nature, it's because comparisons work. When it comes to relating complicated or important data, a picture actually IS worth a thousand words (well, 60,000 words, but we'll go into that later). The reason the same old comparisons of football pitches and space travel are trotted out is that they give an instant image. I might not know exactly how heavy an elephant is, but I know 20 of them weigh a lot.

This article is centred on the charity sector, but applies to all communications for a company, social enterprise or venture. Some of it may seem obvious. If it does, then great, you're already on the way to creating a great tool for your staff, funding applications and partnering and sales opportunities. If not, then I hope it proves helpful in showing an alternate way of approaching your annual report.

By law, UK charities have to produce an annual report, not only financial but with a statement of public benefit. With the right approach, your report need not be a bind, but can in fact be a powerful tool for staff morale whilst aiding communication of your values and achievements to service users, stakeholders and both potential and existing funders.

This makes your report one of the most important documents you will produce all year. When you take into account there are 165,000 registered charities in the UK (Source: Charity Commission, Dec 2015), it's even more clear that showing why you exist, and the difference you make, is of crucial importance.

It's now that time of year when everyone is (or should be) gearing up to collate their work, crunch the numbers, dot the 'i's and cross the 't's.

Through programme monitoring and progress reports, you have a good idea of what's happening in your charity. Every initiative and programme has measured outcomes, so the figures may be at

your fingertips. However, if you're an organization that gets funding from different bodies, providing a range of services, bringing it all together in a meaningful way can seem daunting.

Even if you do have all the figures you need to satisfy existing funders or stakeholders, distilling them into something a layperson understands can be difficult. More and more charities are having to reach beyond the traditional funding streams into the private sector, which means talking to laypeople. There are many business with corporate responsibility strategies and even more that would like to have them. Being able to communicate your ethos, work and results can help them see your real value and open the door for discussion.

This is where some forethought and preparation can pay dividends. Let's look beyond what funders and the Charity Commission require. There are a number of things you can do to help show the complete picture. Some are design related, but design can only do so much. First, you need to get to grips with your figures and see what they really mean.

## The approach

Obviously you should never change your figures, or omit data, but an intelligent approach to how you show your value is key. So often companies or charities say "Oh, but of course X happened because of Y, surely everyone knows that!" when they often don't.



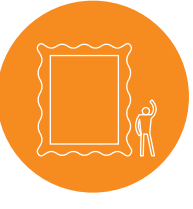
### Step away from your role

Every business, charity or concern needs to step back from the business and look at it from the outside. You can gain perspective by asking customers or service users how they see the work you do, for example. Try out your words and documents on laypeople, and address any questions that brings up.



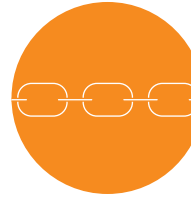
### Decide your narrative

While your narrative can be simple if you provide a single service, when your charity offers a range, showing the theme or mission statement of your organization by the strands of work you do is a must. Even when supplying a single service, there are often off-shoots and positive repercussions of your work. These can be powerful tools, so explore them.



### See the big picture

Your organization is there for a purpose, but often that purpose is part of a much bigger picture. Showing where you stand in a local or national context, for instance, can show that you're tackling a massive need or that your programmes are focused in the areas most in need. Does a potential donor in central London understand the issues that South Yorkshire faces? You can make sure they do by showing appropriate context.

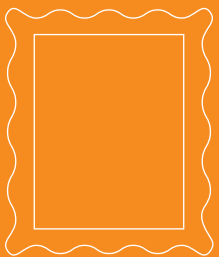


### Make the link

Figures do tell a story, but they can be very dry. Investigate and drill down into your figures to find public benefit examples. For instance; you deliver youth work around a park. Your figures show that you engaged 40 individual young people. You have figures showing age, gender, safeguarding, signposting and so on. This may be enough for funders, but consider the impact of a local policing team testimonial saying reports of anti-social behaviour dropped by 50% during your project.

## Showing your workings

We are visual creatures, so it makes sense to present your work in visual terms



# = 60,000 words

We process visuals 60,000 times faster than text

Source: "The Power of Visual Communication" Mike Parkinson



## It takes just 13 milliseconds to process and recognise an image

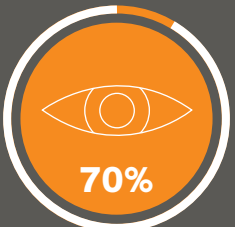
(It took around 3 seconds for you to read that!)

Source: Attention, Perception, and Psychophysics by Mary Potter, Brad Wyble, Pennsylvania State University, Carl Hagmann and Emily McCourt, MIT, 2014

## We are hard wired for visual communication



of information transmitted to the brain is visual



of all our sensory receptors are found in the eye



of your brain is active in visual processing

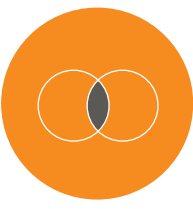


of people respond better to visuals than text

Source: The Importance Of Visual Content by Tom More, 2014  
http://thenextweb.com/dd/2014/05/21/importance-visual-content-deliver-effectively

## Choose your methods

There are various ways of communicating your work in an easy to understand and impactful manner



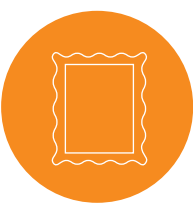
### Infographics

Infographics are a time-honoured way of disseminating your goals and achievements into easy-to-understand, bite-size chunks. They are very good at showing improvements, variations in a set of data or merely to illustrate a point. They really work, partly because of how, as humans, we are wired for visual stimuli far more than for words.



### Tell real Stories

People like to connect to other people. It can be hard to be moved by figures alone, but a real person relating how much, and why, they value an organization, and the ways they have been helped, shows the human reality of the work, which is much easier to buy into. Merely by placing quotation marks around a testimonial raises the engagement of the reader and adds validity to the quote.



### Picture this

Pictures tell 60,000 words (see above). But pick carefully. You have two choices; you can show the plight of your service users, or you can show the improvements. In a world of worthy causes, a lot of people want to buy into success stories, to see the results. Does your imagery show this?



### Make it easy

When you have a lot of involved, industry specific information then using basic design fundamentals will help your reader to latch on to important sections. Ensuring a document is easy to read and digest goes a long way to helping your reader stay the course. Breaking up your information into chunks (as is done on this pdf) can also help with large pieces of content.

## Hiring a professional

Sometimes it can pay to get an outsider to help

Every industry knows how to talk to its peers, but not everyone knows how to talk to 'outsiders' or a layperson. A professional will help there.

But what is a professional? In report terms we're talking about copywriters, proofreaders and designers. These may seem frivolous and expensive, but getting professional help can help show your worth and impact. The tips in this article go a way to helping you reduce any external costs as having a narrative, the kind of figures you need to show and even a theme will help a designer or copywriter to get to the bones of your message quickly, and time is money.

You can also consider asking for volunteers on platforms such as LinkedIn. Again, if you have a strong idea of what you have to say, it makes the job of anyone checking or creating content a lot easier. Just make sure you are clear that this is pro bono or volunteer work from the outset. If you are looking for volunteers, then try and give them as long a deadline as is possible. Short deadlines means choosing between volunteering and paying work, long deadlines provide flexibility.

## The long game

The work you do now can last 12 months

Of course, once you have created all your infographics and materials you can use them for the next 12 months, not only in your annual report, but for exhibitions, your website, presentations and funding applications. This is why it is so important to get the best value out of your figures, collecting them once, and using them often.

You should also make sure that your report can be viewed well as a PDF, not just print, as it can then be distributed for no cost at all over the next year.

## Can we help?

Free consultation

I hope this article has been of some use to you. Please feel free to distribute it if it has! A bit of planning and thought really does go a long way to communicating your values to the outside world.

Seedbed Creative are offering a free consultation to charities looking at making the most out of their annual reports. If you'd like to talk to us, please don't hesitate to get in touch.



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I am a graphic designer with nearly 20 years experience, having worked across the board from large corporate firms to small, local charities and social enterprises and creative agencies. I now run Seedbed Creative.

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