

# Infographics Emerge As Key Component of Content Marketing

***Should data visualization be part of your B2B marketing arsenal? Here's why more experts are encouraging B2B marketers to embrace infographics.***

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*By Matt, McKenzie, Contributing Editor*

B2B marketers already know that content is king. Now, a growing number of them are getting acquainted with a new member of the royal family: the infographic.

The concept behind today's infographics has been around forever: From cave paintings to subway maps, people have always used images to communicate information quickly and clearly. Over the past few years, however, B2B marketers have discovered just how powerful this content format can be when it's combined with a new breed of visual social networking tools.

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## A Powerful New Thought-Leadership Tool

Joe Chernov, VP of Content Marketing for [Eloqua](#), said his company released its first infographic in June 2010, and the overwhelming response surprised him. "In the first couple of days that infographic got more than 2,000 Tweets," he said, "and it's immensely challenging for any company to drum up that much visibility on Twitter" with a single piece of content.

Dave Bruno, Director of Commerce studies for [RedPrairie](#), said he began to notice the growing use of infographics in content marketing around the same time. "I started seeing them show up on Twitter, rather regularly, from the people I was following," he said. "It was very easy to see that people liked them, and when they're done reasonably well they can have a huge impact on readers."

While content marketing experts, however, are now familiar with infographics, the vast majority of B2B marketers still are not. "Most of the companies we work with aren't even thinking about this yet," said Joe Pulizzi, founder of the [Content Marketing Institute](#). "The companies working in tech or social media clearly get it, but in B2B manufacturing, for example, I don't know anybody that has done an infographic yet."

As more marketers get acquainted with infographics, the experts agree that it's important to understand the role they should play within a B2B marketing strategy. Infographics tend to be very effective when they're served at the top of the marketing funnel; they're ideal for building awareness and establishing thought leadership. The format is also very well-suited for sharing, as opposed to being gated or relied upon to generate leads.

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Joe Pulizzi  
Founder  
Content Marketing Institute

“This is awareness-level content marketing,” explained Pulizzi. “With all such efforts, your story will travel farther the less you talk about yourself. The best practice is to include a ‘brought to you by’ line at the bottom, and that’s it.”

“It’s something that’s very lightweight, I’m not asking the target for a lot of commitment to scan an infographic,” Bruno added. “If it’s done well, I earn the right to ask them to view additional content and to make more heavy-weight investments of their time and attention.”

## Finding – and Sharing – B2B Infographics

Twitter is an excellent resource for marketers who aren’t yet familiar with infographics and want to see how their colleagues (or competitors) are using the format. Another is [Visual.ly](#), a startup currently beta-testing a tool that will allow users to turn raw data automatically into custom infographics. According to Lee Sherman, co-founder and Chief Content Officer of Visual.ly, the site now hosts more than 10,000 user-created infographics – with around 3,000 more appearing every month.

“Among B2B marketers that growth is still occurring mostly in categories like technology and social media,” Sherman told DemandGen Report. “But we’re also now seeing other marketers get on board, using infographics to tell stories and present data in more interesting ways.”

According to Pulizzi, yet another great resource for discovering infographics is [Pinterest](#) – a relatively new, pinboard-based social networking site that has generated enormous buzz since the beginning of the year. “Among the people I follow, about half of the new content that I see [on Pinterest] concerns infographics,” he said. “Slideshare took PowerPoint to the next level, and I’m thinking that Pinterest might do the same thing for infographics.”

## It All Begins with a Story

So what, exactly, set off the infographics explosion? Pulizzi attributes it to a new generation of social-networking tools that work especially well with visual content. "Sites like Slideshare, Facebook and Pinterest are all visual-first tools," he noted. "Users can share things they like in one click or less, and devices like the iPad are ideal for viewing this type of content."

The challenge, of course, is creating the kind of visual content that people want to share. According to Sherman, that process doesn't begin with the data – it begins with a story.

"We're strong believers in visual story-telling, rather than just assembling collections of facts," he explained. "Create a narrative with a beginning, a middle and an end, and extract some key insights from the data. If you just try to represent raw data, that's not an infographic – it's a dashboard."

Pulizzi offered similar advice to B2B marketers working with infographics. "Be able to tell a story, from top to bottom," he said. "Don't just give me a bunch of charts – tell me the story, show me how something is evolving or changing, explain why a trend is important."

That doesn't mean the underlying data used in an infographic is unimportant, according to Chernov. "You don't nail it with the design, you nail it with the research," he said. "If you do killer research, uncover insights that are surprising or intuitive but also statistically rigorous, you have a good shot at really getting noticed."

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This infographic, created to cater to retail/CPG marketing and commerce executives, communicates the growth and behaviors of new breed of shopper- the "SoMoLo Shopper"- and offers tactics for capturing their attention and business.



## Going Viral with Infographics

That rigor, said Sherman, should extend to the integrity of the research being used. “We’ve always taken a journalistic approach to creating infographics,” he explained. “Don’t source things from Wikipedia, do original research, make sure the data is accurate, and don’t manipulate the statistics or the presentation.

“The goal is to be viral, and you’re going to be more successful if you tell a story that’s interesting, compelling, and above all true.”

Going “viral,” of course, is the ultimate goal for most content marketing efforts. As usual, though, in the case of infographics that’s easier said than done – especially as sites like Pinterest and Visual.ly raise the bar for creating and distributing high-quality work.

One thing to keep in mind, said Chernov, is that infographics demand an especially light touch in terms of how they’re presented to readers. “Think of infographics as ‘content as a service,’” he said. “If you use infographics as a promotional tool, you’ll fail. If you use them to serve the customer’s needs, then you have a good shot.”

“These aren’t one-offs – they should be part of a strategy,” he added. “Make them part of a campaign. If you publish one and then disappear, that’s not content marketing ... and neither is doing an infographic just because a competitor is doing them.”

### 5 Tips For Optimizing Infographic Appeal: Infographics should:

1. Be informative and engaging — not promotionally-driven
2. Present informative, valuable insight
3. Tell a story to harvest viral impact
4. Not stand alone, but be part of an overall marketing strategy
5. Be combined with other social initiatives and outreach

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