

# Making News Animated—Literally

In just a few years, the human attention span has decreased by around 30 percent, from twelve seconds to eight.<sup>1</sup>

As people’s minds become accustomed to soundbites and the fifteen-second video, journalists have the novel and increasingly difficult task of enticing readers. These trends, however, have ushered in an epoch for journalists to embrace visuals and the desire for “more” to enrich their reports and acquire an audience active in their pursuit of news.

The world has become increasingly centered on visuals. Due in part to technology constructing a world of hyper-stimulation, when individuals attempting to read the news are greeted with a block of words that seem to trail on for infinity, they are immediately put off. Over sixty-five percent of the world are visual learners, and with the movement towards graphics, journalists must embrace their audience; furthermore, visuals not only pique reader interest, they help journalists tell more of their story.<sup>2</sup>

Emerging news outlets such as FiveThirtyEight (538)<sup>3</sup> and Vox News<sup>4</sup> are prime examples of bringing content to life. Their websites are bright and eye-catching, and when readers click on an article, the textual story is interwoven between highly informative graphics, charts, and videos. Readers remember visuals in part because they are compelling, but also because they have a deeper impact on the audience and the story the author is attempting to tell. While words tell one story, readers can interpret visuals for themselves, allowing the audience to take

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<sup>1</sup> “Changing Attention Span and What It Means for Content.” *Ranieri & Co.*

<sup>2</sup> Gillett, Rachel. “Why We’re More Likely to Remember Content With Images and Video (Infographic).” *Fast Company*.

<sup>3</sup> FiveThirtyEight. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/>

<sup>4</sup> Vox. <https://www.vox.com/>

an active part in interpreting the news. It makes news personal and alive, and readers will return to the news sources they remember.

Another integral part of a journalist's story, their words, should also have visual elements. Important elements of the text can be bolded or colored to guide readers through the article. As society's attention span decreases, people have become serial skimmers—they will not read it all.<sup>5</sup> Journalists have yet to catch up with the contemporary serial skimming culture, but it is through purposefully drawing attention to the most important parts of the story that they can do so.

Journalists also have the ability to opt completely digital and switch to video form. Vox News in particular has embraced this change, garnering over eleven million followers and consistently gaining millions of views per video or report. While people find reading intimidating, they can effortlessly click on a five-minute video that covers the same information. In fact, videos actually tell more of the journalist's story through their use of graphics, images, and audio. According to Forrester Research, one minute of video equates to about 1.8 million words of text.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, not only are videos less intimidating, they are more effective in telling more of the story.

This being said, news should neither become all visuals nor all videos; everyone has their own preferences when it comes to consuming news. However, as consumers become more drawn towards tweets and sound bites, journalists have the opportunity to embrace visuals and videos to entice, enrich, and impact their audience.

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<sup>5</sup> "A Minute of Video Is Worth 1.8 Million Words, According to Forrester Research." *Yahoo! Finance*.

<sup>6</sup> "Why Visual Communication Is the Most Important Skill for Journalists in 2015." *HuffPost*.

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