South China
Morning Post

VISUAL EDITING WORKSHOP

Handout
for
Presentation

by

Howard Finberg

1994

South China Morning Post
Visual Editing Workshop

Presented by Howard Finberg
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Outline for seminar

Day One / Start at 10:30 a.m.

INTRODUCTION

The goals of this seminar
- The challenge of serving readers more fully today
  - It is a matter of time
- The challenge of serving readers in the next century

An outline of major topics to be covered during seminar
- Design
- Photography
- Color
- Graphics

READERSHIP ISSUES

How readership is an issue worldwide
- Examples in other countries
- "Eye-track" studies discover how readers see a page
- Using this information to design better pages

WHERE DESIGN STARTS

Thinking of the total page

Thinking of communication issues
- Serving several types of readers
  - Shallow and wide
  - Narrow and deep

Thinking about the elements that make good design
- Stories
- Headlines
- Photos
- Graphics
- Color

Afternoon / Start at 1 p.m.

HOW DESIGN BRINGS ALL THE ELEMENTS TOGETHER

The goals of the newspaper
- Do they mesh with the needs of the readership?

Content drives design, even at design-driven newspapers

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COLOR IN NEWSPAPERS

Why newspapers are "embracing" color
How a reader "sees" color
Using color to set a "tone"
- √ Color doesn't have to be "loud"
- √ The New York Times is heading toward full-color

INTRODUCTION TO PHOTOGRAPHY

Why photographs matter
The universal language
- To the newspaper
- To the reader

PICTURES ON THE PAGE

We all know pictures matter, but how much
- √ Getting more from images

Words and photos working together
Visual editing
- √ Using cropping to improve images
  - Size isn't everything
  - Too small can "bore" readers

Day Two
Start at 11:30 a.m.

THE "BIG STORY"

How newspapers cover big stories
- √ Learning from major events
- √ Using for everyday events

Tips and tricks
- √ Effective photo use
- √ Effective graphic use
  - Making it work for the reader

INFO GRAPHICS

Understanding the various types of info graphics
Understanding maps
- √ The various examples

Understanding charts
- √ The various functional forms

Understanding diagrams
- √ The various functional forms
  - • Diagrams and schematics

Making graphics easy to read
Why *info* is the most part of an infographic
- √ Empty graphics
- √ Zero-base problems
- √ Time-shifting problems

Graphics that shouldn't be graphics

Day Three / Start at 11:30 a.m.

COMPETITION

A look at the Eastern Express
- What are they doing correctly?
- What can the SCMP learn from this competitor?

NEWSPAPERS AND THEIR "DIGITAL FUTURE" (TENTATIVE)

How newspapers are getting on the information highway
- The impact of pagination
- The new types of delivery
- A summary of the "techno-landscape"
  - Fax
  - Audio
  - On-line services

What is the competition today?
- A new type of newsroom and a new type of journalist
  - • Reporting isn't just gathering
  - • The role of editing

CRITIQUES

Using South China Morning Post examples
- Design and typography
- Infographics
- Picture use

FINAL DISCUSSION

The role of newspaper visuals

For as long as newspapers have cared about their appearance, visual editors in the newsroom have had to walk a very thin line between the form of their design and the function of presenting the daily news report.

As technology changes the nature of the newspapers and editors gain more and more control of the finished product, visual judgments will become even more critical. The select group of editors who produce the newspaper will need to be visually sensitive and journalistically aware.

Artists heretofore seen only as sources of graphics or illustrations will take on more valuable roles in planning the look of the product. Designers, once seen as packagers of feature sections only, will play an increasingly important function as the conductors of all the elements on the front page.

Newspapers will strive to build a visual team of artists, graphics coordinators and picture editors who can design a functional newspaper. Some members of this visual team can be absorbed into the page production process, others can be planners and idea people, and others will train and advise news editors on what will work best visually.

Computers will allow the production stage of the newspaper to be done by fewer editors. But those editors must have a wide range of news judgment, visual, and administrative skills to shape the product so that the maximum number of readers get the message.

Walls will be torn down, as designers start to make the same kinds of contributions that any of the paper's editors make. And they will begin to be involved from the very start of the news operation — the planning.

As editors who are concerned with words plan their daily use of manpower and space, so will the visual editors plan the most effective presentation of the day's report. This will mean working with all departments of the newspaper to help create the ***total*** paper. Even the ad-makeup staff will come to recognize the value of a visual editor being concerned about the total page.

Good designers know that their primary function is to convey information with clarity and credibility. Therefore, the clearest message is usually the one that is the easiest and the most inviting to read, hence the element of attractiveness or visual appeal is of paramount consideration.

Most progressive newspapers allow the designer to assume an active role in the overall look of the newspaper. In many cases, the designer draws the blueprint of how the newspaper should look, and then leaves the daily

building of the paper to others.

This is especially true in the news/sports/business sections of the newspaper. Even in the feature sections, the front cover is designed and then this "shell" turned over to a journalist who lays out the inside of the section. Often the inside pages are "built" without a clear understanding of how to design a functional newspaper page.

A more modern approach is to make the designer an integral part of the newsroom team. A designer is a journalist who has developed a sensitivity to visual relationships. Newspapers are at a fork in the road on the issue of how to use designers most effectively. That fork is called computer technology, with all its opportunities for different uses of manpower.

While it is possible to have a computer memory bank full of attractive designs — plug in elements, manipulate type, push a button and out comes a "well designed" newspaper page. These "well designed" pages could make newspapers look the same around the world. Such a system would allow for the "cookie cutter" approach to design without any real understanding of how to use this very powerful tool of communication.

A more effective approach would be to allow highly skilled visual journalists the opportunity to create new and interesting pages regardless of their background or title within the newsroom structure. This technology will free up editors without visual skills to make assignments, plan coverage and make judgments on story placement. Each function plays a vital role within the newsroom, each adding to the overall mission of communicating information to the readers.

The importance of readership studies

Readers are the critical part of the design process. To find out what the readers want newspapers conduct readership studies, which can tell them everything from what typefaces are the most pleasing to which pages in the newspaper are the most popular. The studies are especially important to determine how to package the newspaper more effectively.

Most readers have a personal relationship with their newspaper, and when it changes, they may not like what they see. Editors and managers involved in redesign must be ready for roses and thorns.

Readership surveys can answer such questions as: Do you want more or less local news? More photographs? More color? Longer stories? Shorter stories? Different typeface? Bigger headlines?

Here is a sampling of what readership studies have found:

- Readers want consistency

Many people read a newspaper by habit and they want their favorite features in the same place each day. They also want a newspaper to follow a certain structure. They want the top stories of the day on Page One, with the biggest headlines on the most important stories. A consistent of placement of stories or features gives the paper an image of reliability.

- Readers want organization

They look for groupings and packages of information. These groupings should provide order and structure to the presentation of the news. References to stories elsewhere in the paper are important reading aids.

- Readers don't necessarily read Page One first

The sports section often is the first place some readers go. The comics page, editorial page and local news pages come in first with other readers. Responses such as these mean that attention must be paid to the design of every page and every element in the newspaper because any section front or any inside page might be

the entry point of the day for the reader.

- Advertisements are important to newspaper readers

What is on sale is valuable news to the reader, too. How editorial matter is positioned with advertisements is an important design decision. Readers don't want to confuse advertising matter with news stories because of an ambiguous layout. However, readers can tell the difference between the two and understand the unique role that advertising has within the newspaper. Most readers would not buy a newspaper without advertising. Advertising material is seen as valuable information.

In short, such studies have shown that readers want a paper that is easy to read and easy to follow, a paper that meets their need to know.

Avoiding gray pages

When packaging major and often lengthy stories, care must be taken to make their display as lively and interesting as possible for the reader.

Long stories, perhaps because of space limitations, often are presented as large, unbroken blocks of type. Such editing may get all the important information in the story on to the page, but the display of the story accentuates the normal grayness of the page and makes the story — and the page — less appealing visually to the reader.

The visual journalist can enhance the readership and the readability of such stories by visually emphasizing the story's information through a combination of horizontal and vertical modules of type, photographs and graphics.

Sometimes, the visual journalist can suggest that parts of a long story be trimmed out and used as sidebars. The more visual elements in a major package, the more interesting the page will appear to the reader.

Instead of publishing one 70 -inch story, the visual journalist will work with reporters or wire editors to develop a 40-inch main story and three sidebars, each 10 inches long. In this way, the reader can select those elements of the presentation that he or she is interested in reading.

Adding points of entry

The following treatments are effective tools for engaging the attention of a growing percentage of readers who do not spend much time with the newspaper. These readers quickly "scan" through the paper looking for items on a page that interest them. While photographs and graphics can be used to break up lengthy stories, there are several other devices that the visual journalist can employ:

- **Subheads.** In long stories these "mini-headlines" can provide new points of entry to a reader who doesn't have enough time to read the entire story.
- **A highlights box.** Also called a key points box, this device summarizes the major points in the story.
- **Quotes.** Interesting comments of key people in the story can be reset in larger type sizes.
- **A series highlights box**. If the story is part of a series, a box can highlight other parts of the series.
- **Background boxes.** These contain background information to help the reader understand what is being discussed in the story or to identify key people in the story.

The more visual elements on the page — headlines, subheads, labels, boxes, photographs, — the greater the chance that your newspaper will be able to invite more readers into a story to find information that is of interest to them. While newspapers will never give up the long story, they must realize that solid blocks of type do not invite the reader to invest his or her time and effort to stay informed.

Thoughts about newspaper design

Changing the design of a newspaper requires a lot of research and consideration. It is more than changing the typeface of the stories and headlines. It requires careful thought about the relationship your business has with its community of readers and advertisers. The look of the paper, its organization, its editorial tone all have an impact that relationship. And they are reflections of the basic philosophical approach that your newspaper takes to disseminating the news.

Know the market

Knowledge of the market is essential. Many of the demographic factors of the market will determine the approach to take. Consider the average age, income, status (white-collar households versus blue-collar households), etc., in the readership area. The percentage of street sales versus home delivery should be a major influence in the design philosophy.

Determine what share of this market your newspaper currently serves. What type of market penetration does your paper have and why? What type of penetration does your competition have and why? What part of the market does your paper want to reach that it does not already reach?

Match your paper's visual image to its news philosophy

Begin to establish a strategy for your newspaper's graphic design and development .

Create a design philosophy; e.g., upscale, active, conservative.

Begin to work on the component elements of that philosophy. Start with the typography, text, headline and display.

Get involved in the flow of news through the paper. How can you help graphically, to organize, separate, segregate, isolate and ***direct*** the reader from the front page to the back page.

Create the typographic and graphic elements for the newspaper. These are much like furniture: The same furniture rearranged in the same room can make the room look different.

Get involved in production and quality control. The best design can look terrible with poor reproduction.

The paper's design and its elements must be functional. If one or two elements don't function, get rid of them

and try something else.

Never settle for the first design of an element, graphic or page during the design process. Try a number of alternatives. When you finish something, put it down and leave it for a day or two. Come back and re-evaluate it. It can always be done better.

And remember, one of the best guides in design is common sense.

Checklist for a well-designed page

1 Is the page reader-friendly? Will a reader spend time with the page or quickly skip to the next page or the comics?

2 Does the page reflect the overall style of the newspaper? Even the best designed page that doesn't look like it belongs in your newspaper can make the reader uneasy. Be consistent.

3 Does the page reflect "sound" news judgment? Making a "better design" at the expense of news play is foolish. Readers are more sophisticated than we generally give them credit.

4 Does the page have a dominant art element? Dominant art elements do not always need to be photographs. A typographically pleasing headline can be the dominant element. So can an informational graphic.

5 Are the photographs correctly sized and cropped? Don't waste space with a poorly cropped photograph played large.

6 Do the stories that need highlight boxes, maps, graphics or even fact boxes have them? Have you made the "job" of the reader easier with your design?

7 Do the headlines have enough space for the writers to accurately do their job? Most readers get most of their news via headlines and "deck" headlines. A design that doesn't reflect that fact, doesn't serve the needs of the reader.

8 Are the captions correctly written and do they explain not only what's in the photo but the essential nature of the story? Most readers will read a caption before they read the story. A good caption can serve as a "hook" to the story.

9 Do the color used in the design reflect the tone of the story and page? A serious story should not look like a light-hearted feature presentation.

10 Where all deadlines met? A well-designed paper that is late does not serve anyone except the merchant who needs it to wrap fish.

Tips for better feature design

1 Explore multiple ideas. Try to work on several different formats.

2 Avoid the obvious. Readers are much smarter than we sometimes give them credit. Instead of using the predictable illustration, typography or design, search for a solution that you have never seen before — one that breaks the rules. Don't always rely on the old tried and true.

3 Understand the content of the story before starting on the page design. Think about what the design will say to the reader before the lede is even read.

4 Bridge the gap between the "word" side and the "visual" side of journalism. Both are vital. Design needs to be treated as an equal partner.

5 Get a working headline. This sounds like a simple thing, but you must have at least a phrase or key words that will tell what the story is about in a nutshell.

6 Read, read and read even more. Study magazines, television, advertisements. Never stop looking for fresh ideas.

Guidelines for handling color

The use of color never should make it more difficult for a reader to see, read or understand printed material. Visual journalists need to understand color to use it effectively.

For example, some colors, such as red, have important psychological meanings. Red conveys messages of "hot" or "danger" and it is exciting. Blue, on the other hand, is associated with messages about "ice" or "cold" and it has a more calming effect than red. Examples of the effect color has on emotions can be seen in places such as a dental clinic, where gradations of blue are used on the walls to ease patients' fears, or the walls of a fast food chain, which are painted orange to stimulate the appetite. Understanding the relationship of color to emotions can greatly improve the use of color in the newspaper.

An example of the improper use of color would be the use of blue and green in a graphic about fireworks. More appropriate colors would be red and orange — "hot" and "exciting" colors.

Sometimes, a newspaper will use color to help project an image. By limiting the use of certain colors, the paper can imply to its readers that it is a "calm" or an "exciting" publication.

Pleasant-looking colors, such as a combination of light red and light yellow to produce sand or a combination of blue and red, should be used. Readers should not be shaken with odd or unusual combinations of color unless the story specifically calls for them (punk hairdos, for example).

When color elements are combined—such as photographs and illustration with color type — the visual journalist needs to be aware of what the primary colors are in each element. Sometimes the most attractive pages are created by picking up a color from a photograph or illustration and repeating it on the page in a color screen. A color that is in the primary piece of art or a complementary color also may be used.

Care should be taken to ensure good quality in color photographs. A picture should not be used simply because it is in color. A bad color photograph will detract from the viewing of good ones on the page.

In a speech to the American Newspaper Publishers Association, Craig C. Standen, president of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau in New York, said three factors contribute to the effective use of color:

√ rigorous standards
√ proper training of editorial and production people
√ a commitment from the publisher to produce quality color

More than anything else in a newspaper's production cycle, color requires attention to many details. By paying attention to even the smallest of those details, a visual journalist can create pleasing color pages.

Checklist for better color

❑ In producing color halftones for letterpress, a 65-line screen is recommended. For offset, an 85-line screen is recommended. If the halftone is to be used by both letterpress and offset newspapers, the 65-line screen should be used.

❑ Check transparencies carefully for accurate rendition of "memory colors" such as fleshtones/ food colors, sky and the greens of grass or leaves.

❑ Check transparencies for color cast. A minor color cast often can be eliminated in the separation process.

❑ Make sure colors in the transparency are neither faded (overexposed) nor too dark (underexposed).

❑ Make sure that details are clearly visible in both highlight and shadow areas of original photographs. Avoid transparencies with heavy shadows.

❑ Be prepared for differences between the proof and the final printed product. A color proof is often brighter and sharper than the illustration in the newspaper.

❑ Avoid small areas of color scattered throughout the page or advertisement.

❑ Use artwork with opaque colors. If transparent colors are used, make sure they are sufficiently dark to provide a distinct tone difference between color and paper stock.

❑ Make sure there is sufficient color definition between subject and background photographs.

❑ Avoid type with thin strokes (less than .005 inch), fine serifs, and combinations of thick and thin strokes. It will reproduce poorly

❑ When overprinting type, the value of the lettering should be strong enough to provide adequate contrast with the background.

❑ In overprinting, ink coverage should never exceed a total of 260% for all colors. If one color is a solid, hold ink coverage to a maximum of 240%.

❑ Headlines should be designed to print in no more than two colors of ink.

❑ Avoid calling for more than one color of ink on thin lines, underlines and reverse lettering. The thin lines tend to fill in or they disappear.

❑ Reverse type should be large enough and heavy enough so that it will not fill. Ten-point type is the minimum type size if the background is to be one color. Sans serif bold type is recommended.

❑ When type or lettering is part of a halftone, it should be shot as a line shot and double burned into the halftone.

❑ Color proofs should carry solid color bars for each color of ink used.

❑ Undesirable moiré patterns can be caused by improper screen angles in color separations. The recommended angles are: black-45 degrees, magenta-75 degrees, yellow—90 degrees, and cyan-105 degrees. These angles may vary depending on the system used.

Effective use of informational graphics

Often the biggest obstacle to effective informational graphic use is the decision of which type of graphic is best for presenting the information gathered. The following is a list of suggestions as to when to use the different types of informational graphics. It also includes tips on their most effective use.

Tables or lists

Effective when:

☛ Presenting specific, accurate information. For example, an effective list is the daily stock market tables and the weather page tables. Each has specific information that readers are interested in.

☛ Comparing two or more items for a number of topics, such as school districts' dress codes in a community, etc.

Tips on use

❑ When using lists showing local, national, international information, highlight the specific area of interest to your readers, such as your country or region.

❑ An alphabetical list is the easiest for readers to locate specific information of interest.

Intel's expansion checklist

	Government incentives and permits sought	Governing agency	Status
✓	$22 million water treatment plant	Chandler	Approved
✓	5.5 million gallon/day water supply	Chandler	Approved
✓	Property rezoning	Chandler	Approved
✓	Air quality legislation	Arizona Legislature	Approved
	Foreign trade zone ($50 million property tax cut)	U.S. Commerce Dept.	Pending
	$20 million in state sales tax exemptions	Arizona Legislature	Pending
	Air quality permit	Maricopa County	Pending
	Water treatment plant permit	Arizona DEQ	Pending
	Effluent refuse permit	Arizona DEQ	Pending
	Aquifer protection permit	Arizona DWR	Pending

Source: Intel

DOW INDUSTRIAL

The Dow takes it's largest plunge since October, 1987.

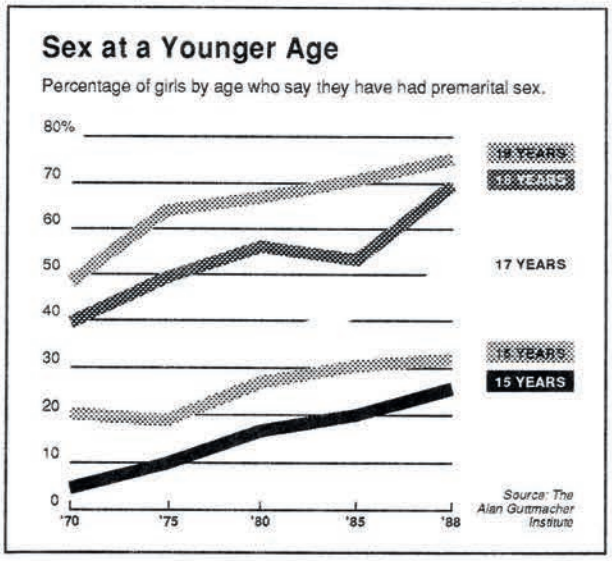
Biggest point losses

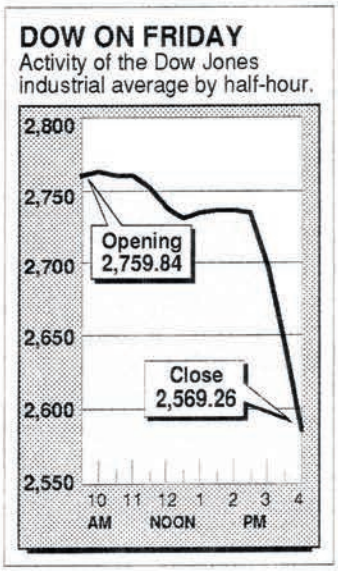
Date	Loss	Close
Oct. 19, 1987	508.00	1,738.74
Oct. 13, 1989	**190.58**	**2,569.26**
Oct. 26, 1987	156.83	1,793.93
Jan. 8, 1988	140.58	1,911.31
Oct. 16, 1987	108.35	2,246.74
April 14, 1988	101.46	2,005.64
Oct. 14, 1987	95.46	2,412.70
Oct. 6, 1987	91.55	2,548.63
Sept. 11, 1986	86.61	1,792.89

Source: Arizona Republic financial news

The Arizona Republic

❑ Use rules, light screens or white space to break long lists into readable amounts; such devices help readers follow the multi-column information across a chart. Avoid big gaps between multiple columns, because they make it harder for readers to read across columns which can cover one-half to a full page.





Line/fever charts

Effective when:

☛ Covering a significant period of time, i.e. a number of years, months, days, hours, etc. Although it is possible to portray a large amount of data in a column (vertical bars) chart, a line chart (or a rectilinear coordinated chart, as it is known in the statistics community) is the most effective use of space.

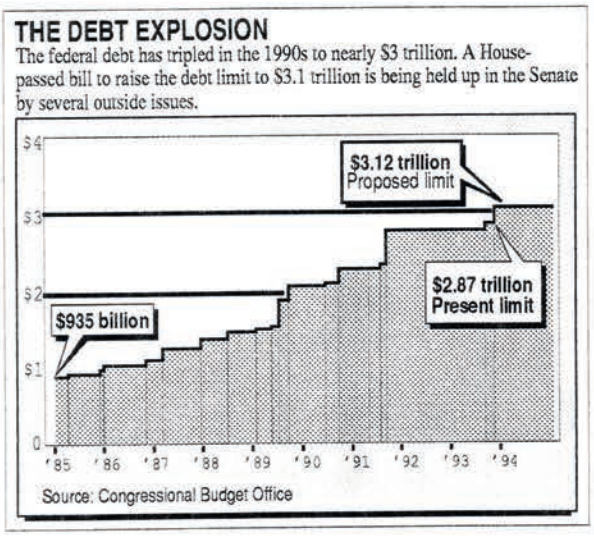
☛ Emphasizing movement rather than the actual numeric values.

☛ Showing a projection, estimate or forecast, such as population growth. It is more graphically or visually accurate to show a dotted line coming off a solid line to indicate of a forecast than to show columns or bars of the same information. The columns or bars of the forecast data would not appear different enough and hence

would not alert the reader as quickly as possible that the data are different.

☛ The data are a step or staircase presentation, such as the Prime Rate or the Federal Discount Rate. Such presentations are used to show abrupt fluctuations in data, the steepness of a trend. Such data would be viewed less accurately if done as a line or curve chart, because the information would be rounded or smoothed.

☛ The data are comparing monthly or seasonal data of an item, such as auto sales, with data of a previous period. Line charts are more accurate in reflecting seasonal changes and comparing like periods with each other.



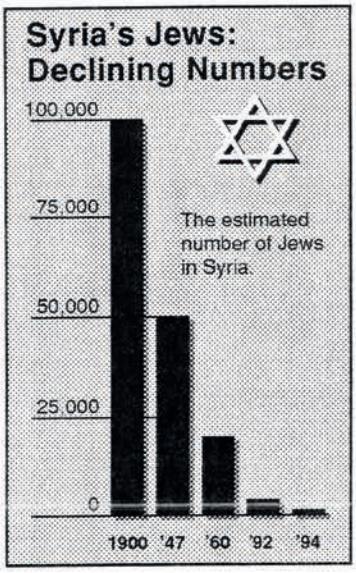
Vertical bar charts

Effective when:

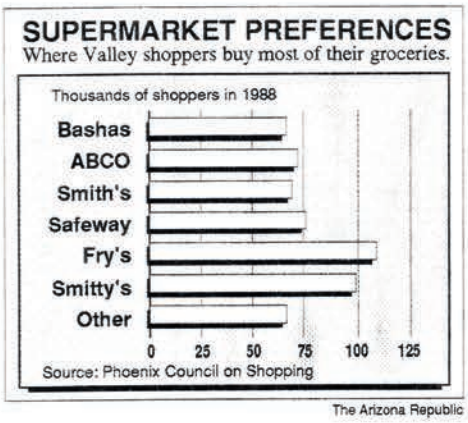
☛ Depicting numerical values of a given item over a period of time. These charts accent the individual points of the data, rather than a trend or movement.

☛ Presenting data in volume where there are missing or irregular time periods, i.e., 1965,1975,1986, 1987, 1988 (1988 being the latest date information is available).

☛ Plotting deviations from the norm, i.e. percent chart figures which can go either in the plus quadrant (I) or the minus quadrant (IV).



Horizontal bar charts



Effective when:

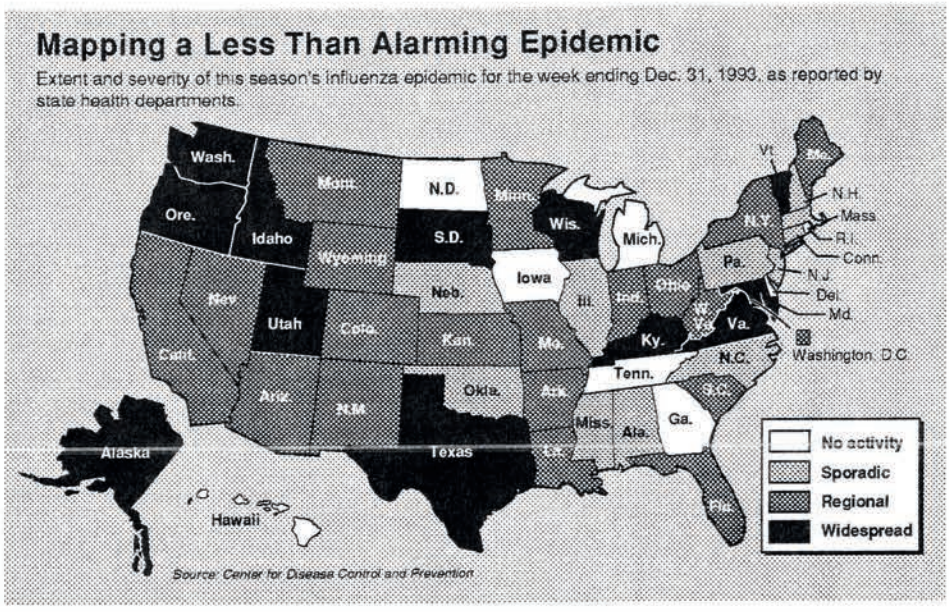
☛ Showing different items that originate from a common base line. For example, a breakdown of Society of Newspaper Design members by income or which supermarket consumers prefer.

Tips on use:

❑ A grouping of horizontal bars, with a legend, can be used to make comparisons of like items at different time periods.

❑ A decision must be made on whether the data should be arranged numerically, alphabetically, chronologically, geographically, etc. When arranging the data numerically, either descending or ascending order is acceptable. An alphabetical arrangement is sometimes used when listing nations or cities, so a reader might quickly compare his or her country or area with others.

Map graphics



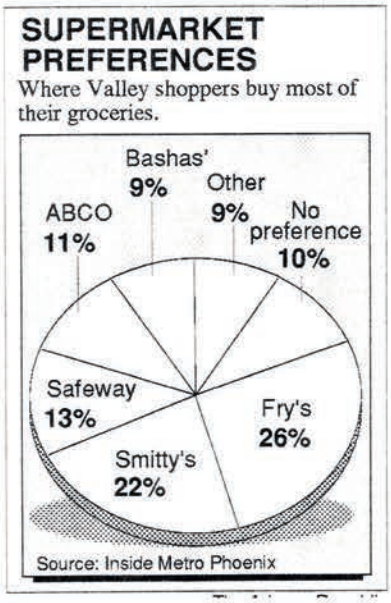
Effective when:

☛ Presenting data that is simple and best suited for showing patterns of distributions.

Tips on use:

❑ Keep the number of tones, shadings or colors to a minimum. The legend should run from either white to black or vice versa. White generally is perceived as less or low and black as high. White is also

generally used as a positive; black as a negative or loss.



Pie charts

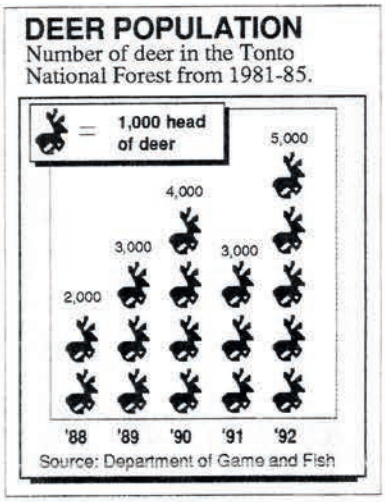
Effective when:

☛ Making a comparison of segments and/or showing relationships to the whole.

☛ Showing a change in the mood of a group or community over a period of time in several different categories.

Tips on use:

❑ When comparing two or more pie charts, shadings, colors, etc., should be consistent. Keep the labels in the same position in all the charts.



Pictograph

☛ This is a style of presentation uses drawings or pictures to represent numerical data. The pictograph images must be easily identified so a reader can quickly follow the information being presented.

Tips on use:

❑ Use a symbol that can be a unit of measure. Design it in such a manner so it can be recognized when divided. It is best not to divide a symbol into a measure less than a quarter of the whole image.

❑ Put statistical data with a pictograph symbol to ensure accurate comparisons.

❑ When showing symbols in various heights, remember the information must be calculated on a volume, or three-dimensional basis. Making a symbol larger, without taking into account the overall volume, is misleading.

Editing the information

Once the information for graphic has been gathered and turned over to an editor or coordinator, it should go through the same editing process that a news story goes through. The graphics editor must ask:

❑ Does the story contain information that can be communicated more effectively in images rather than words? If so,

❑ Is there enough informational to make a graphic, or should the data be part of the story only?

❑ Is this graphic needed only to add visual relief to the page?

❑ Is the information complete? Are there missing years or explanations?

❑ Is the information clear enough so an artist can create a graphic readers will easily understand?

If there are "holes" in the information, the graphics editor should work with the reporter or story editor to fill them. Incomplete information in a graphic can be much more visible, and embarrassing, than incomplete information in a story.

The graphics editor must look at the information for a graphic in much the same way readers might see it when they open the paper. It is safe to assume that readers don't bring any background or inside understanding of a graphic before they look at it. Therefore, what is understood or apparent to the reporter or even the graphics editor might not be so clear to the reader.

When the artist is finished with the graphic, the graphics editor should check it for accuracy. He or she also should examine the graphic's overall visual impact. While there shouldn't be any change in the approach of the graphic if the artist and the graphics editor communicated direction earlier, it is still a good practice to double-check.

Here is another chance for the graphics editor to look at the material as a reader, as well as an editor. The graphic must make sense, it must stand on its own merits. Few graphics should need a story as support; each one should tell its own story with its own headline. It should communicate information clearly.

In addition to checking the "concept," the graphics editor must do "fact" checking. The spelling of each word needs to be checked. And there's much more:

❑ Are all of the months in a chart in the correct order?

❑ Are the oceans labeled properly in a map (the Pacific and Atlantic sometimes get flopped).

❑ Do all of the figures add up? Sometimes, errors are caught when addition or subtraction is double-checked.

❑ Is the chronology correct?

❑ Does information in the graphic agree with the facts presented in the story? For example, if a graphic shows the number of people injured in accidents, the story should use the same numbers.

In other words, even the little things should not be overlooked. If any element is incorrect in an informational graphic, the entire device is called into question. That hurts the credibility of the graphic and the newspaper.

Even the reporter can help check the information. It is generally a good practice to give the reporter a copy of the graphic. The editor working on the story also should have a copy of the graphic as the story is being edited. Both the reporter and editor can provide additional sets of eyes for the graphic and can help prevent errors.

Do readers really read infographics?

The question about informational graphics that keeps coming to editors is this: Do readers attend to informational graphics before or after they read the traditional headline and body text? A study by Steve Pasternack and Sandra H. Utt* concluded the following:

Results suggest that readers turn to the graphs and charts for both content-based and appearance-related reasons. Perhaps the reason depends on the tastes of the individual reader, or perhaps it is based on the dominant status of the graphics device.

For example, 70 percent of subjects in the study read the large, dominant informational graphic before they read the headline/text, while the smaller, less ostensible graphic was generally read after the headline and text. In addition to size and splashiness, the location, as it relates to the story, may also help determine if the infographic is read before or after the story.

In this study the large and dominant graphic was atop its accompanying headline/text, while the smaller, non-dominant graphic was embedded in the body text. Certainly, a large, colorful graphic attracts the eye, but results suggest that subjects went to the informational graphics mainly for content related reasons. In the case of the large, dominant infographic, 55 percent used it as a springboard into the article, read it because they felt it would be easier to capture the gist of the story content from the infographic, or felt that if they read the informational graphic, they could avoid the article altogether.

Those who read the dominant graphic after the headline/text did so principally to expand upon what they already had read. Others indicated they read the headline/text first out of habit — they always go first to a headline. Large dominant graphics are being used by many newspapers in the same way that they use large stand-alone photographs — as a design element to attract readers into the page. Graphics, therefore, could become as useful as photographs. Not only do they tell or complement a news or feature story, they also serve as an element of design and in doing so, take on a more important function than just adding more words and lines to the page. For the smaller graphic device, which most readers went to after reading the story and headline, a majority read the chart for content-related reasons.

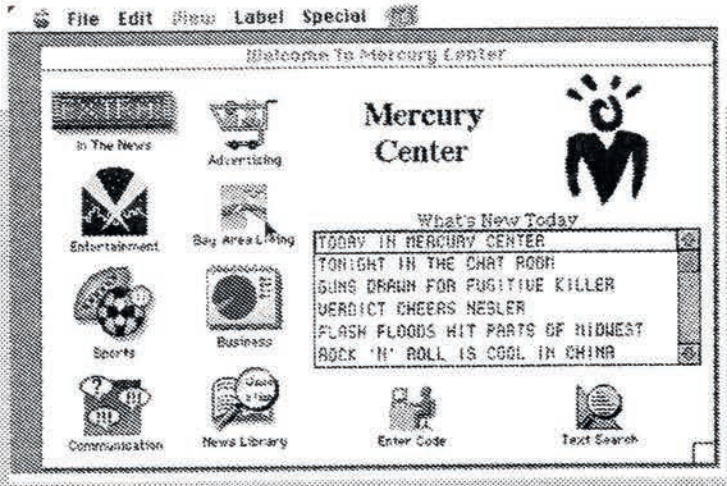
Clearly, the results indicate that there may be a need to emphasize the "info" in infographics. Based on the data here, readers expect charts and other graphic devices to fulfill an information gathering need. Perhaps they assume color and attractiveness as a given. For editors and graphic artists, the first burden is to make graphs understandable. Obviously, information gain cannot occur if reader cannot grasp the graphic device.

Perhaps editors should view the informational graphic as "icing on the cake" — additional detail that normally would be found in the latter portion of an article rather than in the lede. Readers who want the additional information can peruse the infographic to obtain it.

* Steve Pasternack and Sandra H. Utt. "Reader Use & Understanding of Newspaper Infographics." Newspaper Research Journal. Spring 1990.

From the Pages To the PC Screen

The "electronic newspaper" that has been talked about for years is here. All over the country, newspapers are going "on-line" with services accessible to PC users. At right is a screen from The San Jose Mercury News Mercury Center viewed on an Apple Macintosh computer. Here are some of the other dailies in the rapidly expanding market of on-line news services.

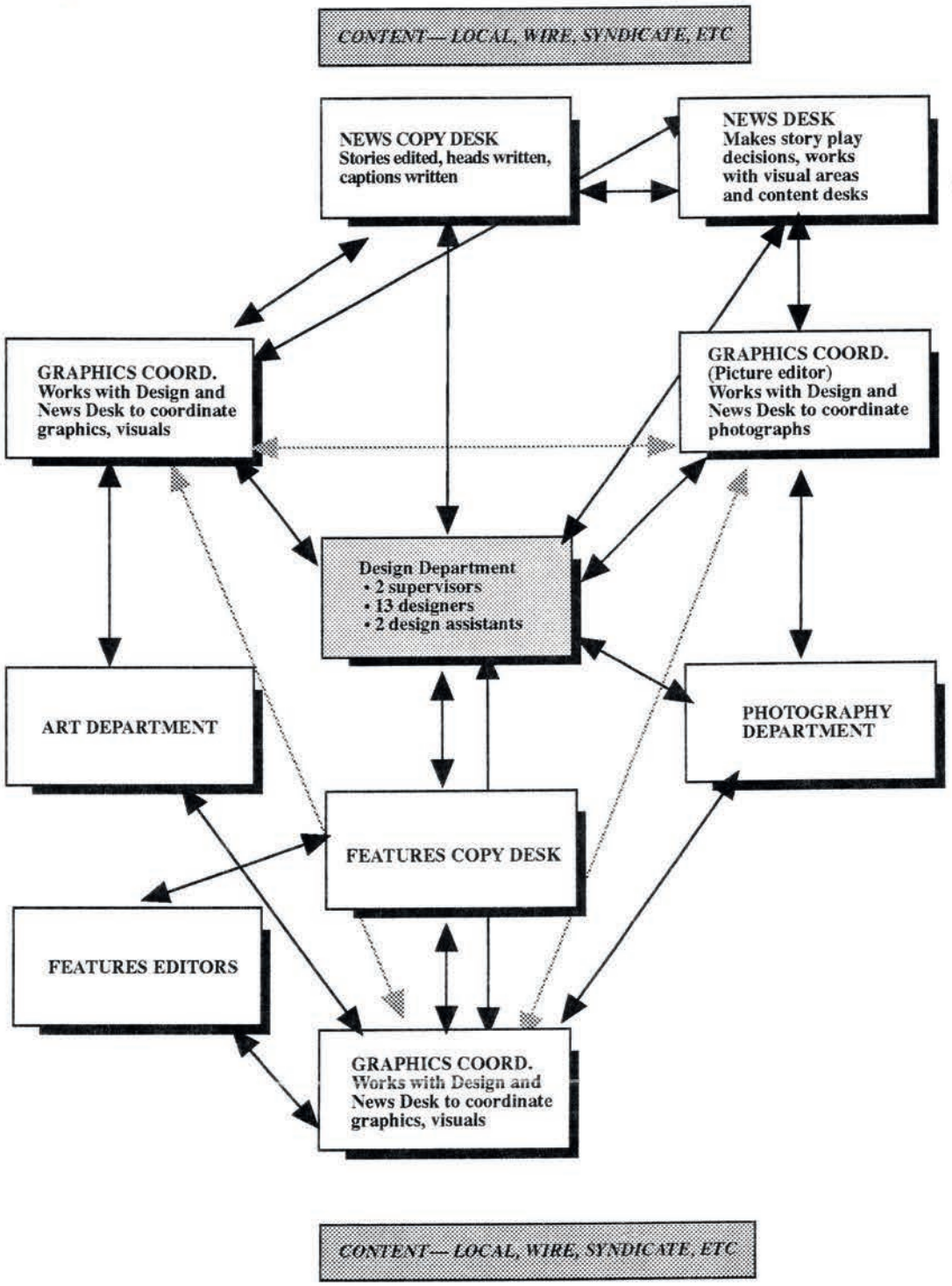


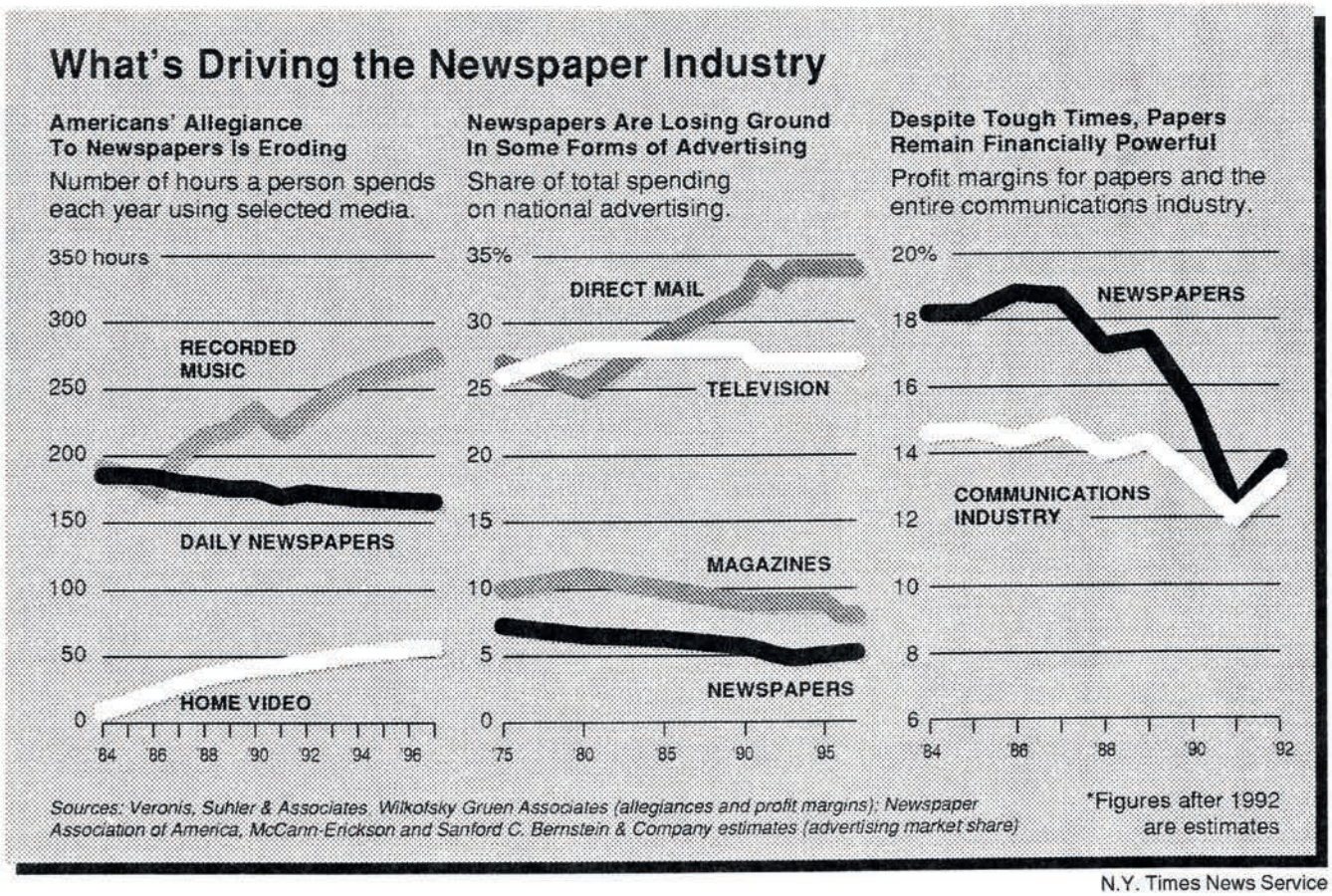
NEWSPAPER	ON-LINE SERVICE	DATE BEGUN	BASIC COST TO USER*
The Fort Worth Star-Telegram	StarText	1982	$9.95 monthly
The Middlesex (Mass.) News	Fred the Computer	1987	Free
The Albuquerque (N.M.) Tribune	Electronic Trib	1990	Free with password published each day in newspaper
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	Post-Link	1992	$9.95 monthly
The Spokesman-Review (Spokane, Wash.)	S-R Minerva	1992†	Free
The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer	Connect:>\Observer	1992	Free
The Chicago Tribune	Chicago Online via America Online	1992	$7.95 monthly
Florida Today	Florida Today Forum via Compuserve	Feb. 1993	$8.95 monthly plus hourly charge
The San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News	Mercury Center Online via America Online	May 1993	$9.95 monthly
The Atlanta Journal and Constitution	(via Prodigy)	Late 1993†	Expected to be about $6.95 monthly
The Palm Beach (Fla.) Post	(via Prodigy)	Late 1993	Monthly fee to be determined
The Los Angeles Times	(via Prodigy)	Early 1994	Monthly fee to be determined
New York and Long Island Newsday	(via Prodigy)	Early 1994†	Monthly fee to be determined

Sources: Newspaper Association of America, industry sources

*Additional charges incurred with extended use.
†These on-line services replaced earlier efforts by the same newspapers.

Design workflow — an example





N.Y. Times News Service