

Infographics

Using the visual capabilities of Microsoft Excel

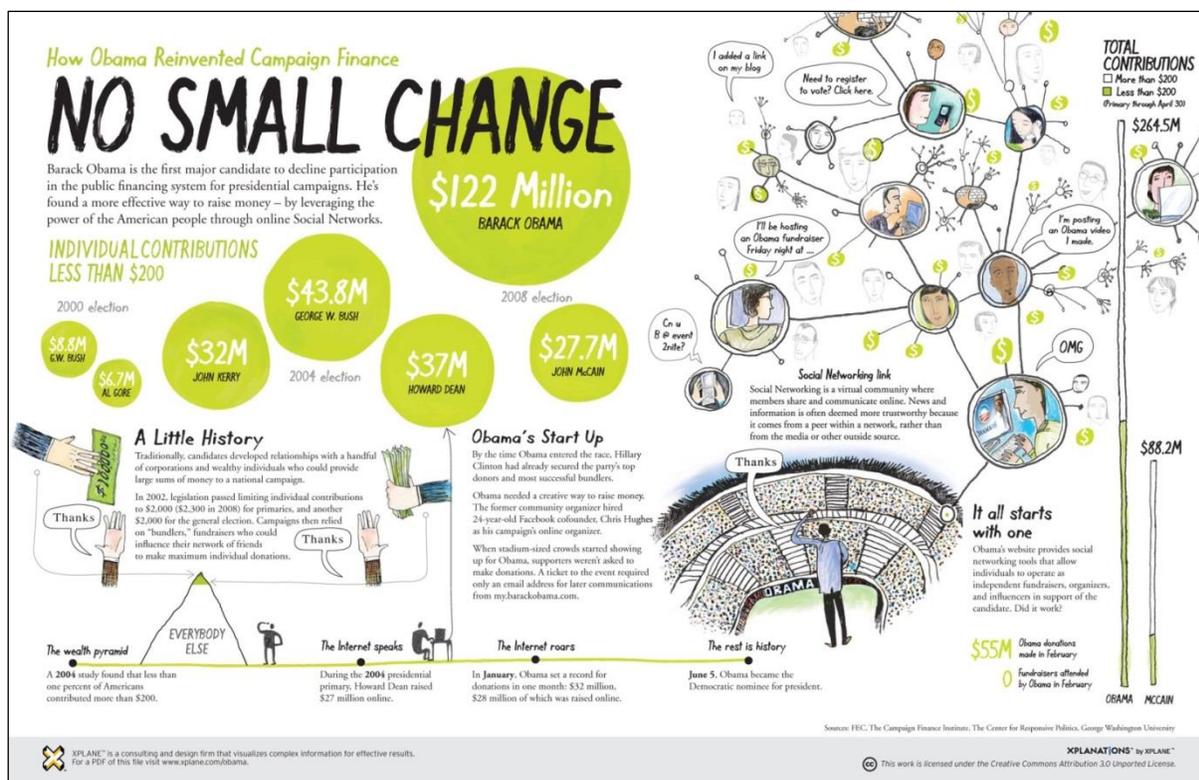
Microsoft Excel is an excellent tool to conduct data analysis. Most business professionals have had some exposure to Excel, and at a minimum, have used it for some level of data analysis. Excel can make it easy to review, analyze, and present data to support key messages. However, some skill is required to take raw data and make it specific, relevant, and appropriate for your audience. The majority of people are visual, rather than auditory or kinesthetic. This means they would prefer to have a visual representation using pictures, charts, and graphical images to “tell the story” of that data. It’s important to remember that the power of data doesn’t lie in the data itself – it’s in how you interpret and display the data. So how do we do that in Excel? Using infographics.

What is an infographic or information graphic?

As defined by Wikipedia, infographics (or visual graphics) are visual representations of information, data or knowledge. These graphics are used where complex information needs to be explained clearly and quickly, such as in signs, maps, newspapers, technical writing, and education. They are also commonly used by computer scientists, mathematicians, and statisticians to simplify the process of developing and communicating conceptual information. Modern infographics can be classified in two categories – info-diagram (process-flow, roadmap etc.) and data visualization.

When did infographics become popular?

Infographics were inspired by American statistician Edward Tufte and The Sunday Times writer Peter Sullivan in the 1970’s, 80’s, and 90’s. Sullivan encouraged newspapers to use more images, which helped readers understand complex messages. In October 2008, a company called XPLANE launched the Obama campaign finance infographic (shown below), and ever since the internet has been packed with creative infographics. Topics range from business and sports, entertainment and politics.



Infographics for business

For marketing complex solutions or conveying technical data to a non-technical audience, infographics can be highly useful. According to 'Artist with an MBA', Cliff Atkinson, designed and used properly, infographics can:

- Help a prospective client understand a concept quickly.
- Show respect for the viewer's visual sophistication.
- Serve as an elegant visual interface to your quality content.
- Motivate readers to dive into the text to find out more.
- Show you care to craft a compelling visual story out of your content, rather than use a cookie cutter approach.

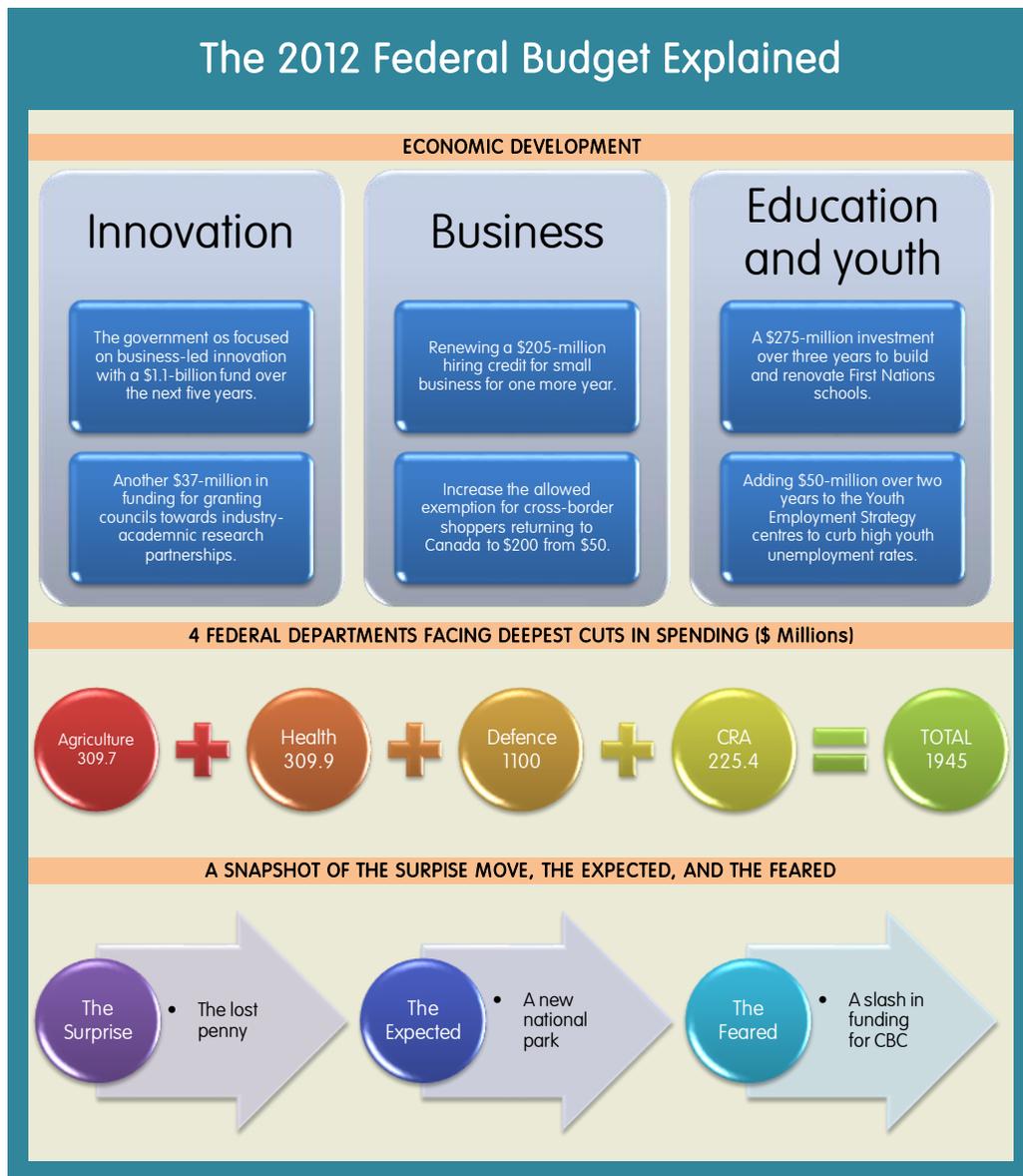
Using Excel to create infographics

Although most infographics are created by graphic designers with years of design experience, anyone with basic Excel knowledge and a little creativity can create an attractive infographic. The image below shows an infographic created in Excel outlining the 2012 Canadian federal budget. With Excel 2007/10, you can use basic shapes or SmartArt graphics to create a visual representation of your information quickly and easily, choosing from among many different layouts, to effectively communicate your message or ideas. There are many shapes available organized into several categories including: lines, rectangles, basic

shapes, block arrows, equation shapes, flow chart, stars and banners and call outs. Just like formatting cells, you can format the shapes that you add to your spreadsheet. The various options include fill, line color, line style, shadow, 3-D format, and 3-D rotation, just to name a few.

If you are just looking for a quick and easy way to represent a list, process, cycle, hierarchy, relationship, matrix or pyramid of your data, SmartArt allows the customization that the basic shapes offer, while providing an easy text pane to enter the data to corresponding shapes on the SmartArt graphic.

An advantage of building an infographic in Excel is the ability to link images to cells, providing the ability for the data in the infographic to automatically update as the spreadsheet changes. Start with a blank worksheet, determine the data you want to convey, and build the shapes, colours, and fonts using Excel's built-in tools.



7 Tips for creating successful infographics

Succinctness: The main goal of an infographic is to answer a specific question or problem. Answer the question or problem concisely to keep the graphic simple.

Creativity: Creativity is what makes an infographic different than a simple chart. Explore the design tools offered by Excel to make the infographic stand out.

Visualization: Use shapes, charts, and diagrams to help visualize the data. Keep the “info” in the infographic the main focus.

Organization: Ensure that data used for the infographic is relevant, precise and well-organized. There should be a logical flow to the images in the infographic.

Transparency: Infographics can be subjective to the reader. Always cite information sources and don't hide data within the graphics.

Accuracy: Be accurate when designing an infographic. Avoid using sizes and shapes that skew the relationship and scale of the raw data.

Relevance: Use a style and look that matches the infographic. Choose a design that's appropriate and reflects the topic.

If you want to try to create more complex infographics than what Excel can offer, here are 9 Powerful Free Infographic tools to try:



piktochart.com



visual.ly



charts.hohli.com



infogr.am



extra.amcharts.com



wordle.net



code.google.com



iconarchive.com



pixlr.com

Want more information about creating infographics in Excel? Looking for Excel training? Contact DHE Consulting as shown below.

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