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Creating beautiful infographics for marketing the arts

This guide will give you ideas and advice on planning, commissioning and producing your own data charts and infographics. It was originally published on the [AMA blog](#) in January 2013.

We love infographics. They're a catchy and effective way to convey a visual message, with an added narrative flow. With web tools speeding up the production and dissemination of content, data visualisation has come a long way since the [days of black and white print](#). Thanks to publications like [Wired](#) and [Wallpaper](#), and social sharing sites like [Visual.ly](#), infographics have become an interesting example of the intersection of medium and message.

Infographics can be downloaded, shared across social networks like Facebook, Pinterest, and Tumblr, and even printed out as posters. First, let's take a look at how arts organisations can use them. An infographic could be used:

- To highlight a season, performance or event
- To give background information or context to an interesting topic
- To break down data about the organisation at public and board presentations

We were recently asked by the [Royal Opera House](#) (ROH) to produce a graphic to illustrate upcoming work in their 2012/13 season. The brief was to condense, in one image, data for both the Royal Opera and the Royal Ballet, keeping a balance between the ROH's traditional visual identity and a modern look.

Our first step was to identify the key messages, and to think about how these could be understood visually. There are many factors to consider here, including design, clarity and visual appeal.

With the surplus of visual information on the internet, a well-thought-out infographic should be able to convey a number of messages whilst looking attractive and clean. The ROH is a large organisation, and there was an incredible amount of data at our disposal. Our job was to navigate this data and select only a subset of stories. With our client's input, we focused on:

- Productions
- Live cinema screenings
- Popular composers and choreographers
- Premieres
- Pricing (40% of tickets under £40)
- Regular artists and visiting companies
- Social networks

Once we had decided on each section, the next step was to think about the design. At this stage we always find it helpful to sketch out some ideas. In order to strike the right balance between dance and opera, we opted for a beautifully-lit picture of the house itself as a background (pictured on the previous page). Illustration and typefaces set the tone of an infographic, so it's very important that they resonate with your target audience. Here, for instance, it made sense to adopt the same typeface routinely used by the ROH in their marketing campaigns (pictured at right).

Simplicity is always best when organising and presenting data. Pie charts, bar charts, Venn diagrams, Tables, Word clouds are all fine, but they shouldn't be thrown together in the same chart. Pick just a few that work – you can see which styles are most popular across the web in the 'Infographic of Infographics'.

The overall look of a chart gives you an additional opportunity to develop the story. For instance, instead of bars and impersonal shapes, we used icons that evoked the art form, such as ballet dancers.

Finally, text and numbers can be used to support the stories; but in charts, think of text as bursts of information rather than long sections.

Adobe Photoshop, Fireworks and Illustrator are fantastic tools to create charts. For those on a very tight budget, consider freeware like GIMP, and in the absence of someone in-house to assist with the graphic design, there is now a selection of user-friendly online tools available, including:

- Visual.ly
- Easel.ly
- Infogr.am
- Wordle
- Piktochart (premium)
- re.vu
- StatSilk

We used a combination of Photoshop and Illustrator. The background photograph was processed in Photoshop with a Gaussian blur filter to make it less sharp. The image was then imported into Illustrator, where text and simple, white shapes were created with the pen tool, with varied levels of opacity creating a contrast between objects (below left).

We sketched some icons, which were scanned into Photoshop, cleaned up, and traced in Illustrator (below right). Alternatively, you could draw the icons from scratch within Illustrator using the pen tool, or buy in vector art from online suppliers like Shutterstock and Vecteezy.
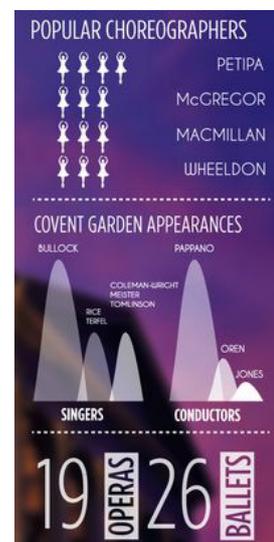
Once it was ready, the completed infographic was exported from Illustrator as a JPEG so it could be posted to the ROH's social networks. You can see it below.

Hopefully this has given you an insight into how an infographic is created. If it has piqued your interest in infographics, or made you want to create your own, here are some further sources of inspiration:

- David McCandless' Information is Beautiful
- Infographics on Pinterest
- Guardian Data blog

Emilia Spitz and *Linda Uruchurtu* work with companies to develop their online voice, producing content, delivering advice and assisting with strategic planning. They can be found at *lumelabs.com* and on Twitter as *@lumelabs*. They also blog at *The Ballet Bag*, a dance webzine named one of the "100 Best Arts Tweeters" by The Times.