



The Plaid Group
PO Box 25247
Houston, Texas 77265-5247
(713) 627-3569
www.plaidgroup.com

A Picture Is Worth ... Well, You Know

Sometimes, The Best Way To Communicate Is With A Visual

By Tim Smith, Principal with The Plaid Group

"If you visualize the end product, work goes easily."

So said my horoscope one morning a few weeks ago. And if you'll pardon the pun, my stars all aligned around those nine simple words. Using pictures to communicate complex objectives and processes is indeed a powerful way to make work go easily.

The reality is that most people learn better visually. It's easier to understand and digest pictures than it is data that arrives via reading or – worse still – listening.

And because of that fact, a picture truly is worth a thousand words.

There are three critical "pictures" that can help you provide context and meaning to your company's communications:

- An organizational chart.
- Enterprise flow diagrams or process maps.
- Charts/graphs of critical performance measurements.

The Good Ol' Org Chart

Some business leaders believe organizational charts are passé – leftover vestiges of the bloated, multi-layered bureaucracies of old. Others found their organizations restructuring so

often, it became impossible to keep track of who worked where!

But an org chart can be a powerful tool, one that adds clarity and definition to reporting relationships, job responsibilities, boundaries and workflow. And org charts are even more important when a company goes through reorganizations and restructurings.

Imagine a house that has been added onto over time with no help from an architect. You end up with something very difficult to navigate – walking through the bedroom closet to get to the dining room! That's what many businesses have become as they've morphed over time, and there's no visual representation of the structure as it currently exists.

If your company doesn't have a current organizational chart, create one. And distribute copies to all employees, along with a performance expectations document that clearly details each department's responsibilities. You'll find that employees will have a much better understanding of who does what.

So THAT'S How It Works!

An enterprise flow diagram – also known as a process map – is simply a visual representation of how work moves through a company, from

person to person, department to department, to produce a specific result.

The Plaid Group uses flow diagrams to help clients better understand the logistics of their businesses, and uncover where there are unclear responsibilities or unshared expectations. Flow diagrams are especially useful in organizations where there are multiple handoffs – where information or material is passed back and forth among people or groups.

For many employees, that initial look at a flow diagram is the first time they see how their work fits into the bigger picture. They see how their actions – good and bad – affect others in the company; for example, how a delay on their end impacts other departments down the line. They gain a stronger understanding of what their coworkers do, and how it takes everyone working together to produce the company's product or service.

In fact, a flow diagram can help replace finger pointing and criticism with support, tolerance and respect for other employees and departments. It's true that a visual can be powerful!

How Are We Doing?

Ever notice how fund-raising goals are communicated? We've all seen the giant thermometer with the end goal at the top, and as money is raised, the red line moves higher.

That's a great example of a performance chart and how easily it can communicate success – or the need to work harder.

Companies that create visuals to illustrate corporate objectives find that employees have a better understanding of what is expected. And they are more attuned to progress or lack thereof, which means they will take the necessary steps to get on track if they see that a goal is in danger of being missed.

Sometimes, a visual used in this manner can even become ingrained in a company's culture to the extent that it serves as a form of "shorthand" for common goals.

The strength of a visual is that it can be easily and quickly viewed and understood. The simple pie chart is an example of how a picture is stronger than a table of numbers.

Get In Focus With Pictures!

The benefits of using visuals to communicate are many:

- A more informed and aligned organization – people pulling in the same direction.
- More focus and clarity on how the organization works and its primary goals and objectives.
- A self-sufficient and self-regulating organization that is easier to manage.
- Better work judgment – people understand how their actions and decisions impact others.
- Improved operational results that translate into improved financial results.

The more your employees understand what your company does, how it does it and how it is organized and managed, the more capable they will be of achieving the results you want. But don't just tell them ... show them with pictures!

More Information? If you would like to learn more about this important topic, please send an E-mail to tim@plaidgroup.com, visit our web site at www.plaidgroup.com, or call us at 713-627-3569. The Plaid Group publishes a free bimonthly email newsletter filled with insights and ideas you can use to enhance your company's operational performance, spur growth, and increase bottom line profits. To subscribe, change your email address, or unsubscribe, please visit http://www.plaidgroup.com/newsletters_subscribe.asp.

Author's Note: **Tim Smith** is a Principal with The Plaid Group. The Plaid Group helps companies simplify and stabilize their business operations to improve financial performance and gain a competitive edge.