

# About images

It's an unavoidable fact that most publications depend on illustrations. Although *The Lancet* and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* are living proof that it is possible to use only a minimum amount of images, these examples are few and far between.

We place more meaning and value on the visual aspect in the world we live in, so images have become increasingly important.

Images are of particular importance in magazines, whether we're dealing with full colour visuals printed on glossy paper or simple black and white cartoons from an amateur publication.

Illustrations determine, more than any other design element, how readers go through the publications – whether they are drawn into the stories and decide to read on, or simply turn to the next page.

This is why it is important to be very clear about why you wish to use illustrations in your magazine, and what kind of style these illustrations must have.

It is equally important that your magazine concept contains guidelines with regards to the distinct styles of photography, graphics and other illustrations, as it is important to have defined styles with regards to the writing.

## Different illustrations

Mostly, illustrations found in magazines are photos. To a large extent the use of fantastic photography printed beautifully has secured magazines the place they have in the media world today.

However, photographs are just one of many ways to illustrate something.

Illustrations can also be drawings, cartoons, paintings, and graphics – computer-generated or not – pie charts, tables, info-graphics etc.



When you are responsible for a magazine, it is important to know when it is appropriate to use these different forms of illustrations. Photographs, for example, document how things and people look, but can at the same time generate strong emotions.

Drawings are less suitable when it comes to documenting, unless they are technical drawings which show, for instance, how a machine works or a building has been constructed. These kinds of illustrations are usually computer-generated nowadays – whereas pen or ink drawings tend to be used for caricature and other drawings which mostly mean to bring on a smile.

Graphics and info-graphics are a form of expression which has developed rapidly with the introduction of computers in the editorial rooms. With the aid of computers, graphics and info-graphics have found their own voice whose strength lies in the fact that a mixture of words and images illustrates certain connections.

## The path to great images

Too many magazines use too many dull photos – badly. This is a strong allegation, but unfortunately it is my experience that most magazines fail to define what it is they wish to achieve with their illustrations. So they end up with something incidental and influenced largely by the imagination of the photographer or illustrator.

**Images** can tell more than a thousand words. This is why images are so important in newspapers and magazines. However, there are many choices to make. Above are two photos taken at the same occasion, yet telling two very different stories.



**Photos** manage to put across what words and other forms of illustrations can't. Photos can document reality.

There is nothing wrong with this as such. However, if you consequently depend upon the fact that your subcontractors will come up with something brilliant, you will invariably end up in a situation in which coincidence reigns.

It is important for a magazine to constantly develop its way of using illustrations. To achieve this, keeping a portfolio of appropriately illustrated stories, is as good an idea as to keep samples of good journalism – whether the samples belong to your own magazine or the competitor.

The path to great illustrations relies upon the ability to communicate. And the results will be limited if the communication is restricted to only dealing with whether images are considered 'good' or 'bad'.

It is very useful to create a so-called image policy. An image portfolio will be of great help to achieve this, as you will be able to point at certain samples and agree that this is the style needed to get your message through to your target group.

### **Documentary images**

Nowadays photos are one of the most important ingredients in most magazines. Historically we speak of two considerate milestones in the development of magazines, as they look today. The first impor-



tant step was taken when it became possible to reproduce photographs, which meant that magazines were given the chance to develop from a word rich media to a visual media.

The second step was when it became possible not only to reproduce black and white photos, but also colour photos. This development was as significant to the printed media as the leap from black and white to colour was to television.

The main characteristic of a photo is that it can document. Although much is written about the disappearing credibility of the photo as it becomes easier to manipulate images, it is because of their unique ability to document events that photos remain one of the most vital pieces of the jigsaw puzzle called magazine production.

Photos can document a variety of things. The look of someone or something, is what we most frequently see pictured. However, photos also document events, and thus prove that they actually took place.

The series of photos above is an example of the latter. The photographer was present when a group of divers were joined by a number of sharks.

Without photos this article wouldn't have been the same – regardless of how articulate the author may be.

The words could have brought powerful images to the mind of the



reader, but the visual experience brought on by the photos would have lacked.

### Illustrative photos

There may not always be an event to visualise when a story is being told with the aid of images.

Contrary to journalists, who can always return to a source to document passed events – and actually write an article without having witnessed an event – the photographer depends upon being present at the right time in the right place, if he wants to bring home documentary photos.

Documentary photos are typically photos of reportage and feature. Within photographic terminology the terms reportage and feature cover more or less their counterparts within journalism (see pages 64-66).

But there are other photographic genres, such as the illustrative photo. The illustrative photo is created when the photographer stages a situation before he releases the shutter.

These kinds of photos are now commonly used in magazines, not least on the front cover and when illustrating certain themes. The photos can be about anything, from culinary photography or Lego bricks, to model photos and cliché photos.

The latter come into being after a journalist has written an article which then needs to be illustrated. An article titled 'Throwing money down the drain' could be illustrated with money stuffed into a sink. And an article about a famous actor 'Back on track' is obviously photographed on a railroad line.

However, just as linguistic clichés can impede the legibility, visual clichés can also spell things out to an irritating degree. Imagine what a cliché photo of the term 'spelling things out' would look like, if you needed to produce a photograph of it.

### Portraits

Photos of people is the most widespread use of photos in the printed



**Photos** send out different messages – depending on how they are used.

media. The portrait photo not only documents what someone looks like, but can also say something about what the person is like.

There are roughly two kinds of portraits – the classic portrait which plainly portrays a person, and a portrait taken of someone in their own environment. The latter shows more than just someone's physical features, as it illustrates a part of the person's work or hobby.

A portrait set in the environment could for instance be a fisherman on his boat, a chessplayer in front of the chess board, or an actor at the makeup table in the dressing room.

This kind of photo adds a new dimension to the classic portrait whose primary function is to document what someone looks like.

The classic portrait is useful in connection with photo bylines or if photos are printed with the width of one column, as details easily disappear at this size.

### Using photographs

Magazines depend on photos. However, photos, like text, need to be viewed in connection with the rest of the elements. Just as text almost always needs editing, we also often need to alter the images. Typically this takes place by cropping the photo, but there are other ways.

This spread shows a photo of Queen Elizabeth. It is a classic portrait, documenting exactly what she looks like, but says little about her as a human being or as a monarch.

By using the same photo in a variety of ways you can express different things and send out different messages.

Top left shows the original photo. The colours are rather dominating, and one can query how important the colours are to the photo.

The image below is identical, but the colours have been removed. By doing this we tend to pay more attention to the shape of the face, and its expression. This example demonstrates that colours often distract from the object.

The last three photos demonstrate how a photo changes its character if you turn it into a duotone or make a partial cut-out.



**A photo** isn't just a photo. Here the same photo of Queen Elizabeth has been printed in five different ways: In full colour; black and white; as a duotone; as a partial cut-out in colour with a thin black line around and finally as a black and white photo with a partial cut-out.





**Different ways** of usage can alter the look of an image completely. Above are four identical pages, on which only the shape of the image is changed. Left to right: an ordinary black and white photo, same photo with a frayed line around, same photo now printed as a duotone, and finally in full colour.

**Photos are quadrilateral**

Photos are taken with a camera – whether it is digital or uses film. The one common denominator for photos is that their basic shape is quadrilateral – rectangular or square.

By using many photos in our magazines, and the photos all being quadrilateral, we run the risk that our magazines end up looking rather square.

This is just one of many reasons why, for the sake of variety, it can be interesting to use other kinds of illustrations. Drawings are, for example, seldom square. On the contrary, they seem to exist beyond the framework, and help create white space on the pages.

In order to get beyond the square look photographers often create different kinds of frames around their photos. This is done by copying a bit of the negative’s edge when developing the photo in the dark chamber.

However, software producers have also become aware of this need, and today a wide variety of frames are available within software packages. The samples on this page shows how big an impact a frayed frame has to the page layout.

Magazines also use the cut-out technique more and more, which helps break the square look.

**Cropping photos**

Copy supplied by a journalist is not necessarily used in the exact form in which it arrived, and this goes for images too.

Just as text requires editing, it may be necessary to crop an image. Sometimes there’s too much going on in the photo, or simply because the story is told with more clarity if some of the superfluous background is cut back.

Photos taken by non-professionals often have unnecessary background to them as the photographer hasn’t moved in close enough on the target. In these cases, photos will gain considerably by being cropped tightly.

However, the way in which images are cropped could also be a part of the visual identity of a magazine. The example on this page has been inspired by the way in which the British designer Neville Brody started using photos at the beginning of the 1980s.

This way to crop images is an expression of minimalism: how little is needed to show in order for the readers to recognise someone?

Not all images can be cropped. By cropping some images, you might delete the whole meaning.

Occasionally daily newspapers end up not just cropping but actually dissecting an image.

Although some images easily stand alone and tell a story, images will, more often than not, be seen as part of a context, so basically image and caption go hand in hand.

Also, if a designer starts cropping an image, the editorial assistant will need to check whether the caption may need to be rewritten. Readers do get irritated if they see a photo of one man, whilst the caption shows three names.



**Image cropping** is a sensitive topic. This sample is heavily influenced by the British magazine tradition. Beneath is the original photo, uncropped.





**Letters** from the alphabet can at times appropriately substitute images, as seen above. To the right the letter has been turned into an image.

### Photo cut-outs

We've established that not all photos are award-winning. And sometimes this is dealt with by sending the photographer back out, or asking another photographer to have a go. Yet, other times this isn't possible, so you simply have to make do with the existing raw material.

There are numerous ways of making a photo look more appealing, and make them function as one or more entrypoints to the body text.

A variation of frames is one way. Drop-shadows is another. Some photos may gain from being cut out, entirely or partially. This particular technique has been used – not always successfully – for many years.

In early days it was performed with a pair of scissors or even a knife, but today the computer will do it, which makes it much easier.

Bear in mind that many images are still extremely complicated to cut out. This goes for people as you frequently end up either deleting too much hair, or leaving in too much of the background.

Buildings, cars and other sharply defined objects are easy to cut out from their backgrounds, and this can create great effects on an otherwise undynamic page.

Yet cut-outs are not only used to tart up dull photos. In some situations it might have been decided beforehand that the photos taken

will be cut out. This is often seen in connection with fashion features, photos of food etc.

Below is an example from a reportage from a race meeting. There are four different page layouts using exactly the same headline, body text and photo. Yet there is a big difference to how dynamic the layout is. On the two examples to the right a partial cut-out has been applied, so that the horse almost breaks the frame of the photo.

A complete cut-out could also have been created – it entirely depends on individual taste.

On page 104 is a different kind of cut-out. This is an attempt to create a photo which tells more than one story simply by not having a square format.

### Other illustrations

Since photos play such an important part of most magazines, the photo has been predominant in this chapter. However, there are other forms of illustrations, which help bring character to a publication.

These are, for instance, drawings used to illustrate novellas in weeklies such as *The Peoples' Friend*.

Over the years a very distinct style of drawings has appeared,



### Photographers

don't always bring award-winning photos back to the designers. However, it is often possible to create an interesting layout even with dull photos. Here are four examples from a magazine about horses, in which the same photo has been used in different ways. Notice how the design becomes gradually more interesting as we move from left to right.



**Photos** usually arrive in a square format, and if you use too many photos in your magazine, you risk ending up with a very square-looking publication. That is why it can be tempting to use images with a different shape, such as this photo of Big Ben.

which has assisted in the development of the characteristics of these kinds of publications.

There are many kinds of drawings and graphics as well as a variety of mixed media.

In this day and age the majority of magazines are produced digitally – with computers. Photos are either taken digitally or scanned for further adaptation, and most graphics are also digitally generated.

Perhaps this explains why something hand drawn or hand painted gets a lot of attention when it finally appears on magazine spreads.

The same can be said about collages which are great in order to vary the look of an otherwise photo heavy magazine.

Good illustrations can be hard to come by – and they're usually not cheap either. This is why it can be useful to use other methods, as shown on the examples on the following page.

To the left a fairly unexciting photo has been altered with the use of photo editing software, so that it looks like a watercolour.

In a similar way it is possible to add different effects to a non-specific photo, such as a blurred filter.

### Repeating images

There are countless ways of using photos creatively in magazines. The ideal situation is to have fantastic photos to start with – yet, it is still possible to create inviting page layouts even with mediocre photos.

One way this can be achieved is by enhancing specific areas of the photo where the action takes place. Or by fading out the photo or perhaps by accentuating parts of the photo by using colour whilst the rest remains black and white. Or like the example to the right in which details from a photo have been repeated – which creates an interesting graphical effect.

### Drawings and caricatures

Photos make up the majority of illustrations in most publications, but that doesn't make the remaining illustrations less important. It is,



on the contrary, the style of other types of illustrations that creates and develops a magazine's specific identity.

Drawings add a lot of character to a magazine, and over many decades the very specific genre or artform known as magazine cartoons has developed.

A magazine cartoonist can, with a minimum amount of strokes, put a news event into perspective – most often with a humouristic touch to it.

A special genre within magazine cartoons is caricature, and most caricaturists have the ability to enhance a person's good or bad sides with a few lines of the pen.

It is important that certain general decisions are made clear when designing a magazine:

Do we want drawings in our magazine at all?

If so, what kind of style will they need?

Will they be black and white or full colour?

What size?

How many drawings will we use?

How often?

And what for?

One solution can be to have a regular cartoon commentary to current events. These are quite common in newspapers, and usually

**Photos** are by their very nature documentary, although that may not always be what is needed when laying out a magazine. Here are alternative ways of using photos. To the left the photo has been manipulated with a Photoshop plug-in, so that it ends up looking like a watercolour. To the right the graphic effect called "repetition" has been applied – in which different details of an image is shown.





**The term 'illustrations'** covers more than just photos. It also means drawings, charts and info-graphics. It is as important for a publication to develop its own distinct voice with regards to photos as it is to find an appropriate voice when it comes to other illustrations used. The slightly grotesque and naturalistic style above, is a world apart from the style opposite, which has a more humouristic stroke.

they feature in the same spot each day, and are mostly extremely political.

This is also a possibility for magazines published weekly or monthly. A regular cartoon on a specific page can add a lot of character to the publication.

It is, however, important to decide how far you wish to allow your cartoonist to go, for instance with regards to caricatures. These pages show three very different ways of portraying Ronald Reagan – and they belong in three very different kinds of magazines.

A full chapter could be written about cartoons. It remains only to be said that cartoons really do add value and character to the visual identity of a magazine.

### Stories told with graphics

If we placed the different elements of a magazine page on a scale of how they appeal to the readers, the body text would be at the opposite end of the photos.

Somewhere on the middle of that scale we'll find info-graphics and news graphics, which is a special kind of visual expression, combining words and images.

In some cases graphics can be unaccompanied and will still tell their own story.

It is more common, though, that graphics will form part of a story, in which there is both body text and other types of illustrations, such as photos.

As with all the other illustrations, it is important that a magazine finds its own style when it uses graphics. Defining typography, typefaces, typesizes, colour etc is important.

The German magazine *Focus* constantly uses news graphics, and has developed its own distinct graphics style, particularly with regards to typefaces and colour.

Info-graphics have a similar function to a page-layout – to create a connection between text and images, which enhances understanding.

Or one could say that graphics appeal to both parts of the brain at the same time.

### The functions of graphics

Info-graphics can illustrate points which are difficult to clarify by using only words or images – and info-graphics also create a clearer general view. During the Gulf war news graphics boomed, because graphic designers daily managed to illustrate the development of the war in a way both photos and words failed to do.

Fundamentally, graphics can be used to supply readers with answers to the four key questions in journalism: What, Where, How and How much?

What is it?

Graphics can show what something looks like – from the inside or from the outside. In the aftermath of an election this could be the debating chamber at parliament, with different coloured seats indicating the new party distribution.

Where is it?

This question is probably the easiest one for graphics to answer. You simply need a map with an X on it, whether it's a map of the world or a detailed town plan. Sometimes it's useful to show two maps in order to first establish where the country is, and then where a certain region is.

How does it work?

This is where graphics have an almost encyclopedic function. Graphics can show how a motor works or how a bumble bee manages to fly. But graphics can also display connections – how two cars hit each other, or what happened when the aeroplane crash landed.

How much is it?

Bar charts and fever charts are ideal tools if showing a development trend – in exchange rates, political opinions or magazine readership. Pie charts can be used when you need to show a distribution, i.e. x number of readers per specific magazine or x number of voters per political party.



**Whether** it is politically correct or not, this shows that there are many ways to portray people. Above, Ronald Reagan is shown to be a rather diabolical yet stately figure, whereas he looks like a caricatured cowboy below.



**Graphics** are useful if for instance a specific location needs to be displayed. In this fictitious example a readily available Clip Arts globe has been incorporated. A red X plainly indicates where the event took place, and the butterfly has been used at three different sizes. In this case an illustration has been used, but it could equally have been a photo.

**This is the home of the world's rarest butterfly**

Biologists from the South American Organisation of Butterfly Collectors recently made the headlines, when they discovered a whole new species, which they immediately named Butterfly butterfly. The biologists believe there are less than 20 of these butterflies still alive in the impassable rainforest.

*Source: International Geographics*

These kinds of graphics don't show a development but give a freeze frame of a given situation.

On these pages are a few samples of info-graphics - from a simple bar chart to something slightly more complex above.

During and after the Gulf war info-graphics developed its own unique international form of expression. Its main characteristics were

### How to make info-graphics

It doesn't have to be complicated to make your own info-graphics. Here is an example, as well as a step-by-step demonstration of how to do it:

1. Select a photo
2. Select a drawing
3. Make a cut-out of the photo
4. Convert the photo to black and white
5. Create a measure
6. Merge all elements
7. Create a tinted backdrop

**The longest jump in the world**

Hand-drawn and here

that almost everything was computer-generated. Yet in the following decade we've seen a softening of this, and today many graphics use a mixture of hand drawn elements and photos.

**Info-graphics** have become an increasingly popular feature in magazine design. Graphics provide explanations – photos don't. If graphics are used to explain a connection or a certain sequence of events, numbers are an appropriate aid to control the reading order.

**The simplest form** of graphics is a set of columns, depicting a development of some kind. Anyone can do this.

