

*5 easy-to-create*

# BLOG GRAPHICS

(even if you don't have any graphic design skills!)



IT'S  
EASY!

*Like any other skill, creating graphics like this isn't something that's reserved for "graphic artists." It's a skill that you can learn and master by doing, experimenting and being inspired by and learning from the best work of others.*

*Fortunately, software used to produce graphics, diagrams and visual maps have gotten so good that almost anyone, with a little bit of training and inspiration, can produce great-looking graphics to promote their blog posts, products and services.*

*In this tutorial, I will explain how to create 5 types of common web graphics. Most of the tools needed to do so are either free or low cost. Most importantly, they are easy to use.*

*So let's get started!*

Chuck Frey

- 1 Simple linear flow chart
- 2 Pull quote
- 3 Image quote
- 4 Simple mind map
- 5 Blog post header graphic

## The tools you'll need

I recommend that you try each of these tools to determine which one(s) work best for you. Each one has its strengths and weaknesses, which I describe in the summaries below. As you go through the tutorials, I encourage you to experiment with these tools - push them to see what you're able to create with them. Get inspired by others' web graphics. Try to figure out how they created them, and then think about how you can adapt their techniques to your needs. Most of all, have fun!

### Web graphics software

- [Canva](#) - A web-based tool that provides a large collection of templates, images and graphics you can use to quickly and easily create common types of web graphics.

- [PicMonkey](#) - Another web-based tool that has many powerful tools for editing your images and adding distinctive text to them. But it's almost totally image focused. There doesn't seem to be a way to create an image with a plain or gradient color background, for example.
- [Xara Web Designer](#): This program combines image editing and illustration tools that are fairly easy to use. I started to experiment with this program because Adobe has decided to discontinue development of Fireworks, which has been my go-to program for creating these types of graphics for years. In its current iteration, it can only be downloaded as part of the Adobe Cloud product - which costs US\$50 per month! Xara Web Designer looks like a worthy replacement for Fireworks. The basic version is US\$49.95; the premium version is \$99.95.

If you already own a higher-end vector graphics program like Adobe Illustrator or CS Odessa's ConceptDraw, you can use them with this tutorial, too.

### Diagramming software

- [LucidChart](#) - An excellent web-based tool for production of diagrams and other graphics. It's greatest strength is its ease of use. It's also quite

affordable: US\$3.33 per month for the basic version and US\$8.33 a month for the pro version.

- [Gliffy](#) - Another excellent web-based choice for creating many types of diagrams, including flow charts, Venn diagrams, SWOT analyses and more. Its standard pricing is US\$3.99 per month; the pro version is US\$7.99 a month.
- [SmartDraw](#) - I've been using this program for many years to create numerous diagrams for my blogs. The huge variety of diagrams and charts it can produce is astounding. Purchasing a license for this program isn't cheap - just under US\$200. But the developer recently introduced a monthly pricing scheme that is significantly more affordable: US\$9.95 per month.

### Mind mapping software

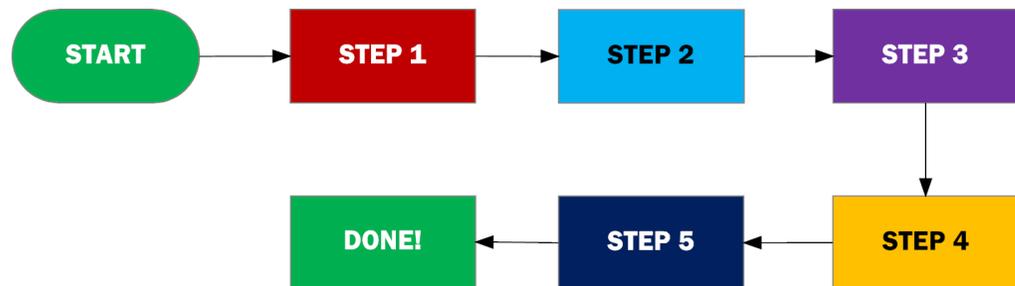
- [MindMaple](#) - You can get started quickly with this desktop mind mapping program, thanks to its easy and intuitive design. The basic version of MindMaple is free.
- [NovaMind](#) - This innovative mind mapping program creates the prettiest-looking rainbow-colored mind maps - ever. NovaMind 5 Express costs US\$29.95 and has enough functionality for our purposes.



## A simple linear flow chart

**Objective:** Visually depict a process or flow, such as the way in which a business decision is made or a "before and after" process.

**Recommended tools:** LucidChart, Gliffy, SmartDraw



### How to make it

Flow charts are composed of simple shapes, such as rectangles, rounded rectangles and diamonds. The latter is used to depict a decision step - usually yes vs. no. Shapes are joined together using lines with an arrow to depict the flow of the process, usually left to right and/or top to bottom.

#### 1. Start by selecting a landscape orientation for your workspace.

Most flowcharts are wider than they are tall, so this will give you more room to work within.

#### 2. Drag and drop your first shape - a rectangle - onto the left side of your workspace.

**3. Name it with the first step of your process.** Try to keep it as brief as possible; otherwise, your shapes will become too large and cumbersome.

**4. Add shapes to your chart:** Depending upon the tool you're using, either drag and drop the next shape to the right of the first one, name it and join it to the first one with a connector line, or use your application's command to "grow" a shape (with a connector already attached) from the existing one.

**5. Move the steps and their connectors as needed** to make your flowchart clearly depict what you're

trying to communicate.

#### 6. Resize topic shapes as needed

to give them a uniform appearance. This step may be necessary because the text in some shapes may have "stretched" them to larger dimensions. Usually, a flow chart looks best if all shapes are the same size.

**7. Align shapes:** Once you're satisfied with the size and relative positions of the shapes in your flow chart, use your software program's object alignment tools to ensure it has a neat, orderly appearance.

**8. Identity:** Add a title, your company's logo (if desired) and any copyright or privacy statements at the bottom of your diagram in small text (9 or 10 point is usually adequate).

**9. Export your chart:** The final step is to export your completed chart into a graphic format that can be displayed on your blog. I recommend PNG output, because it tends to hold up best if you need to resize it. Second and third preferences would be TIF and BMP formats, because they are not compressed the way GIF and JPG are. Export your chart at a size that is as close as possible to the size at which you'll need for your blog - or larger, if possible. For example, when I create a chart in SmartDraw, I often do a PNG export at 200% of normal size. This enables me to shrink it to the size I need with very little loss in quality.

## A pull quote to support an article

**Objective:** The goal of this type of graphic is to draw attention to an important concept from the article, blog post or report - to pull the reader into it.

**Recommended tools:** Canva, Xara Photo & Graphic Designer

### How to make it

**1. Decide what your "sound bite" will be.** Select a sentence that is fairly short, declarative and which encapsulates the theme of the article - something that is going to make readers stop and say, "*Whoa! I need to read this!*"

**2. Create a rectangular shape,** preferably no wider than half the maximum width of a post on your blog. Fill it with a solid background color or a linear gradient (where one color transitions to another in a straight line). I recommend you select an eye-popping primary color that also fits in with the color scheme of your blog. A bright red, blue or green works best, in my experience.

**3. Add quote marks:** If you want to dress it up visually, do a Google search for "quote marks + PNG." Then add open and close quote marks above left and below right of your quote (as shown in the image above right). Consider changing the opacity of the color fill on the quote marks, which will make them appear more muted.

**4. Refine the layout:** Tweak the text, quote marks and the height of the rectangular box until you think they have a proper proportion to each other.

**5. Align the elements:** Use your image editor's alignment tools to ensure your blocks of text are aligned to each other and that your pull quote is vertically aligned within the rectangle.

**TIP:** To improve the readability of your pull quote, increase the line spacing until it looks pleasing to the eye. Usually, single spacing is too compact and hard to read.



Ideally when you take a course, read a book or learn something new, it ought to transform your thinking in some way. It also ought to deliver far more in use value than your investment in it. Jason Womack's *Productivity Pack* is a winner on both counts.

- Chuck Frey



## An image quote

**Objective:** The purpose of an image quote is to draw attention to an important idea - either created by you or an author or blogger you admire.

Unlike a pull quote, which is monochromatic and is meant to be used only with an article, the image quote can stand on its own. It's ideal for promoting your own books and reports or those of key people whom you're trying to help

**Recommended tools:** Canva, Xara Photo & Graphic Designer

## How to make it

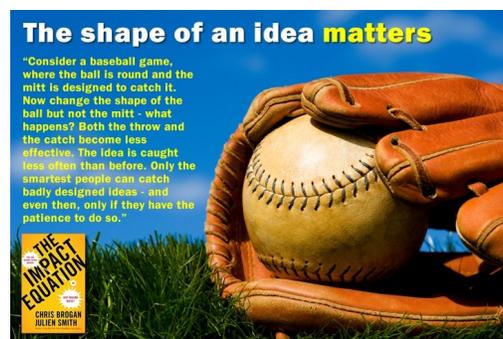
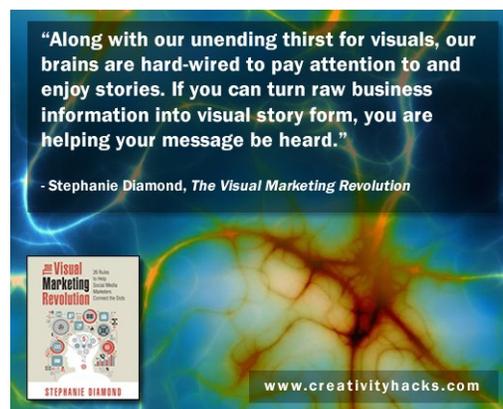
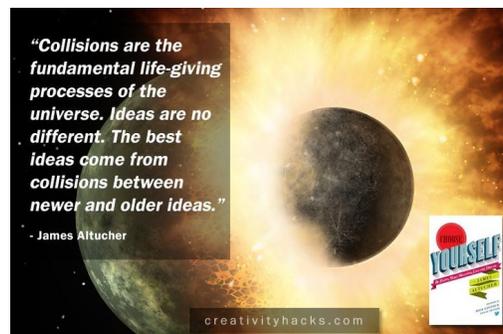
**1. Locate an evocative image** that has some "white space" on the right, left, top or bottom that can contain the quote. This part of the image can't be too busy or it may interfere with the quote. The image selected ought to be closely related to the topic of the quote. Visual metaphors work well.

**2. Crop and resize the image as needed to a 400x600 pixel size.** According to one visual marketing experts, this is the ideal size for social networks that use a "card" type of multi-column interface. Tall images take up more screen real estate and thus attract more attention.

**3. Place the text on a separate layer,** tweaking the text font, style and size until you're happy with it. Consider placing a drop shadow behind the text to help it "pop" off the page.

**4. If necessary, place a rectangle on a layer between the base image and the text** - either black or white - and screen it back 40-60 percent, to help visually separate the text from the background. Once again, you'll need to experiment until you're happy with it.

**5. Don't forget to add the URL of your blog** (or the site of the person whom you're promoting) or call to action at the bottom of the image. I recommend you use a smaller, plain font such as Arial or Franklin Book and add space (kerning) between the letters. As you tweak this element of your image, keep in mind that this is a supporting item. It should not fight for attention with the main message of your image.



## A simple mind map

**Objective:** Convey a visual outline of your blog post's information in an attention-getting format

**Recommended tools:** NovaMind, MindMaple



### How to make it

Mind maps are one form of visual content you should consider adding to your blog. When converted into images, they can be shared on a variety of social media channels and can convey a lot of information in a compact space.

**1. Start with a clear idea of what your central topic should say.** Mind maps are all about brevity; that means your central topic should be 1-3 words maximum. Place this word or short phrase in the center of your mind map.

**2. Consider adding an image to the central topic** to create greater visual interest. It may be positioned to the left, right, top or bottom of the topic text. I usually prefer moving the image to the left of the central topic's text. Look for images or icons that are fairly iconic and easy to understand, even at a small size on screen.

**3. Tweak the size of the image and text.** Keep in mind that your map will be displayed in a fairly small (less

than 1,000 pixels wide) size on screen. Compensate for that by increasing the size of the central topic text to at least 28 points. The image should be proportional to the size of the text. Don't be afraid to experiment at this early stage of building your mind map.

**4. Create first-level topics,** which are connected to central topic with lines. These are the equivalent of level 2 in a hierarchical outline. In other words, they represent the major divisions of information within your topic. Normally, you would add sub-sub-topics to those you created in step 2. But for most blog uses, a central topic and a collection of first-level topics is all a visitor to your blog can read easily.

**5. Color the central topic and first-level topics to add visual interest.** One program, NovaMind, makes it easy to select the central topic and then apply "rainbow" coloring to its first-level topics. Other programs use map "themes" to quickly reformat topic shape, color, font, size and style. (bold, italic, etc.).

## A header graphic to lead off a blog post

**Objective:** Compel readers into reading your blog post.

**Recommended tools:** Canva, Xara Photo & Graphic Designer

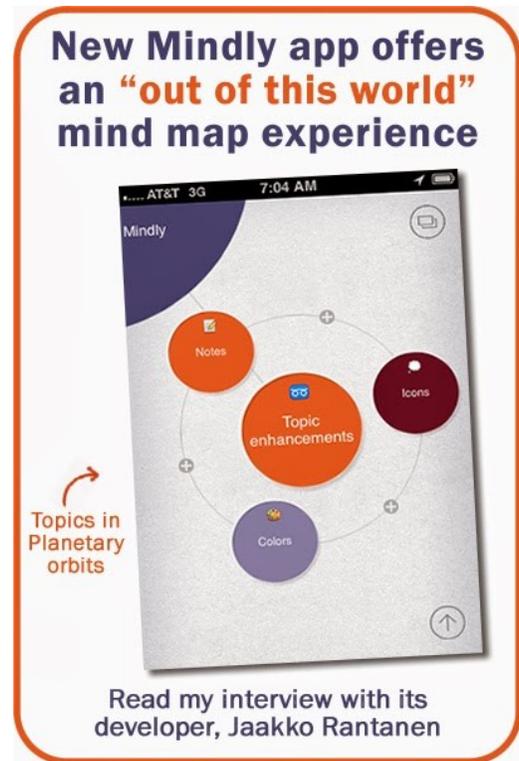
### How to make it - vertical "card" image

**1. Start by gathering key images and artwork** related to the topic of your blog post. If you're writing about a book, for example, search for images of the book cover and/or author. If you're writing about a piece of software, a logo or "box shot" would be appropriate. If you're writing about a company (such as Twitter or LinkedIn, for example), simply do a Google image search and download a logo file. If you're writing about any other topic, do a search on the commercial image site of your choice (I tend to use iStockPhoto, or look for images and artwork on Flickr that are approved for use under Creative Commons). What you want to avoid is stealing someone's original image or artwork. Look for images that are colorful and which suggest the meaning or feeling you're trying to convey.

**2. In your web graphics editor, create a rectangle 400 pixels wide by 600 pixels tall.** This will be the "container" for your image. Decide on a background color. If your aim is to get attention, avoid pastel colors. Bright primary colors such as green and red tend to "pop" off the screen and get attention. Orange can work very well, too.

Keep in mind that some of the images you plan to use in your graphic may have white backgrounds, which will result in an odd-looking white block around them if you drag them onto a colored rectangle. If that's the case, then I recommend you stick with a white background color and use a contrasting primary color (blue, red or green, for example) for the border of the rectangle to draw attention. Try 5 and 10 pixel widths.

To create even more visual interest and break up the rectangular

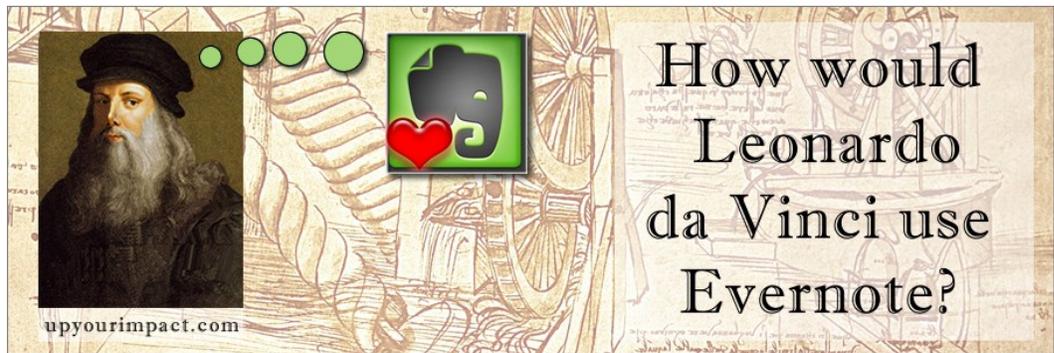


"blockiness" of your blog's pages, try creating rounded corners on the rectangle.

**3. Import the images and elements you collected in step 1.** Don't position them yet. Just drag them onto your canvas and proceed to step 4.

**4. Decide on the message you want to convey and create a text object to contain it.** Choose a heavier font, such as Franklin Gothic Demi or Cooper Black and adjust the font size until you like the way it looks. It should almost fill the horizontal space of your image, but still leave some "white space" on each side. If your text is too close to the right and left sides of the rectangle, it won't look right. Left aligned versus centered text? Try both arrangements and see which one looks best to your eyes. Placement of your text block? Experiment with placing it at the top and bottom of your image and use what looks best to your eyes.

**5. Drag the other art elements**



**(images, logos, etc.) into the rectangle** and resize as needed to fit the available space. Creating this type of graphic is more art than science, so be prepared to experiment with different arrangements of your elements. Use the blogs of [Donna Moritz](#) and [Rebekah Radice](#) for inspiration. Look at how they tend to arrange text and images. Which treatments get your attention? Don't copy what they're doing (that's plagiarism!) but learn from their techniques and adapt them to your blog's needs.

**6. Use your image editor's alignment tools** to ensure that your block of text and art elements are aligned appropriately to each other. Most commonly, you'll want to position all of the elements on the vertical centerline of the rectangle. But also play around with left aligning everything. What you're aiming for is a neat, professional-looking layout of all the elements of your image.

## How to make it - horizontal image

The other type of header image you can create is one that is horizontal and spans the width of your average blog post. We're going to assume that you have already gathered your art elements in step 1 of the previous section. Let's jump right into step 2:

**2. Determine the width of your average blog post in pixels.** If you're

not sure, download a free screen ruler. For Windows, [JR Screen Ruler](#) works very well. Your goal is to create a compelling horizontal image that is slightly narrower than your blog posts. Drag the ruler to make it slightly longer than the shortest line of one of your blog posts. Align the left side of the ruler with the left edge of your blog's text and measure the width in pixels. For my personal blog, that number is roughly 900 pixels. For my Mind Mapping Software Blog, it's only 600 pixels.

**3. Using your graphics editor, drag a rectangle** that is equivalent to the blog post width from step 2, and a height about half that size. You can adjust the image height later to meet your needs. For now, you're just creating a "container" within which you will design your header image.

**4. Decide on the message you want to convey and create a text object to contain it.** Choose a heavier font, such as Franklin Gothic Demi or Cooper Black and adjust the font size until you like the way it looks. Consider where you want to place it within your header; on the left side usually works best, because people read from left to right.

**5. Drag the other art elements (images, logos, etc.) into the rectangle** and resize as needed to fit the available space. Creating this type of graphic is more art than science, so be ready to experiment with different

arrangements of your elements.

6. Adjust the sizes and placement of your image's elements to give a balanced, attractive appearance. Remember to align your elements horizontally with one another - either to the bottoms of each element or to their horizontal centers.

I can't overemphasize how important experimentation is. Images to accompany blog posts are not something you can knock out in 5 minutes. It

takes care to select the right image elements, care to figure out what text is going to be most persuasive in your image (and post headline) and much trial and error until you arrive at something you're happy with.

***Like any other skill, creating graphics like this isn't something that's reserved for "graphic artists." It's one that you can learn and master by doing, experimenting and being inspired by and learning from the best work of others. Good luck with your graphics!***



## About the author

Chuck Frey is the founder and author of The Mind Mapping Software Blog, the leading website that covers visual thinking tools and techniques, including mind maps, diagrams, visual marketing, sketching and graphical facilitation.



Chuck is a highly skilled marketer and writer with over 18 years of experience in online marketing and over 10 years of business-to-business public relations. He specializes in creating compelling web content - both in words and visuals – that command attention and compel action.

## Follow Chuck's work online

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## Contact Chuck Frey

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## Visual Marketing Resources

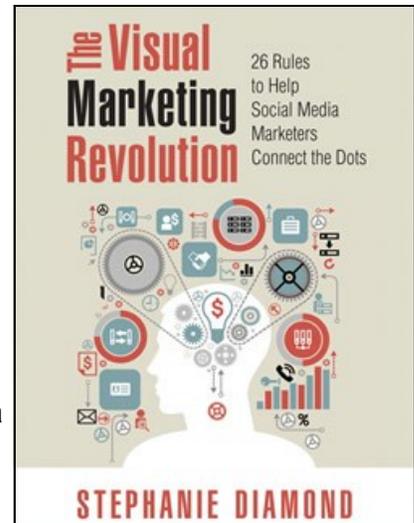
### BOOK

[\*The Visual Marketing Revolution: 26 Rules to Help Social Media Marketers Connect the Dots\*](#)

By Stephanie Diamond

*The Visual Marketing Revolution* is an essential guidebook to the myriad of ways in which visual thinking can enhance your marketing and social media efforts. This book is a masterpiece of ideas and actionable advice that you can put to work

immediately to help grow your online reputation and your business. [Click here to read my book review.](#)



### BLOGS

[Socially Sorted](#): Donna Moritz is one of the smartest people I know when it comes to visual marketing. I've learned a lot from her. She recently launched a new e-course entitled [Create Traffic-Driving Images](#) that looks really good. It promises to help you create original images that get shared and drive traffic - even if you're not creative.

[Rebekah Radice](#): This social media expert is committed to helping you stand out online. Creating distinctive images is a key strategy she employs and teaches about.

[Pamela Wilson](#): Pam is the author of the Big Brand System Blog, in which she regularly writes about visual marketing. Along with [Kelly Kingman](#), she has also published an e-course called [Visual Buzz 101](#).