

EDUCATION

What is a Visual Practitioner?



by
Christina Merkley

HELLO AND WELCOME



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Welcome to our site and welcome to the world of "visual practicing". If you've managed to find us, chances are you have some inkling about who we are and what we do. Perhaps you are a practitioner yourself, or perhaps you have worked with one of our colleagues. Or perhaps you have stumbled across this site as you've surfed the web looking for interesting 'graphic' resources.

However you have come across us, please know that we are glad to make your acquaintance and hope to offer you a helpful glimpse into our emerging international community and unique way of working.

WHO ARE WE?

"So", you may be asking, "just what is a visual practitioner anyways?" In a funny way, we as a group have been asking this question for many years, and continue to do so. In a nutshell, we are an emerging grassroots network of diverse practitioners who use visual methods to assist learning and communication between groups and individuals.



We are an informal community of like-minded individuals - bound together by our strong beliefs in the power of "visual thinking" ... knowing innately that a picture is truly worth a 1000 words, we come together to share our experiences, trade resources, support and encourage each other, and, year by year, raise the profile of our unique and growing profession.

We are a new association, just having formed in 2003, although the roots of our profession extend formally back to the 1970s (and much further back if you consider the history of visuals over the eons!).



photo courtesy of I. carruthers, www.gbn.com

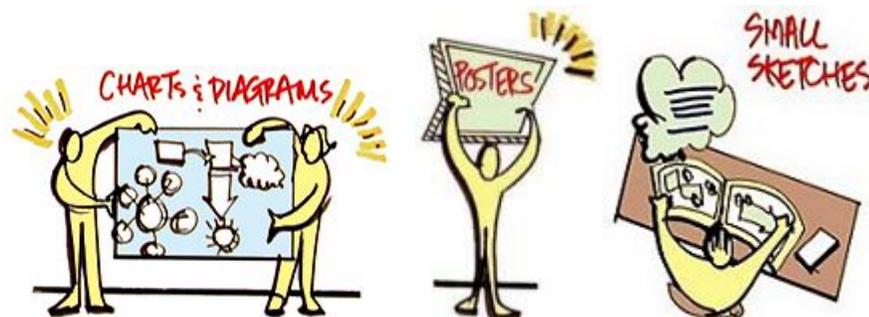
WHAT DO WE ACTUALLY 'DO'?

Ahhhh, perhaps you are scratching your head a bit over that general explanation. Maybe a bit perplexed and wondering "geez, what do these practitioners actually do?" Well, the answer is, we DO a lot of different things, but there is always some sort of common denominator in terms of using a visual approach.



In our ranks we have facilitators, trainers, scribes, consultants of many types, community leaders, artists, designers and different kinds of performers. Generally we work with groups or in some setting where groups of people are coming together to do talk, think and collaborate. We assist people in thinking, or as one of the early pioneers in our field likes to say, we **"help people SEE what they mean"**.

As Visual Practitioners we weave a graphic component into our work. We literally draw information out of people, functioning as facilitators and scribes to get the wisdom of groups into a tangible form. Some of us use visual presentations to "PUSH" information to people. Other use a "PULL" approach, gathering the information that is pulled out of people, into graphic displays or renderings. Whatever approach is used, the artifacts that are created have a very graphic or visual nature.



Some of these materials are very large (such as when graphic recorders or graphic facilitators use large wall size sheets of poster paper to capture the thinking of groups). Other materials are smaller in scope (such as the poster board displays that the information architects and designers in our midst use).

Many of these materials are later formatted into handy digital versions (the arrival of digital cameras has made the reproduction end of our work easier, faster and more cost effective than methods of even a few years ago).



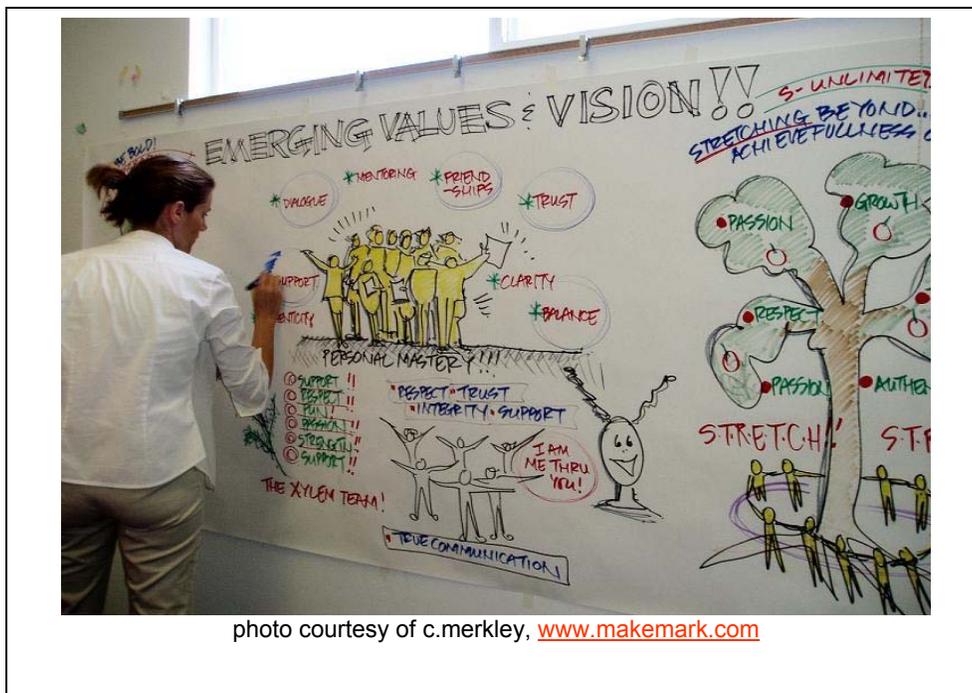
WHAT ARE THE VENUES WE COMMONLY WORK IN?

As we are so diverse, the venues that we work in are very diverse as well. Some of us are facilitators and thinking partners in business meetings (strategic planning, visioning, forecasting, change management, value



propositioning, branding, etc). Others of us work in large-group interventions; using different methods to help large groups of people interact and think well together. These groups may be governmental, corporate or community oriented. Others of us work in large or small conferences that have many speakers and presenters. And still others choose to do their work with individuals, in one-to-one formats such as coaching and counseling.

- Planning & Visioning Forums
- Leadership Retreats
- Scenario Planning Meetings
- Change Management Projects
- Marketing / Branding / Identity / Positioning Meetings
- Mediation / Conflict Management Sessions
- Large Group Conferences / Summits Keynote Addresses / Special Presentations
- Curriculum Design / Workshops
- Focus Groups Open Space
- Brainstorming Sessions
- Dialogue Sessions
- World Café Forums & Circles
- Individual Coaching Retreats & Tele-Sessions



WHERE ARE WE GEOGRAPHICALLY AND HOW MANY VISUAL PRACTITIONERS ARE THERE?



Visual Practitioners are scattered throughout the globe and our numbers are surely in the 1000s, perhaps tens of thousands, depending on how one defines the term. The International Forum of Visual Practitioners (IFVP) has its roots in the San Francisco Bay Area, as this area was a nexus point in the 70s for the development of the facilitation field and its graphic facilitation offshoot. The IFVP and its yearly conference generally draws a core group of 60-70 members.

Membership is primarily American (currently), with several members from Europe (Wales, Germany, Denmark), Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Korea and other far-flung spots. The majority of Visual Practitioners work in English, however we do have members who record in other languages, including Spanish, French, Korean, Danish and German. Each year our ranks grow, as folks working in relative isolation discover one another and join together (via the internet and via the yearly conference). Organizers feel a "hundredth monkey" or a critical mass phenomenon is underway ... as more and more people are turned onto the graphic way of working and the popularity and familiarity of the field grows.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF WORKING VISUALLY?

As human beings our world is speeding up and the amount of information that we are forced to digest is growing exponentially. One of the prime benefits of working visually is that it is humane! The human brain processes information visually - pictures help convey reams of data efficiently. Visual Practitioners know and use the efficiencies of visuals. We know how to extract and distill the key messages, wisdom and knowledge held within an individual or group.



Working graphically is efficient and effective - as such it saves time, money and much aggravation. Comprehension increases, participation increases, the quality of decision-making tends to increase ... all in all, working visually helps people more effectively see their circumstances, understand themselves and one another, and results in smoother decisions and agreements.

The ease of reproduction is another large benefit of working visually, particularly in the case of business meetings or settings where meeting minutes and summary notes are of prime importance. No longer does someone have to slave over the transcription of an important meeting - most of the approaches that visual practitioners use do not require additional writing work ... the minutes are literally created as we go (particularly in graphic recording and graphic facilitation venues).

BENEFITS (INTERACTIVE, HIGHLY FACILITATED APPROACHES):

- Increases Clarity And Comprehension (People Literally See What They Mean);
- Boosts Learning For Visual And Kinesthetic Learners (Over 88% Of People);
- Heightens Thinking Levels (Enables Higher Level Of Dialogue And Discussion);
- Saves Time And Increases Efficiency By Reducing Repetition And Redundancy;
- Lowers Misunderstandings And Helps Resolve Conflict;
- Increases Quality Of Decisions And Understanding Of Commitments And Accountabilities;
- Shrinks The Need For Traditional Meeting Minutes And Reports (The Charts Become The Report).

BENEFITS (PASSIVE, OFF-ON-THE-SIDE SCRIBING APPROACHES):

- Collects Key Information Without Invasive Questioning Or Interruption;
- Expands Retention And Understanding Of Key Themes And Main Ideas;

- Increases The ROI (Return On Investment) For Speakers & Presenters (Documents Their Crucial Points);
- Builds A Graphic Summary That Leaders Can Use To Summarize/Interact With;
- Equips Participants With A Unique 'Takeaway' Of Their Experience (Paper Or Digital)'
- Makes For Easy Sharing And Communication Of The 'Gestalt' Of The Event.

HOW CAN THIS WEBSITE AND THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM OF VISUAL PRACTITIONERS (IFVP) ASSIST YOU?

Perhaps you are a colleague who has heard of us or who has stumbled upon us for the first time. If so, feel free to peruse the site for information about resources, practice tips and check out how other colleagues represent themselves and their work. We'd love to see you at the yearly conference if you are interested to meet others face-to-face. And, as a new Association, we are always looking for new members and those who want to contribute their time, talent and skills to move our profession forward.

Or, perhaps you are a potential client checking out this Visual Practitioner 'stuff' for your own needs. If so, we have a directory of members that lists out the many locations, skill sets and specialties of our members - a great resource should you be trying to locate the right professional for your meeting, conference or coaching needs.

THANKS FOR VISITING ... WE HOPE TO SEE YOU AROUND!

Thanks for checking us out. We hope you found this overview article a helpful starting place in terms of navigating the "Visual Practitioner World". Feel free to drop us a line at info@visualpractitioner.org should you have any questions, comments or just want to take the next steps in terms of contacting us or becoming a member. We'd love to hear from you.

Author Bio: Christina Merkley, M.A. is a Graphic Facilitator, Coach and Mapmaker with Make Your Mark Graphic Facilitation. She 'has paper and will travel' and can be reached at Christina@makemark.com or by phone at 250/383-1894.

www.makemark.com

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