Creating Infographics

This is a brief introduction to the five most commonly used web-based applications for creating infographics: Infogr.am, Piktochart, Easelly, Canva, and Thinglink.

INFOGR.AM (same url as name). This app lets you create data-driven infographics and interactive online charts. There are a number of good free introductory tutorials available on YouTube. It's worth checking them out because this app is actually kind of dense and not super intuitive. Here are a couple I'd recommend:

go.osu.edu/rGX

go.osu.edu/rGZ

go.osu.edu/rGb

Infogr.am is a free app, but you are limited to only being able to download your graphic in a PNG format. Upgrading to the PRO version gives you the option to download PDF files of your graphic, and also gives you access to some different color theme options.

When you log in to your account you are immediately given the option to choose from 10 similar infographic templates. There is no option to start from a blank canvas. Since colors and fonts can't be modified, I would recommend sticking with a neutral template like the dark gray theme (shown at right) in order to stay on brand, but that is not a requirement.

Clicking the gear icon at the top of the page will bring up a 'settings' menu where you can modify the width of the infographic. Clicking on the eye icon at the top will give you a preview of your art.

Icons on the right side of the page allow you to add custom charts. Options include bar, column, pie, line, area, scatter, bubble, pictorial (like the people in the graphic I created), hierarchy, table, progress, wordcloud, treemap, and financial. There are also variations of each option (see people bar charts at the bottom of my infographic).

sample infographic created with infogr.am

You can also add maps (like I did in my example), create additional text blocks, add your own photos, and even add videos. Videos are linked through either Vimeo or YouTube.

Downside

Infogr.am is great when you have number-driven data that you want to show in a visual way and you want to get it done quickly. The graphing is handled through a very Excel-like interface, so if you're comfortable with that program, using this app to create your graphics will be a piece of cake.

However, unless you upgrade to the professional version, your options are limited. And even with the upgraded version, infogr.am lacks the ability to do any sort of customization with brand elements. You also have to upgrade in order to create any kind of hyperlink.

PIKTOCHART (piktochart.com). This app allows you to create professional-grade infographics, either through the use of pre-existing templates or by starting with a blank canvas. The two examples to the right were created from scratch. Piktochart is web-based, which means that you don't have to download or install any software, and is very easy to use. The infographics that are generated are readable by search engines, and hyperlinked elements can be added without assistance from a web developer.

Here's a link to a short tutorial: **go.osu.edu/rGd**

sample infographics created with Piktochart using a blank canvas as a starting point

Highlights

There are over 100 infographic templates to choose from, including templates for reports, banners, and presentations. Fonts, images, and colors can easily be customized for brand compliance. A handy feature is the ability to search for a title or topic within each category. I typed 'education' into the search box and got 60 templates to use as a starting point.

Basics

You can upload PNG or JPG versions of the brand-approved art elements and backgrounds and incorporate them into your infographics. Simply click on the 'uploads' icon in the left column and then drag the image(s) into the dotted area. Keep in mind that PNG files allow for transparent backgrounds; JPG files will have backgrounds and will give you that ugly surrounding white box.

Brand colors can be incorporated into the designs as backgrounds or graphics. Click on the water drop icon to bring up a color window where you can select or add your custom color. Make sure you refer to the university's brand site for the proper hex formulas (**go.osu.edu/ rGV**), and to the CFAES brand site for secondary color palette groups (**go.osu.edu/ rGS**).

Template before any changes

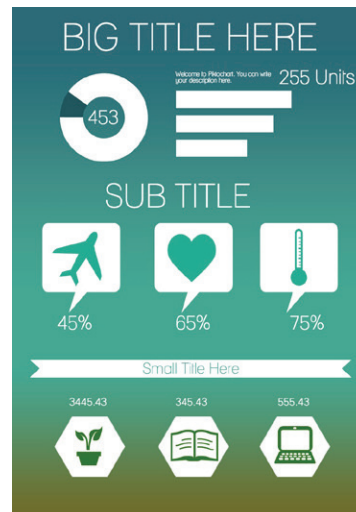*Template with modifications to colors and fonts.*

There are many fonts to choose from, but in order to create an on-brand graphic you should use Arial. Each template has its own assigned font, so don't forget to click on each box and switch it. You can also insert maps, charts, and rule or divider lines. These can be found by clicking on the 'tools' icon in the left hand column. Clicking on the individual pieces allows you to modify the colors and make them brand appropriate. There is also an option to add video from this menu. YouTube and Vimeo files are both supported.

Double-clicking on the graphic background will bring up a smaller secondary menu. Clicking on the gear icon will bring up a menu that allows you to change the width and height of your infographic. Make sure the box labeled 'resize content' is checked so that if you change the overall size of your graphic your art automatically adjusts to the new size.
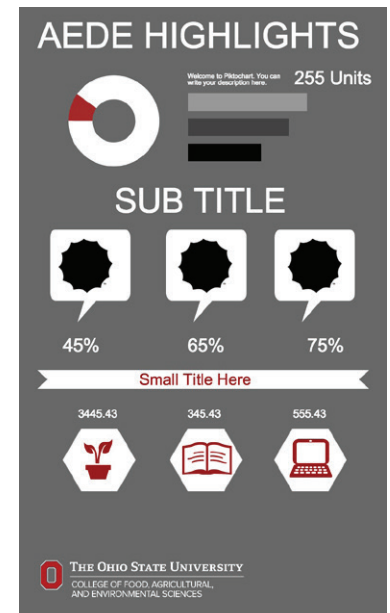
Objects can be hyperlinked by clicking on them and then clicking on the 'link (chain)' button at the top. Enter the url into the pop up window, and hit 'okay'.

EASEL.LY (same url as name). This app also allows you to create professional-grade infographics through the use of templates. It's a little clunkier and less intuitive than Piktochart and lacks the ability to allow for much customization, but it does produce nice graphics.

Here's a link to a short tutorial: **go.osu.edu/rGn**

Basics

You can choose to start with a blank canvas and build your own infographic, or select one of the 15 available templates. To select a template, click on 'vhemes' in the top left menu area, scroll through the options, and then click and drag your selection to the artboard area. Save your selection via the option in the very top menu. If you change your mind and decide to use a different template, select 'clear' from the top menu.

Fonts and colors are both limited. You should use Helvetica as your typeface, and use a color that appears to be on brand. Avoid dark and royal blues, golds, pinks, bright greens, and oranges. Sizing of your text is limited to what the app offers, and I can't find a way to adjust the alignment. It appears as though everything must be aligned left. Deleting items is accomplished by selecting the item and clicking the trash can button at the top left in the gray menu bar. An object can be duplicated by clicking on the double circle icon in the same bar.

Sample infographic created with Easelly

Adding a background is similar to selecting your template. Click on the 'backgrounds' button from the top white menu bar, scroll through the options, and click and drag your selection to the artboard. The size of your artboard can be changed by clicking and dragging the lower right corner in (to make it smaller) or out (to make it larger). Dimensions will be displayed near the cursor. Just a warning: getting an exact dimension is tricky and time consuming. Adding a background grid may be helpful when trying to resize or align objects. Click on the small 'grid' button in the top white menu bar to add it; click on it again to make it go away.

You can add brand elements, including the logo, by clicking on the 'upload' button in the top white menu bar. Supported file formats are JPG and PNG. Remember: PNG files will typically be transparent; JPG files will have colored background boxes.

'Objects' can easily be added by clicking and dragging them to your artboard. Categories include animals, banners, food, icons, landmarks, maps, music, nature, people, and transportation.

Important tip: when you're scaling an object, DO NOT hold down the shift key. Doing so will cause the object's proportions to become squashed or stretched. This is counterintuitive, I know, because we tell you to always do this in Word and PowerPoint. If you want to scale something, click and drag on one of the four corners and either pull out or push in. You'll also notice that each container box includes a handle that sticks up vertically from the center. Grabbing this handle and turning to the left or right will allow you to rotate the object.

Downside

The pre-existing template options are very limited, and the types of graphics that can easily be created are limited. For example, I haven't seen an option for a bar graph, which is a pretty common element for an infographic to contain. There is also no ability to hyperlink anything or add a video. If one of the templates will work for you with some slight modifications, great. But if you need to start from scratch, I'd use a different app.
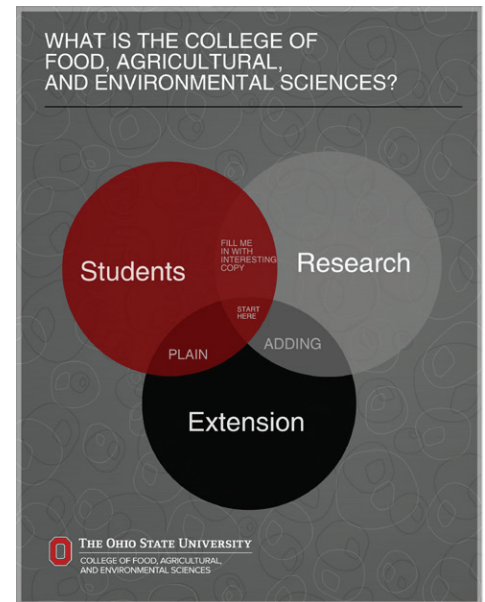
CANVA (canva.com). This amazing (and free!) app allows you to create art for twitter posts, social media graphics, presentations, posters, Facebook cover images, blog graphics, Pinterest images, Google+ covers, Twitter headers, photo collages, and invitations.

Here's a link to a short tutorial: **go.osu.edu/rGs**

Basics

Canva has what seems like an unlimited number of templates to choose from — all of which are completely customizable. If you'd prefer to start with a blank canvas using custom dimensions, click on the text link 'use custom dimensions' on your home page (just above the canvas option icons), enter your dimensions, and click the green 'design!' button.

If you'd prefer to start with a template, choose one of the categories on the home page. The graphic to the right was created from the social media graphic category. Once you make your selection you'll be taken to your canvas page. On the left, you'll see a number of template options to choose from. Don't be concerned with the images or message, because you'll be changing those out. Choose the overall design that you want to use. Click it and drag it to your canvas.

Chances are you're going to want to switch out the background image. Clicking on the image will bring up a menu with a trash can icon. Hit the icon and the image goes away. You can now either upload your own image to use, or you can click in the search bar in the top left corner. Once you click there, you'll be presented with 21 different categories to choose from. Most of the images you'll find here are free. Some cost $1. There's no cost to upload your own images. If you want to just use a background color, select 'background' from the menu on the left. You can create your own color (remember to use an appropriate brand formula), or you can use one of their images. Simply click and drag the square onto your canvas.

To create the image below, I started with a Twitter Post as my base. Next, I deleted the background image and uploaded my own. Dragging the corner of the image allows you to enlarge the object or make it smaller. DO NOT hold down the shift key while dragging. Your proportions are automatically maintained just by dragging.

When you click on an image and get the pop up menu, you'll notice two things: an option called 'filter,' and a drop down arrow. Clicking on 'filter' brings up a number of Instagram-like filters that can be applied to your image. You also have the ability to open up 'advanced options' where you can adjust the saturation, tint, brightness, and contrast of the photo, and even apply a blur or vignette to the outer edge. My image has the vignette and something called the x-process applied to give it a sort of vintage or retro look. Important: Canva doesn't allow you the opportunity to do a 'save as' so if you come up with a design you like but want to do two versions of it (maybe one in color and one in black and white), you will have to create both options by starting from scratch.

To add the red box with the white frame I clicked in the white search bar and selected 'shapes' from the category options. I dragged a plain red square onto my canvas, selected it to apply a different color to it, and then resized it. Then I clicked on it and selected 'copy' from the pop up menu, and made that one white, and sent it to the back.

For my graphic I just updated the text box that was already in the template. Since brand fonts aren't an option, I chose Helvetica. If you click on 'text' in the menu on the left you'll see a number of amazing text box options you can add to your graphic. Again, just remember to change your font to Helvetica to remain brand compliant, and adjust any colors to brand appropriate ones.

When you're satisfied with your graphic, choose the 'download or link' button from the top right.

Sample social media graphic created using a Canva template.

Sample Twitter post graphic created using a Canva template.

THINGLINK (thinglink.com). This app allows you to take a static image and make it interactive by adding tags, which are essentially hyperlinks that are embedded in the image. The tags can link to videos, songs, other photos that relate to the base image, or additional web articles related to the topic.

Here's a link to a short tutorial: **go.osu.edu/rG5**

Basics

Thinglink has a number of payment tiers. The Basic Business option is free and allows you to add tags your image and get analytics to see how many people are clicking on or hovering over those tags. There is no ability to upload and use your own logo or custom icons unless you upgrade.

Begin by uploading an image of your choice. Use the '+' or '-' tools on the right to control the crop of the image and its fit on the canvas.
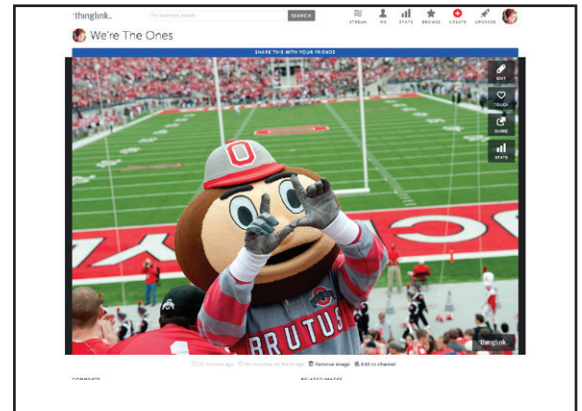
Next, add a title to your graphic in the title bar at the top.

Now you're ready to start adding tags. You can add your own if you have specific things you know you want to link to, or you can look for content using the search bar in the upper left corner. For my graphic, I searched for 'Ohio State Buckeyes' and got a number of options. Double clicking on the item adds it to your canvas. Clicking on the tag opens up a window where you can edit the information associated with the tag. You can add a text message or description, edit the link, and edit the shape and color of your icon. Hit 'save' and then start adding more tags.
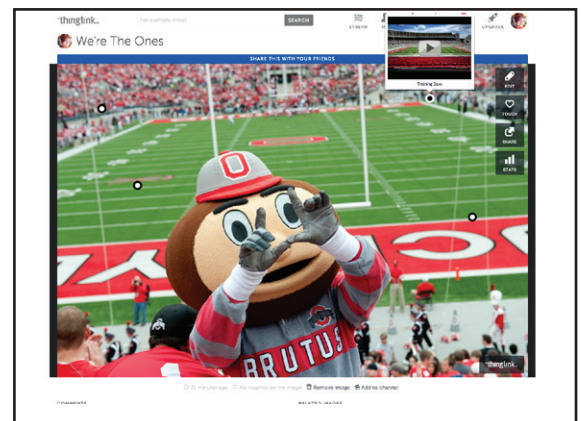
When all of your tags have been added, hit the green 'save' button at the bottom right and you'll be ready to share your image. There is no option to download a file, since this is all about being interactive, but you do have the option to share it on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, Tumblr, and Edmodo. You can also email the file, or use the embed code to add the graphic to a website or a blog.

Basic graphic created in Thinglink

Graphic with tags - rollover for video 1

The university has also created templates for general social media graphics. They require access to a photo editing program like Photoshop, but are already branded. You can download them from the brand site at **go.osu.edu/rG7**

Questions? Comments? Email Kim Brown at **brown.3384@osu.edu**.