



THE POWER OF IMAGES

Care2's Guide To Using Imagery in Your Online Campaign



HUMAN BRAINS AND BLUE SQUARES

As communicators, we are passionate about the work of our organizations. We dedicate time to crafting the right message, honing our target audience, and getting the message out.

But all that work may be for naught if we fail to quickly engage potential supporters for our cause. The best way to do that?

POWERFUL IMAGERY.

The human brain processes visual information 60,000 times faster than text, and 90 percent of the information fed to the brain is visual. If we use this knowledge wisely, we can maximize our impact by involving potential readers, activists, or donors on an emotional level and compelling them to action.

The example below illustrates how our brains are tuned to visual information.

IMAGE



TEXT

This is a blue square. A square is a regular quadrilateral. It has four equal sides and four equal angles which are 90°. Blue is the color between violet and green on the optical spectrum. The sky is often blue, and the color blue is considered cool & calming.

The blue square clearly best communicates its concept quickly and effectively.

This also illustrates the potential drawback to inserting text on your images: it dilutes the visual information that is being conveyed and forces readers to pursue a different line of thought – one that will be less effective at evoking emotion in a potential supporter.

IMAGES: THE BASICS

Quality matters. Images should be clear and have an obvious focal point and tell a story consistent with your campaign. Considering these three guiding principles can help you choose high-quality images:



COMPOSITION

The focal point of your image should be obvious at first glance.

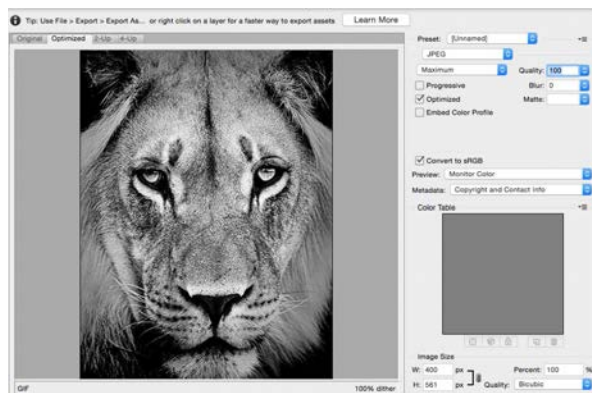
In images that contain multiple subjects (a crowd, herd, landscape), you may wish to crop a high-resolution version of your image to highlight a specific focal point (a single person in the crowd, a single animal, or a particular feature of a landscape).



SIZE

In general, feature images should be consistently sized across individual websites.

The standard image size for Care2 petitions is 750 pixels wide by 300 pixels tall (a 2:1 aspect ratio).



RESOLUTION

For presentation on the web, images should be saved at 72 pixels per inch and be free of visible pixilation.

It is also important to consider how aesthetics within the photo will influence a viewer's perception of your campaign and her or his willingness to engage with the issue.

Consider the next two photos. Both images have an adorable toddler. But the quality of the image on the left is blurry, a little dark, and the subject is unclear.

In the photo on the right, the baby peers into the camera, the focus is tight and the image is bright and clear.



THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

When selecting an image for a campaign, it is also important to consider context. How will the image appear in your campaign? Is this the main image for a petition? For a mailing? How will that image appear in different formats such as a thumbnail, or on Facebook?

Step back from your campaign, and try to imagine you know nothing about the subject at hand. Does your image still tell the story of your campaign?

For example, your campaign may be about pollution from the trucking industry. An image of a truck may be accurate, but without context, it is just a truck. The image of the child struggling to breathe is a more powerful image— especially out of context.

MAXIMIZING IMPACT WITH IMAGES

Because images play such an important role in communicating your message – and motivating readers to action – thoughtful image selection is a must. The ideal image communicates your campaign’s main idea clearly without the need for additional explanation.

Below is a checklist for you to use in selecting an image for your next campaign.

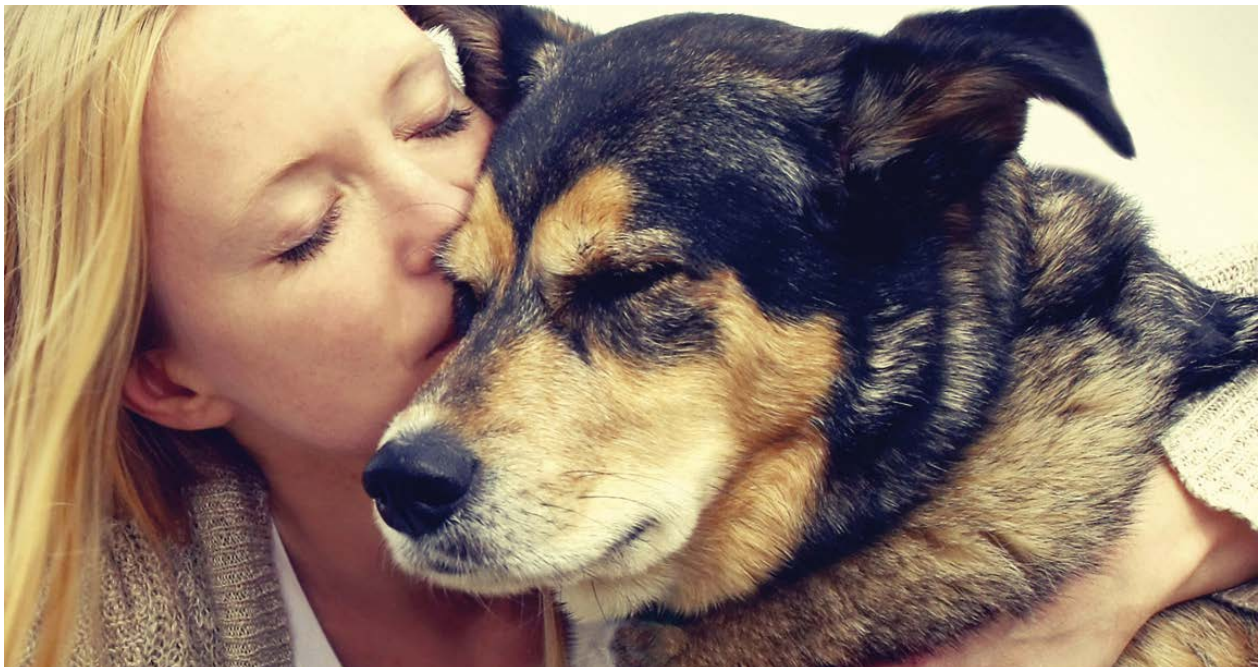
IS YOUR PHOTO...

- RELEVANT TO THE CONTENT IT HIGHLIGHTS?**
- EMOTIONALLY COMPELLING?**
- TONALLY APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR PETITION?**

IS YOUR IMAGE RELEVANT TO THE CAMPAIGN’S MAIN MESSAGE?

The subject of the campaign should inform the choice of image.

If the campaign is about a dog rescuer fighting to keep her animal shelter open, the ideal image might feature the actual woman and one of the dogs. It would be close up, clear, and evoke emotion.



AUTHENTICITY

In a world dominated by social media, authentic imagery – images that are directly sourced from the specific story that you are telling in your campaign – is becoming more important for credibility.

For instance, this image depicting the attack on Eric Garner is far better at communicating the need for police reforms:



... than this stock image:



IS YOUR IMAGE EMOTIONALLY COMPELLING?











Eliciting an emotional response from potential supporters is vital to the success of your campaign, but that response should be a singular, specific emotion.

Before you begin your image selection process, review existing creative assets for your campaign and determine the campaign's emotional tone. You will want to ensure that the emotional tone of your campaign is consistent across words and images.

WHAT IS THE FIRST EMOTIONAL RESPONSE YOU WANT POTENTIAL SUPPORTERS TO FEEL?

POSITIVE

NEGATIVE

BELONGING/ EMPATHY		FEAR	
VALUE		GUILT	
AGENCY		GREED	
SPECIALNESS/ UNIQUENESS		ANGER/ OUTRAGE	
URGENCY		URGENCY	

THE LIST ABOVE IS BY NO MEANS COMPREHENSIVE, BUT THESE ARE SOME OF THE MOST MOTIVATIONAL EMOTIONS.

ATTRIBUTES OF EMOTIONALLY COMPELLING IMAGES

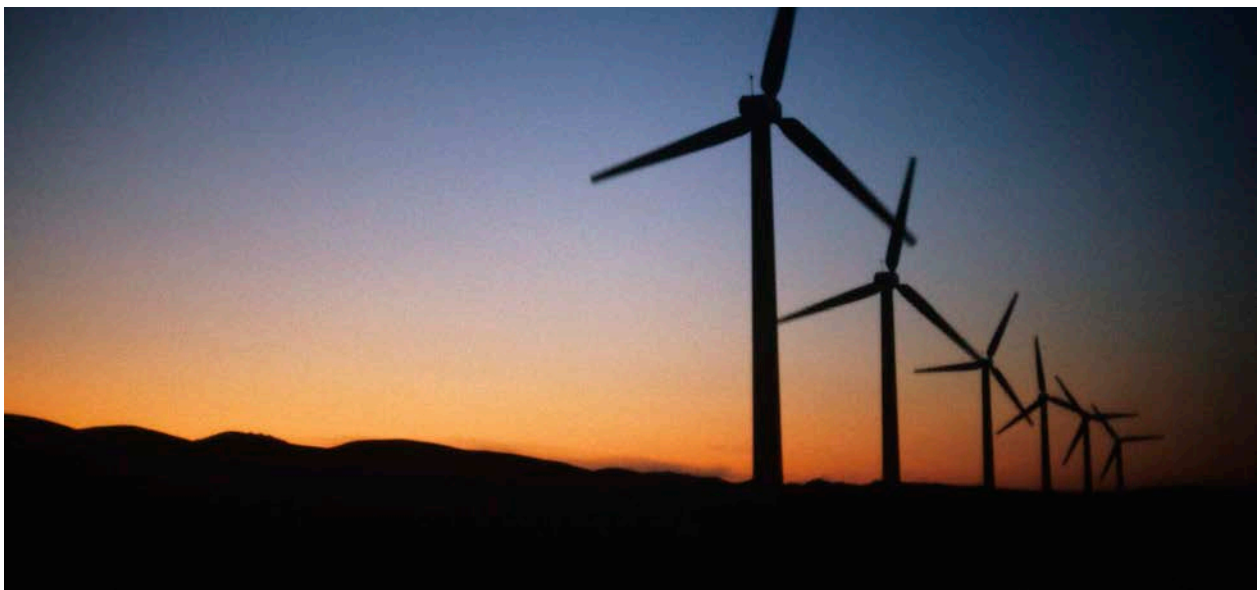
PEOPLE/ANIMALS.

Living creatures are far more relatable than abstract concepts. These images are also more likely to elicit an emotional response that will lead to engagement.

For example, a petition calling for action to reduce wind power-related bird deaths would be better served by a photo like this:



... than a more conceptual photo like this:



A SINGLE SUBJECT.

Behavioral research shows that people are far more likely to be empathetic to a single child suffering from hunger than to thousands of children facing the same fate.

For example, a campaign promoting the benefits of childhood nutrition would be better served by an image like this:



Than an image with multiple subjects like this:



Whenever possible, the subject's eyes should be directed at the reader, inviting a response.

SIGNIFICANCE VS. RELATABILITY

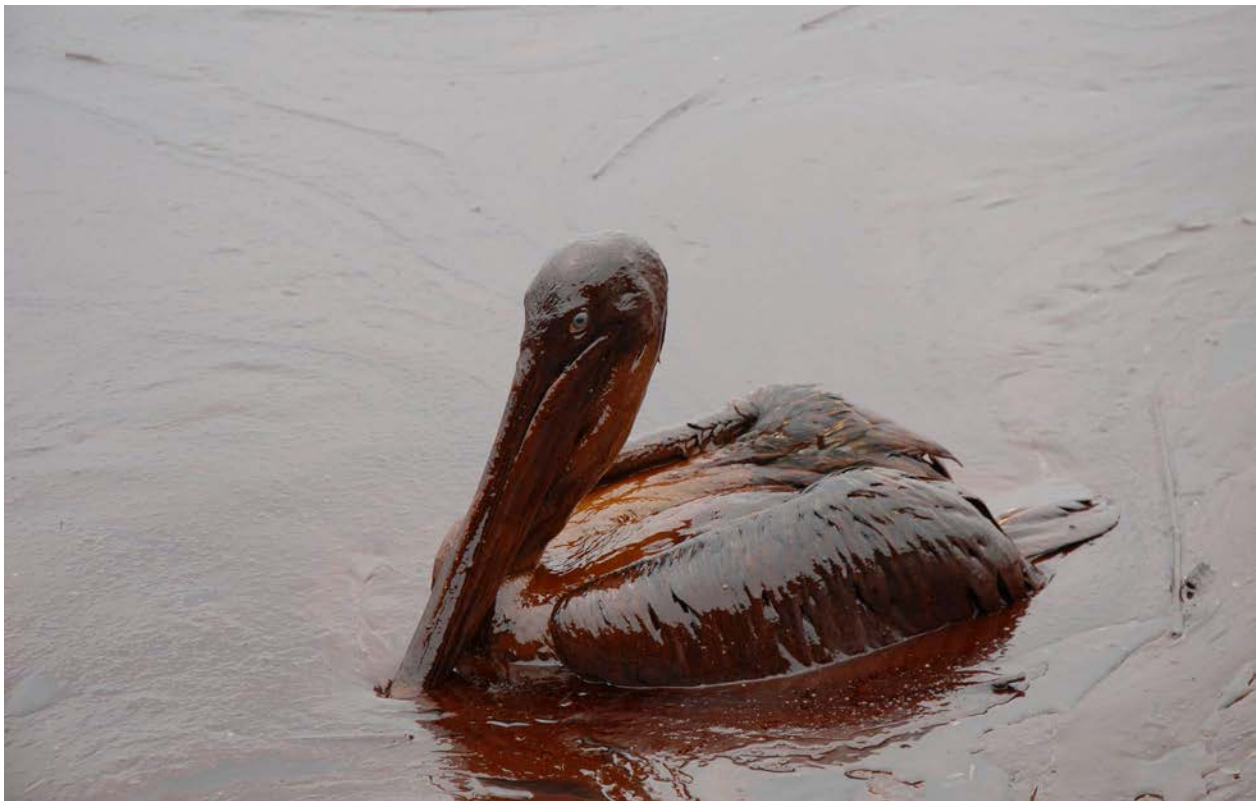
The more conceptual or intellectual your presentation is, the smaller the audience will be that can relate to campaign's underlying story.

The most effective way to communicate your message is to show your readers the problem *in a specific way*.

For example, suppose you were seeking support for reforms to offshore oil drilling practices in the wake of a major oil spill. Readers may become overwhelmed by the image of millions of gallons of oil spilled, or an abstract notion of a whole ecosystem.

Potential supporters are more likely to believe they can help if you represent the campaign in relatable terms, such as a specific animal, fisherman, or community affected by the spill.

In fact, you would likely engage a wider audience with an image like this:



... than a more general spill image like this:

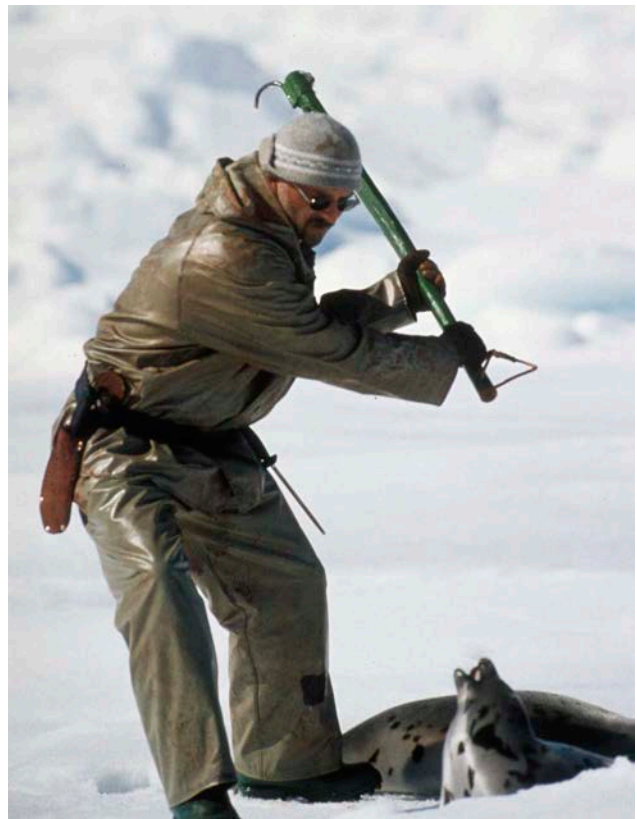


ACTION-ORIENTED.

Your image should compel the people who see it to feel they urgently need to solve a problem.

Use action photos wherever possible. This helps visually communicate the problem and what will continue to happen if the potential supporter does not take action.

For example, let's consider the ongoing campaign to stop the Canadian seal hunt. This action photo makes readers want to stop the man from clubbing the seal:



© IFAW/R. Sobol , International Fund for Animal Welfare/R. Sobol

The previous image is not a close-up, but it is more powerful at communicating the problem than a simple photo of a happy seal.



POSITIVE VS. NEGATIVE IMAGERY



Care2's internal testing shows that negative images like the photo on the left can boost response rates by 7 - 24 percent.

However, the very last thing you want to do is support a visual narrative that undermines your organization’s long-term goals for problem solving and supporter engagement.

THREE KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- 1. DOES YOUR IMAGE EMPOWER POTENTIAL SUPPORTERS? TOO MUCH NEGATIVE IMAGERY CAN FEED CYNICISM AND CAUSE SUPPORTERS TO TUNE OUT.**
- 2. DOES YOUR IMAGE REINFORCE HARMFUL STEREOTYPES?**
- 3. IS YOUR IMAGE CONSISTENT WITH THE PICTURES SUPPORTERS WILL SEE IN SUBSEQUENT COMMUNICATIONS?**

EDITING IMAGES FOR IMPACT

Image alterations can help evoke emotional responses in potential supporters, but it is important to establish clear guidelines for acceptable editing practices to ensure honesty and maintain credibility with your audience.



CROPPING

This is perhaps the most common form of image alteration. Cropping images can help campaigners re-focus an image on a single subject or fit required dimensions for the page where the image will appear. In general, you should avoid cropping a photo in such a way as to change the editorial intent of the photographer.

Again, avoid altering your image in such a way as to subvert the photographer’s editorial intent.



COMPOSITES

Photoshop enables campaigners to layer images together to make an editorial point that may not be apparent in a single image. On the other hand, composites are by nature artificial and should not be presented as an accurate portrayal of reality.

In general, you want to present as authentic an image as possible to support your campaign. Image editing should be used sparingly.

IS YOUR IMAGE TONALLY APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR PETITION?

Images communicate on their own. If the feeling and tone of the image is at odds with the campaign, it can cast doubt on the meaning or import of the words. The emotional tone and subject of your image must be consistent with other creative assets across your campaign.

For example, these two photos say two different things, and each imparts its own feeling.



The photo on the left may be more appropriate for a campaign urging potential supporters to end the tragic confinement of research primates. The image on the right would only tell potential supporters that this petition has something to do with chimps.

A FINAL THOUGHT

As communicators and policy wonks, we all get caught up in the issues. We care deeply about making our world a better place. But motivating action in others means we need to tap into the emotion that makes us fundamentally human. Image choice should be an integral part of your team's communication strategy.

The image you choose is your campaign's first impression. It should say as much about your organization and why you need your reader involved as it does about the campaign it illuminates. We hope this guide helps you to tell even more powerful and compelling stories, to advance your causes and to win the good fight.

