

# The Impact of Graphics On Jurors

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In 2002, we\* conducted one of the first experimental research studies on mock jurors to assess the educational impact of two popular types of courtroom graphic presentations: static board graphics and animated graphics presented with PowerPoint®. The results of this experiment were surprising and dispelled quite a few assumptions that had been made in the area of visuals at trial. Our results and their implications for attorneys who use graphics in the courtroom are outlined below.

1. **On average, lawyers who use graphics will be better able to educate jurors on case facts/issues.**

Research shows that a greater percentage of jurors understand case facts/issues when the case presentation includes graphics, regardless of whether the graphics are shown on static boards or animated in PowerPoint.

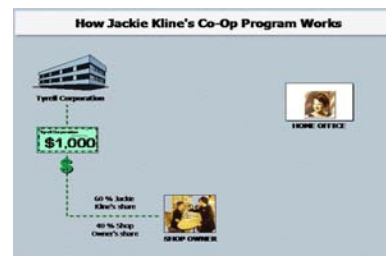
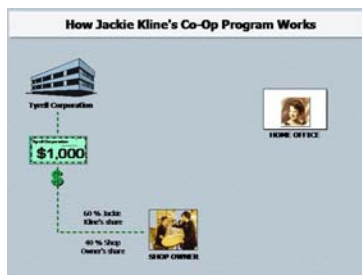
2. **Animated graphics increase juror understanding and retention of facts.**

Research shows that jurors shown PowerPoint graphics are more likely to understand and remember case facts than jurors shown graphics on static foam boards. Research suggests that animations are the catalyst for this effect. However, animations do not affect jury education simply because they add flash and visual interest to any and all graphics. They do so by affecting juror attention, focus, and concentration in decidedly different ways. As such, animations are not equally effective in all circumstances. In some situations, a particular animation will contribute to juror understanding of the case information displayed in a graphic. In a different situation, that same animation will inhibit juror education. When used strategically, animations can maximize an attorney's ability to educate the jury.

3. **Attorneys who use organization and process charts to explain complex phenomena should consider animation when displaying these relationships or processes.**

Research suggests that jurors who are shown graphics built with sequencing animations in PowerPoint are more likely than jurors shown graphics on static boards to understand the complex phenomena the graphics visually represent. PowerPoint's ability to sequence, or lay out these relationships in stages, forms the basis of this effect.

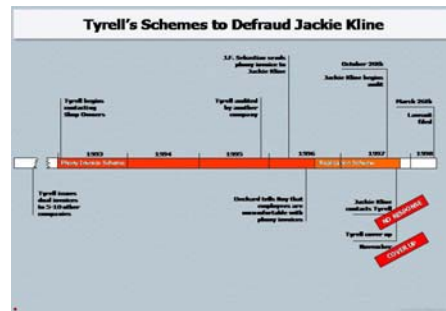
For example, these graphics



illustrate how sequencing might be used to display a fiduciary relationship between three companies. Rather than visually portraying all elements of the relationship simultaneously, as is most common, each element is graphically displayed separately. Moreover, because other relationships disappear from the graphic, jurors are not visually distracted or bombarded with excess information. Sequencing allows attorneys to walk jurors through each part of a larger whole, one step at a time, thereby keeping jurors' attention focused solely on the issue at hand. This type of presentation helps jurors not only better understand each part within the larger whole, but, in the end, the whole as well.

4. **Timelines, one of the most common graphics used in the courtroom, should be presented on static boards.**

Research results indicate jurors are more likely to understand case facts when they are displayed in timeline form on static boards rather than animated in PowerPoint (see Graphic 3). Results also suggest that while animations, particularly sequencing animations, enhance jurors' understanding of complex relationships, they hinder jurors' understanding of case facts when employed in timelines.



Graphic 3

Why do animations obstruct jurors' understanding of case facts in timelines? Timelines are used for a variety of reasons during presentations; one of the most frequent being to summarize or tell the client's story, from beginning to end. While not typically the most persuasive way to tell a story, timelines can be an effective way of organizing a great deal of information (see Graphic 3). Although information-intensive, jurors have an intuitive ability to understand timelines because of their left-to-right linear design.

5. **Interacting with visual displays helps attorneys gain juror confidence.**

Attorneys who use graphics in the courtroom learn quickly that jurors' attention turns to, and sometimes lingers on, the graphic. Courtroom graphics can compete with the attorney for the jurors' attention. The findings suggest that attorneys must direct jurors' attention back to themselves during critical points in their presentation. Blacking out the graphics

on the screen and/or verbally directing jurors' attention back to themselves are two simple techniques to address this issue successfully. During exit interviews, jurors commented that they developed greater respect for litigators who show a command of both facts and display technology.

\*DOAR Litigation Support & Trial Services in conjunction with  
Demonstrative Evidence Specialists Association (DESA)

About the author:

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Trained in both statistical and interpretive research methods, Chad received his B.A. and M.A. in Sociology from the University of North Texas and his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Colorado, Boulder. A former professor of Sociology at Duquesne University, a private Catholic university in Pittsburgh, he specializes in criminology, criminal justice studies, and media studies. He is an expert on criminal behavior, particularly violence and white collar crime, as well as how narratives and images are constructed to cast people and their activity as wrong, deviant, or criminal.