

THE BACK OF THE NAPKIN

Solving Problems and Selling Ideas With Pictures

DAN ROAM

DAN ROAM is the founder and president of Digital Roam Inc., a management consulting firm specializing in the solution of complex problems through visual thinking techniques. Mr. Roam has consulted with companies such as Google, eBay, General Electric, the United States Navy, HBO, News Corp., Sun Microsystems, Wal-Mart and Wells Fargo Bank among many others. He is an experienced key note speaker and public presenter.

The Web site for this book is at www.thebackofthenapkin.com.

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MAIN IDEA

Visual thinking is a whole new way of looking at and discussing business. It is harnessing and applying our innate ability to use our eyes and our imagination to discover, develop and share ideas with others.

All of us are visual thinkers at heart. This is why sometimes, a simple drawing on the back of a piece of paper like a napkin can be more effective in visualizing the solution to some business problem than any Excel spreadsheet or PowerPoint presentation could ever be.

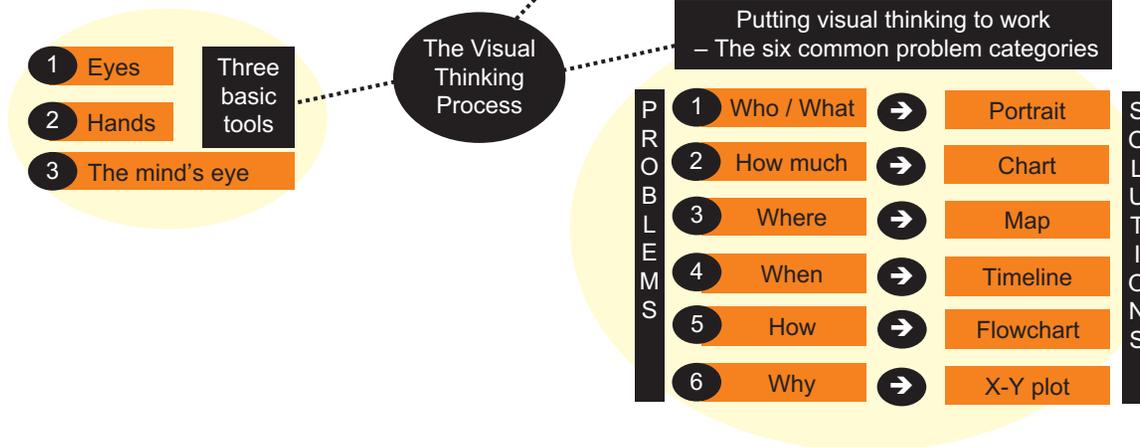
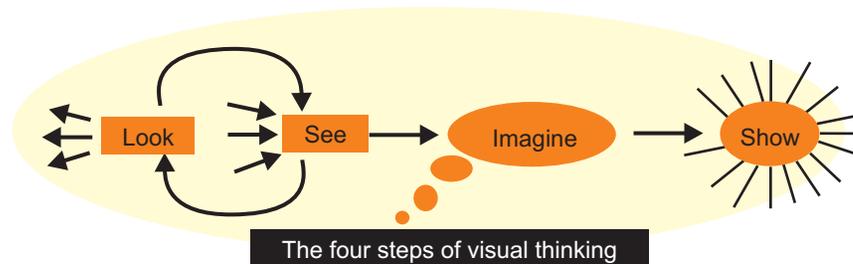
Visual thinking works in business because:

- By drawing something on paper, you can take a vague idea and clarify it for everyone involved in the discussion.
- By keeping it simple – using just a paper and pen – you make the activity inclusive rather than exclusive, which means everyone’s ideas can get grafted in.
- By drawing pictures, you can quickly and concisely help others see what you’re talking about. Pictures clarify whereas words often confuse.
- By using a picture to direct your thoughts, you don’t have to rely on any notes or a written script. You can focus on talking with other people and getting their ideas rather than on giving a formal presentation.

In all, visual thinking is a better way of looking at business problems and a new way to find interesting or innovative solutions.

“The backbone of visual thinking is a very simple process. It is composed of just four steps, and the beauty of these steps is that we already know how to do all of them. In fact, we’re so good at doing them that we don’t consciously think about them at all. But by calling attention to these steps and drawing out the distinctions between them, we can instantly improve our understanding of how visual thinking works. That’s it. Welcome to a whole new way of looking at business.”

– Dan Roam



1. The three basic tools of visual thinking Page 2

There are really only three tools you need to become great at solving problems with pictures: your eyes, your mind’s eye or imagination and a little eye-hand coordination. You don’t need any technology – this is a case where the hand is mightier than the mouse.

2. The four steps of visual thinking Pages 3 - 6

- The backbone of visual thinking is four simple steps, repeated over and over:
- *Look* – collect information, focus on what’s important and screen out everything else.
 - *See* – recognize patterns, select those which are applicable and group details together.
 - *Imagine* – use your mind to see what’s not there yet but should be.
 - *Show* – get others to catch on to what you’ve thought up and making it all clear.

3. Putting visual thinking to work – The six common problem clumps Pages 7 - 8

- When using visual thinking, most problems will fall into one of six general categories:
- A “*who or what*” problem – use a portrait picture to organize potential solutions.
 - A “*how much*” problem – use a chart to show how the numbers compare to each other.
 - A “*where*” problem – use a map to show where items are in relation to each other.
 - A “*when*” problem – use a timeline that shows how items change over their life cycle.
 - A “*how*” problem – use a flow chart that illustrates how different things work.
 - A “*why*” problem – use a multi-variable plot which shows what is happening.

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