

# Business literacy:

## Five tips to help in any situation

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The industry's in massive transition. News organizations everywhere are trying to find new answers. There are buyouts and layoffs. Staff cuts and space cuts. Online emphasis. Interaction design. Multimedia this and that. Always on. 24/7.

The whiplash around what to do next

would make anyone's head spin. With that in mind, we give you some basics that will help you with any change process, whether that's selling a redesign, pitching a plan to reinvent the way you work, or trying something sort of simpler.

The best advice, of course, comes from tailor-making a plan to fit your place. One size never fits all.

### 1) Know some numbers

A good rule of thumb, especially when presenting ideas to top leaders, is to know there's an expectation you've done some homework on how much something will cost and what the return on that investment will be. What's that you say? Aren't we journalists, "content specialists" whose intrinsic value to the organization should be readily apparent? Well, uh, maybe in some ideal world. But we live in the real one. Know costs and project revenue. Figure out how to do a simple profit-and-loss statement for your idea. Ignore numbers at your own peril.

### 2) But don't know too many numbers

Don't overreach, though. You're a visual journalist, after all, and no one expects you to have the expertise of the advertising, marketing or circulation directors. Your job should be to talk with those folks in other divisions, clue them in to your grand plan (or, better yet, work together on it), and take in their advice. That's right: Listen to what they have to say and bear in mind that they are the ones who will help take your great thing to market. Never ever blindside them in a public meeting with wacky numbers you cooked up. That's just not sporting.

### 3) Know what success looks like

Set up your metrics as soon as you can. That means being able to answer this important question: What does success look like? Sometimes, you will have two or three answers to that question, one of which should include being profitable. There are, to be sure, journalistic reasons to try innovative things that may not make money short term. If that's the case, be honest and explain why that innovation cycle may be needed to drive longer term business success. Be sure you mean that and aren't just ducking. Even for the grandest of plans, try to find short-term successes that will build enthusiasm for the bigger and better later. Remember this from Point 1: We live in the real world.

### 4) Then help people visualize success

Finally, this is where you shine, right? It's actually a place where many visual leaders fall down. They're so worried about appearing "serious" in all their research that they forget to spread the infectious, innate coolness that made this extraordinary idea so darned exceptional to begin with. Cut loose. Show what you mean. Change the game right in front of your editors' and publishers' eyes. That kind of transformational change is what visual thinking's built to do, and when it works it's pure magic. Conjure it up at the correct moment. Then bask and watch the believing begin.

### 5) And don't forget to look outside

A friend of mine likes to say we should forget "best practices" and call them "last practices" instead. He also likes to remind me of Einstein's definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. What he means is that by only looking inside what your industry does and applying what's working, even in the success stories, you're likely to miss truly innovate ideas. So that's a giant problem. We need to improve our vision, widen the expanse. We, as a craft, should not simply replicate what looks like success in one market, at one newspaper or Web site. Otherwise, there would just be a bunch of youth tabs and mommy sites. Oh, right.