



## Thinking Visually: How Graphics Sharpen Trial Strategies

In litigation, words tell the story, but visuals make it stick. This is not about mere decoration; when used deliberately, visuals can clarify complex ideas, strengthen themes, and force deeper strategic thinking. Rooted in both art and science, a structured approach to creating trial graphics elevates advocacy well beyond traditional argumentation.

### Why Visuals Matter in Trial Work

Many lawyers operate primarily in “Word Land,” relying on logic and verbal explanation. But people learn in different ways; some are visual learners, while others rely on narrative or tactile cues. The [best teachers](#) combine words with images so that audiences can follow, retain, and apply new information. [Trial graphics](#) serve that exact purpose; they translate abstract or technical material into accessible forms that jurors can understand and remember.

More importantly, the act of creating graphics improves the case itself. Sketching ideas, diagramming [timelines](#), and iterating on layouts forces the team to simplify, prioritize, and identify gaps. Even if a graphic never makes it into court, the process of designing it will make the underlying argument clearer and stronger.

### Five Steps to Thinking Visually

A reliable creative process keeps trial visuals purposeful and effective. It typically follows five steps:

- 1. Uncovering:** Surface the core issues and the mental categories jurors will use to make sense of the facts.
- 2. Understanding:** Pinpoint what jurors truly need to know and how they will relate to that information.

- 3. Simplifying:** Reduce complexity until the idea is as clear as possible; less is often more.
- 4. Informational design:** Use proven design principles to convey data efficiently and avoid visual overload.
- 5. Presentation planning:** Decide how the material will be shown so that the medium reinforces the message.

The initial four steps are iterative and creative, involving continuous refinement. The fifth step—the presentation—should be reserved for last, once the message is fully developed, to ensure media choices do not prematurely limit the message strategy.

## The Power of the Process, Not Just the Product

A common mistake is treating trial graphics as “pretty pictures” or theatrical flourishes. Visuals do capture attention, but their greatest value often lies in the thinking they force. Placing an idea on paper requires defining relationships, ordering facts, and choosing comparisons, activities that uncover weaknesses and clarify strengths.



Visuals do capture attention, but their greatest value often lies in the thinking they force.

A simple pencil sketch or an 8.5” x 11” diagram can do more strategic work than an elaborate multimedia display.

The discipline of thinking visually helps teams test assumptions, build teachable “toeholds,” and create trial demonstratives that jurors can actually recall in deliberations.

## Designing for Diverse Reasoning Styles

Jurors do not all think the same way. Relying solely on verbal explanation assumes everyone reasons like the trial team, which is rarely true. Visual advocacy recognizes [multiple cognitive paths](#) and supplies tools that reach jurors regardless of background or learning preference.

Effective trial demonstratives give jurors a clear path to comprehension, start with a familiar reference, compare the unfamiliar to the familiar, and build understanding in manageable steps. That way, jurors who need a visual anchor get one, while those who prefer words still benefit from clearer structure.

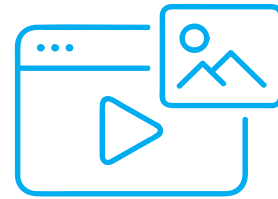
## Avoiding the “Yikes Alarm”

A key design objective is to convey a lot of information without triggering mental overload. Utilize informational architecture, hierarchies, comparisons, and progressive disclosure, so jurors can engage rather than recoil. Ask, what must a juror see first, what can come later, which comparisons immediately provide meaning?

Another safeguard is to test visuals with representative audiences or mock jurors. Research exercises reveal whether the demonstrative achieved its learning objective and which elements need tightening.

## Match Message to Medium

Never let media choices drive the message. First, determine what needs to be communicated, then evaluate your presentation options. Sometimes, a live whiteboard or chalkboard, used like a teacher, provides intimacy and credibility. At other times, dynamic electronic displays that reveal processes step-by-step are more effective. Consider how the method of delivery becomes part of the persuasion; the medium itself can send signals of importance, scale, or clarity.



Use technology and format choices strategically; a sequence of progressive visuals can create a sense of flow, while a carefully timed reveal can guide attention and build a narrative beat.

Use technology and format choices strategically, for example, a sequence of progressive visuals can create a sense of flow, while a carefully timed reveal can guide attention and build a narrative beat.

## Teaching the Jury, One Small Unit at a Time

Complex subject matter must be taught incrementally. Start with a toehold—a relatable concept or analogy—then expand in small, testable units. Break complex processes into discrete steps so jurors can master one idea before moving to the next. This mirrors how effectively teachers introduce new topics, ensuring jurors can follow and retain crucial points.

Testing those trial tutorials, collecting mock juror feedback, and making strategic revisions are among the most impactful steps in persuasive case preparation.

## Visual Advocacy as Strategic Advantage

When visual thinking is integrated early into trial strategies, it does far more than make exhibits attractive. It clarifies argumentation, identifies teaching moments, and equips jurors with accessible mental frameworks they can use during deliberations. The true value of trial graphics lies as much in the rigor of their creation as in their courtroom use.

By committing to an iterative visual process—uncovering, understanding, simplifying, designing, and then presenting—trial teams create demonstratives that teach, persuade, and stick. This process turns complex facts into compelling, juror-friendly stories that elevate the entire advocacy effort.

**IMS Legal Strategies** is a trusted partner to law firms and corporations worldwide, providing the expertise and technology needed to solve dispute-related challenges and protect reputations. IMS delivers strategic solutions for the entire litigation lifecycle, including advisory and analytical support, specialized expert witness services, data-driven jury consulting, powerful trial graphics, and seamless presentation technology. We work closely with clients to develop a strong case around key themes and present compelling narratives that leave a lasting impression on decision-makers. Our integrated teams have decades of practical experience in more than 65,000 cases and 6,500 trials. Together, we win. Visit [imslegal.com](https://imslegal.com) for more.