

Mauldin, Sarah K. C. *Data Visualizations and Infographics*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. 119p. \$85.

*Reviewed by Hannah Alcasid**

¶98 *Data Visualizations and Infographics* is an accessible book for information professionals with varying levels of, or even no, experience with graphic design or image-generating tools. Though useful for all levels of expertise, it gives attention to the timid user, allowing the reader, chapter by chapter, to take small, comfortable steps up to designing a project of his or her own with many tools and strategies. In a time when libraries are urged to rethink how information is disseminated, Sarah K.C. Mauldin not only instructs but sets out to inspire librarians to think about their stories and how they might share them with their communities in palatable, visual forms. She also states that “[t]here is no right way to use this book” (p.xii). It can be used as a handbook or read as an overview of infographics and data visualizations, and how libraries have used and can use them to further their mission.

¶99 The book consists of seven concise chapters. To dip your feet, Mauldin begins with a brief history of how images have been used for communication and storytelling, from Paleolithic times to the present. In chapter 2, she employs various hypotheticals to help the reader understand the context for her visual project and decide what tools may be appropriate at different times, with an emphasis on the

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questions of when, why, and what to use. For readers with a different understanding of a potential project, in chapter 3 Mauldin provides an overview of the free and low-cost creator tools available. These include Piktochart for infographics and Tableau Public for data visualizations, among several others. She also covers a number of resources for pulling data, such as Data.gov, that may assist in creating a compelling story. And for those not yet comfortable with being in waist high, Mauldin provides case studies, in chapter 4, of successful projects spanning academic, public, and special libraries. Those who have made it in but are still unsure about wading further will find chapter 5 most practical. It provides step-by-step technical instructions for eight potential projects using different creator tools, as well as standard software like Microsoft Word. The final chapters discuss tips and the expanding consumption of information in a visual form in the future. Throughout the text, Mauldin references prime examples and other sources for inspiration, but concludes with a list of recommended readings that includes books, presentations, websites, and blog posts to explore further. So by the end, you should be ready to swim.

¶100 I found this text to have three purposes: to be persuasive, instructional, and informative. There are a number of books that review available tools, but with this book's catering to library projects and including successful case studies, it is unique in that it also addresses the reservations library professionals might have about creating visual projects, including why they are useful. Mauldin digs into the process in a very practical way to answer questions, to relieve those reservations, and to help make plans. She provides inspiration to be innovative with examples of how other libraries have used visual tools to tell stories to their audiences.

¶101 While useful for the novice, as someone versed in Adobe InDesign, Illustrator, and other such software, I also found Mauldin's suggestions informative in figuring out what tools may be more suited for different visual projects, especially ones with less time for creation, denser data to display, and perhaps different audiences. The design tools mentioned would certainly save time compared to creating something from scratch. For seasoned designers, there also may be times when one has less creative flow, and the strategies and tools outlined in this book can be employed to still make that sleek product or even an inspiring mock-up that leads to a final product using other software.

¶102 Visuale not only help library professionals reach a larger audience but also prove the evolution of the library from an institution rooted in access to knowledge through text (the book) to one that promotes access to knowledge and information in as many forms as we can imagine.

¶103 Mauldin asks, "Why should you, an information professional, be interested in the content of this book? The short answer is in the word information. . . . This book is about corralling information of all shapes, sizes, and types into manageable and readable presentations that can be easily comprehended . . ." (p.1). She successfully gives both novices and designers the techniques and tools to corral and create in any context.