J11   Exhibit Design and Presentation

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how a well thought-out visual account of an expert's results can best be used in case reports and courtroom exhibits to make effective visual exhibits that aid verbal communication.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by reviewing how forensic document examiners can use the various computer software options and tools to their best advantage and effectively present complex information in a clear and concise manner.

As experts, we are expected to simplify complicated questioned document examinations. Understanding the perspective of the jury and having a basic knowledge of color theory, composition, and content selection will aid the expert in the communication of his or her findings.

When testifying before a jury in today's crime drama obsessed society, the use of exhibits is not only beneficial, but expected. It has been expressed by attorneys that the most effective expert witnesses are excellent teachers. As such, visual aids are critical to demonstrating evidence and findings. This presentation will share the research behind what juries respond to and expect from experts in this regard. The advantages and disadvantages inherent in the various presentation options available will be discussed such as the static poster format vs. a slideshow presentation (software format) or individual handouts for the jurors vs. one central poster.

Exhibits can support the expert's testimony and make it more impactful and memorable. For decades, forensic document examiners have used photographs, photocopies, or drawings to demonstrate handwriting and other evidence. The digital age has ushered in a variety of software programs with capabilities that far exceed the simple formats of the past.

Many elements compose the basics of design such as: visual hierarchy, positive and negative space, font choices, annotations, and color influences. Software programs provide forensic document examiners with many design options in these areas. Some of these elements overlap. Visual hierarchy includes the use of emphasizing scale, colors, font style, placement, and opacity. Positive space is the subject matter area and negative space is the remaining surrounding areas. Knowing how to compose the content/subject matter on a blank canvas will make a difference in keeping the jurors' attention and their eyes inside the frame of your exhibit. Font choices are pertinent for legibility and speed in which the jurors can read the information without hesitation. When the font is difficult to read, this can deter the jury members from reading on further. It is common that forensic document examiners create annotations on their exhibits. These annotations may be made with multiple colors that can potentially lead to confusion in the courtroom. Organizing notations and choosing the right colors can make an inviting environment for the viewer. Therefore, jury members will spend less time trying to comprehend what the annotations are conveying and focus more on what is important. Having a better understanding of these topics will facilitate a foundation for a straightforward and powerful chart that best demonstrates your evidence.

Exhibit, Design, Testimony