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Visualization as an Essential Communications Tool

As a sight-driven species, 80 percent of our experiences are mediated through our eyes; only 7 percent of the impact comes from the words we speak. Humans innately think, create, and respond in a visual world. Our society is becoming ever more visually oriented as a result of television, the Internet, and other modern media. Although we may be aware of the importance of visualization in our daily lives, we tend to forget what a powerful communications tool it can be.

Using visualization during the design process leads to more creativity and thus enhanced problem-solving. Visualization allows a greater audience to understand the information, so that a more productive dialogue can ensue among project stakeholders such as planning commissions, city councils, agency staff, private partners, and the general public. Visualization of what is yet unbuilt can also prevent hidden surprises, help discover unforeseen challenges, and reduce personal interpretation.

Visualization means more than “pretty pictures.” Effective visualization can be achieved through one of several possible graphical formats, including site plan renderings, elevations, perspectives, 3-D images or animated models. Its effectiveness comes from creating an engaging, self-explanatory image that is more memorable than written text or spoken words. Visualization is a way for project developers to convey a design and unravel their vision. It can communicate, for example, that a proposed multi-family housing development has been designed to add both character and value to a community.

Successful visualization requires both technical and artistic expertise. State-of-the-art computer programs provide a level of accuracy and realism not seen in traditional sketches and plans. Today’s software can take into account distances, changing scales, and even topography, which historically was difficult to express. The aesthetic component involves careful and thoughtful



Visualization portrays the complete transformation of an undeveloped site (top) into an attractive community gateway (bottom). Highlights include entry landscaping and elements of architectural interest such as variation in exterior colors and treatments.

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placement of objects and elements and the use of lighting to create a charged, dynamically-balanced scene with focal points that leave the viewer with an intentionally memorable “postcard” image. By combining artistry with technology, visualization integrates realistic textures, such as those that characterize building and landscaping materials, with objects such as cars, people, and structures, to produce an image so lifelike that it can be barely distinguishable from a photograph.

As the old adage goes, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Communicate your vision through visualization.



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