

The Application of Animated Whiteboard Videos  
in Teaching Concepts from  
The Urantia Book On Social Media

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## **Introduction**

The revolutionary innovation of mechanical movable type by Johannes Gutenberg in 1439 facilitated the spread of knowledge and growth of civilization during the Renaissance (14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century) and later in the Protestant Reformation and Scientific Revolution of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the modern era, the profound changes wrought upon civilization by Mark Zuckerberg and a host of digital innovators on the frameworks of material culture and the landscape of digital media and information may be even greater than those of Guttenberg's printing press. The amount of text on a print or digital page has generally shrunk while the amount of graphic content (images and videos) has increased. Youth in particular seem to prefer visual learning.

In this paper we will look at the effectiveness and application of digital animated whiteboard videos – a technique that employs both text and graphic images to communicate ideas – in the online educational arena, specifically with respect to expressing important concepts from the Urantia Book. This fresh new technique is actually built on ancient human behavior – man's predilection for incising rock over the past three hundred thousand years or more, and for drawing and painting signs and pictures in the last 30,000 years, in order to express an inner experience of outer reality.

To gain a better understanding of the power of text that is integrated with compelling images to effectively convey the meaning of concepts in an online environment, we will also include a brief survey of human online behavior and preferences for watching videos or reading text, the history of human drawing, the function of language, and how The Urantia Book refers to the importance of language in understanding higher-level concepts of divine reality.

## **What is Whiteboard Animation Video Technology?**

Whiteboard animation software gives users the tools to create videos in which the hand of the "artist" or video creator appears to quickly draw or paint images on a digital canvas and write words which tell a story related to the image. The images may be either hand drawn by the artist/storyteller, selected from an online library of images, or uploaded from the user's computer.

Every such animated whiteboard video is designed to explain an idea or tell a story about something. The script is typically narrated and short. The finished video is animated so that the images and text are rapidly drawn and appear on the screen for a few seconds only, or the amount of time it might take the average person to view and read the screen.

“Where Good Ideas Come From” is an interesting example of a whiteboard animation by TED speaker and popular science writer, Steven Johnson, author of the bestselling *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation* and *Everything Bad Is Good For You*.



Fig. 1. Steven Johnson, Where Good Ideas Come From, YouTube, Sept 17, 2010.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NugRZGDbPFU>

Whiteboard animation is a relatively new invention that has gained great traction in the advertising and marketing industry as well as education and training. It is a lot more interesting to the human brain to watch an animated video on how to clear a paper jam in a photocopier machine than to read dry text in a manual.

To illustrate and prove this point, there is a delightful, one-minute, VideoScribe whiteboard animation by David Barneda that teaches viewers how to throw a boomerang. He accomplishes this quickly and effectively with humor, playfulness, and an Aussie accent to boot!



Fig. 2. Link: <https://youtu.be/EqLTtRqkH6Y>

Animated whiteboard videos are effective for both slow and fast learners alike. Those who absorb information quickly are not held back by those who prefer a slower pace. At the same time those who may struggle with a rapid delivery of information can access the video anytime and watch it as many times as they like. The result is that whole spectrum of learners are more engaged and more likely to remember the key messages.

Research shows that Whiteboard animation is particularly effective at holding the viewer's attention. Its basic technique of using a hand to dynamically draw and write on the screen as a means of imparting content on the screen is exciting to the viewer and results in high levels of retention. Visually rich video is said to be up to 500% more memorable than text or images on their own.

The secret to the success of whiteboard animations in communicating a message or explaining an idea is that humans are highly visual. Unlike other animal species, like dogs for example, that rely much more on smell in navigating their environment than on sight, humans interpret the world around them chiefly through the sense of sight. It is estimated that about 85% of all information processed by individuals is obtained through vision.

### **Human Online Behavior and Preferences – Watching Videos and Reading Text**

Research psychologist Liraz Margalit, Ph.D. studies online behavior to understand the decision-making process of users in regards to the content they view. In an online article in *Psychology Today* that appeared in 2015, she discusses – with businesses in mind – the advantages and disadvantages of delivering online content by video or text.

To assess these factors it helps to understand a little bit about how the human brain is wired to perceive information from the environment. It turns out that watching a video and reading an article activate separate cognitive functions. Watching a video is a lot easier on the brain than reading text. In fact, Margalit states that, “Videos are processed by the brain 60,000 times faster than text.”

She points out that two different brain processes are involved in watching videos and reading text. “When we read, the process requires us to be actively involved. The brain gets a much better workout when reading vs. watching, and the process requires a longer attention span and deeper cognitive efforts.”

Video watching, on the other hand, is more passive and less demanding on the brain's resources than reading. Margalit reminds us that, “Humans are hardwired to avoid demanding

cognitive strain, so this tendency toward “laziness” will, more often than not, invite us to choose information that is easy to process over the form that makes us put out a lot of effort.”

Nevertheless, research shows that when website visitors must make an important or consequential decision – such as purchasing insurance or financial products, for example – “their more rational, detail-oriented modes are activated and they want to feel in control. In this case, text will provide businesses with a better outcome than video.”

On the other hand, more often than not, video is preferred by website visitors when they don’t have to do any cognitive “heavy-lifting.” Thus when thinking about whether to use videos or text as the primary mode of communicating a message to consumers of information, it is helpful to remember that many factors unconsciously drive a website visitor’s decision-making process and influence their viewing behavior at any given moment, depending on what their needs are. These factors include the type of content on the site, the consumer’s current state of mind, the type of product the visitor is searching for, and the viewer’s personality.

No wonder many people would rather watch a video than read a page of text, a preference that seems to have exploded in the age of social media. This fact undoubtedly reflects the experience of being bombarded and overloaded with information in the digital age.

Science correspondent Richard Alleyne of *The Telegraph* reported on research published in 2012 by Dr. Martin Hilbert and his team at the University of Southern California that quantified the amount of digital information the average American sends and receives daily. They looked at email, twitter, social networking sites, and text messages that humans generate every day and calculated that the average person churns out “six newspapers worth of information [in 2012] compared with just two and a half pages 24 years ago – nearly a 200-fold increase.”

Using the analogy of an 85-page newspaper, Dr. Hilbert’s team found that in 1986 the average American received around 40 newspapers full of information every day, but in 2007 this volume had rocketed to the equivalent of 174 newspapers. The unceasing information traffic has continued to grow exponentially since then.

The massive amount of information being sent and received by users results in a kind of information blur. Although the brain is built to process huge amounts of sensory data and information, the human viewer nonetheless has to make ever more discerning choices about what to read and what to skip in order to quickly get onto the next task. This phenomenon results in the amazing statistics we read about in terms of shortened attention spans and declining rates in book sales and book reading.

In a study conducted by Microsoft, it was famously reported in 2015 (Watson, *The Telegraph*) that the modern human attention span had shrunk from 12 seconds in 2000 (around the time the mobile phone revolution began) to eight seconds in 2015. This data was based on a survey of 2,000 participants in Canada and also upon studying the brain activity of 112 others using electroencephalograms.

The punch line was that even a goldfish had a slightly longer attention span than humans! They can pay attention for at least nine seconds.

There is no turning back from the Information Age. If organizations with educational missions do not start now to become masters of digital media, they will be severely challenged in the future. It is no longer about *why* they should do it. Now it is about *how!*

### Video Statistics for Facebook

There is plenty of evidence from social media to confirm the popularity of photo-sharing and video-watching.



Fig. 4. Photo Credit: Facebook

According to a MediaKix online report on Facebook video statistics, published in August 2016:

- Facebook videos posts have increased by 94% annually in the U.S. from January 2014 to January 2015. For international Facebook users, the increase in Facebook videos published is a still-impressive 75% annual growth rate (AdAge)
- In November 2015, Facebook hit 8 billion video views daily ([TechCrunch](#)), doubling its figure of 4 billion from April just 6 months earlier. At a linear rate, Facebook would be expected to eclipse 16 billion video views in May 2016.

## A Very Brief History of Human Drawing

Long before modern humans developed a sophisticated system of spoken and written language, they communicated by signs and drawings. The example below of a cupule-shaped incision discovered in a cave in central India is considered to be the oldest expression of art in the world. It is at least 290,000 years old and may be tens of thousands of years older!



Fig. 5. Cupule and meander petroglyph on a boulder at the Auditorium Cave, Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh, India (c.290,000-700,000 BCE). Photo © Robert Bednarik, OriginsNet.com.

Sometime during the Upper Paleolithic period, which began about 40,000 BCE, Neanderthal Man was replaced by a more "modern" version of *Homo sapiens*. Urantia Book readers will recognize that this sudden advancement in artistic expression is attributable to the upstepping of the human races by the offspring of Adam and Eve, who arrived on the planet in 35,914 BCE.

At the same time that modern man appeared, prehistoric art took a massive leap forward, as revealed in the magnificent cave paintings of Lascaux Cave in France and Altamira Cave in Spain, which have been dated between 17,000 and 15,000 BCE. The equally astounding cave paintings of Chauvet Cave in France have been dated from 29,700 to 32,400 BCE.



Fig. 6. Scene depicting Cro Magnon painters of Lascaux Cave – Getty Images DEA Library

These cave paintings depict hundreds of scenes of animals which figured prominently in the life of humans of that period as well as a quantity of mysterious, geometric, abstract signs. It is said that Pablo Picasso paid a visit to Lascaux Cave in 1940 and marveled at what he saw, saying that man had learned nothing new in the last 12,000 years (Price, *Washington Post*).

These cave paintings can be likened to footprints left behind in the mud. They tell us somebody was there and reveal something about the experience of these Cro Magnon hunters. However, without any text to accompany the images, we are left with a great deal of mystery and uncertainty about the mind and nature of the people who painted these scenes and what the images meant to them.

Much later in history, after alphabets were developed and word symbols could be formed to denote objects and convey a commonly agreed upon meaning, it became possible to describe an object or event and convey its meaning with little or no ambiguity.

Other early civilizations similarly produced beautiful marks and symbols such as those we find in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) and later in Egypt and China. Calligraphy and art have always been entangled in non-Western societies. Many ancient populations fashioned writing and drawing instruments in order to communicate. The urge to do so seems to be universal as if it were an inevitable stage of human evolution and cognitive development.

Next we zoom ahead to the 20<sup>th</sup> century when a clear movement began toward the greater expression of personal thoughts and feelings. Drawing could serve many more purposes in terms of informing, explaining, enticing, educating, challenging, and entertaining the viewer. Photography also surged as an art form and had a great impact on drawing inasmuch as the camera could be used to take a picture of reality, allowing other forms of art to become more abstract.

As we move well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is evident that drawing is enjoying a resurgence of popularity. It can be used for more purposes than ever before. Digital technology provides aspiring artists today with a brand new type of canvas and set of tools to create endless forms of art for a wide variety of purposes.

Whiteboard animations have carved out a new and unique niche in the world of online storytelling and the communication of ideas. They powerfully combine the two great means of human communications – images and text – to convey rich and replete meaning to the viewer.



## **What is Language (Briefly)?**

Language is a vital part of what makes us human. Simply put, language is a shared system of symbols that permits the “sharing” of meaning between persons. Humans created word symbols in the deep past in the form of signs and sounds in order to share their experience of the environment in which they lived. Language obviously had basic survival value for small groups of early humans. Making sounds and signs even allows other orders of animals, including birds and insects, to function cooperatively together.

The meaning of something lies in the person – in the mind – not in the word symbol itself. Language allows human beings to share a common reality and transfer meaning to each other in a way that is meaningful to the sender and the receiver.

The aim here is not to get entangled in semantic or foundational theories of meaning, but rather to understand the basic function of language as a communication vehicle by which information is sent or made available to people and by which social influence is exerted or attempted by the Sender. On the receiving end, it is up to the Receiver of the communication to interpret or make sense of the sender’s message.

Basically language serves three functions in explaining meaning. It serves as the representation of reality to the human thinker and secondly as a medium for gaining and processing information. Finally language functions as social fact, which is able to create various forms of communication between individuals in a society.

A word has a denotative or literal meaning like that defined in a dictionary. It also has a connotative meaning which refers to the emotional implications and associations of a word. Words thus give us a powerful way to describe our inner thoughts and emotions and to interpret our outer experience of the world to each other in a way that is mutually understood.

All of this discussion about drawing and language is important when it is brought to bear on animated whiteboard videos. That is because such creations must use language sparingly yet adequately and precisely in order to effectively convey the greatest amount of meaning to the viewer.

At the same time, whiteboard animations rely heavily on drawings or other graphic content to convey even more subtle layers of meaning, particularly of an emotional quality. When these two elements are skillfully integrated to convey a concept or tell a story, especially for the purpose of education, the impact is great on the mind of the viewer/learner.

## What Does The Urantia Book Say About Language?

To demonstrate the importance of language, The Urantia Book begins with a grand statement about the conceptual poverty of human beings with respect to thinking and speaking about God. That is because human languages, even English which has a rich and beautiful vocabulary of well over a million words, lack adequate words to denote and describe levels of knowledge about divine reality which lie beyond our present awareness and state of evolution. We mortals may think we are quite evolved and technologically sophisticated, but we are still in the womb when it comes to apprehending divine, cosmic reality.

- <sup>0:0.1</sup> IN THE MINDS of the mortals of Urantia — that being the name of your world — there exists great confusion respecting the meaning of such terms as God, divinity, and deity. Human beings are still more confused and uncertain about the relationships of the divine personalities designated by these numerous appellations. Because of this conceptual poverty associated with so much ideational confusion, I have been directed to formulate this introductory statement in explanation of the meanings which should be attached to certain word symbols as they may be hereinafter used in those papers which the Orvonton corps of truth revealers have been authorized to translate into the English language of Urantia.

The author, a Divine Counselor, then goes on to tell us how difficult it is to “present enlarged concepts and advanced truth” in the revelators’ “endeavor to expand cosmic consciousness and enhance spiritual perception” when they “are restricted to the use of a circumscribed language of the realm [English].” (0:0.2)

We are told that the revelators have been instructed to use “the word symbols of the English tongue” whenever they can and to “introduce new terms only when the concept to be portrayed finds no terminology in English which can be employed to convey such a new concept partially or even with more or less distortion of meaning.” (0:0.2)

Clearly the humans of Urantia are being challenged by the Urantia Papers to grow intellectually and personally through this new revelation. To do this, we must enlarge our vocabulary and adopt new word symbols to describe a vision of universe reality that is more vast, rich and grand than we ever imagined. This gets especially troublesome given the number of languages currently spoken around the world and the highly subjective interpretation of meaning given to words by individual intellects heavily influenced by societal belief systems and values.

- (1.3) 0:0.3 In the hope of facilitating comprehension and of preventing confusion on the part of every mortal who may peruse these papers, we deem it wise to present in this initial statement an outline of the meanings to be attached to numerous English words which are to be employed in designation of Deity and certain associated concepts of the things, meanings, and values of universal reality.

Enlargement of vocabulary does not in itself equate to growth, but it is a necessary factor in expanding a person's intellectual recognition and appreciative understanding of spiritual and cosmic meanings along with an ever-expanding discovery of values.

We know that personal growth from the cosmic perspective occurs on three levels of human personality: the intellectual, the morontial, and the spiritual; upon the mind, in the evolving soul, and with the indwelling spirit. (100:2.3) Thus it could be said that mortal beings must increasingly expand their vocabulary in all spheres of their eternal existence in order to make progress towards greater God-consciousness through the accumulation of meanings and the elevation of Supreme values.

In a way, the entire Urantia Book is a cosmic dictionary given to humanity to help us elevate our thinking to transcendent levels by enriching and expanding our current philosophical and spiritual vocabulary. Of course, we must discern and *experience* God before we can truly live into the cosmic meanings and values alluded to in The Urantia Book.

- (537.2) 47:7.2 Having mastered the local universe language before leaving the fourth mansion world, you now devote more time to the perfection of the tongue of Uversa to the end that you may be proficient in both languages before arriving on Jerusem with residential status. All ascending mortals are bilingual from the system headquarters up to Havona. And then it is only necessary to enlarge the superuniverse vocabulary, still additional enlargement being required for residence on Paradise.

### **An Example of Using VideoScribe to Teach Concepts in The Urantia Book**

Having briefly examined the elements of animated whiteboard videos and some of the characteristics of the Information Age, as well as some of the online behavior of humans, a brief history of drawing, and the components of language, we finally turn to an animated whiteboard video that I created about a concept from The Urantia Book.

It is called, *What does The Urantia Book say about the Soul?* [Note: This video will be shown live during the Education Seminar.]



Fig. 7. Whiteboard Animation video screen. Videoscribe.com.

## Conclusion

Animated whiteboard videos are a powerful and effective technique employing graphics and moving images that are integrated with text for the purpose of communicating ideas – for storytelling and conveying information in an engaging and meaningful way to viewers and learners.

This fresh, new 21<sup>st</sup> century technology is built solidly on ancient behavior – man’s predilection for creating marks and symbols in the very distant past, and for drawing and painting signs and pictures in the last 30,000 years which express an almost unutterable inner experience of the human mind, most often with reference to his outer reality.

This method should prove to be highly effective in conveying the teachings of *The Urantia Book* in the hyperactive world of the Internet where videos are often preferred over text across social media platforms like Facebook. The Information Age presents unique opportunities for teaching clear, quick and simple lessons from the Urantia Papers about important meanings and values of divine and cosmic reality that have been transmitted in over a million words and more than 2,000 pages of printed text.

With the growing preference, among the younger population in particular, for images and video formats for receiving information – no doubt heavily influenced by the crushing overload of information bombarding modern society in the digital age – animated whiteboard videos may prove to be a super channel for organically and fluidly teaching and spreading the Urantia revelation to an ever-widening circle of spiritual truth-seekers.

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