

Purpose Audience and Design Analysis of Two Reports

Posted on September 5, 2024

Introduction

The NOAA material on invasive lionfish and the Starbucks annual report are both professional reports, but they belong to different genres and solve different communication problems. The lionfish report explains an ecological threat and encourages awareness and participation. The Starbucks annual report documents a public company's financial condition, risks, strategy, governance, and performance for investors and regulators. Both use headings, quantitative information, and visual organization, yet their purposes determine different choices in language, evidence, navigation, and design.

A useful analysis considers the complete rhetorical situation: who produced the report, what action or understanding it seeks, who must use it, what legal or scientific constraints govern it, and how design helps readers find information. "Purpose," "audience," and "design" are interconnected. A report cannot be judged as attractive or detailed in the abstract; its success depends on whether its form allows the intended readers to make informed decisions.

Report One: NOAA's Invasive Lionfish Communication

The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary is managed within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. Its lionfish material explains that lionfish are native to the Indo-Pacific and have established populations in the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico. The sanctuary first documented lionfish in 2011. The report combines species identification, ecological concern, monitoring, removal activity, and public guidance. (Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary)

Purpose

The primary purpose is educational and environmental. The report must help readers recognize lionfish, understand why an attractive reef fish can be ecologically harmful outside its native range, and learn how sanctuary staff monitor and manage the invasion. It also supports public participation by telling divers or other observers how to report sightings and by explaining removal efforts.

A secondary purpose is institutional accountability. NOAA is a public agency, so its communication should show why management resources are being used and how observations support policy. The report does not simply say that lionfish are “bad.” It explains origin, range expansion, venomous spines, prey consumption, reproduction, and concern for native reef communities. This evidence establishes the scientific reason for intervention.

Audience

The audience is layered. Members of the general public may arrive through a search engine and need a brief explanation. Divers, fishers, sanctuary volunteers, educators, and local conservation groups may need practical identification and reporting information. Scientists and managers may seek dates, counts, locations, and links to research. Students may use the material as an introduction to invasive species.

This mixed audience requires accessible language without sacrificing accuracy. Scientific names and ecological concepts can appear, but definitions and images reduce barriers. The report cannot assume that every reader understands reef ecology, yet it should provide enough detail for experienced users to follow references or related monitoring pages.

Design and Organization

The lionfish material uses a web-based structure rather than the linear form of a printed academic paper. Headings divide the invasion history, biological characteristics, sanctuary observations, management response, and public action. Photographs help readers identify the species and visualize its reef habitat. Maps and dated observations show movement through the Western Atlantic and Gulf. Tables or figures can summarize sightings and removals over time.

The design supports scanning. A diver may need a reporting form, while a student may read the complete narrative. Hyperlinks connect the main page to research, sanctuary conditions, educational resources, and participation. This layered architecture is appropriate for a public information site because not every reader needs the same depth.

Report Two: The Starbucks Annual Report

Starbucks Corporation’s annual report is a regulated corporate document. Its central financial filing is the Form 10-K submitted to the United States Securities and Exchange Commission, often accompanied by an annual report to security holders and separate impact reporting. Unlike a promotional brochure, the annual filing must include audited financial statements, management discussion, risk factors, controls, legal information, and other disclosures required of a public company. (Starbucks Corporation)

Purpose

The report's main purpose is to enable investors and regulators to evaluate the company. It explains revenue sources, operating expenses, store development, licensing, debt, cash flow, assets, risks, and strategic priorities. It also provides a record against which management can be held accountable.

The document has additional purposes. Employees, suppliers, lenders, analysts, journalists, competitors, and communities use it to understand how Starbucks operates. Environmental and social information may appear in the annual report, but the company also publishes a separate global impact report. These documents should not be treated as interchangeable. The 10-K is governed by securities disclosure obligations; an impact report emphasizes selected social and environmental goals and usually uses a more public-facing design.

Audience

The principal audience includes current and potential shareholders, financial analysts, lenders, and regulators. These readers expect precise numbers, standardized accounting categories, material risk disclosure, and comparability across years. Some possess advanced financial knowledge, while individual investors may require explanatory summaries and clear tables.

Other stakeholders read selectively. Employees may focus on workforce strategy. Suppliers may examine purchasing and geographic growth. Community or environmental groups may search for climate, sourcing, packaging, labor, and human-rights information. The report therefore uses a table of contents, indexed sections, notes, and cross-references to serve readers who rarely proceed from the first page to the last.

Design and Information Architecture

The annual report combines narrative and highly formal data. A shareholder letter or strategic overview provides a broad story about performance and priorities. The business section explains segments, products, competition, seasonality, and intellectual property. Risk factors identify events that could harm operations. Management's discussion and analysis interprets trends, while audited statements and footnotes present detailed evidence.

Tables are central because financial readers need exact figures and year-to-year comparison. Charts can emphasize store counts, revenue, or selected performance measures, but the authoritative data remain in the statements and notes. Typography, page numbers, section labels, and internal links help users navigate a document that can exceed one hundred pages. Legal language and accounting terminology make the report more demanding than the lionfish page, but precision is necessary.

How Purpose Shapes Evidence

The lionfish report relies on biological observation, distribution records, photographs, removal counts, and ecological research. The relevant question is whether the species is established, how it affects native ecosystems, and what management response is justified. Evidence is often spatial and ecological.

The Starbucks report relies on audited accounts, operating data, legal disclosures, management estimates, and risk analysis. Its relevant questions concern profitability, liquidity, growth, uncertainty, governance, and compliance. Evidence is financial and institutional. A photograph of a lionfish can directly help identification; a photograph of a coffeehouse cannot establish financial performance. Conversely, a consolidated cash-flow statement would be inappropriate for a public species-identification page.

Similarities Between the Reports

Structured Reading

Both reports divide complex information into labeled sections. Readers can identify the problem, supporting evidence, response, and further resources. This structure prevents the report from becoming one continuous block of text.

Use of Quantitative Information

Both use numbers to create credibility. NOAA may show sightings, dates, locations, or removal totals. Starbucks reports revenue, costs, store counts, assets, liabilities, and other measures. In each case, a number gains meaning through context. A lionfish count requires a location and survey method; a financial figure requires a period, accounting definition, and comparison.

Institutional Credibility

Both depend on the authority of the producer. NOAA's credibility comes from scientific management and public responsibility. Starbucks' annual report is issued by management but includes audited statements and regulatory filing requirements. Each report should identify sources and methods so that authority does not become a substitute for evidence.

Visual and Navigational Support

Headings, tables, images, charts, and links help readers process large amounts of information. The visual elements are functional rather than decorative when they clarify species appearance, geographic spread, financial trends, or document hierarchy.

Differences Between the Reports

Public Education Versus Investor Decision-Making

The lionfish report seeks broad awareness and responsible action. Its success may be measured by understanding, accurate reporting, and support for management. The annual report supports investment and governance decisions. Its success depends on complete, material, and comparable disclosure.

Tone

NOAA can use direct educational language and explain why readers should care. The annual report uses formal, cautious language because claims can create legal and financial consequences. Corporate narrative may still be persuasive, but risk factors and accounting notes must qualify uncertainty.

Reading Pattern

The lionfish page supports short, nonlinear visits. A user may look at an image and reporting instructions. The annual report expects reference reading: analysts move repeatedly among management discussion, statements, and notes. Searchability and cross-referencing are therefore especially important.

Regulatory Constraints

Environmental communication must be scientifically responsible and comply with public-agency standards, but a corporate 10-K is governed by detailed securities rules. Material omissions or false statements can have legal consequences. This explains the annual report's density and standardized sections.

Accessibility and Plain Language

Both reports should be accessible to people using screen readers, mobile devices, and different levels of technical knowledge. Images need meaningful alternative text. Tables need clear headers. Color should not be the only way to communicate a category. PDF documents should have tags, bookmarks, logical reading order, and searchable text.

Plain language does not mean removing necessary technical terms. It means defining them, shortening sentences where possible, and showing relationships clearly. NOAA can explain “invasive species” before discussing ecological effects. Starbucks can define non-GAAP measures and reconcile them with standardized accounting results.

Potential Weaknesses

The lionfish report may oversimplify uncertainty or encourage readers to believe that occasional public removals can eliminate a widespread invasion. It should explain the limits of control and the importance of safe handling because lionfish spines are venomous. Data visualizations should state survey effort so that an increase in observations is not automatically interpreted as an equal increase in population.

The Starbucks report can overwhelm non-specialists and place important risks deep inside technical sections. A glossy opening narrative may emphasize success more strongly than uncertainty. Readers should compare the management story with audited statements, footnotes, and risk disclosures. Social-impact claims should include baselines, definitions, and progress against measurable targets.

Recommendations for Better Report Design

The NOAA report could provide a one-page summary for the public, a clearly marked reporting and safety section, downloadable data for researchers, and explanations of how monitoring effort affects counts. Interactive maps could display dates and sanctuary zones without forcing the reader to interpret a static image.

The Starbucks report could provide a concise navigation guide linking each strategic claim to the relevant financial or risk section. Tables should remain available in machine-readable form. The annual financial report and the impact report should cross-reference one another while preserving the distinction between audited financial disclosure and voluntary sustainability communication.

Conclusion

The invasive lionfish report and the Starbucks annual report both organize evidence for a defined audience, but their genres produce very different designs. NOAA uses accessible ecological explanation, images, maps, and action-oriented links to educate the public and support sanctuary management. Starbucks uses formal sections, audited statements, tables, footnotes, and risk disclosures to inform investors and regulators. Their shared strengths are structure, quantitative evidence, institutional accountability, and navigability. Their differences demonstrate a central principle of professional communication: report design should follow the decision the reader must make.

Works Cited

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. "Invasive Lionfish." National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. <https://flowergarden.noaa.gov/education/invasivelionfish.html>

Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. "Invasive Species at Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary." NOAA.

Starbucks Corporation. *2025 Annual Report*.

<https://investor.starbucks.com/financials/annual-reports/default.aspx>

Starbucks Corporation. *Fiscal 2025 Global Impact Report*.

<https://about.starbucks.com/annual-impact-report/>