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Good Charts: The HBR Guide To Making Smarter, More Persuasive Data Visualizations



Synopsis

Dataviz—the new language of business—A good visualization can communicate the nature and potential impact of information and ideas more powerfully than any other form of communication. For a long time, dataviz was left to specialists—data scientists and professional designers. No longer. A new generation of tools and massive amounts of available data make it easy for anyone to create visualizations that communicate ideas far more effectively than generic spreadsheet charts ever could. What's more, building good charts is quickly becoming a need-to-have skill for managers. If you're not doing it, other managers are, and they're getting noticed for it and getting credit for contributing to your company's success. In *Good Charts*, dataviz maven Scott Berinato provides an essential guide to how visualization works and how to use this new language to impress and persuade. Dataviz today is where spreadsheets and word processors were in the early 1980s—on the cusp of changing how we work. Berinato lays out a system for thinking visually and building better charts through a process of talking, sketching, and prototyping. This book is much more than a set of static rules for making visualizations. It taps into both well-established and cutting-edge research in visual perception and neuroscience, as well as the emerging field of visualization science, to explore why good charts (and bad ones) create feelings behind our eyes. Along the way, Berinato also includes many engaging vignettes of dataviz pros, illustrating the ideas in practice. *Good Charts* will help you turn plain, uninspiring charts that merely present information into smart, effective visualizations that powerfully convey ideas.

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Customer Reviews

Like it or not, charts and graphical representations have changed since many of us were at school or university. Simple line, bar and pie charts are so old-school that they soon will be coming back as a retro fashion. Until then, a book like this that will give the latest and best advice about creating and using intelligent, persuasive and responsive data visualisations will be a great help. It might be a cliché but it really did bring things to life. The only negative point for this reviewer was the layout: it just felt very hard to read a multicolumn book, particularly on a tablet, as the layout interrupted the flow. Fortunately, the content itself made up for it! The author carefully and patiently takes the reader through the entire subject without being patronizing or assuming everybody is a data nerd: a good balance was reached and the reader feels inspired and empowered to do more with their data. Graphics and charts are more than just filler material and after reading this book you surely will want to get your hands digitally dirty and be creating. The reader is encouraged to "think visually" and the author advocates a system that will let your graphics do the talking, leveraging the underlying data to a possibly new level, whilst considering your prospective audience and taking into account your goals. There is a lot more to data visualization than the default range of charts in Excel which, to be fair, can be better than nothing assuming you have selected the right chart from the get-go that will tell a particular story. It was also interesting to note the author's obvious (when you think about it) comments about the way particular data points can be presented.

The name of the publisher (Harvard Business Review Press), if not the subtitle, should convey that this book is mostly aimed at business professionals. Indeed, I've seen this book in airport bookstores. It could be helpful as well as easy reading on a flight or even while waiting for the plane to take off. I am not in business and bear witness that many other people could also find this book interesting and useful as an essentially non-technical introduction to charting their data. Berinato's book is not as different or as radical as it sometimes implies, which is fine by me; the principles of good and bad graphics don't change that rapidly, whatever the vagaries of fashion, with small ins and outs of what is and isn't on trend. So, the chapter on design principles really isn't that different from what Edward Tufte was arguing 30+ years ago, especially in emphasizing clarity and simplicity. (But who argues for obscurity?) I wanted more examination of whether the complicated graph forms mentioned positively (including tree maps and alluvial and Sankey charts) really work well with the intended audience, or any audience. Of the trendier stuff, grid maps (e.g. each state of the United

States as a square or hexagon) are I think here to stay; it's not always helpful that Montana takes up more space on a map than Manhattan, to borrow a good example from this book. On the other hand, to my taste unit charts are too redolent of grade school. My personal choice of the best chapters: Chapter 2 has an excellent simple overview of how we read displays. Chapter 7 has a thorough and sane discussion of the pluses and pitfalls of truncated and double y axes and of maps.

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