

Chart Tamer

Designing a Fix for Excel's Charts

Stephen Few

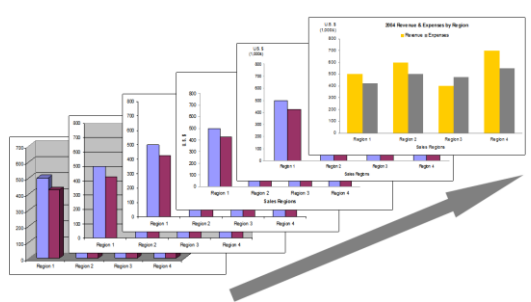
Perceptual Edge & University of California, Berkeley

The opportunity



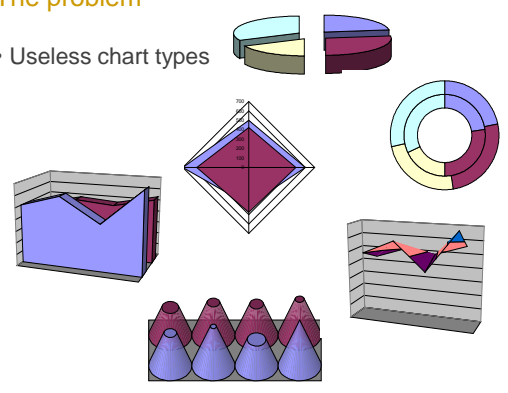
The problem

Excel Charts An Extreme Makeover



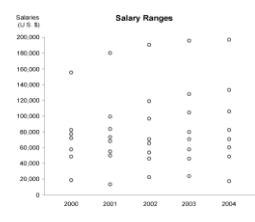
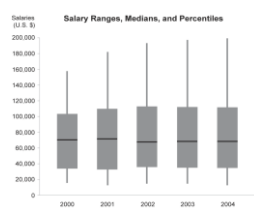
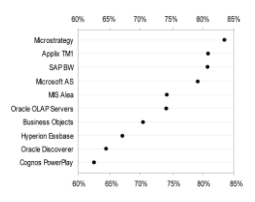
The problem

- Useless chart types



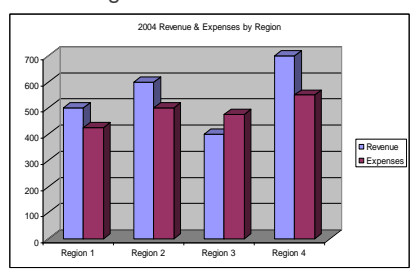
The problem

- Useless chart types
- Missing chart types



The problem

- Useless chart types
- Missing chart types
- Poor formatting defaults



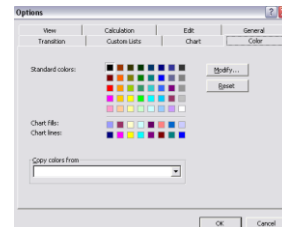
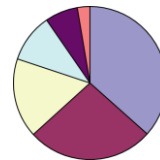
The problem

- Useless chart types
- Missing chart types
- Poor formatting defaults
- Silly formatting options



The problem

- Useless chart types
- Missing chart types
- Poor formatting defaults
- Silly formatting options
- Poor colors



The problem

- Useless chart types
- Missing chart types
- Poor formatting defaults
- Silly formatting options
- Poor colors
- No chart selection assistance



The offer

Stephen Few (sfew@perceptualedge.com)
 Date: Wed 9/7/2005 5:42 PM
 To: Dan Cory
 Dan,
 Thanks for taking the time to contact me. It's nice to have access to someone who exercises influence over the design of Excel.
 Being the omnipresent product that it is, I'd like Excel to provide some of the best visual data

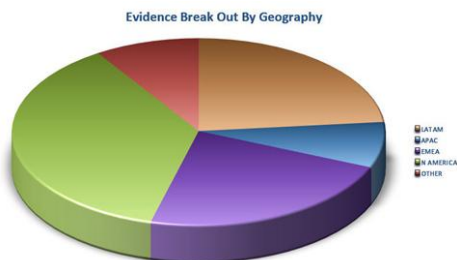
“I'd like Excel to provide some of the best visual data presentation functionality available.”

effectively.
 2) A wizard or advisor to coach users through the process of selecting the right chart type based on the data and their message and then to help them design the chart to communicate the message in the clearest possible way.
 4) Good examples in the user documentation to properly illustrate the use of the various chart types.
 I can take some time to write up my recommendations regarding items 1 and 2, but a detailed decision tree that would be needed for the wizard based on the principles that I teach in my book "Show Me the Numbers" and actual examples produced for Excel's user documentation go beyond what I could do quickly and provide for free. I'll send something to you in a few days regarding the first two items. If you're interested in my help with the last two items, just let me know and we can discuss it.
 Thanks,
 Steve

The hope-filled anticipation

Dan Cory (dancory@exchange.microsoft.com)
 You replied on 9/7/2005 10:44 AM.
 Sent: Wed 9/7/2005 10:31 AM
 To: sfew@perceptualedge.com
 Steve -
 Thanks. This was quite interesting and useful. I think you'll be pretty happy with some of the changes we are making for Office 12.
“I think you'll be pretty happy with some of the changes we are making for Office 12.”
 Two such articles written by others:
<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/assistance/H4012216891033.aspx>
<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/assistance/H4012069861033.aspx> (about the author page with links to five articles)
 I'm sure there'd be interest in some of your table material as well as charts.
 If this interests you, send me a few topics and I'll get you in touch with our editors.
 Dan

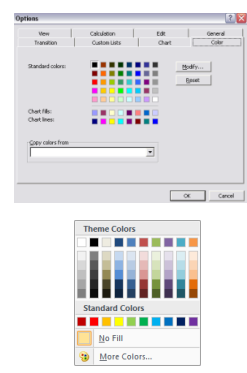
The disappointment



More is not always better.



The problems remained.



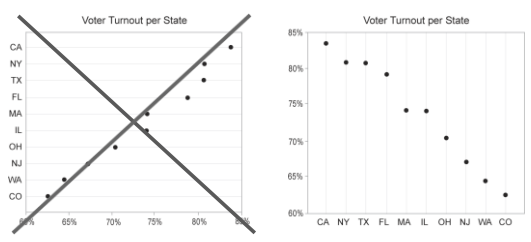
The decision

FIX IT!

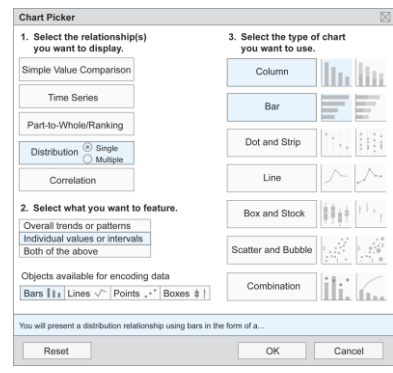


The constraints

- Don't depart radically from Excel's interface
- Don't write code that won't work on all platforms
- Stick to what can be done through Excel's API



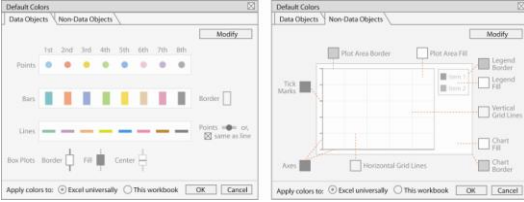
The original design – chart selection



The original design – color



The original design – defaults



The original design – formatting options

