Every Visualization You’ve Seen is Worthless

Strata NYC • October 23, 2012
Noah Iliinsky • @noahi
Nearly Every Visualization You’ve Seen is Worthless

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Really? But I liked that one with the circles...
What does success look like?

1. Has clear purpose and focus.
2. Contains (only) the right information.
3. Is the right structure.
4. Has useful formatting.
What does success look like?

1. Purpose
2. Content
3. Structure
4. Formatting
A good visualization reveals what’s important.

1. Trends
2. Gaps
3. Outliers

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anscombe’s_quartet
Purpose and focus.

Limited content.

Is It Better to Buy or Rent?

Whether renting is better than buying depends on many factors, particularly how fast prices and rents rise and how long you stay in your home. Compare the costs of buying and renting a home in the calculator below. Click the ADVANCED SETTINGS button to change inputs such as your rate of return on investments, condo/common fees and your tax bracket.

Buying is better than renting after 5 years.

- Home price: $172,000
- Monthly rent: $1,100
- Down payment (%): 20.0
- Mortgage rate (%): 5.50
- Annual property taxes (%): 1.35

Years from now:
1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12  13  14  15  16  17  18  19  20  21  22  23  24  25  26  27  28  29  30

$20,000 $15,000 $10,000 $5,000 0 $-5,000 $-10,000 $-15,000 $-20,000

+2% Annual home price change
+3% Annual rent increase or decrease

Buying is better
Renting is better

Actionable answers.

What does success look like?

* Not just overview.
* Not just numbers.
* Answers to questions.
* Enables decisions & action.
Structure failure: The 189% donut.

http://ilovecharts.tumblr.com/post/33308788744/from-the-boston-metro-oct-10th-hannabeth-well
Valid pie (and donut) graphs must total 100%
Structure success: Time, not in a timeline.

http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2010/05/02/business/02metrics.html?pagewanted=all
Does the formatting aid understanding?

http://awesome.good.is/transparency/web/1004/mean-happiness/flat.html
But wait!

2,500 out of 45,000 is about...
5%
Formatting fixed: Full bars.

3D is wrong.
Even if Steve did it.
... unless you have a 3D printer.
Summary: what to look for

1. Does the visualization have a clear purpose?
2. Does the visualization include the right information?
3. Does the visualization use an appropriate structure?
4. Does the visualization have clear formatting?
Thank you!

Book signing Wednesday 10:20 am

Office hours Wednesday 1:30 pm

@noahi

http://ComplexDiagrams.com