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## ARTICLE
## PRESENTATIONS

# When Presenting Your Data, Get to the Point Fast

*by Nancy Duarte*

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# When Presenting Your Data, Get to the Point Fast

by Nancy Duarte
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Projecting your data on slides puts you at an immediate disadvantage: When you're giving a presentation, people can't pull the numbers in for a closer look or take as much time to examine them as they can with a report or a white paper. That's why you need to direct their attention. What do you want people to get from your data? What's the message you want them to take away?

Data slides aren't really about the data. They're about the *meaning* of the data. And it's up to you to make that meaning clear before you click away. Otherwise, the audience won't process — let alone buy — your argument.

Take this table, for instance:

# European Sales

| GEO and Desc | Consulting | Research | Products | Components | Systems | Support | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grand Total | 4,634,068.91 | 3,883,621.28 | 5,843,307.44 | 2,890,064.81 | 2,531,168.87 | 831,178.79 | 20,395,527.67 |
| UK | 1,812,064.34 | 1,659,130.10 | 1,677,140.18 | 1,734,038.89 | 1,593,727.52 | 287,646.49 | 8,763,747.52 |
| Germany | 385,195.50 | 145,927.68 | 737,681.62 | 520,211.67 | 129 | 70,969.04 | 1,860,114.51 |
| France | 53,743.00 | 360,629.35 | 296,676.27 | 57,801.30 | 261,631.24 | 41,861.04 | 1,072,342.20 |
| Italy | 9,730.00 | 62,204.26 | 287,966.62 | 28,900.65 | 0 | 37,208.19 | 426,009.72 |
| Spain | 30,246.48 | 935,909.79 | 160,940.14 | 86,701.94 | 0 | 29,158.87 | 1,242,957.22 |
| Portugal | 0.00 | 124,531.50 | 115,279.71 | 31,790.71 | 0.00 | 11,678.77 | 283,280.69 |
| Switzerland | 1,194,630.10 | 209,724.09 | 302,458.78 | 31,790.71 | 278,337.21 | 53,392.28 | 2,070,333.17 |
| Nertherlands | 317,484.50 | 85,999.93 | 320,678.71 | 34,680.78 | 0.00 | 44,457.28 | 803,301.20 |
| Western Europe Other | 119,394.74 | 284,601.35 | 1,281,434.33 | 28,900.65 | 397,085.90 | 199,308.40 | 2,310,725.37 |
| Russia | 94,053.01 | 6,532.05 | 211,934.18 | 14,450.32 | 0.00 | 8,548.41 | 335,517.97 |
| Poland | 325,191.36 | 8,431.18 | 237,751.17 | 21,675.49 | 0.00 | 7,490.30 | 600,539.50 |
| Eastern Europe Other | 292,335.88 | 62,453.86 | 213,365.73 | 18,785.42 | 258.00 | 39,459.72 | 626,658.61 |

It's confusing — especially if you project it for five seconds and then move on. And even if you leave it up for five minutes while you talk, anyone who's struggling to derive meaning from it won't be paying much attention to what you have to say. They'll be too busy squinting from their seats, trying to navigate all those heavy grid lines that give every single cell equal weight. It's not at all clear where the eye should go. Your audience won't know what direction to read — horizontally or vertically — or what conclusions to draw. Though the Grand Total line is emphasized, is that really the main point you want to convey?

Now let's look at the data presented more simply. Say you've identified three business units with potential for sustained growth in Europe. By eliminating the dense matrix and connecting only key numbers to a pie with leader lines, you remove clutter that distracts from your message. And notice the clear hierarchy of information: You can highlight important pieces of the pie by rendering them in color and their corresponding annotations in large, blue type. Other sections recede to the background, where they belong, with their neutral shades and small, gray labels.

## Total Europe Sales

Support $0.5M

Systems $3.1M

Components $3.2M

Consulting $4.6M

Research $3.9M

Products $5.3M
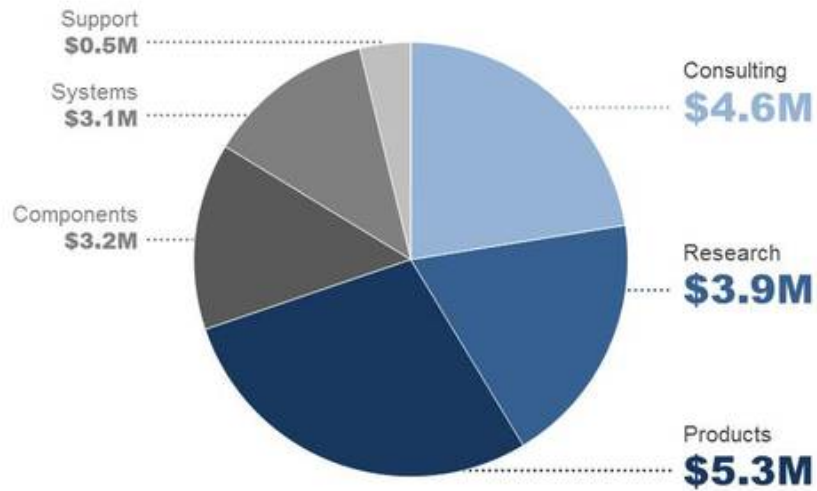
But pie charts can be tricky for an audience to process when segments are similar in size — it's hard to distinguish between them at a glance. If you're running into that problem, consider displaying the same data in a linear way. In this bar chart, for example, you draw attention to the poorest-performing unit, a point that got lost in the pie:

Total Europe Sales
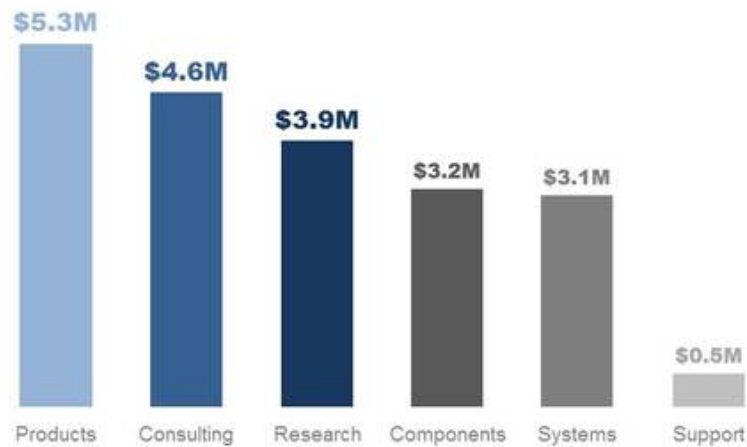
These few tricks will help audiences see what you *want* them to see in your data. By focusing their attention on the message behind the numbers, not on the numbers themselves, you can create presentations that resonate with them and compel them to act.

**Nancy Duarte** is a best-selling author with thirty years of CEO-ing under her belt. She's driven her firm, Duarte, Inc., to be the global leader behind some of the most influential messages and visuals in business and culture. Duarte, Inc., is the largest design firm in Silicon Valley, as well as one of the top woman-owned businesses in the area. Nancy has written six best-selling books, four have won awards, and her new book, *DataStory: Explain Data and Inspire Action Through Story*, is available now. Follow Duarte on Twitter: @nancyduarte or LinkedIn.