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MKTG 420

Effectively Communicating Numbers

This article begins by stating that many companies make the costly mistake of making poor graphs to represent data. Many employees want to make their visuals fancy and end up making the data overcomplicated, difficult to interoperate or misrepresent the data. Just because employees can make a complicated graph, it rarely means that they should.

One common mistake is using a graph when a table would suffice. Tables should be used to “look up” specific data points of interest whereas graphs/visuals should be used to communicate trends in the data. The article then describes the three different types of scales used to label graph axis. The fist type is Nominal which is text descriptions of the data. The second type is ordinal which is number based. Lastly, there is Interval which shows a period of time, this is primarily used to show trends.

This article then covered the seven types of relationships in Quantitative business data which are: time series relationships, ranking relationships, part-to-whole relationships, deviations relationships, distribution relationships, correlation relationships and nominal comparison relationships. After discussing these types of data the article then covered three ways to encode the data in a visual through points, lines and boxes. A point would be used when there are a large number of data to show or when bars are not necessary. A line is primarily used in interval scales to display trends. Bars are used to compare different sets of data.

Next, the article covered how to best display variables in a visual. One great way to differentiate different variables is through the use of color. Another way is to change format, font and grouping. This section also stressed the importance of using small multiples when complex data sets need to be visualized. It also warned against using a non-scaled graph and how this can overemphasis an incorrect trend or data point. This article concluded by stating that the best way to emphasize a certain data set, point or trend is through the use of color.