The Big Book of Dashboards: Visualizing Your Data Using Real-World Business Scenarios

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The Big Book of Dashboards: Your Definitive Guide to Visualizing Data in the Real World

Being able to create a well-designed dashboard—one that presents meaningful data in a way decision-makers can quickly grasp—is no longer a nice-to-have skill for business leaders.

It’s a must-have skill. The Big Book of Dashboards, packed with real-world scenarios, helps leaders ensure that their data visualizations really yield useful, actionable insights.

Hoboken, NJ (April 2017)—Tasked with overseeing or building the development of a business dashboard and not sure of the best way to apply it to your industry? Sure, you can pick up any number of books that cover the fundamentals of data visualization. They contain great examples about why a bar chart is almost always better than a pie chart—but until now, none of them have provided any real-world solutions that matter to you.

That’s too bad, say Steve Wexler, Jeffrey Shaffer, and Andy Cotgreave, authors of The Big Book of Dashboards: Visualizing Your Data Using Real-World Business Scenarios (Wiley, April 2017, ISBN: 978-1-119-28271-6, $49.95). As the business world becomes ever more complex (and less and less forgiving), the ability to show data in a meaningful way—without overwhelming people or leading them to the wrong conclusions—has become a foundational skill for all leaders.

“Looking at a bad dashboard is like trying to look at the world through cataracts,” says Wexler. “You miss important, often critical, things that if you could only see them would lead to better understanding and better decisions. And your job is always to pave the way to the best possible decisions for your company.”

The authors have written a book that helps leaders master the “must-have” skill of creating dashboards that really provide useful, actionable insights. Clear, concise, and packed with how-tos (and just as important, how-NOT-tos), this is the definitive reference book focused on proven, real-world examples of business dashboards and why they succeed.

Comprising dozens of examples that address different industries and departments (healthcare, transportation, finance, human resources, marketing, customer service, sports, etc.) and different platforms (print, desktop, tablet, smartphone, and conference room display), it’s the only book that matches great dashboards with real-world business scenarios.

Wexler, Shaffer, and Cotgreave have a combined 30-plus years of hands-on experience helping people in hundreds of organizations build effective visualizations. They have fought many “best practices” battles and bring an uncommon empathy to help readers survive and thrive in the data visualization world.

Here are just a few of their insights on why we need better dashboards:

**Being able to visualize time is critical to business, but most organizations don't know how to do it right.** Being able to plan and forecast effectively requires you to have a good handle on time, but visualizing time isn’t just about making a timeline! Want to really understand churn and attrition in your organization? Then you’ll probably want a waterfall chart. Need to understand demand for services at different locations at different times and different days of the week? Then you’ll probably want to try a cycle plot. Need to show if you are on track to reach goals? Then a pace chart may serve you best. Twenty-three of the 28 dashboards in the book deal with time, and the authors explain how each dashboard uses a different combination of chart types to help readers see how to master time.
Dashboards should change, radically, as organizations mature. A good dashboard will generate as many questions as it provides answers. The moment people see something and think, That’s phenomenal! I never saw that before! they will soon counter with, I need to know more... why is this happening? Has it always happened? Is it happening for all products and sectors? Enlightened leaders and analysts know that dashboards may need to evolve to adapt to an organization’s evolving questions.

Just because you have a million colors at your disposal doesn’t mean you should use them all. Color can be amazing at helping people distinguish what’s important from what isn’t, but the moment you have more than a handful of colors in play, a dashboard becomes a mishmash of visible noise. The best dashboards use color sparingly and purposefully. The book fully explores the best practices for using color and steers the reader away from using color combinations that are likely to alienate large percentages of the population (yes, there are some widely used color combinations that some people cannot decipher).

Curvy lines and packed bubbles are not the best ways to engage and inform. They may look cool, but if you really want to engage people, personalize your dashboards. (The book explains exactly how to do this.)

In addition to the scenarios, there’s an entire section of the book that is devoted to addressing many practical and psychological factors you will encounter in your work.

“It’s great to have theory and evidence-based research at your disposal, but what will you do when somebody asks you to make your dashboard ‘cooler’ by adding packed bubbles and donut charts?” says Shaffer.

“A well-designed dashboard can point out risks, opportunities, and more; but common mistakes can make your dashboard useless at best, and misleading at worst,” adds Cotgreave. “The Big Book of Dashboards gives you the tools, guidance, and models you need to produce great dashboards that inform, enlighten, and engage.”

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About the Authors:

Steve Wexler, Jeffrey A. Shaffer, and Andy Cotgreave are coauthors of The Big Book of Dashboards: Visualizing Your Data Using Real-World Business Scenarios.

Steve Wexler has worked with ADP, Gallup, Deloitte, Convergys, Consumer Reports, The Economist, ConEd, D&B, Marist, Tradeweb, Tiffany, McKinsey & Company, and many other organizations to help them understand and visualize their data. Steve is a Tableau Zen master, Iron Viz champion, and training partner. To learn more, visit DataRevelations.com.

Jeffrey A. Shaffer is vice president of information technology and analytics at Recovery Decision Science and Unifund. He is also adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati, where he teaches data visualization, and was named the 2016 Outstanding Adjunct Professor of the Year. To learn more, visit DataPlusScience.com.

Andy Cotgreave is technical evangelist at Tableau Software. He has over 10 years’ experience in data visualization and business intelligence, first honing his skills as an analyst at the University of Oxford. Since joining Tableau in 2011, he has helped and inspired thousands of people with technical advice and ideas on how to build a data-driven culture in a business. To learn more, visit GravyAnecdote.com.

About the Book:


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