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Data Visualizations and Infographics

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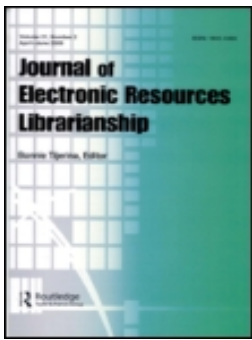
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Data Visualizations and Infographics, by Sarah K. C. Mauldin, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, 134 pp., \$85.00 (hardcover), ISBN-13: 9781442243866.

The old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words takes on new meaning when using data visualizations and infographics to frame issues and share information. Data visualizations and infographics have become important sources of information used as teaching tools and to promote library services and demonstrate library value. Data and visual literacy and the ability to access, manipulate, and use statistical information are skills that are becoming increasingly important in our everyday lives. For this reason, I was excited to read this book.

In the opening chapter, entitled “An Introduction to Data Visualizations and Infographics,” the question of why information professionals should be interested in reading this book is addressed. This is followed by a brief introduction explaining infographics. Then a section entitled “A Short History of Infographics” concludes with visualizing data and what to expect from the book. This chapter lays the groundwork for this relatively informal, enjoyable, and informative “how-to” book.

The second chapter, “Getting Started With Data Visualization and Infographics,” asks the reader to decide whether or not infographics are the proper vehicle to use to capture the attention of and spur some action on the part of the audience they seek to reach or influence. In doing this, the author presents three scenarios in which users can use data visualizations to reach a particular audience.

The scenarios are common ones, involving budget shortages, new technology implementation, and creation and introduction of new services. The chapter examines how best to address each issue by using the right tool for the job and what to do once you have found the tool that fits your goal or purpose. The chapter ends with a word about the importance of planning.

The third chapter, aptly entitled “Tools and Applications,” offers a wide-ranging selection of free and low-cost tools that can be used to create data visualizations. Among them are government-related websites and data sources such as DataFerrett.census.gov, Census.gov, and Data.gov. The chapter concludes with a note on how to collect and manage your own library’s data, which can include collection and circulation statistics or information about the “most popular books checked out in the past year.” Collecting data by year is essential when creating infographics that illustrate the growth or decline of a particular service, or to show why funds need to be diverted to another area to meet collection needs or even to calculate usage of certain items.

The next chapters, four and five, serve as the heart of the book. In these chapters, entitled “Library Examples and Case Studies” and “Step-by-Step Library Projects for Data Visualizations and Infographics,” respectively, the author fully articulates the myriad ways that data visualizations and infographics can be used and have been used in libraries to create charts and tables. To drive home the point of their usefulness as tools for teaching, explaining, and sharing information, in chapter five several example projects are offered as ways to present information, beginning with simple ways to display information using Microsoft Word and fee-based tools, such as Piktochart, to create infographics to promote library services. The final two chapters, “Tips and Tricks” and “Future Trends,” are short chapters that serve as an excellent summation of the book.

This is a well-written, organized, and readable book that offers practical and easy-to-follow advice on how to create visualizations and infographics to present data and information. I believe that reading it will benefit librarians of all types and help us plan and execute projects that will allow us to frame issues, share information, and clearly illustrate needed information to reach our organizational goals.

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