

# FIX UP YOUR CHARTS!

From CEO Tools at [www.ceotools.com](http://www.ceotools.com)

Many users have complained that Microsoft Excel's charting is not user-friendly and doesn't "work." This forced us to develop some information on using, applying, and overcoming Excel's charting shortcomings. Excel can indeed work, and we're all stuck with it, so here are a few tips, tools, and ideas based on extensive use of Excel's XP versions...other versions and operating environments before and after XP (e.g., 95, 2000, Vista, Seven) contain many of the same challenges, inconveniently re-packaged by Microsoft into even more challenging apps. Please use this guide to overcome these, but also please adapt our approach to different Excel versions. These tips also work for most charts in other software.

**How to Re-Scale Your Charts:** It is necessary to re-scale your chart when you first enter your data in any Trailing 12-Month (T12M) Chart or 12-Month Moving Average (12MMA), dashboard, or for that matter, any ordinary chart (it's just basic Excel 101A), and then every once in a while thereafter. The idea is to get your graph on each chart to "fill up" the vertical space of the chart border, so that your eye can most easily see ups and downs over the months. To re-scale, right-click in the vertical (left-hand, Y-axis) of each chart to get a "Format Axis" dropdown; then just select "Options" or "Format Axis" and you should see where you can select "Scale." Do select Scale and then change the Min, Max, Major & Minor Units, as well as the X-Axis Cross Point to be compatible with the full range of your calculated or entered numbers being charted. Again, the idea is to run your graph from your smallest number to the largest from that column (take a look at how we did it on T12M Charts at [www.ceotools.com](http://www.ceotools.com)). Save after re-scaling!

Another thought: you may need to re-scale or change the horizontal axis for the right months. At [www.ceotools.com](http://www.ceotools.com) we re-set all charts each year so that you can download them with the upcoming year ready-to-go. If you want to do this yourself, just follow the same logic presented for the vertical axis to change your time (horizontal) axis.

**How to Structure Your Charts:** We like our charts to have two years of history plus the year we're currently tracking (currently in). What this does is allow you to see an overall trend, not just this year versus last. But at the same time, you don't want more than two years of history, else your chart might be scaled so severely that you don't see the fluctuations in current months that you need to see. So, let's say you want to set up a chart to track your sales each month during 2010 – you'll want to show each month of actual sales for 2008 and 2009 with the 12 months of 2010 on the chart with no numbers in them as you start the year. Take a quick look at the free PDF of the T12M Chart at [www.ceotools.com](http://www.ceotools.com) to see an example of this.

**How to Update Your T12M or 12MMA Charts Each Month:** As you enter your regular monthly number each month into the data column for an Excel chart, it will be necessary to *copy-paste* the logic for calculating that month's *T12M* or *12MMA number* down one row each month.

## **Fix Up Your Charts, continued:**

**How to Read T12M Charts:** This is the easiest of all, since T12M and 12MMA charts automatically read “up is good, down is bad” for any positive-reading metric (like sales, profits, volume, customer satisfaction, etc). Conversely, “down is good” when measuring a negative-reading metric like costs, expenses, etc.

**What to Do When a T12M or 12MMA Chart Won’t Open:** Interestingly, and rarely thank goodness, some versions of Excel and/or some computers equipped with Excel, just won’t open an Excel file (XLS in some cases, XLSS in others, etc). In older versions, we have found the following works, and you may have to adapt this approach to newer versions as well. Double-Click on My Documents, and at the top of the screen in the tabs bar click on Tools, then on Folder Options, then on File Types. Scroll down to see if the following Extensions and associated File Types are listed: XLS with Microsoft Excel Worksheet, DOC with Microsoft Word Document, and PPT with Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation. If not, proceed as follows: Select New and click on it. Type XLS in the little box and click Advanced. Click the box labeled Associated File Type. Scroll down to Microsoft Excel Worksheet, click it and click OK. Now click Apply if lit, and/or then Close. Now close My Documents.

**What to Track on Charts:** Any series of metrics or numbers you can measure can and should be tracked on T12M and 12MMA charts. All other charts lie or mislead you, without exception. All financial measures should be tracked on T12Ms and all “business key indicators” as well. These business KIs are the drivers that happen well before all the financial key indicators we typically track. So, to get ahead of the game, track business as well as financial metrics.

**How to Get Your Numbers into a Dashboard:** First click on the “Data Table” tab at the bottom of the Excel Spreadsheet. Now copy-paste your numbers into each green column if you have your numbers in another spreadsheet, or just type your numbers into each green column by month. Or, “export-import” numbers into the dashboard if you’re familiar with that. Charts will update automatically from your data, as described below.

**How to Update a Dashboard Each Month:** Go to the Data Table spreadsheet, and enter your current month data in only the green (data) columns. Then, in the red (calculated) column, copy-paste last month’s red entry down one cell into the current month in the same red column; this usually will correspond to (be right next to) the current month entry made in the green column. Do this for each red (calculated) column. Your dashboard will automatically update the charts on the Charts page(s).

Do not copy-paste the red cell logic on down the column, unless you have actual data in the corresponding green cells; this would give you faulty numbers for the T12M or 12MMA (red) calculated figures since you would have empty cells (which show up as zero in Excel) and your Trailing 12-Month Totals or 12-Month Moving Averages would have invalid data, thereby making them completely wrong and very misleading!

## Additional Chart Tips:



### Kraig's Chart Tips

1. Line graphs, never bar charts, seldom pie.
2. One graph per chart...stack charts vertically if you want comparatives!
3. Two years of history plus the year we're now in and tracking.
4. Re-scale to fill up vertical space (see Page 7 aka Fix Up Your Chart!).
5. T12M for one variable vs. 12MMA for two (% , ratio, index).
6. Right chart time frequency: T12M, T4Q, T52W, and/or T365D.
7. Power-Tools: 4-Charts, 5-Charts, 8-Charts @ [www.ceotools.com](http://www.ceotools.com).
8. Only T12M-type charts; those ordinary and YTD charts lie!
9. You can track ANYTHING with T12M and related charts.
10. Use to forecast budget or projections – and track actuals against.
11. No trailing 3-month, 6-month, or 18-month charts: they'll bite you!
12. Charts should have white background and big data point markers along the lines of your graphs.
13. Eventually, we'll talk about 3-over-3 and 12-over-12 charts (also known as rate-of-change charts), but please understand T12Ms thoroughly first, else confusion will probably result! Yes, I do love those RoC charts, too!
14. Try Dashboards: visit [www.ceotools.com](http://www.ceotools.com), click on New Tools Catalog, then scroll down to various dashboards on many business topics!

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**Final Thoughts:** Please let us know if you have any thoughts or changes that you think would make the charts or these tips work better. We're always looking to improve the tools, so please email us at [info@ceotools.com](mailto:info@ceotools.com) with your comments; please put "Kraig" on the subject line so we don't mistakenly spam it away. May you thrive through recessions and also through all the good times! With best wishes, Kraig Kramers  
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