

FIX UP YOUR CHARTS!

From CEO Tools at 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). Save after re-scaling!

Another thought: you may need to re-scale or change the horizontal axis to show the right months. At 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 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 as you enter the actual new monthly number.



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.**
- 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, click on New Tools Catalog, then scroll down to various dashboards on many business topics!**

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U.S. Corporate Partners, LLLP
Phone and Fax: (770) 389-8511
159 Glen Eagle Way
McDonough, GA 30253
Email: kwker@mindspring.com