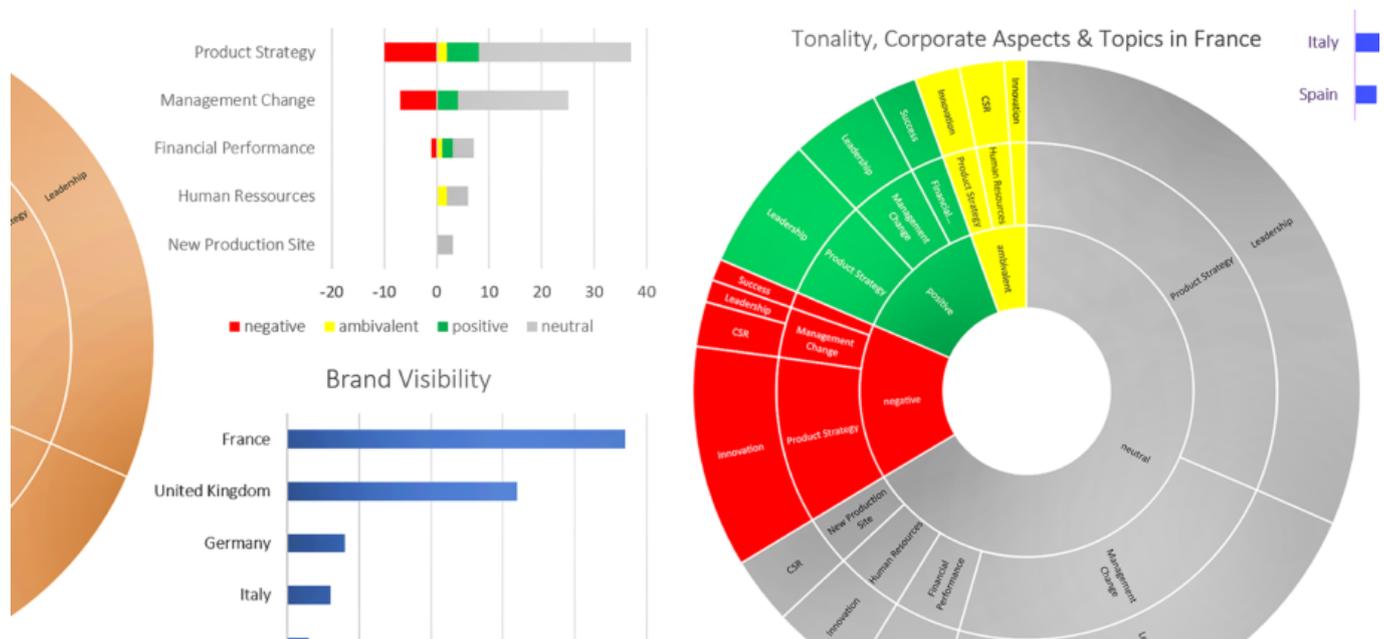


# Visualizing Insights: Telling a Story with a Chart



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At a time when everyone has data and everyone owns a “tool,” research-based “Actionable Insights” have emerged as the goal for better decision-making in business as well as Public Relations. The desire for insights means that communicators want more than data, charts and graphs. Instead, they want to go beyond “x is bad” or “y is good.” Instead, evolved communicators want to know “x is bad because of y and especially in the areas a, b and c. And here’s what to do about it.” This additional context and guidance enables Public Relations professionals to understand their situation and to act in ways that positively differentiate the company, its brands, its products and the issues surrounding them.

In too many cases, researchers deliver results using descriptive text accompanying simple bar graphs and pie charts. The safe approach is to substitute the safety of data explanations rather than precise analysis, insights and

guidance. In today's working environment, research-driven communicators have no time for exhaustive PowerPoints with page-after-page of charts, graphs and simple descriptions (today's professional needs no help in seeing that "30% is green and 70% is red").

The demands of business require advanced analytics that uncover the connections, inferences and insights in the data presented simply, accessibly and digestibly. Rather than repetitive descriptions of "what the chart says," visuals tell more of the story so researchers add value through their unique category expertise and critical thinking. In PRIME's work for many of the world's most admired companies, we've experienced different approaches to answer our clients' most frequently asked questions.

Let's look at three different approaches to create visualizations:

## **Fully Automated "Portal Analytics"**

Downloaded from an analytics portal, reports contain multiple charting options created and collated by the client user. While offering easy access and real-time content and data, the result is "do-it-yourself" which requires a staff operator to translate data visualization into insights and guidance.

**Chart types:** "Unrelated" pies, bars, columns, lines, etc. 

### **Assets:**

- Exciting visualization options but the story they tell is limited to what is most visible
- Quick data
- Relatively inexpensive out-of-pocket cost

### **Liabilities:**

- Requires staff expertise to uncover insights and

engineer strategic application

- Operator-related overhead can make this option more resource intensive than may appear initially
- Purely automated systems capture irrelevant content leading to inaccurate data and false conclusions

#### **Good for:**

- Organizations with limited out-of-pocket funding
- Those who for whom unvalidated content and data to be “good enough”
- Simpler questions related to volume and reach

## **“Hybrid Analytics”**

Combining the consistency and speed of automated solutions with the benefits of expert-aided content analysis, Hybrid Analytics ensure content relevancy and data accuracy as a foundation for better decision-making.

A major European political institution with whom PRIME works from our offices in Germany, England and Switzerland seeks actionable and detailed media insights from traditional and social media in more than 30 countries, split by topics, PR performance and more. Self-learning automated PRIME systems gather and filter content for country/category experts to fully code and report on local issues in the native language for their respective media territories. The solution delivers portal access as well as monthly country dashboard reports featuring visualizations for topics, press activities and more while also providing insights about the tone and impact of the coverage.

**Chart types:** “Related” pies, bars, columns, lines, etc. 

#### **Assets:**

- Reliable content and accurate data as a foundation
- The speed and consistency of automated solutions along

with a partner to aid in insights generation and strategic guidance

- Outsource expert talent when and if needed to free communications executives to do what they do best

### **Liabilities:**

- May cost more than the fully-automated
- Human involvement may limit real-time scalability beyond what the technology can offer

### **Good For:**

- Organizations with budget but limited staff resources (not enough people/not the right people/too much going on)
- Higher stakes situations requiring higher quality data and analysis
- More highly matrixed organizations where business units and brands make simpler visualizations more obtuse

## **“Expert-First Analytics”**

In certain cases, do-it-yourself visualizations may be impractical or impossible. In such cases, data scientists prepare the charts and graphs along with interpretive analysis, actionable insights and strategic guidance from an accompanying consultant. Here, visualizations support the consultant’s narrative. While a real time content stream and analytics portal may be operating in parallel, the responsibility for reporting shifts mainly to the consulting firm.

One of the world’s most recognizable Silicon Valley tech companies faces serious reputational challenges across the entire European continent. The assignment requires PRIME to produce local country reports as well as a pan-European analysis. Rather than focusing on brands or brand attributes, the study focuses on high-level issues related to “trust,”

“leadership” and “corporate social responsibility” in its many forms. Broad-based issues with tens-of-thousands possible combinations and definitions prove difficult for pure technology platforms. Further complicating the matter, the company confronts challenges which threaten their ability to operate freely and competitively from one country to another. The implications for the company represent billions of dollars in market capitalization.

Recognizing the need for a “public license to succeed,” the company partners with PRIME to deliver the intelligence they need to make better communications decisions wherever and whenever they do business. PRIME met their need by creating a dedicated Pan-European team of consultants, data scientists and analysts to deliver “deep-dive” reporting along with advisory and consulting services. Not bound by portal or reporting (which run in parallel), the visuals support complex concepts at the hyper-local, national and continent levels. These “sunburst charts” deliver perspectives of media tonality, issue, product along with a complete scope of reputational aspects in dozens of languages. At a glance, one can see the overall tonality distribution and the details about which the issue is discussed, praised and criticized across all levels, topics and content drivers. This example combines seven “portal analytics” charts to provide additional context and understanding.

**Chart types:** Sunburst, Tree map, Net, Bubbles

## Tonality, Corporate Aspects & Topics in France



### Assets:

- A partnership rather than a “vendor” relationship
- Expert analysis frees busy communications executives to focus on the priorities for which they are uniquely qualified
- Visualizations reveal essential findings as distilled by the partner. Complicated matters made simpler.

## **Liabilities:**

- More expensive
- May be more time-consuming and less scalable (but synchronized to the speed of the decision being made)
- Visualizations require an ability to interpret more complex representations

## **Good For:**

- Fully-resourced corporate communications departments operating globally
- Data-savvy executives who know how to interpret more complex visualizations
- Frees the communications executive to focus fully on the big picture and activating response strategy and tactics

## **Summary**

In today's fast-paced business environment, exhaustive reports with reams of findings no longer fit every communications requirement. To meet the demands of leadership and PR teams alike, analytics must reveal the guidance, insights, context and data in a condensed and consumable way designed to fit the decision being made. This concise reporting style encourages quick decision making and simultaneously answers the "what," "the "so what" and the "now what."

Serious existential decisions require in-depth research reporting with data, complete documentation, a full complement of charts and graphs and thorough analysis. But in most situations, simpler reporting styles communicate more with less and for less without sacrificing the integrity of the data and findings. When executed properly, these reports deliver nuggets of insight visually. The visual story-telling of these reports simplify performance KPIs down to sub-variables to provide details about the cause and effect. Data-savvy audiences expect visualizations beyond the usual bar-

and-pie to reveal a second, third or even fourth layer of information, intelligence and insight.

**About the Author:** *In his role as Senior IT Specialist at PRIME Research in Mainz, Germany, Leon Rausch helps clients make better communications decisions through technological innovation and development. He can be reached at rausch@prime-research.com. Follow him on Twitter <https://twitter.com/leonmrausch>*