

Considerations for choosing data visualization software

Some criteria for choosing a data visualization software program include:

- **Type of visualization:** You will want to choose a program that can create all the types of visualizations that you will need. Different software programs vary in their different capacities. Some programs can serve multiple purposes, whereas others may be more specialized for a specific type of visualization (*e.g.*, Instant Atlas for map visualizations).ⁱ Visualization types to consider include: pie graphs, line graphs, bar graphs, tables, timelines, maps, and combinations of these chart types.
- **Skill level needed:** The different data visualization software programs vary in the degree of skill needed to learn and use the tool effectively. Some programs are easier to learn than others, but may have more limited visualization capacities. Some may require greater understanding of quantitative analysis or computer programming language. For instance, D3.js requires programming and familiarity with HTML, CSS, and SVG.ⁱⁱ It is important to consider analysts' skillsets and support offered by vendors.
- **Platform and data storage:** Some data visualization tools are web-based, whereas others offer desktop versions that can be downloaded and installed on your own computers.ⁱⁱⁱ For desktop programs, it is important to check whether the program operates on Windows or Mac operating systems, or requires Java. A key consideration for health centers who handle personal health information is data storage and data security. Some data visualization programs process and store data on local servers, whereas others may use external or public servers.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Cost:** Some data visualizations programs are free or open access. Others may have limited free versions; often, use of the programs at its full capacity with all features requires paid access.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Dun & Bradstreet. "Connectors: Perspectives on Data and the New Art of the Marketer". Accessed Oct 9, 2015. From: http://www.dnb.com/connectors/14_Data_Visualization_Tools_to_Tell_Better_Stories_With_Numbers.html#.VhgbWPIVhBc

ⁱⁱ Sharma, N. "The 14 best data visualization tools". Accessed Oct 9, 2015. From: <http://thenextweb.com/dd/2015/04/21/the-14-best-data-visualization-tools/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Machlis, S. "Chart and image gallery: 30+ free tools for data visualization and analysis". ComputerWorld. Updated Mar 26, 2015. From: <http://www.computerworld.com/article/2506820/business-intelligence/business-intelligence-chart-and-image-gallery-30-free-tools-for-data-visualization-and-analysis.html>