Five Annotation Strategies That Will Make Your Charts Stand Out

You don’t have to be a professional designer or a data visualization wizard to master the magic of annotating insights. Instead, according to Nancy Duarte, CEO of Duarte Inc., you just have to add simple visual elements as a supplementary layer to explain the most pertinent details in an elegant way. Here are some examples in action.

**HIGHLIGHT DATA WITH A POP OF COLOR**
Draw attention to your data by using color highlights on the most important pieces of information. Use neutral colors for the rest of the chart.

**ADD LABELS TO CHARTS TO COMMUNICATE WHAT’S IMPORTANT**
Charts often include a lot of numbers and data, and it can be hard for a viewer to know where to look. To draw attention to the most important points, call out statistics with labels or large type in addition to using a contrasting color.

**BUNDLE WITH BRACKETS TO MAKE CHARTS EASIER TO READ**
Bracketing data on a chart shows the differences or summations of different elements by incorporating some math. This simple annotation helps connect data points and weave a story about how much data has changed or stayed constant.
DELINEATING DATA SHOWS SHORTFALLS AND SURPLUSES
Adding a simple horizontal line to indicate a baseline turns a simple chart into a clear visualization of where benchmarks are being met and where they are not.

DISSECT DATA BY EXPLODING IT OUT
To provide additional information on one data set, create a secondary element on the chart where you highlight subcategories with colors and graphics.

Implementing the Five Strategies
Applying the right annotations — small additional pieces of visual elements — to the data on a chart can bring the insights within the material to life. Let's look at some makeovers of a real slide deck. Our goal was to make the CEO's dense data slides simple, elegant, and — most important — easy for the audience to quickly scan and digest.

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