“DESIGN ISN’T JUST WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE AND FEELS LIKE. DESIGN IS HOW IT WORKS.”

STEVE JOBS
The world we live in is full of overwhelming data and constantly flowing information, and most people have to decode this data to be successful in their jobs.

Dashboards serve an important purpose as they transform dull and sometimes opaque data into visually stunning insights that resonate with a wide range of users. To maximize their impact, however, dashboards must be implemented around the needs of the business, so that the decision makers consuming it can act immediately on the information presented.

An effective dashboard, therefore, must have at least four components:

- **Value** – must be useful
- **Usability** – easy to use
- **Adoptability** – easy to get started
- **Desirability** – exciting to use

Another crucial element of an effective dashboard is the careful selection of useful and actionable information. It’s important to be strategic, as too little information will limit dashboard actionability and too much will render the dashboard cumbersome and painful to view.

What are some of the emerging design trends that are resonating with users? Let’s take a look at the top ten design trends to keep in mind as you create impactful dashboards at your organization.
1. THE DAWN OF FLAT UI

“Our opportunity is to learn how to handle the complexity, rather than shy away from it, and to realize that the big art of design is to make complicated things simple.”

Tim Parsey, Head of Digital Customer Experience, JPMorgan Chase

Flat user interfaces (UI) have become fundamental in creating successful user experiences because they offer a straightforward minimalistic approach to design. Utilizing two-dimensional illustrations and minimizing the use of shadows, gradient textures, and three dimensional treatments is aesthetically pleasing and helps users to process the content quickly without distraction.

With the advent of Windows 8, iOS7 and Google Material, it’s clear this trend isn’t going anywhere anytime soon.
2. MOBILITY ON TOP OF MIND

A 2013 Gartner study indicated that one-third of BI users will access their dashboards from a mobile device, so it’s no surprise that the proliferation of mobile and tablet devices over recent years is forcing designers to re-evaluate the user experience.

The challenge now is how to replicate the same relevant content usually seen on desktop devices on mobile. Really, they shouldn’t compete but rather complement each other with features that allow for the remote worker to be fast, agile, and simple. Features like responsive design, scrolling (continuous, parallax, horizontal and vertical), and “swipe” will surely propel this trend forward for the next several years.

(Dribble)
3. WIREFRAMING IS #TRENDING

“People ignore design that ignores people.”
Frank Chimero, Designer & Author of The Shape of Design

Users who know what information they want displayed in their dashboards turn to a process called wireframing to convert their “stream of consciousness data” into visualizations by building a base framework to organize dashboard components. This uniform sizing helps reduce distractions by identifying dashboard features easily, and helps make the design process less iterative. While more of a best practice, this nascent trend is becoming more prevalent as designers are proving that it’s a step that should not go overlooked.
4. COLORBLOCKING IS SO IN

There’s a growing problem with the use of color on dashboards these days.

There’s often too much of it making the dashboard visually overwhelming, or too little of it, producing a dashboard that’s frankly - boring to look at. To engage users, the best use of color is a balance of monochromatic background colors, juxtaposed against bright colors to highlight important insights or anomalies in that data that users should pick up on.
5. SERIOUSLY, LESS REALLY IS MORE

“Users are not always logical, at least not on the surface. You need to look a little deeper into how people think and act.”

Paul Boag, Digital Strategist and Founder of Headscape

Dashboards should always deliver actionable insights on information that’s relevant to its purpose and audience. How should this be done?

- Minimize the use of logos as it takes up valuable real estate
- Wireframes, which were mentioned earlier, provides more reliance on typography and simple clean graphics
- Use minimal charts and tables for visualizations rather than 3D graphics that can be difficult to read

Some designs are even moving towards almost no visible text, and instead relying more on images and icons to convey important information.
6. TO GAUGE OR NOT TO GAUGE

Remember 10 years ago when gauges were considered dashboard eye candy?

The intention of this chart type was pretty straightforward. If anyone could read gauges in their cars and tell how much gas they have, how fast they’re driving, and where their oil levels are, then it would translate well to a dashboard. While some still prefer this visualization (and it’s true, it does grab your attention) – gauges are notorious for taking up valuable space and providing limited information since it presents data on a single dimension. All it really tells you is whether something is on target, above target or below target. So what are the other alternatives? Line charts show trends over time, bar charts are great for comparisons, bullet charts are good for targets, and if the feeling for being fancy arises - opt for a mishmash of several types of combinations. It’s up to you where you want to fall on this great gauge debate.
7. ICONS DESERVE SOME ATTENTION

To help support a great user experience, dashboards are more frequently being integrated with labeled icons in the navigation pane.

This usually consists of a small graphic or image followed by a pithy description so that users know exactly what they are looking at.
8. BE DYNAMIC, BE-BE DYNAMIC!

“When there’s that balance between functionality and emotion, the two amplify each other and the result is really powerful.”

Mike Matas, UI Designer, Facebook

A dynamic dashboard can provide owners or authors with the ability to seamlessly update and add new content. This can include importing/exporting abilities, customized dashboard views via drag and drop, and integration with platforms or existing web technologies like Salesforce or Google Analytics.
9. INTERACTIVITY – DUH

“Design should never say, look at me! It should always say, look at this!”

David Craib, Owner of Parable Communications

Today’s dashboards are leveraging richer content experiences through interactive elements like video, light boxes, overlays, slicers, etc. to promote user engagement with the content and to help them derive further insights. Capabilities like zooming, drill-down and filtering are becoming more commonplace as well. Some dashboards even utilize social feeds to heighten brand loyalty and deliver real-time actions.
10. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

It used to be that dashboards used maps to visually represent performance metrics based on geography.

Now, with the steady advent of GPS technologies embedded into more and more devices, location mapping has become much more intelligent – like machines-are-taking-over-the-world intelligent. Questions like what resources are being accessed the most across campus, and total miles traveled by country - can now be answered quickly.

(Campus Quad – a location based dashboard that provides administrators with real-time data that measures the utilization of student services and resources)
FINAL THOUGHTS

“Design can be art. Design can be aesthetics. Design is so simple, that’s why it is so complicated.”

Paul Rand, American Modernist & Graphic Designer

In conclusion, there are a lot of elements that make up a great dashboard. New, exciting, and modern dashboard features are making it easier for users to consume, comprehend, and act on the data. Which trends are you seeing within your organization? And what do you want to copy to improve your current assets? Do you anticipate design to become a ubiquitous factor in dashboards in the next decade? Only time will tell.
ABOUT ALCHEMY50

Founded in 2010, Alchemy50 is an award winning application studio and digital agency located in NYC. Alchemy50 builds powerful interactive experiences, momentum and possibilities. They are a creative technical group that brings it all together, including other collaborators, from writers to animators, sharing a passion and reputation for exceptional design and development, from mobile applications to marketing sites; from handling complex systems in finance to making deep data dives in healthcare.

Website: a50.co

ABOUT LOGI ANALYTICS

Logi Analytics enables enterprises to make better use of their data by delivering on the promise of analytics everywhere. By providing both a Web-based data discovery solution and a business information platform that can be embedded within applications, systems and processes, Logi Analytics helps its customers from the C-suite to the factory floor to be more informed, make better decisions and improve corporate performance. With more than 1,200 customers worldwide, Logi Analytics meets the needs of organizations ranging from small businesses to Global 2000 enterprises. The company is headquartered in McLean, Virginia and has sales and support offices in the U.K. and Europe. Logi Analytics is a privately held, venture-backed firm with investments from Updata Partners, GroTech Ventures, Summit Partners and LLR Partners. For more information, visit LogiAnalytics.com.

This document was based on a presentation given by Alchemy50’s Creative Director, Ryan Anderson.