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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

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1. INTRODUCTION

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The use of tables and graphs to communicate quantitative information is common practice in organizations today, yet few of us have learned the design practices that make them effective. This introductory chapter prepares the way for a journey of discovery that will enable you to become an exception to this unfortunate norm.

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Quantitative information forms the core of what organizations must know to operate effectively. The current emphasis on metrics, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), Balanced Scorecards, and performance dashboards demonstrates the importance of numbers to organizations today. Stories contained in numbers can be communicated most effectively when we understand the fundamental characteristics and meanings of simple statistics that are routinely used to make sense of numbers, as well as the fundamental principles of effective communication that apply specifically to quantitative information.

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Because graphical communication is visual, it must express information in ways that human eyes can perceive and brains can understand. Our eyes and the parts of the brain that handle input from them work in particular ways. Thanks to science, how we see is now fairly well understood, from the initial information-carrying rays of light that enter our eyes to the interpretation of that information in the gray folds of the visual cortex. By understanding visual perception and its application to the graphical communication of quantitative information, you will learn what works, what doesn't, and why. This chapter brings the principles of graphical design for communication alive in ways that are practical and can be applied skillfully to real-world challenges in presenting quantitative information.

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