Dear Many Eyes Designers,

I am a masters student at the University of Maryland and recently used Many Eyes for an assignment in my Information Visualization class. I’m writing this letter to provide you with feedback on my experience using Many Eyes.

First, I’m very impressed by the aesthetics of the site and the visualizations that are produced. I’ve worked with MS-Excel, OpenOffice.org Spreadsheet, and gnuplot for visualizing data in the past, and Many Eyes has produced by far the best looking visualizations. I really like that the user doesn’t have to focus on this aspect, and can focus on exploring the data, choosing the right way to visualize it, and making sense of the visual product. I think that aesthetic appeal plays an important role in the perception of visualizations (for good or bad) and is an important aspect to take into account, which you’ve done beautifully.

I also like how easy it is to get at the original data and data source that Many Eyes visualizations came from. I’ve found it an interesting place to find new data sets, which has been helpful for my information visualization class.

My only criticism of the site is the data import process. I had a couple of issues while importing data; issues that seem like they would be fairly common. The first issue is that its very hard for users to do even small manipulations on the data that they have uploaded. I forgot to add column headings to my data set, so the first line (and the most interesting point) was recognized as a column heading. When I tried to fix the problem, I could enter the data point, but couldn’t edit the headings. I ended up having to duplicate the data set with a correct version and couldn’t find how to delete the first. I think the ability to add/edit column headings and delete bad data sets would be a nice feature for your users.

The other problem that I had importing data was the Many Eyes parser. I pasted a comma separated table and found that it couldn’t be properly imported. When I changed the data to tabular format, I had to add extra spaces in different places to make sure all of the data was imported correctly because the preview didn’t match the way the data was finally imported. This was a problem because, as I mentioned before, I couldn’t delete data sets that were bogus because of import errors. I think that these problems could be easily solved, however. Most spreadsheet programs have import features that are very robust, allowing the user to specify delimiting characters (comma, tab, 5 z’s) or byte offsets on which the columns are aligned. This works great every time, and was my final solution. I imported my data into OpenOffice.org Spreadsheet and pasted from there into the Many Eyes interface. I will admit that copying from OpenOffice.org and MS-Word are probably what the majority of users do, but more options would be nice to have.

Overall, my experience using Many Eyes has been positive and fun. I will certainly use it in the future, I especially like the ability to embed live visualizations in other sites! Thank you very much for creating Many Eyes and making it available for free.

Sincerely,

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