ManyEyes designers,

Thank you for your efforts designing a web application of visualization tools. I was introduced to ManyEyes through an assignment in a course on Information Visualization at the University of Maryland. I would like to share my experience with using your application and offer some suggestions that may help attract new users and improve user experiences.

The public user interface is very straightforward and easy to use. Most of the necessary features for probing through sets of visualizations and datasets are there. Having the ability to search and sort by various features to explore public contributions is nice. The FAQs and Tutorials were invaluable in identifying features that did not visually stand out or intuitive, such as deleting datasets and some of the basic spreadsheet calculations.

It was not until I logged in that I experienced some issues. Listed below are some of the issues I encountered while using the site. Some rendering issues of some of the visualizations, memory issues and query execution failures which I have listed below.

- Bubble chart visualization: After setting the color attribute and “flipping” the data, when selecting choices in the left attribute bar and then “unflipping” the scale blows up, the data points wind up in the extremes of the Java frame, and the drop-down selection boxes disappear.

- Matrix chart: Labels and axes are displayed on top of data points when there are too many categories.

- It seems that the visualizations are cached in the browser and not freed until the browser is closed. I was using FireFox at the time and after going back and forth between visualizations for a while, FireFox stopped responding.

- Double clicking the “My Stuff” link brings up a query execution error. This error is also displayed on failed logins.

- Session state: Sometimes when logging in or out, the screen does not display the current status of the user. The page needs to be refreshed or the user has to navigate further into the site to see the changes take effect. This is typical of Cookies and sessions that require a page refresh to take affect; however, I found it inconvenient that if there was a query execution failure then the screen rendered as if I was not logged in and I had to select one of the public links to see “My Stuff” again.

As for my experience uploading a dataset and subsequently visualizing it, I found a couple features lacking or not intuitive. The data upload step was fine, although it was annoying to have to reenter the meta information every time, especially when I was uploading a different format of the same dataset. It would be nice if there were a way for the user to associate datasets together as being different views or calculations based on the same dataset and assigning these views as a
subset of the main dataset. When editing the dataset, the division operand was inconvenient and not intuitive. It took me a bit to realize that it only worked after 1) highlighting a column, 2) adding a new column and 3) going through a montage of menu bars identified by column name to get the result. Also, the trash icon to remove the dataset is not visually recognizable the first time in the site. It took me a few days to realize this wasn’t for trashing the changes, but to actually remove the dataset. The trash icon does not stand out, it is very faint, blends into the background, and is not in a recognizable spot where I would normally look for a delete action.

As for some features I would like to see, it would be nice to visualize multiple visualizations of the same dataset at the same time, such as maps and scatter plots. Allow user input values for the number of maps displayed, in addition to 1, 2 and “All”. Allow a row for aggregates, means or standard deviations. Add these calculations to some of the visualizations, such as a second visualization to display the change in aggregate values, or another data series overlay for the mean with the standard deviation shaded below. Additionally, I would like to see the scatter plot include coloring on attribute. Scaling and zooming for other visualizations similar to the map interface, based on mouse location rather then the center of the visualization if using the mouse wheel.

Allow users to group data subsets together, possibly allowing sub views on full datasets and grouped categories of similar sets. This does not seem to require much more functionality beyond the versioning system in place, except that the user can then create multiple views on the same dataset to target specific conditions or attributes. In the user management section, allow users to archive old information so that they don’t have to see it all the time and don’t have to delete it from the system to get rid of it or create folders to help manage and organize their datasets.

Overall I had a very positive experience with ManyEyes. I appreciate your patience and wish you well with your endeavors.

Sincerely,

Ken Knudsen

ken@cs.umd.edu