Dear graphic designers of the New York Times interactive visualization team,

As part of my course requirements in “Information Visualization”, I am writing to you to provide some feedback and comments on the interactive article entitled “The Ebb and Flow of Movies: Box Office Receipts 1986 — 2008” (URL: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/02/23/movies/20080223_REVENUE_GRAPHIC.html).

First of all, let me commend you on the visualization's headlines and aesthetics that are both creative and eye-catching. They invite the user to further explore the data even at first glance.

I really liked the creative use of the classical “stacked graphs” representation to visualize the information: by removing the y-axis so that data can be placed on both sides of the x (time) axis. It enables a large number of movies to be stacked on both sides of the axis that prevents clutter while preserving the width of the stacked regions to indicate accumulated sales. Users immediately see what movies were popular initially and how long they maintained their popularity when other (newer) movies opened at different times.

Furthermore, the colors and responsive pop-ups indicating the movie name, total sales and highlighting the selected regions greatly enhanced the visualization by providing immediate feedback while users explore the data.

There are, however, a few issues that should be addressed to improve the visualization further.

Firstly, the lack of an interface that allows for zooming makes navigating the visualization difficult should one needs to see the entirety of the data before focusing to a particular period. A time slider (similar to what is found in http://www.nytimes.com/ref/us/20061228_3000FACES_TAB2.html) that enables the user to reveal movies listed over a period would significantly simplify the navigation effort while emphasizing localized trends; allowing the user to further manipulate the filtered data.

Secondly, the lack of a fully functional scroll bar – complete with left and right scroll buttons and a scroll track that could be clicked – and keyboard support using the familiar arrow keys prevents rapid navigation throughout the visualization and may frustrate some users.

Automatic focusing of the selected movie is another functionality that would be helpful – especially if the selected movie is near the border of the current period. Moving the mouse away to drag the scroll bar will immediately deselect the movie, forcing the user to search for the movie again.

Finally, the search function can be improved by returning movies based on multiple criteria; filtering the
visualization so that only the returned movies are presented to the users for quick analysis. In the same way, users could interactively select multiple movies; save their selections and view the selected movies in a filtered view.

Once again, I would like to thank the team for their effort in creating the various interactive visualizations that continue to bring more insights, discoveries and new points of view for the users.

Sincerely,
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