September 17, 2013

Dear Ford Fessenden, Tom Giratikanon, Josh Keller, Archie Tse, Tim Wallace, Derek Watkins, Jeremy White and Karen Yourish,

This letter is in regard to the visualization titled “The Bloomberg Years: Reshaping New York” (reshaping-new-york) provided in the New York Times. I would like to thank you for providing the users with such a wonderful visualization. Truly speaking, this is the first visualization I came across which tries to put together the text and animation in the same frame. What we see usually is a live video or an animation or an image embedded within an article (eg. operation-to-raise-costa-concordia-cruise-liner-in-italy), which requires the users to view them separately and not simultaneously. Your approach towards news compilation/presentation is perhaps the first step towards integrating text, image and video/animation together.

However I have a few suggestions which might be helpful in further enhancing the quality of the presentation.

1. The comparisons that had been presented in the visualization between Downtown 2002 and 2013, Williamsburg 2002 and 2013, etc. could have been better visualized by the user if the images had been presented in the same area in the screen. It becomes a bit problematic to compare images if they are not presented either adjacent to each other (as shown below) or in the same screen space. The best way to compare perhaps would be to superimpose one image over the other but I presume that’s difficult with actual images, that too when the images are captured years apart.

Further the comparison between Long Island 2001 and 2013 makes little sense to the user as the two images are captured from an entirely different angle. Therefore it becomes difficult for the user to perceive the difference in a short span of time.
2. The individual items in the visualization are sequentially accessed. The whole presentation would have been more useful if there were links by which the user could have had random accesses to the different items. This would have increased the interactivity of the visualization.

3. As the saying goes: "A picture is worth more than a thousand words", the information via the text content in the items such as "A Boom in New Housing", "A Third of the City Rezoned" and "Transforming Neighborhoods" could have been replaced by interesting visualizations (or plots) in the form of a timeline within the same area. If the user is interested further, the area of the visualization could have been maximized to analyze the data in the plots. When done, the user should have been able to minimize the display/plot (which blocks a significant portion of the background) and focus on the larger details in the background.

4. Last but not the least, the visualizations in the background are not interactive as it does not allow the user to zoom in and zoom out the details as and when it is required. For example, it would be more useful to the user if he could have had a birds-eye view of the new bike lanes in the New York City or the places which have been rezoned.
I hope the suggestions here would further enhance the quality of the presentation. I would be more than happy to assist you in case you require any further clarifications regarding the points mentioned above.

Sincerely,

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