Crabby goes chart crazy with Excel 2007

Applies to: Microsoft Office Excel 2007

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Crabby Office Lady

Summing up large quantities of information used to be time-consuming and daunting if you were unfamiliar with how to put it all together, particularly if you had to do it with a chart. Excel 2007 has made such huge improvements in the area of charts that you may find yourself making all sorts of charts for no apparent reason...other than it's fun.

A lot of new features and doodads found their way into Excel 2007. So many, in fact, that I can't really contain them all in a single column.

NOTE Not that I want to go into such detail here, anyway. There are scads and scads of assistance articles, demos, training courses, and other types of content *right on this very site* that will give you the full scoop on all that's new and fabulous in this version of Excel. Check the **See also** box in the top right of this column to link off to some of those resources.

So, I decided to pick one of my favorite things about Excel 2007 and wax poetic about it right here and now — and just for you.

Charts, charts, and more charts

I create (not to mention look at) a lot of charts. Every month I gather information about how many people have read my column, how they rated it, how many people read it versus how many actually rated it. I look at your comments, I look to see where you go after you've read my column, and I watch for trends: Which columns do well? Which don't? Which garner the most happy comments? Which encourage vitriolic comments from you? I use all of this information to get a better idea about who my readers are, what they want to read about, and how I can make my columns better. (And you thought I didn't care, didn't you?)

Charts in Excel help me plot all this out in a nice and friendly manner, a manner in which I can send my monthly status to my manager and say, "Look! See! I had *x* number of readers this month and *y* actually took the time to rate it!" (Hint-hint, *x and y*.)

And you can do this too, no matter what line of work you're in, whether you're an accountant, attorney, real estate broker, administrative assistant, private investigator, teacher, student, or someone just trying to get a handle on your own family budget.

One of the most exciting changes in Excel 2007 is its improved charting feature. Now you no longer have to go to an outside vendor to create professional looking charts. Everything you need, from intuitive tools in the interface to incredible formatting options such as visual enhancements like 3-D and glow, truly make it fun and easy to chart like a pro.

NOTE The improved charting capabilities in Excel 2007 are shared across the Microsoft Office system, which means that you can create and interact with charts the same way — regardless of the program you are using. For example, if you want to add a chart to a report in Word 2007, you can take advantage of the same tools you would use in Excel 2007 to modify and format the chart. (How's that for playing nice together?)

Here are a few of the things you can accomplish with the improved charting tools in Excel 2007:

- You can format individual chart elements, such as the chart area, plot area, data series, axes, titles, data labels, or legend.
- Update the data in an existing chart.

- Change the type of chart you want, even after you've created your chart.
- Change the chart style with just a click.
- Switch rows to columns and columns to rows...with just one click.
- Decide where you want to put the title (if you even want a title), or where you want to put the legend (again, if you even want a legend).
- Save the chart you created as a template (which is what I did with the chart below so that I don't have to reinvent the wheel — or the bar, I guess — every month when I send out my numbers to my manager).

In other words, you can pretty much take the tools we've given you and run with it.

Below is an example of the chart I created for data I looked at for the months of August 2006, September 2006, and October 2006.
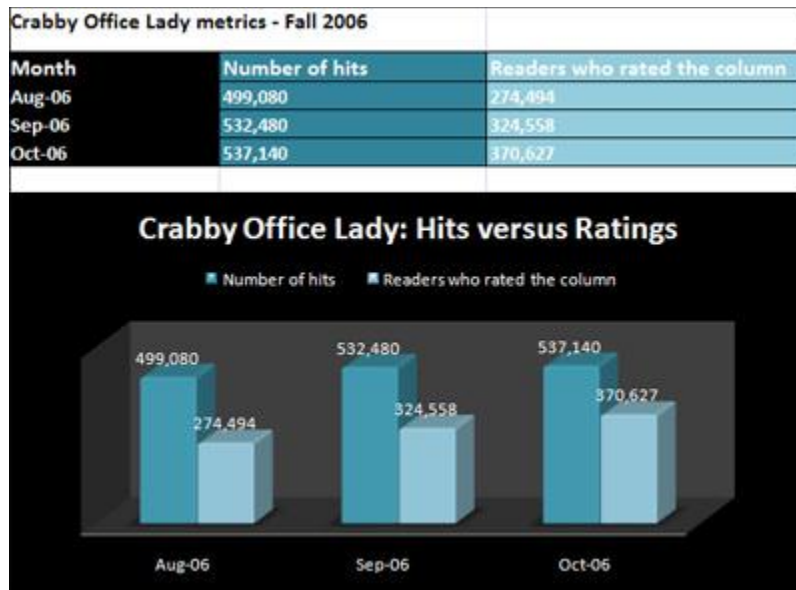
NOTE I learned how to create this chart just by watching this demo: Create charts in Excel 2007. In other words, in a snap.

How about a teaser, Crabby?

Now that I've gotten you excited about charts, I don't feel I should get off scot-free by just sending you off somewhere else to take a look at what else is new in Excel 2007. Let me just give you a few examples of some of *my* favorite things about the new Excel (besides charts):

- **Increased spreadsheet row and column capacity (the biggest request *of all time*, says one of our top program managers)** One million rows and 16,000 columns (what kind of data are you inputting anyway? Well, no matter; you no longer have to use many different spreadsheets to support all that information).
- **Improved sorting and filtering** When you're working with large amounts of complex data, new options for sorting and filtering are going to make your life a whole lot easier. Now you can sort by date, selection, or even color; manage up to 64 sorting levels from a central location; and use AutoFilter in a deeper way, such as by applying custom filters to more than two items. Sort and filter away...
- **Support for new file formats** Excel 2007 supports the new Office XML Formats. The benefit? Because the file formats are compressed, they result in substantially **smaller file sizes** than with previous versions of Excel, Word, and PowerPoint. As well, when you need to create a "fixed version" (meaning, "No you cannot change what I wrote!") of your spreadsheet, you can now save it as an XML Paper Specification (XPS) file or Portable Document Format (PDF) file. This "locks" your data while providing a fine-looking report for customers.

For more information about all that Excel 2007 offers, read the Microsoft Office Excel 2007 product guide. And again, the **See also** box at the top of this column will take you to all the resources you need.

"There's the chart — and there's the heart. And it's great when they both line up. But you better follow your heart, 'cause that's where it's at." — Marty Stuart

About the author

Annik Stahl, the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.