



The Business Lab, Inc.  
 12402 Mile Drive  
 Houston TX 77065-1508  
 phone (281) 517-0998  
 fax (281) 517-0789  
[www.thebusinesslab.com](http://www.thebusinesslab.com)

## Are Your Charts and Tables Easy To Understand?

by Kathy Ellis, Business Lab Marketing Coach

Charts and tables are an important part of our proposals to our customers and an important part of our internal business communication (budgets, sales activity, etc.). How many times have you had to decipher a poorly designed table or chart? We see them every day...when the ones, tens, and hundreds columns do not align, or when the item at the left end of a row is a mile away from its price at the right.

Below are some tips for creating charts and tables that will help your communications look more professional. Paying attention to ALL of your communications (whether they be internal or presented to your customers) and ensuring each piece is well written and well presented, will give your company an edge. The more professional and consistent each communication, the more your customers (and employees) will feel they are dealing with an organized, proficient, professional company. One who they have confidence in to solve their problems and provide the necessary guidance they are seeking.

**Tip from The Business Lab: Use a typeface with letters and number of uniform width when possible, and select fonts carefully.** When building a chart, choose a typeface that has numbers of consistent width. Most fonts are built with monospaced numbers, meaning a "1" takes exactly the same horizontal width as a "0" or any other digit. If the font was designed with this in mind, the commas for each thousand, hundred thousand, million and billion (etc.) will align from row to row.

Our suggestion for fonts when setting up tables and charts are san serif fonts like Helvetica, Arial, or Univers. It is important that you select san serif fonts for this purpose. *San* serif fonts are fonts that *do not* have serifs (the ending strokes of characters; short cross lines at the ends of main strokes). Times is an example of a serif font whereas Helvetica is an example of a san serif font (font without serif).

ex: Times, a serif font = 1234abcdefABCDEF  
 ex: Helvetica, a san serif font = 1234abcdefABCDEF

**Tip from The Business Lab: Use only top and bottom rules for tables.** Boxed in tables are old fashioned, out-of-date. Use a heavy weight (thick) line at the top and bottom. Or use a heavy weight line under the headline and the bottom, with light (thin) lines above totals. Here is a good table, set in Helvetica font and utilizing heavy lines top and bottom. In this example, notice the "air" between the word Total and the line above it. Give your table some "air."

WowWee	Stated Assets	Stated Liabilities	Surplus
R&D	\$ 4,032	\$ 2,090	\$1,933
Manufacturing	11,093	7,111	3,982
Sales	897	850	47
Distribution	8,901	9,002	-101
Accounting	311	10	301
Total	\$25,234	\$19,063	\$6,162

**Tip from The Business Lab: Screened boxes should be used judiciously.** Most computer applications will let you put a screened area behind the row of column headings. If you must use a screen, be certain it is a light screen (lightly shaded). Avoid screens completely if you plan to photocopy your table or chart. Photocopying will produce dark and muddy screened areas.

**Tip from The Business Lab: Avoid leaders if possible—keep columns tight.** Leaders are the dots commonly used to connect a row of information (i.e., Assets...\$123). The most difficult task for your reader is to read from one column to another without getting lost. Leaders can help in this process, but they are unattractive. A better solution is to reduce the space between the columns and narrow your chart up. If you must use leaders, choose open leaders (those with more space between the dots).

**More Information?** If you would like to learn more about designing professional tables and charts, please send an E-mail to [ideas@thebusinesslab.com](mailto:ideas@thebusinesslab.com) or fax a note on your letterhead to 281-517-0789.

**Author's Note:** Kathy Ellis is a Marketing Coach and the owner of The Business Lab, a full service marketing and graphic design company. We specialize in relationship marketing programs including database marketing, company brochures, client newsletters and promotional marketing materials for our clients. We share with you our FREE newsletter to showcase powerful marketing tips, techniques and ideas to help you improve your business. The Business Lab is based in Houston, TX at 281-517-0998 or by E-mail at [kathy@thebusinesslab.com](mailto:kathy@thebusinesslab.com)