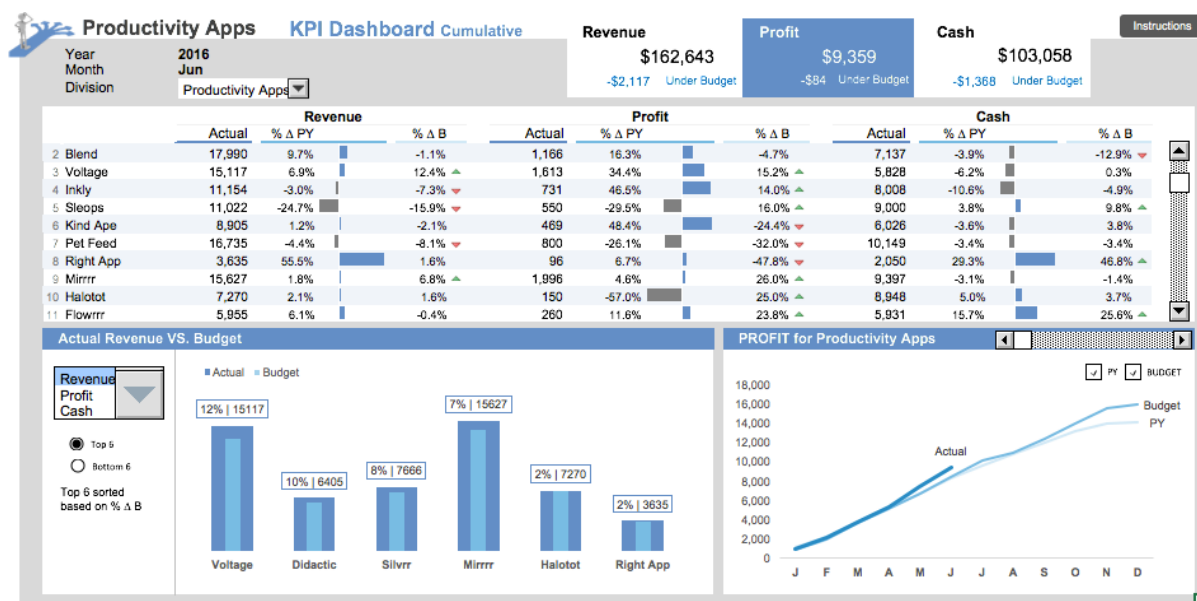


# Apply these 5 Design Principles to make your Dashboard Layouts pop out of the page

Designing dashboards involves making decisions about what data to emphasise, which in turn depends on the message that you want to communicate.

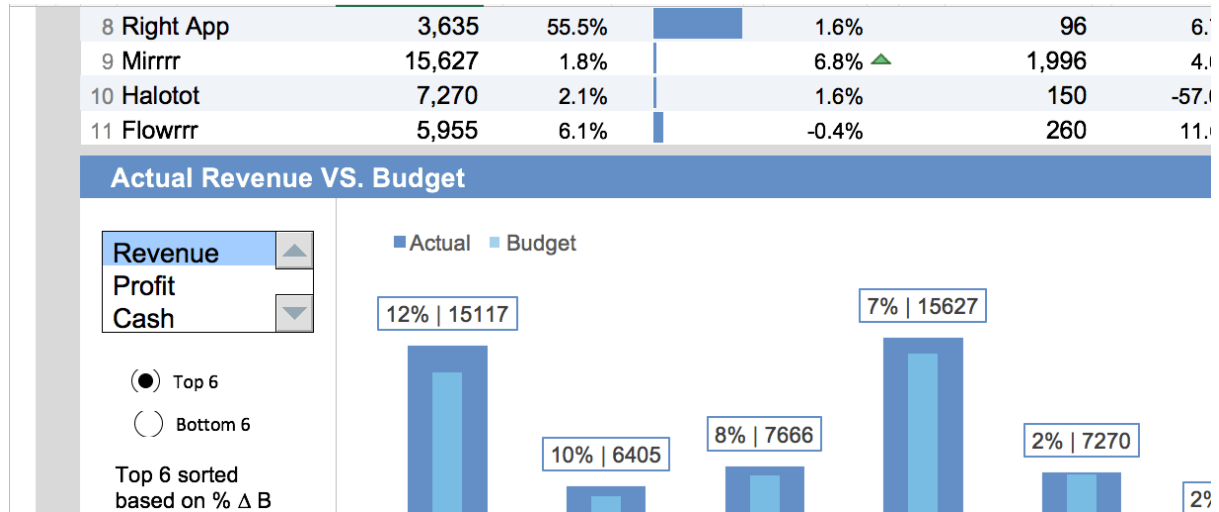


The following design principles will help you showcase the information as clearly and directly as possible.

## Contrast

*Contrast creates emphasis.*

You may want to add a **strong contrast** for headings to communicate at a glance the KPIs on display in your dashboard.



Contrast on the heading: Actual Revenue VS. Budget

You could even use a **subtle contrast** on the table rows as a visual aid for these long rows to ensure the current number on the right you're looking at is connected to the correct company far on the left.

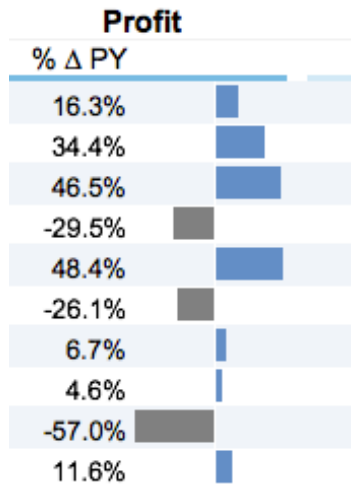
Month	Jun			-\$2,117 Under Budget			-\$84 Under Budget			-\$1,368 Under Budget		
Division	Productivity Apps											
	Revenue			Profit			Cash					
	Actual	% Δ PY	% Δ B	Actual	% Δ PY	% Δ B	Actual	% Δ PY	% Δ B			
2 Blend	17,990	9.7%	-1.1%	1,166	16.3%	-4.7%	7,137	-3.9%	-12.9%			
3 Voltage	15,117	6.9%	12.4% ▲	1,613	34.4%	15.2% ▲	5,828	-6.2%	0.3%			
4 Inkly	11,154	-3.0%	-7.3% ▼	731	46.5%	14.0% ▲	8,008	-10.6%	-4.9%			
5 Sleeps	11,022	-24.7%	-15.9% ▼	550	-29.5%	16.0% ▲	9,000	3.8%	9.8% ▲			
6 Kind Ape	8,905	1.2%	-2.1%	469	48.4%	-24.4% ▼	6,026	-3.6%	3.8%			
7 Pet Feed	16,735	-4.4%	-8.1% ▼	800	-26.1%	-32.0% ▼	10,149	-3.4%	-3.4%			
8 Right App	3,635	55.5%	1.6%	96	6.7%	-47.8% ▼	2,050	29.3%	46.8% ▲			
9 Mirrrr	15,627	1.8%	6.8% ▲	1,996	4.6%	26.0% ▲	9,397	-3.1%	-1.4%			
10 Halotot	7,270	2.1%	1.6%	150	-57.0%	25.0% ▲	8,948	5.0%	3.7%			
11 Flowrrr	5,955	6.1%	-0.4%	260	11.6%	23.8% ▲	5,931	15.7%	25.6% ▲			

Subtle contrast on the table rows

## Alignment

Alignment connects different elements. Use it to show relationships.

In this case, layout default (left align) has been subverted by **aligning** the ΔPY to a centre line - either left of the centre line for decrease and right of the line for increase.



*ΔPY aligned left of the centre line for decrease and right of the line for increase.*

The viewer should logically deduce that the centre line is PY, and left or right reflects a negative or positive Δ from PY.

Using layout in addition to color to communicate in this case loss or gains makes this **more legible** from a distance and **more quantifiable** - the brain counts shapes most easily.





Month	Jun			-\$2,117 Under Budget			-\$84 Under Budget			-\$1,368 Under Budget		
Division	Productivity Apps											
	Revenue			Profit			Cash					
	Actual	% Δ PY	% Δ B	Actual	% Δ PY	% Δ B	Actual	% Δ PY	% Δ B			
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11 Flowrrr	5,955	6.1%	-0.4%	260	11.6%	23.8%	5,931	15.7%	25.6%			

*Legible from a distance: performance.*

**Table Alignment**

Numbers in a table should be right aligned in their cell so you can immediately tell larger or smaller numbers apart. The convention is to align numbers to the right. Generally, text is left-aligned.

Headers can be an exception to this, based on preference.

Revenue			
Actual	% Δ PY		% Δ B
17,990	9.7%		-1.1%
15,117	6.9%		12.4%
11,154	-3.0%		-7.3%
11,022	-24.7%		-15.9%
















Numbers should be right-aligned. Headers as per preference; here, centre-aligned.

### Repetition

Repetition encourages the brain to draw parallels and create associations.

Two things that should be standardized throughout the dashboard are **abbreviations** and **color usage**.

The common visual shorthand of a down red arrow and green up arrow is repeated in this table, each time positioned next to a -% or +%.

Revenue		
% Δ PY		% Δ B
9.7%		-1.1%
6.9%		12.4% 
-3.0%		-7.3% 
-24.7%		-15.9% 
1.2%		-2.1%
-4.4%		-8.1% 
55.5%		1.6%
1.8%		6.8% 
2.1%		1.6%
6.1%		-0.4%

Using **arrow icons** in addition to **color** increases legibility from distance of this data, signposting it.

Month	Jun			-\$2,117 Under Budget			-\$84 Under Budget			-\$1,368 Under Budget		
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From afar, the viewer can visually filter high performing or low performing companies, before going up close to examine details.

## Proximity

Proximity organises content. It creates focal points.

Another way of looking at proximity is **grouping** and its opposite, **separation**. This example shows the metric (%ΔPY) grouped with its visual (conditionally formatted bar chart), to imply they are connected.

Revenue		
Actual	% Δ PY	% Δ B
990	9.7%	-1.1%
1117	6.9%	12.4%
1154	-3.0%	-7.3%
11022	-24.7%	-15.9%
8905	1.2%	-2.1%
16735	-4.4%	-8.1%
3635	55.5%	1.6%
15627	1.8%	6.8%
7270	2.1%	1.6%
5955	6.1%	-0.4%

Metric and visual grouped together

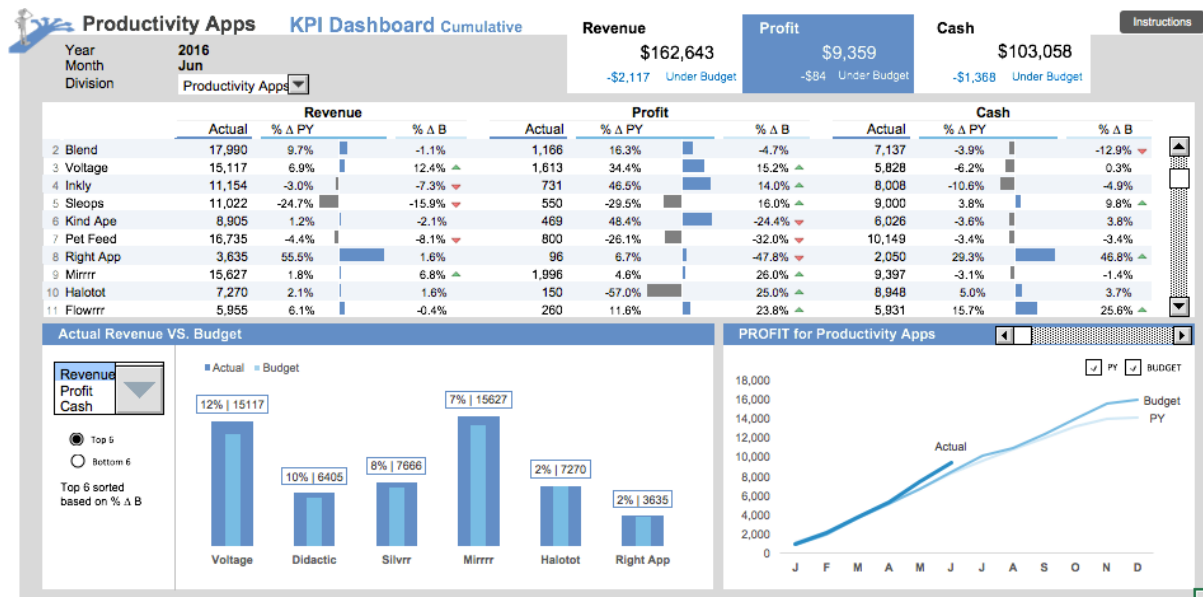
White space separates this set from another metric (%ΔB) and its visual.

This use of proximity helps clarity and adds visual punctuation in what would otherwise be a densely-packed table.

## Balance

Weigh large elements against smaller elements for visual harmony.

In this dashboard, the large table on top is balanced with 2 mid-sized charts below it. The borders are also aligned.



This balance unifies the different elements and reinforces their interconnectedness.

Written by Gregeboyle for XelPlus.com