

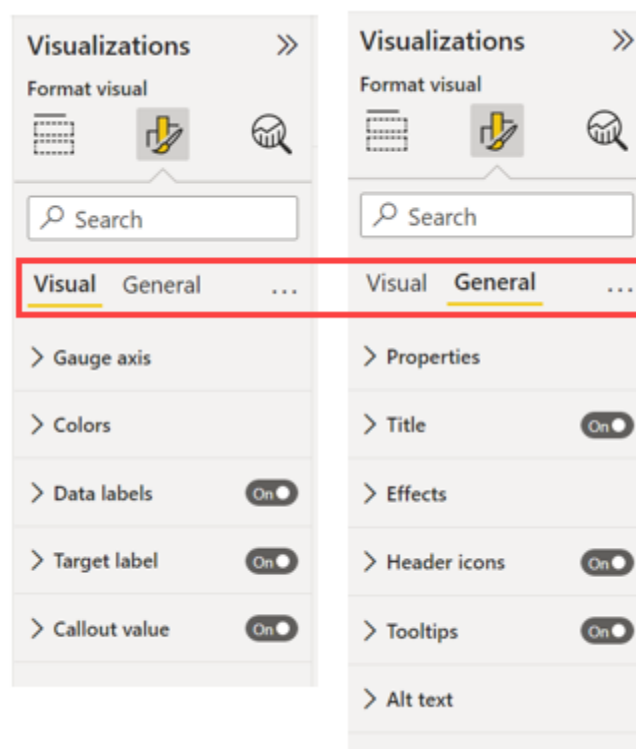
“Office-Like strategy” – the March 2023 Power BI update takes UX in a very cool new direction

Since turning on the new on-object interaction opt-in preview in the [March Power BI update](#), I must confess; I'm struggling with it, but I want more! This update has the potential to cause a shift not just in how individuals use the product, but how it is regarded and used as a business tool.

The Old

As a Power BI veteran, I'm accustomed to the rapid evolution of this platform and having to periodically re-learn the idiosyncrasies of this BI monster. However, throughout the evolution of the report designer interface, one thing has been consistent: all the settings for visuals have been tucked away in a side panel, nested in sections and sub-sections.

New users struggle with it a lot. Especially business users who have become accustomed to working with charts in Excel. Searching through the options to structure and style your visual has not been an ideal user experience for many.



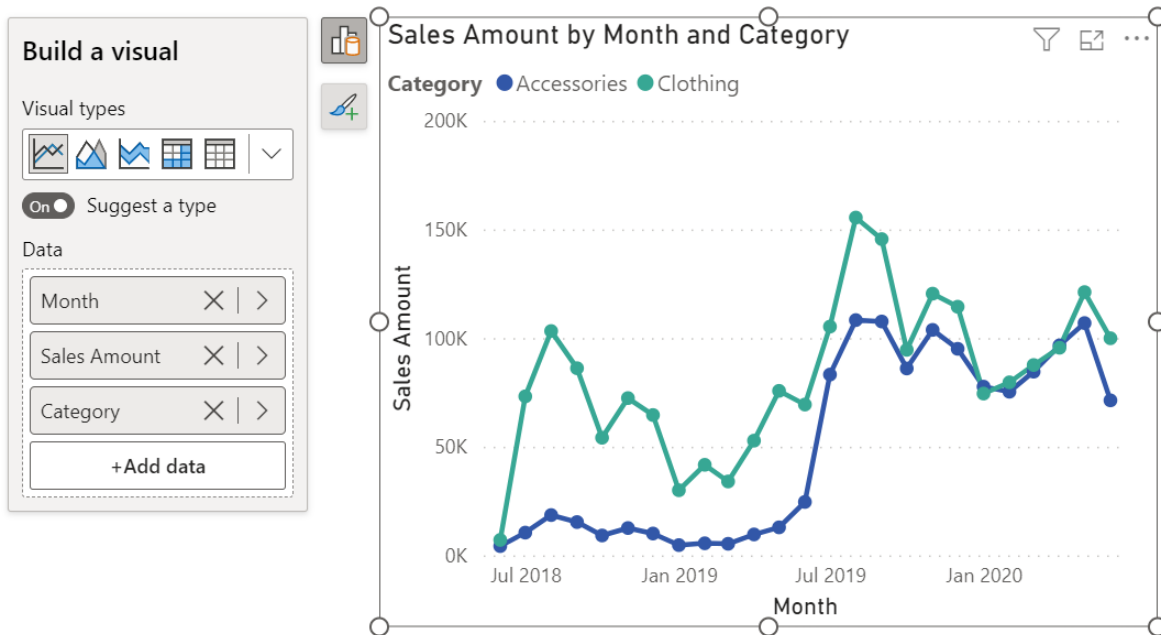
When you're accustomed to the panels, it's a logical enough arrangement, if not ergonomic it is at least a somewhat consistent and learnable layout. However, the options and formatting navigation

has been a roadblock for many would be excel converts who have not had the time to invest in learning the layout.

A simple "how do I change the line colour" interaction could send otherwise tech savvy analysts down a 10-minute rabbit hole of exploring options and settings. Often the resulting general feeling from business users is that it's not for them. This is a developer's tool.

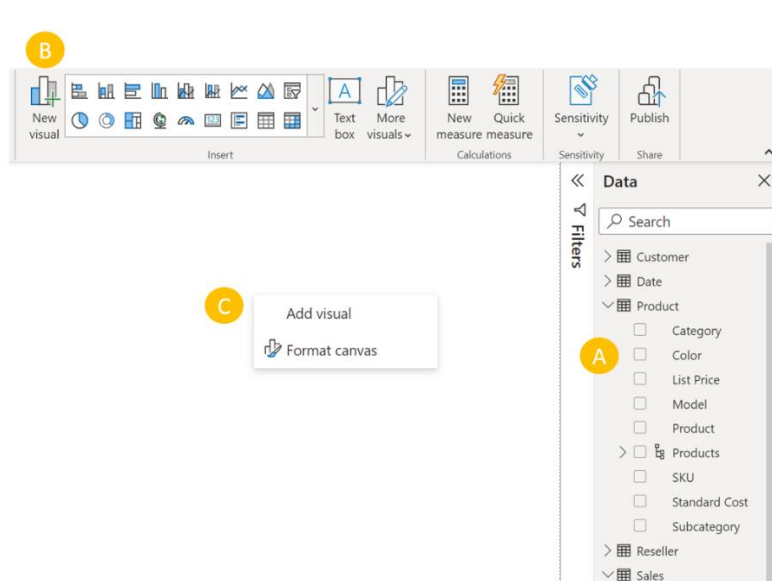
So, what's new?

[On-object interaction](#) presents a new way to build and format a visual, directly on the visual!

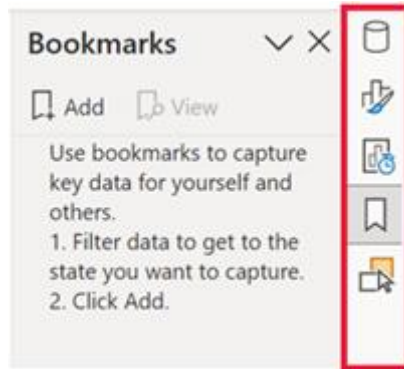


To enable this new feature, make sure you have the latest version of Power BI desktop installed, then select File > Options and settings > Options > Preview Features > On-object interaction. Check the box and restart your Power BI app and you're done – on-object interactions are available.

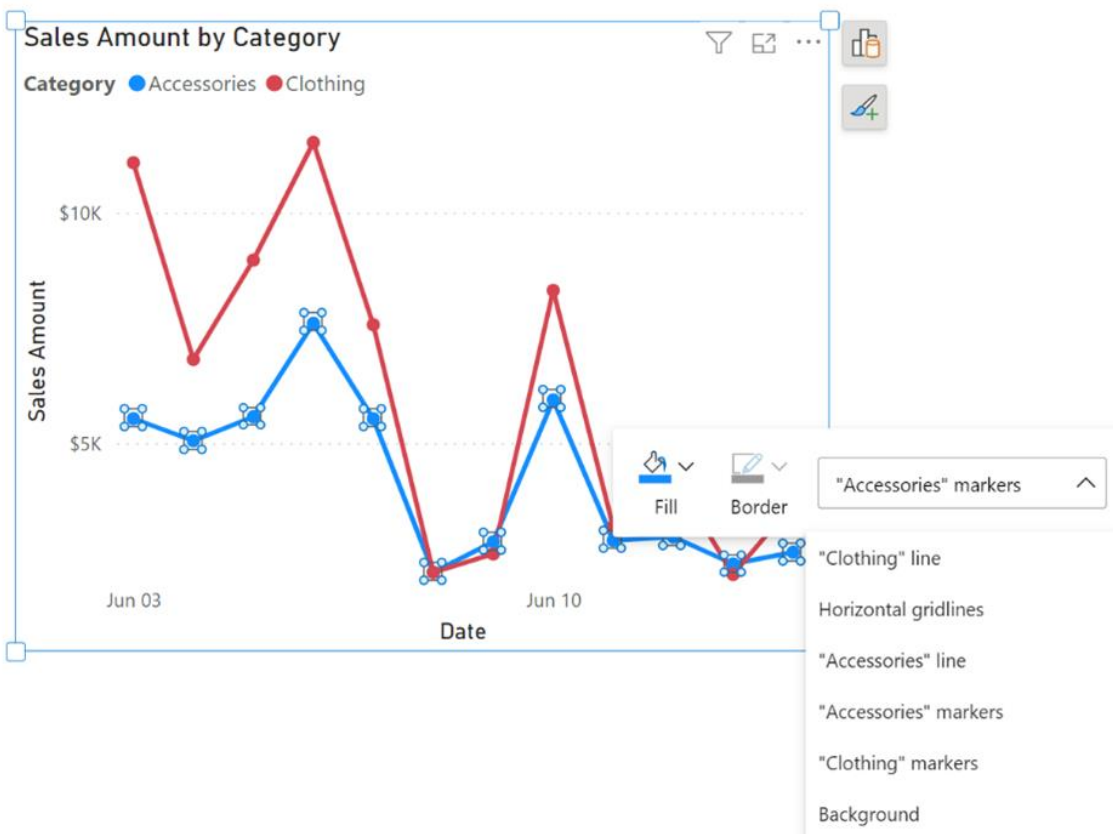
You'll see the old visual pane is now moved up to the ribbon menu and the data pane stands alone on the right-hand side.



This will be immediately more familiar feeling for Office users. Instead of multiple cascading panels for features such as bookmarks, selection pane and sync slicers, this update introduces a "pane switcher" to also align to Office's pattern of "one pane at a time" and give you more real estate on the canvas.



The on-visual editing is reasonably intuitive. The simplicity of right-clicking an element and directly selecting the colour will appeal to people who have been lost by the formatting panel in the past.



Users who have struggled with understanding the difference between, say setting a visual header text vs its title will have little trouble simply double-clicking words above the chart and editing the text directly. Removing an axis label is as simple as right-clicking it and choosing delete.

Why this is such a paradigm shift?

As a seasoned Power BI consultant, I have provided training and mentoring to many Power BI users of various backgrounds and skill levels. A common problem is that getting started with visual

creation is unintuitive to begin with. Things are not where you'd expect them to be if you are accustomed to using Excel, or other BI packages such as Tableau. Simply getting the right data in the right place is a stumbling block for many.

Another common issue is that formatting reports has been just too hard for many people. Dashboards are often left looking unfinished. Adding that professional veneer to the presentation of a dashboard goes a long way, but the Power BI learning curve has meant this is often neglected. Worse, stylised data visualisation in Power BI is often treated as a "dark art", beyond the reach of mere mortals!

People often need to be able to tweak and personalise how their insights are presented. This all compounds to that familiar chorus of "Hey, this is a really nice report, but how do I get it in Excel?" that is often the bane of Power BI adoption efforts.

With this change, Microsoft is signalling a move into a more friendly and familiar space for Office users. With this strategy, as the product continues to evolve, power users will feel more confident and comfortable with creating and using Power BI assets for their data visualisation needs. This is a very good thing!

So why am I struggling with it?

On-object interaction is very much a preview of a version 1.0 feature, and it is not ready for mass adoption right now. I found it difficult to intuit which chart design elements were interactive – where I could right click to change things, what needed to be double clicked etc. The new visual editing elements are easily confused with data navigation options that fire from a right-click, and this will undoubtedly cause some problems for newer users.

Also, it is very much sticking with facilitating basic editing changes with this release. Anything that goes beyond simple colouring, re-labelling and adding/removing visual elements is still buried deep in the formatting panel. In my first attempt at using the on-object formatting, I actually managed to add a massive container padding to one side of my chart, which took a while to figure out and undo.

Like all early releases, I expect the initial issues will be bedded down over time. Moreover, I predict that if the Power BI team stick with this "office-like strategy" it will be a game changer, heralding the next stage of the product evolution and engendering even deeper uptake across businesses.

If your business needs help with Power BI, please contact a Fujitsu Data & AI specialist now.

Contact

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