

# A New Look for Complex Data

Spotfire's visualization software is helping companies make sense of massive amounts of information.



**G**ENERATIONS OF SCIENTISTS HAVE BEEN AWED by how Albert Einstein came up with the theory of relativity: by visualizing abstract information about light and mechanics and manipulating the picture in his head. But when it comes to complex problem-solving, the rest of us need a little help. Enter Spotfire, a business-intelligence software company based in Somerville, Mass.

Spotfire's products—including the biotech-focused DecisionSite and the newly released DXP, designed for marketing and financial analysis—act as virtual Einsteins, processing massive amounts of data and displaying it in clickable graphs. "We want to take a cognitive task and make your eyes do the work," says Spotfire founder and CEO Christopher Ahlberg. "We make it so lots of information doesn't feel like lots of information."

That's proving invaluable for a diverse roster of clients, including Chevron, the Federal Aviation Administration, and Merck. They're using the visual interface to uncover patterns and make predictions about all sorts of nonvisual data, from revenue to customer complaints. Privately held

Spotfire won't disclose its financial details but says the 200-person firm has seen 30 percent annual revenue growth since its founding in 1996.

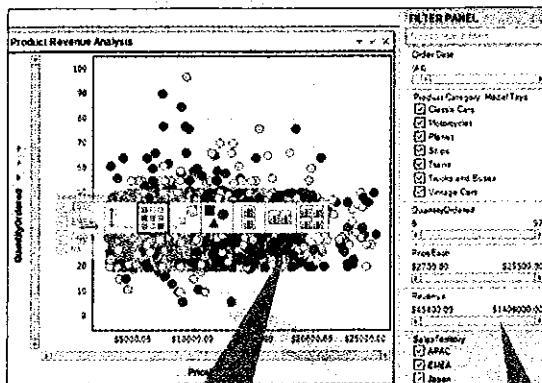
**CUSTOMER FOCUSED**  
Ahlberg's clients include the FAA, Chevron, and Merck.

In the past, large data sets were mapped on graphs, with every numerical change requiring tweaking a spreadsheet. But Spotfire lets people manipulate data simply by clicking on the images themselves. That allows users to see more information all at once—as many as 5 million records—and to identify patterns. Such tools could prove crucial for law enforcement agencies looking for connections among thousands of case files. Not surprisingly, Spotfire counts the CIA's venture capital arm, In-Q-Tel, among its investors.

DXP isn't cheap: A three-year site license averages \$150,000. But as companies are inundated with data, predictive technology like Spotfire's is the fastest-growing component of the \$4 billion business-intelligence software industry, according to IDC analyst Henry Morris. It doesn't take an Einstein to know that's a good opportunity. — SAHELI S.R. DATTA

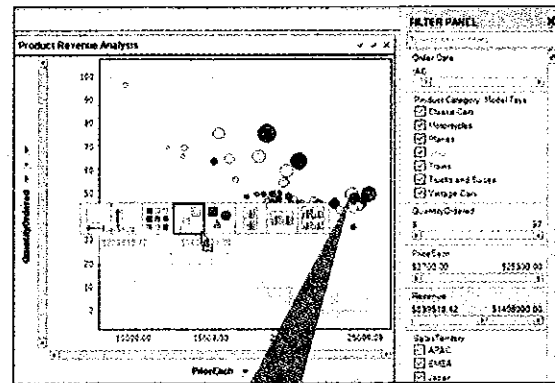
## By the Numbers

Using Spotfire's DXP software, a toy company executive can upload all of the firm's sales data and view the variables in the form of colors and shapes.



**1** Each data point represents a batch of toys. Color indicates the territory where each batch was sold.

**2** Using the sliding bars and checklist, a user can manipulate the data so the graph displays only certain categories and variables.



**3** Here the user has excluded toy ships, small-quantity orders, and cheaper items from the view. The size of each sphere indicates the revenue derived from the category. Now it's obvious that just a few orders in the blue and pink territories brought in a big chunk of the money.