

More Than Meets The Eye: Spotfire Powers Interactive Visual Analysis of Inc. 500

Spotfire Reveals Facets of Entrepreneurial Success at Inc.com

Visitors can visually navigate all the characteristics of the Inc. 500 companies.

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What do makers of curried chocolate, sellers of PCs for hard-core computer gamers, and cleaners of restaurant deep-fat fryers have in common?

Each was a winner in the Inc. 500 competition – a list of the 500 fastest-growing private companies in 2005, which is researched and published by Inc. magazine.

The premier publication for small to medium-sized businesses, Inc. has been surveying businesses since 1982. Every year, the magazine staff contacts thousands of companies and scrutinizes volumes of data to compile its annual list of 500 winners. The list for 2005, however, was different.

In 2005, Inc.com, the Website of Inc. magazine, leveraged Spotfire's DecisionSite software, which offers interactive visual analytics, to make the list come alive online. Inc.com used DecisionSite to crunch the Inc. 500 data and publish interactive reports on its Website, thereby allowing visitors to perform their own analyses on this year's winners, and thereby giving readers unprecedented insight into the Inc. 500 list of fastest growing companies.

"With DecisionSite, our users will gain more insight into the Inc. 500 than ever before," said Carole Matthews, Senior Editor of Special Projects for Inc.com. "Users will be able to interact with the data, by honing in on specific areas of the country and receiving in-depth details into the companies and their respective industries."



“The publishing business of the Inc. 500 may be a unique application of DecisionSite,” said Senior Editor Matthews. “But I suspect our editorial use of the product’s visual analytics is the same as any company’s: the visuals help us ask questions we didn’t know we needed to ask.”

– Carole Matthews
Senior Editor
Inc.com

Identifying Trends

Using DecisionSite, the editors of Inc.com were quickly able to spot interesting trends in a variety of 2005 data, which ranged from company listings to research surveys that were conducted with winning companies. By linking data and visualizations, such as interactive maps, DecisionSite makes geographic distributions of business growth readily apparent.

For example, DecisionSite showed that while the New England region had the largest number of Inc. 500 winners, the highest overall median business growth among winners occurred in the Southwest. The Northwest region had the least number of winners, but it led in industry growth for advertising.

DecisionSite revealed urban as well as regional activity. Eight or more Inc. 500 winners were found in each of the following cities: Indianapolis, San Francisco, Irvine, Atlanta, Houston and Austin.

Static vs. Live Data

Benefits to Inc.com editors are shared with Inc.com visitors. DecisionSite’s reports let readers interact with the data in real-time to ask and get answers to questions that are relevant to them. For example, a visitor to Inc.com interested in the telecom industry can click on a radio button in the DecisionSite interface to view results containing only the telecom winners in the Inc. 500.

A filtered list of Telecom winners is immediately produced and sits next to a map in the Web-based view. Since the DecisionSite table and map views are dynamically linked, the visitor automatically sees where on a United States map the Telecom winners are concentrated.

In another DecisionSite view, the same visitor sees a bar chart of revenue showing which of the telecom winners made the most money over a three-year period. By clicking on the tallest bar, the visitor changes the table view, which now lists the telecom company with

the highest revenue at the top. Columns of the table display characteristics of the company, such as number of employees.

If the Inc.com visitor wants to know more about telecom winners with fewer employees – like his own small firm – he can use a DecisionSite query tool, called a Range Slider to exclude Telecom companies with more than 150 employees. He thereby can analyze characteristics of successful companies more like his own. With DecisionSite, he can ask and get answers to questions that are important to him – questions that may never have occurred to Inc.com to prepare for him in a static report.

“With DecisionSite, our users can drill into the live data that is relevant to them, query it, visualize it, and draw their own conclusions,” said Matthews. “It’s added an element of control for the user to make the data more meaningful to his or her own company.”

Flexibility and Control

For Spotfire customers, DecisionSite traditionally helps users not only to find new insights in data through flexible analytical inquiry, but also to share those insights with employees, business partners and customers. At the Inc. 500 Website, DecisionSite gives subscribers storylines and analytical flexibility, while also giving Inc.com control over the data.

DecisionSite enables Inc.com to guide its visitors quickly to questions they are likely to ask. For example, visitors are able to view the top ten companies by rank, revenue and region instantly. Visitors can immediately see the fastest growing industries; in descending order, they are energy, insurance, financial services, construction, and telecommunications. This instant access is related to a feature that Spotfire calls Annotations, which act like bookmarks to valuable analyses.

Since DecisionSite data is live, users tweak the data and the views to perform ad hoc

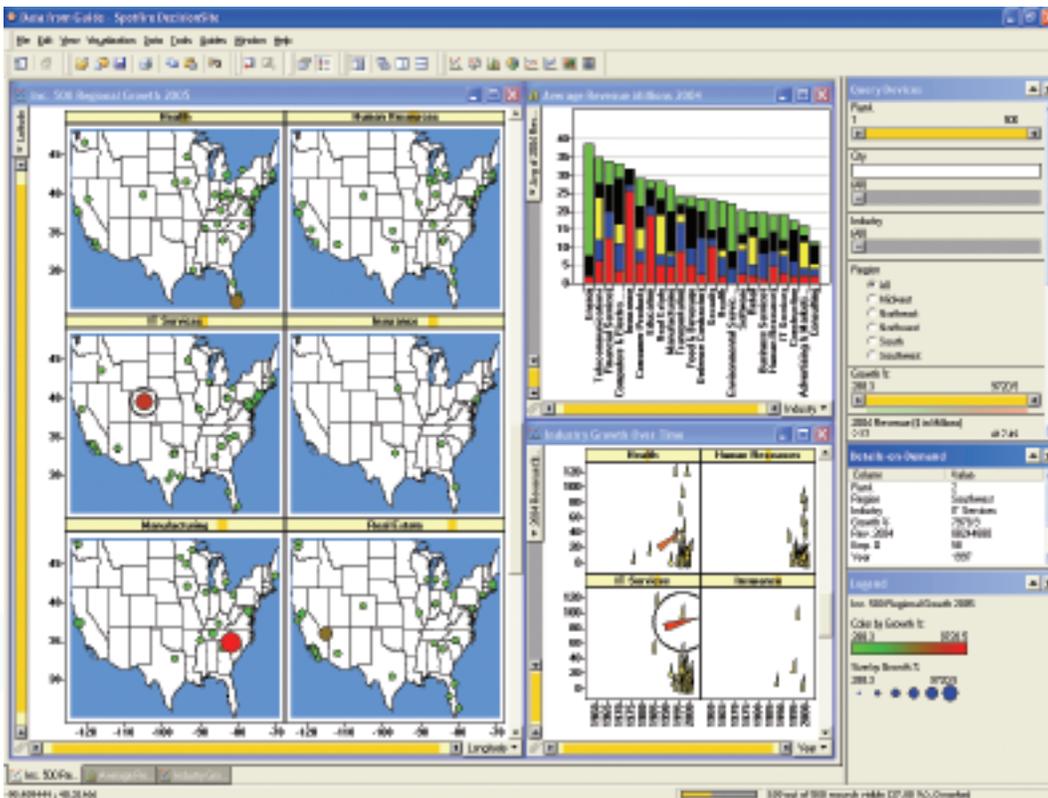


Figure 1: Growth rate among the Inc. 500 winners is quickly analyzed across regions and time. Red, large, and rotated markers show exceptional growth.

analyses. When the results of such analyses promise to be relevant to others, users bookmark the analyses and share them. In a corporate environment with read-write rights. DecisionSite Annotations feed into a company's knowledge-management workflow by allowing users to comment on the data and collaborate in decision-making. In the case of the Inc. 500, however, Inc.com chose to maintain read-only rights, disabling the creation of new Annotations in order to streamline the application for a large number of Inc.com readers.

Useful, Atypical Questions

As Annotations lead Inc.com subscribers to typical questions, DecisionSite leads Inc.com editors to unexpected queries. And that's a good thing, related to the power of DecisionSite's visual analytics.

"Interactive analytics can help business people to learn more about their data, in a shorter period of time, than static reports ever can," explained Christopher Ahlberg, CEO of Spotfire.

Mark Lorion, Director of Marketing Analytics at Spotfire, who helped craft the Inc. 500 application, illustrates Ahlberg's point.

"It's one thing to stare at a table with 500 entries or a series of static reports to try to discern trends," said Lorion, "It's another thing to look at DecisionSite interactive visualizations, where trends jump off the screen."

In an Inc. 500 analysis, the screen might be a map of the United States, studded with color-coded markers. The red markers, Lorion explained, indicate the fastest growing companies. No markers in a state indicate an economy of no or slow growth. Inc.com editors analyzing such growth patterns in regions and across industries find surprises.

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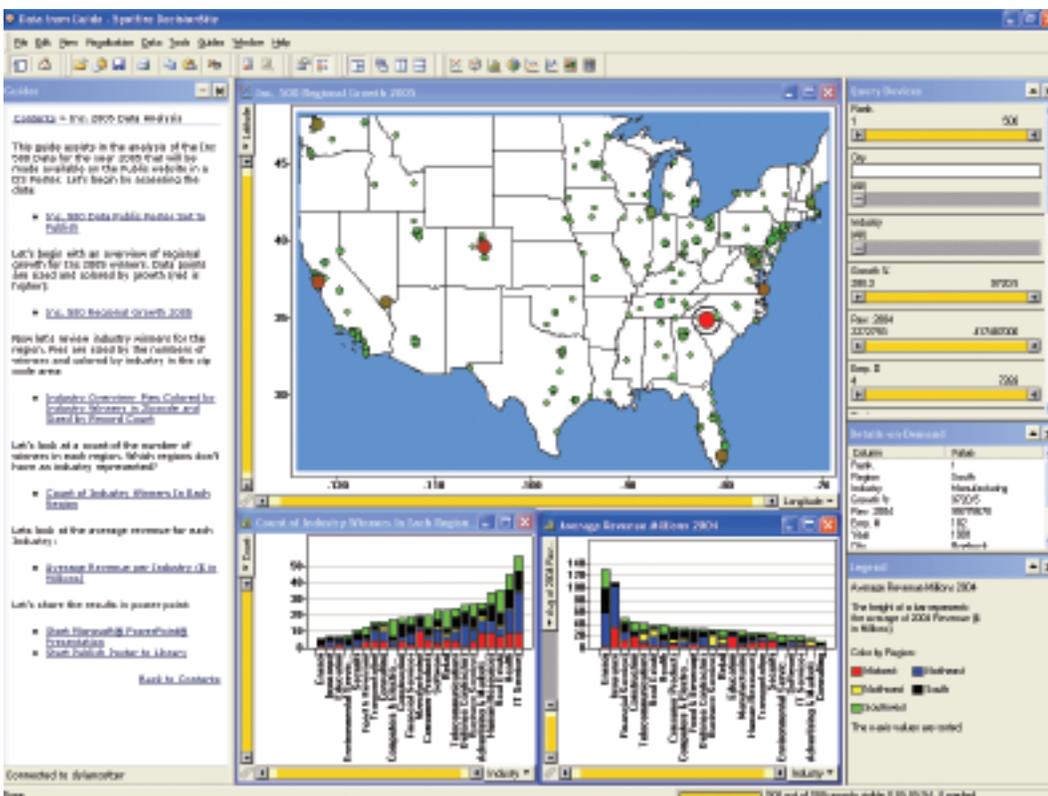


Figure 2: A DecisionSite Guide leads the user through the analysis process, enabling efficient and standardized ways of analyzing the Inc. 500 data. For example, users can identify the top 25 by growth in each region.

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About Spotfire, Inc.

Spotfire, Inc. provides interactive, visual data analytics applications and services that empower enterprises and their end-users to improve operational performance and gain an information advantage over the competition. Over 25,000 users in close to 1,000 organizations around the world use Spotfire DecisionSite to drive confident decision making by quickly and easily spotting trends, outliers and unanticipated relationships in critical business data. The company maintains U.S. headquarters in Somerville, Mass., and European headquarters in Göteborg, Sweden. Additional information can be found at www.spotfire.com.