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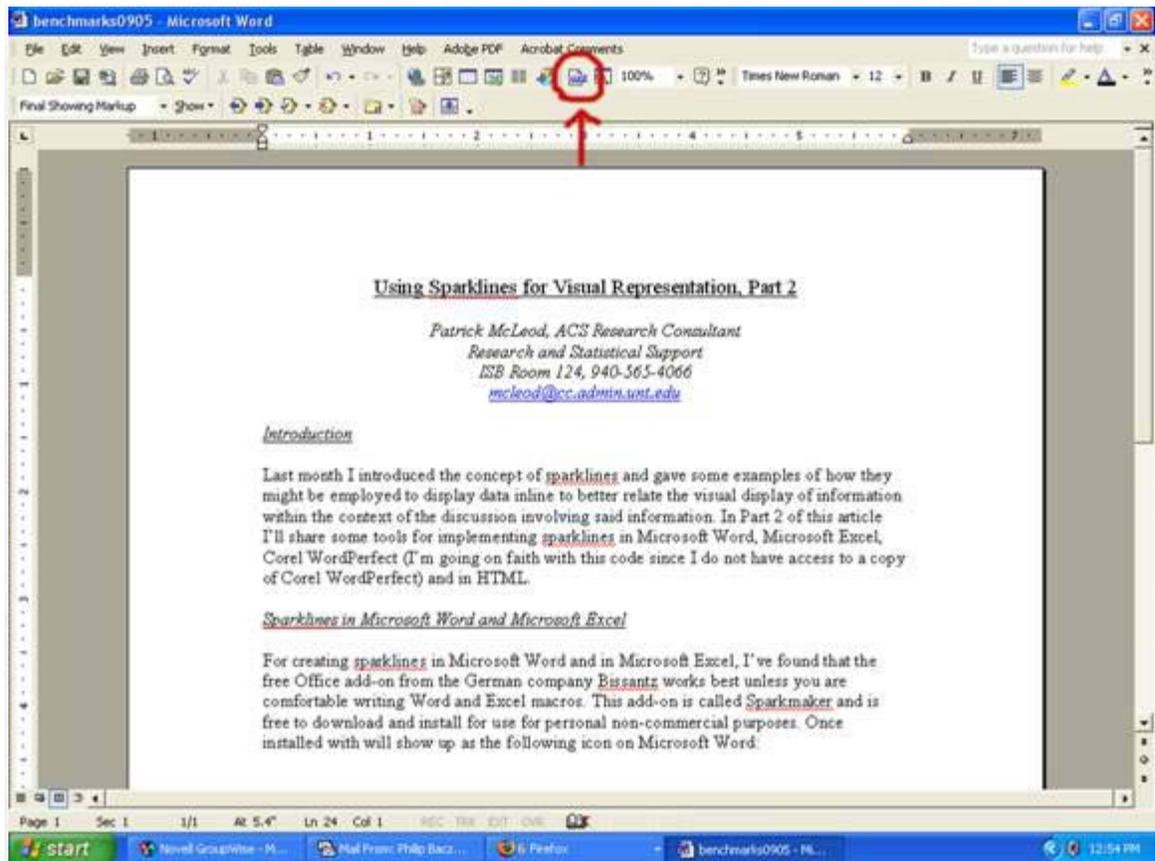
Using Sparklines for Visual Representation, Part 2

By Patrick McLeod, ACS Research Consultant

Introduction

Last month I introduced the concept of sparklines and gave some examples of how they might be employed to display data inline to better relate the visual display of information within the context of the discussion involving said information. In Part 2 of this article I'll share some tools for implementing sparklines in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and Corel WordPerfect (I'm going on faith with this code since I do not have access to a copy of Corel WordPerfect). I'll conclude with some resources to find sparkline implementation in some common languages such as PHP, Python and Ruby.
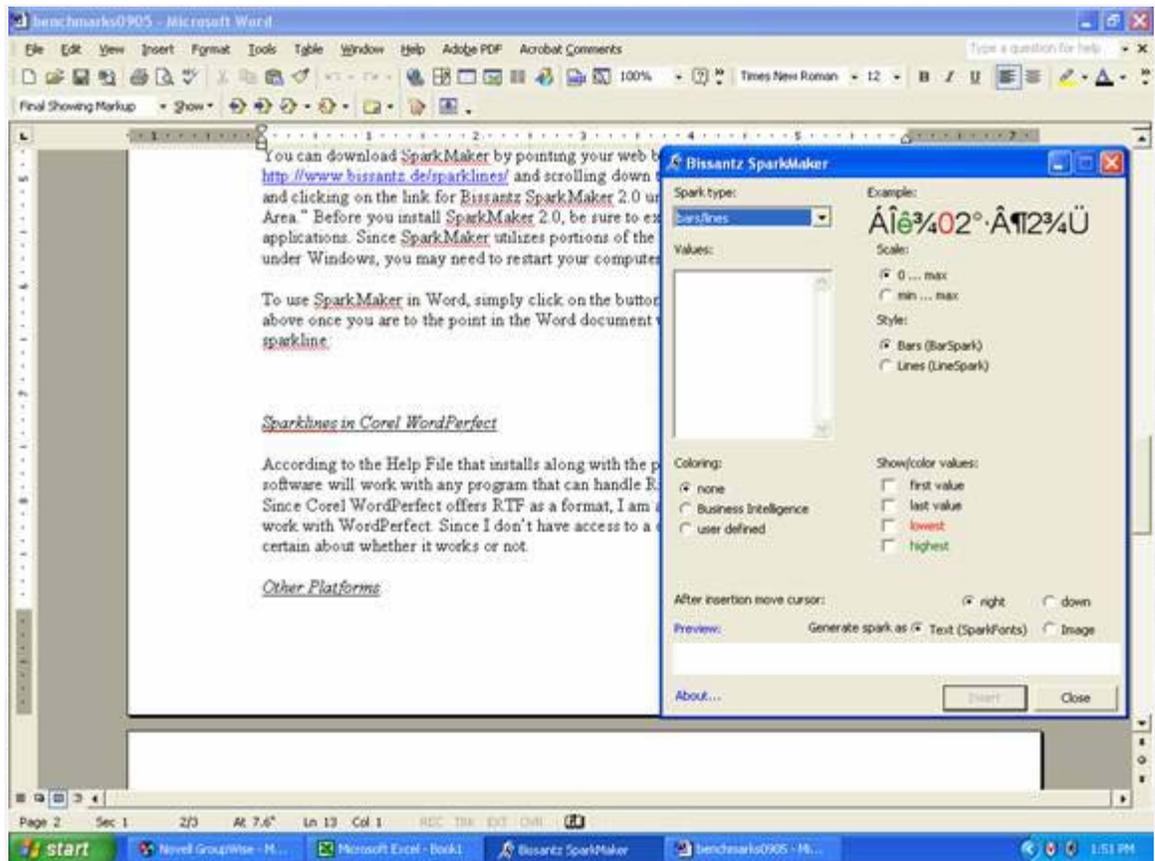
Sparklines in Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel

For creating sparklines in Microsoft Word and in Microsoft Excel, I've found that the free Office add-on from the German company Bissantz works best unless you are comfortable writing Word and Excel macros. This add-on is called Sparkmaker and is free to download and install for use for personal non-commercial purposes. Once installed with will show up as the following icon on Microsoft Word:
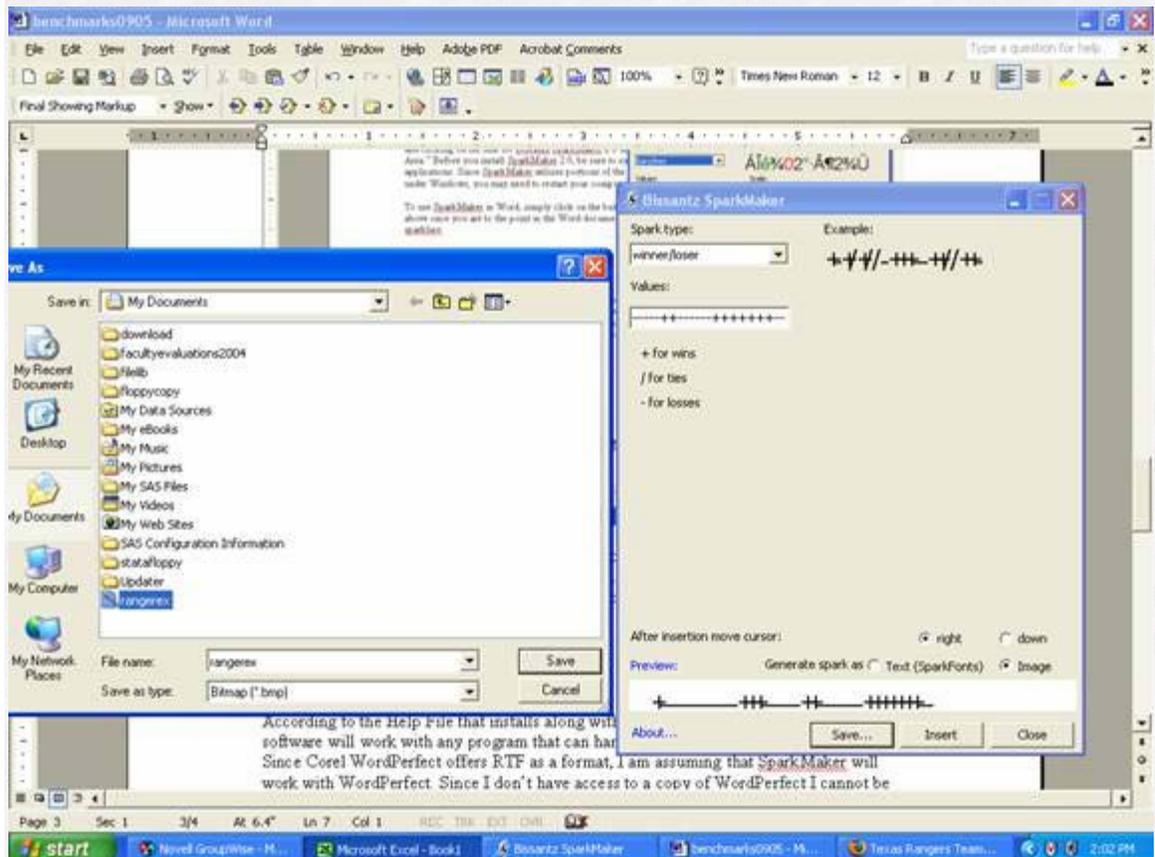
You can download SparkMaker by pointing your web browser at
http://www.bissantz.de/sparklines/ and scrolling down to the section titled "SparkMaker"
and clicking on the link for Bissantz SparkMaker 2.0 under the subsection "Download
Area." Before you install SparkMaker 2.0, be sure to exit any open instances of Office
applications. Since SparkMaker utilizes portions of the .NET framework with Office,
you may need to update your .NET framework and restart your computer before it will
work properly.

To use SparkMaker in Word, simply click on the button on the toolbar in the picture
above once you are to the point in the Word document where you want to insert your
sparkline:

Once you've entered the values you're wanting to display as a sparkline, you can elect to either generate the spark as text (if you download the SparkFonts free package from the Bissantz website) or you can save the spark as a bitmap image (my choice) and then insert the spark or insert the image you generated into your Word document:

Sparklines in Corel WordPerfect

According to the Help File that installs along with the program, Bissantz's SparkMaker software will work with any program that can handle Rich Text Format (RTF) files. Since Corel WordPerfect offers RTF as a format, I am assuming that SparkMaker will work with WordPerfect. Since I don't have access to a copy of WordPerfect I cannot be certain about whether it works or not.

Other Platforms

If you're looking to implement sparklines in a language or on a platform not listed here, never fear! If your language or platform has an active coder base and is somewhat geared toward research, statistics and/or data mining, some has probably written a sparklines package or library or code snippet for your platform. Here are a handful I know of:

PHP: Project SparkLine from SourceForge.net;

Python: Bitworking article on drawing sparklines with the Python Imaging Library;

Ruby on Rails: Weed (MIT open source, does not require Rmagick) and Geoff Grosenbach's Rails sparklines library (requires Rmagick).

Until next month, happy computing!

Links:

- Edward Tufte on Sparkline Implementation: http://www.edwardtufte.com/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg?msg_id=0000Lk&topic_id=1

- Edward Tufte on New Sparklines: http://www.edwardtufte.com/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg?msg_id=0001OR&topic_id=1

- Sparkline.Org: http://www.sparkline.org/

- Sparkline Wiki: http://sparkline.wikispaces.org/

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