



**Analysis Lesson From a 5 year Old**  
Late night ramblings from Chuck Hooper October 8, 2012  
web: [www.bialytics.com](http://www.bialytics.com)

I was taking care of my 5 year old granddaughter for the day. She wanted to paint some pictures. I pulled out her water colors and set them up on the kitchen table. She took a brush, dipped it in water, then into a few different color paints. Then, she proceeded to put ten blobs of color on ten different places on the paper. She held up the final product and asked "Papa, do you like this?". I smiled and nodded a big YES! She then asked "Do you know what they are?". I said they looked like pretty birdies. She frowned and tossed the paper aside: **"NO! They're kitty cats!"**

We repeat the process – ten more blobs of new colors, in new shapes, all over the paper. Same questions asked.

THIS time, I am going to be smarter! The last were kitty cats. She's 5. These MUST be puppy dogs! She says **"No!. They're horsies!"**. Another work of art tossed to the side.

One more time....

I am an analyst. I am a bright guy. No 5 year old will stump me a third time!

This time, about a dozen colorful blotches on the paper. Same questions asked. I ask if I am allowed multiple guesses. She says "Yes.", so, I start: "Are they aardvarks? Abacuses? Accountants? Adams apples? Affidavits? Aggravated grandpas?..."

I go through the alphabet. I go back through the alphabet. And again. 30 minutes later, I am sweating. She is bored with saying "No!" so many times.

Finally, I am done. I say: "Papa gives up. What are they?".

She shakes her in disgust, rolls her eyes (more disgust), and says.

**"Papa! Sometimes they're just dots!"**.

How often, as analysts, do we look for insights, and not find them, only to keep trying until we pass out?

How many times is the data we are looking at just dots in a scatter plot?

How do we know when to look elsewhere? And, where is that elsewhere?

What other data do we need to add to the mix, to make the data we already have useful?

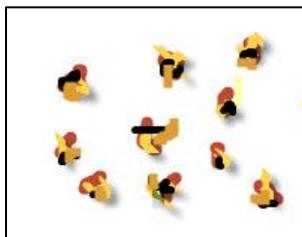
BI tools can't answer these questions. These are the questions that need human brain power to answer.

The tool you use to analyze the data should let you "play with your data".

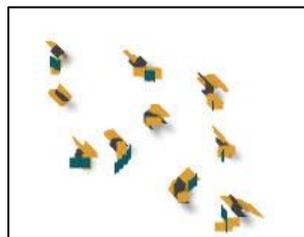
My friends at Tableau Software like to say "Party with your data!". It's the same idea.

It's the easiest way to find those gold nuggets hiding in the numbers.

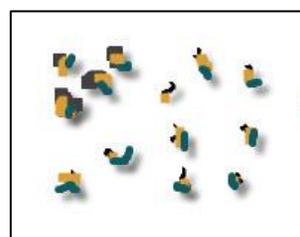
It's also the fastest way to find out you're just playing with dots!



**Kitty Cats**



**Horsies**



**Dots**



Chuck Hooper is a business intelligence and data visualization consultant, specializing in healthcare and education. He brings 47 years of business and IT experience with him. In addition to the current consulting offerings, he does speaking engagements, and, conducts training sessions on the use of Tableau Software products, visual analytics, data warehouse design, and other business intelligence topics, at both the technical and the executive levels. For further information: email: [chooper@bialytics.com](mailto:chooper@bialytics.com) Twitter: @chuck\_hooper web: [www.bialytics.com](http://www.bialytics.com)  
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