

How to Easily Create a Combo Chart in Google Sheets

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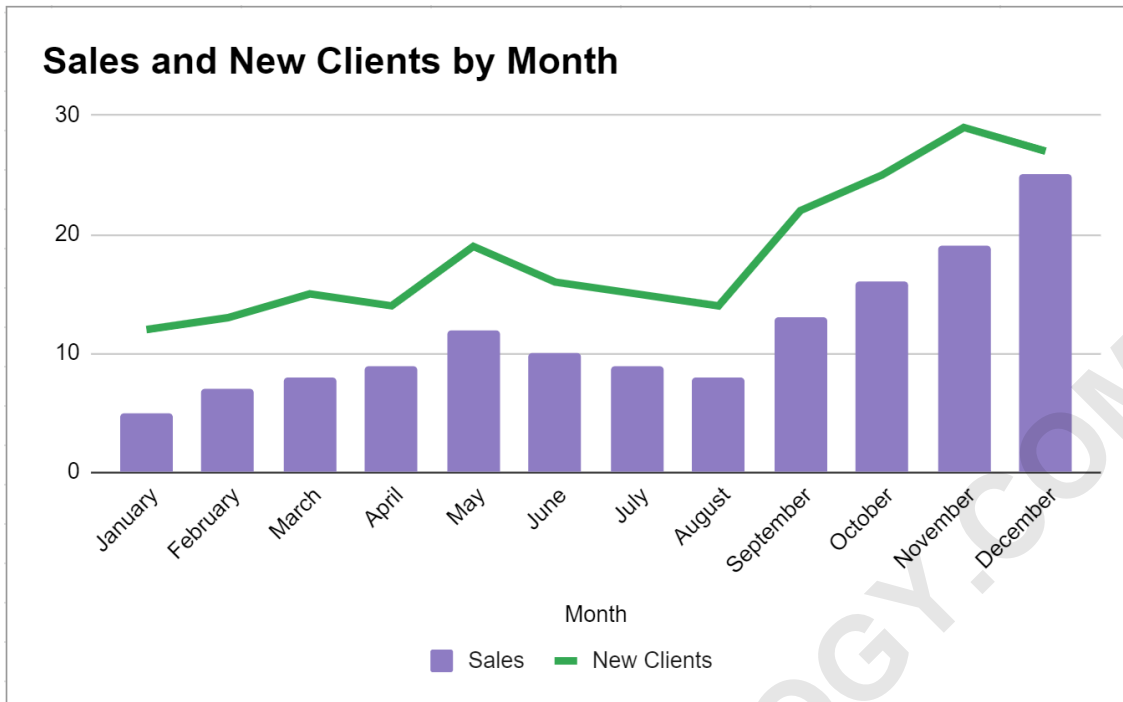
PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=104077>

The creation of a combo chart within Google Sheets is a highly effective method for visualizing two distinct data sets simultaneously on a single plot. This technique allows users to compare different metrics, often measured on separate scales, or to highlight correlations between key performance indicators (KPIs). The fundamental process involves careful selection of your source data, utilizing the integrated charting tools, and specifically configuring the series to adopt both bar and line formats.

To begin constructing this powerful visualization, the user must navigate to the spreadsheet containing the data and access the chart creation interface. This is typically achieved by clicking the **Insert** tab and then selecting **Chart**, which opens the comprehensive chart editor menu. Once the editor is accessible, the initial step requires highlighting the necessary data range. Google Sheets will automatically suggest a chart type, but the subsequent transformation into a combo chart is straightforward, utilizing the dedicated options within the **Chart editor** to customize the series types and axis assignments.

Unlike simple charts that display one variable, the combo chart combines graphical elements--typically columns (bars) for one metric and a line for another--to present a cohesive, multi-layered view of the underlying data. This structure makes it ideal for comparing volume (e.g., sales) against rate (e.g., client conversion rate) over a shared period. The final adjustment is made within the **Chart editor**, where the user can fine-tune titles, legend location, and, critically, assign different data series to the primary and secondary axes for clarity.

A **combo chart**, or combination chart, is a sophisticated graphical representation tool that integrates two or more chart types--most commonly a column chart and a line chart--to display metrics that share a common X-axis but may utilize different Y-axis scales. This structure is superior for illustrating complex relationships, such as how sales volume (bars) correlates with customer satisfaction trends (line) across monthly or quarterly intervals.



The following detailed, step-by-step procedure provides a comprehensive example of how to successfully create and configure a polished combo chart using Google Sheets, ensuring maximum data clarity and impact.

Understanding the Combo Chart and Its Applications

Before diving into the technical steps, it is essential to grasp why a combo chart is the preferred choice for certain data analysis tasks. Its primary strength lies in its ability to handle dual metrics effectively. When you have two data series where one represents discrete quantities (best suited for bars) and the other represents cumulative progress or trends (best suited for lines), the combination structure ensures that neither metric overshadows the other, provided the scaling is handled correctly through the use of primary and secondary axes.

Common applications for combo charts include financial reporting, where you might plot monthly revenue using columns and the corresponding profit margin percentage using a line. Similarly, in logistics, you could chart the number of shipments (bars) against the average delivery time (line). The key determinant for using this chart type is the presence of a shared category axis, typically time (months, quarters, years), allowing for a direct comparison of the two variables across the same reference points.

However, successful implementation relies heavily on clear differentiation. The visual distinction between the column and line series must be immediate, which is why color coding and careful legend placement are critical steps in the customization phase. Misuse, such as poorly scaled

secondary axes or unclear labeling, can lead to misleading conclusions, a phenomenon known as "chart junk" or misrepresentation. Therefore, designing a combo chart demands both technical skill in Google Sheets and a commitment to data visualization best practices.

Prerequisites: Preparing Your Data for Visualization

The foundation of any accurate chart lies in clean and correctly structured data. For a combo chart in Google Sheets, the data must be organized in columns where the first column serves as the X-axis (categories, e.g., Month), and subsequent columns represent the series data points (e.g., Sales, New Clients). The uniformity of the X-axis is paramount, as it dictates the alignment of both the bar and line series.

For this specific example, we are using two distinct metrics: **Total Sales** (a quantitative measure suitable for bars) and **Total New Clients Signed** (a count/trend measure suitable for a line). Our data spans a 12-month period. Ensure that all cells in the range are correctly formatted; for instance, sales figures should be formatted as currency, while client counts should be standard numbers. Consistent formatting prevents input errors and aids the chart creation process.

We will structure our spreadsheet with three columns: the first column for the category (Month), the second for the primary metric (Sales), and the third for the secondary metric (New Clients). This simple columnar layout ensures that when we select the data range, Google Sheets can easily interpret the structure and assign the series appropriately during the initial chart rendering phase. This preparatory step is critical for a seamless transition into the graphical interface.

First, let's enter some data for the total sales and total new clients signed for a certain company during a 12-month period, structured as follows:

	A	B	C	D	
1	Month	Sales	New Clients		
2	January	5	12		
3	February	7	13		
4	March	8	15		
5	April	9	14		
6	May	12	19		
7	June	10	16		
8	July	9	15		
9	August	8	14		
10	September	13	22		
11	October	16	25		
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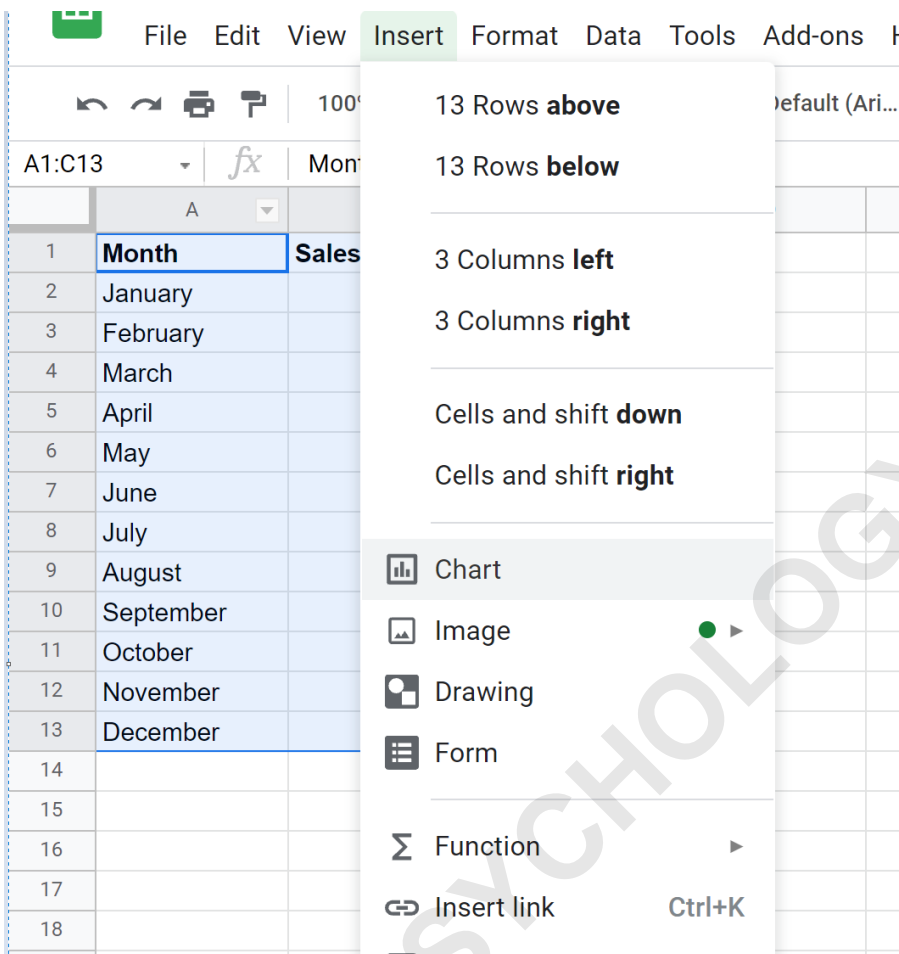
Initial Chart Creation and Data Selection

With the data properly prepared and occupying a contiguous range (in our case, **A1:C13**), the next step involves invoking the charting tool. Unlike some software where you must specify the chart type immediately, Google Sheets generally starts with a default selection, often a column or line chart, which we will later refine into the desired combination format. The key is precise data range selection.

To initiate the chart creation, highlight the entire range of cells, including the header row (A1 through C13). Selecting the header row is important because Google Sheets automatically utilizes these labels (Month, Sales, New Clients) as series names and axis titles, significantly reducing manual labeling work later on. Once the range is highlighted, navigate to the main menu bar, click **Insert**, and then select **Chart**.

Upon selection, the **Chart editor** pane will appear on the right side of the screen, and a preliminary chart--often a simple line chart, as noted in the original sequence--will be embedded directly into the spreadsheet. At this stage, do not worry if the chart does not look exactly like a combination

chart; this is merely the system's initial guess. The primary focus now shifts to the editor panel for transformation and configuration.



Transforming the Default Chart into a Combo Layout

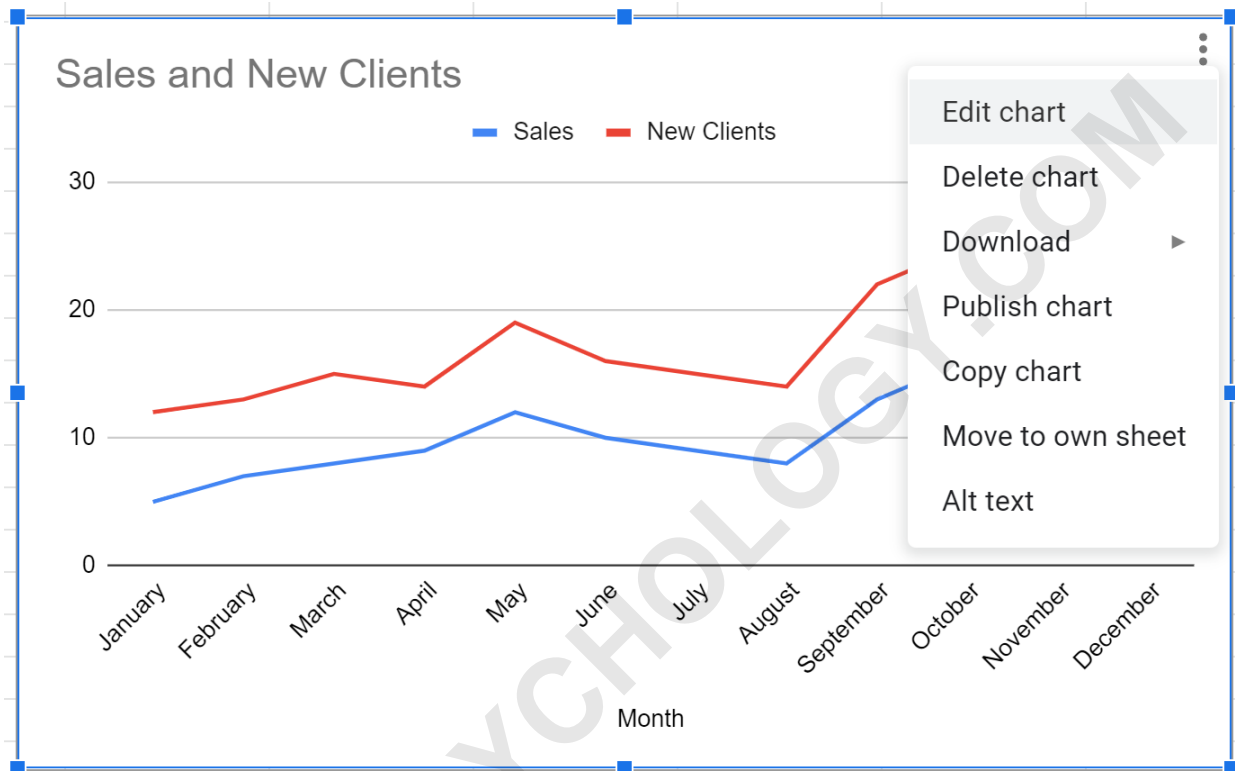
The transition from a standard chart type to a specialized combo chart happens entirely within the editor panel. If the editor panel closes for any reason, you can reactivate it by clicking anywhere on the chart, clicking the three vertical dots (More options) in the top right corner of the chart overlay, and then selecting **Edit chart**.

The Chart editor is divided into two main tabs: **Setup** and **Customize**. In the **Setup** tab, locate the **Chart type** dropdown menu. Scroll through the available options until you find the **Combo chart** selection, typically located under the "Suggested" or "Other" categories. Clicking this option immediately applies the combination style to your existing data series.

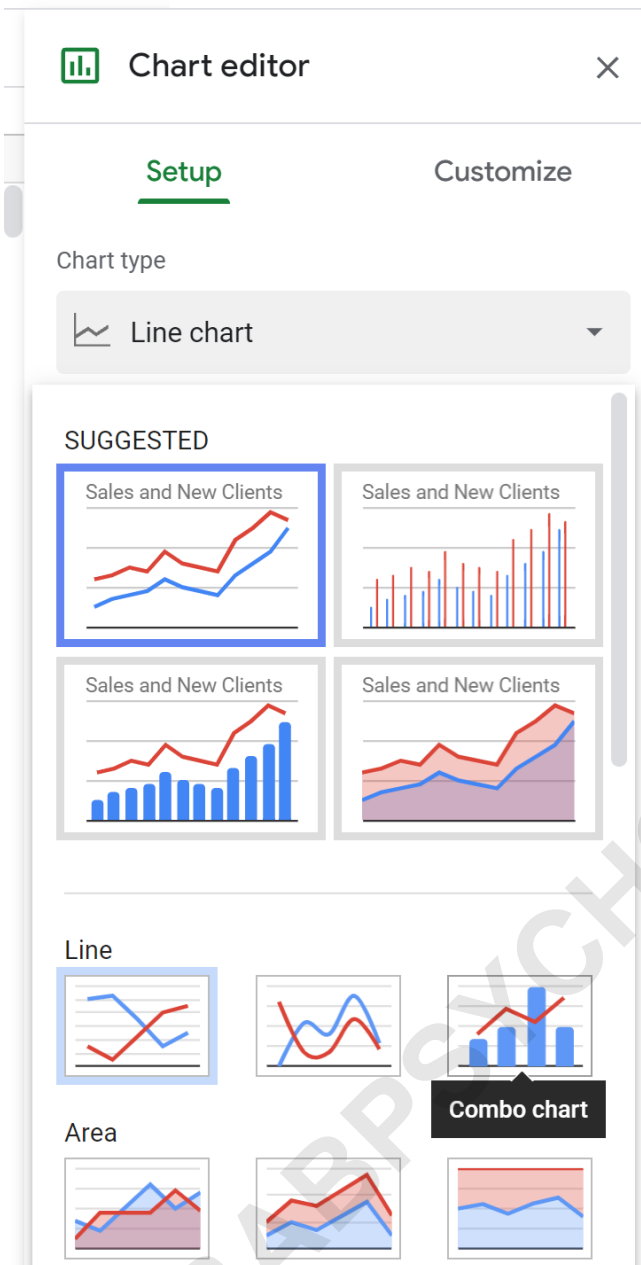
When the **Combo chart** type is selected, Google Sheets intelligently attempts to assign one series to columns and the other to a line. Typically, the first data series (Total Sales) defaults to columns, and the second series (Total New Clients) defaults to a line. This automated step significantly

accelerates the process, providing a baseline visualization that we can now refine for optimal clarity and professional presentation.

To explicitly access the editing features once the chart is placed, click anywhere on the chart canvas, then click on the three vertical dots in the top right corner, and finally click **Edit**:



In the **Chart editor** panel that appears on the right side of the screen, click the **Chart type** dropdown menu under the **Setup** tab, then click **Combo chart**:



The chart will automatically be converted into the combination format, presenting both the bar and line series using the shared X-axis (Month):



As illustrated, the x-axis displays the monthly intervals, the bars represent the total sales by month, and the superimposed line displays the total new clients signed by month. This basic configuration already provides a powerful visual comparison.

Configuring the Series and Axes for Dual Metrics

One of the most critical aspects of creating an effective combo chart is ensuring the correct scaling of the two data series, especially if they operate on wildly different magnitudes (e.g., Sales in thousands vs. Clients in tens). This is achieved by utilizing a secondary Y-axis.

Navigate to the **Customize** tab within the **Chart editor** and select the **Series** dropdown section. Here, you can individually configure each data series. Select the **Total Sales** series first. Confirm that its type is set to **Columns** and, crucially, ensure that its Axis is set to **Left Axis** (the primary axis). This will serve as the scale for our volume metric.

Next, select the **Total New Clients Signed** series. Verify that its type is set to **Line**. Now, change its Axis setting from **Left Axis** to **Right Axis**. This action introduces a secondary vertical axis dedicated solely to the New Clients data, allowing this series to maintain its own accurate scale without being compressed or exaggerated by the larger sales figures. This dual-axis approach is what gives the combo chart its analytic power.

Advanced Customization and Styling Techniques

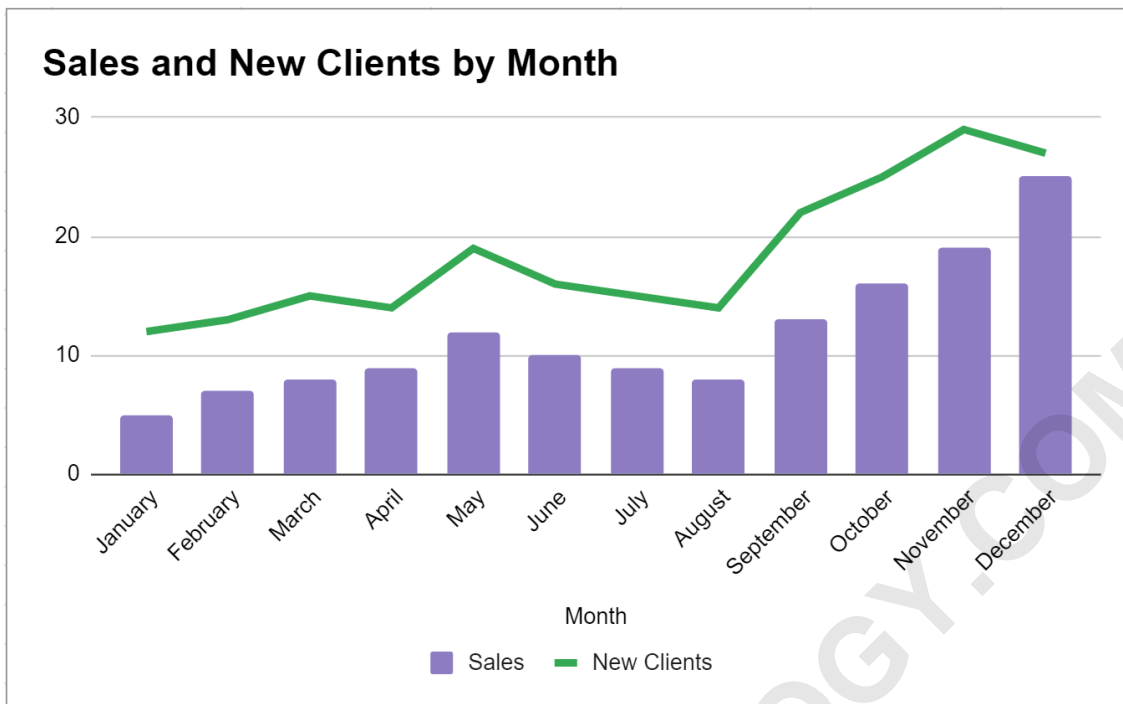
Once the fundamental structure and axis assignments are complete, the focus shifts to aesthetics and labeling to maximize readability and professionalism. The **Customize** tab offers extensive options for refinement, covering everything from font selection to background colors.

In the **Chart & axis titles** section, you should rename the main title to something descriptive, such as "Monthly Sales vs. New Client Acquisition." You should also ensure the **Vertical Axis** (Left) and **Right Axis** titles are clearly labeled, for example, "Total Sales (USD)" and "New Clients Signed," respectively. This explicit labeling is vital for preventing reader confusion regarding which series relates to which scale.

The **Legend** section allows you to adjust the position (e.g., Top, Bottom, or Right) and formatting of the legend. Placing the legend strategically ensures that it identifies the colors and symbols used for each series without obstructing the main data points. Finally, explore the **Gridlines and Ticks** options. While gridlines help measure data values, too many can clutter the visualization; often, fewer major gridlines are better, especially on the secondary axis.

Feel free to click on individual elements in the chart to modify their appearance. For example, using contrasting colors (e.g., blue for sales bars and orange for the client line) helps reinforce the separation of the two metrics and improves overall chart impact.

For example, we can change the title, the colors of the bars and lines, and the location of the legend to produce a final, highly stylized output:



Best Practices for Effective Combo Chart Usage

While the technical steps in Google Sheets are straightforward, the analytical integrity of a combo chart depends on adhering to visualization best practices. The primary pitfall to avoid is misinterpreting correlation versus causation, especially when the two metrics are scaled independently. Always ensure that the scale chosen for the secondary axis does not visually suggest a strong relationship where none exists, or conversely, conceal an important trend.

It is recommended to use the bar series for data that represents discrete quantities or totals (e.g., volume) and reserve the line series for data that represents a rate, trend, or index over time (e.g., percentage, growth rate). This convention is standard practice and makes the chart immediately more intuitive for the viewer.

Finally, always review the chart's title and source data. A good chart should stand on its own, meaning a viewer should be able to understand the core message and the relationship between the two metrics without needing external explanation. Use clear, concise labels, and consider adding textual context or annotations within the sheet itself if the chart reveals a particularly surprising or critical data point.

Summary of Steps for Quick Reference

Creating a professional combo chart involves several distinct phases, from data preparation to detailed customization. Following these steps ensures a clear, well-structured visualization:

Data Preparation: Organize data into columns with categories in the first column and metrics in subsequent columns.

Selection: Highlight the entire data range (e.g., A1:C13).

Insertion: Go to **Insert > Chart** to open the editor.

Transformation: In the **Setup** tab, change the Chart Type to **Combo chart**.

Axis Assignment: In the **Customize > Series** tab, set the volume metric (Sales) to **Left Axis** (Columns) and the trend metric (New Clients) to **Right Axis** (Line).

Refinement: Customize colors, legend placement, and ensure clear, descriptive titles for the chart and both Y-axes.

[How to Create a Stacked Bar Chart in Google Sheets](#)

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