A LOW-STRESS GUIDE TO GOOGLE FUSION TABLES

Using Google Fusion requires a lot of little steps, but the basic concept is simple: You're taking one set of information and merging it with another set of information to create an interactive image. Often, the end result will be a map, but Fusion can also create charts, graphs and timelines.

Here's what you need:

1.) A GMail account that isn't affiliated with an institution.

2.) Data in the form of a spreadsheet or another acceptable file format. More on this later. You can assemble your own data set or find one that already exists. To see some of the data that's available online, search http://research.google.com/tables.

3.) A goal. What do you want to understand? To see? To show your audience?

Depending on your goal, you may use Fusion to turn a single spreadsheet into a map, chart or visualization. More complex projects may require multiple spreadsheets. Here are the steps for each:

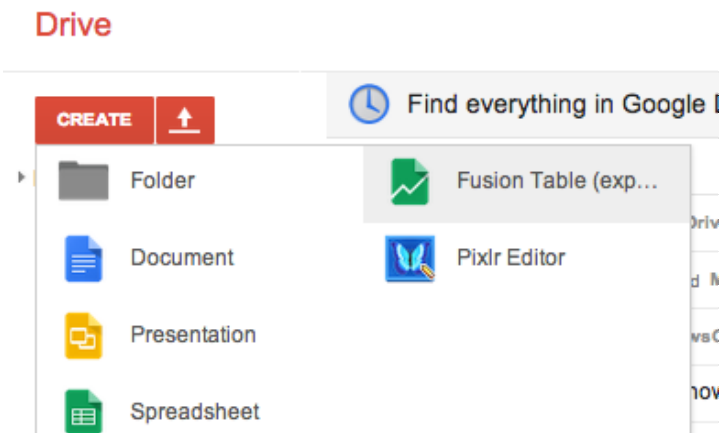
SINGLE DATA SET:

STEP 1: Prepare your data. Do as much editing as possible before you upload the data to Fusion. Clean up fonts, edit text for content/style and made sure your number formats are uniform. For our purposes, we'll use a small spreadsheet that I put together to show some (very) early visits to New Hampshire by possible 2016 presidential candidates. Here are the columns:

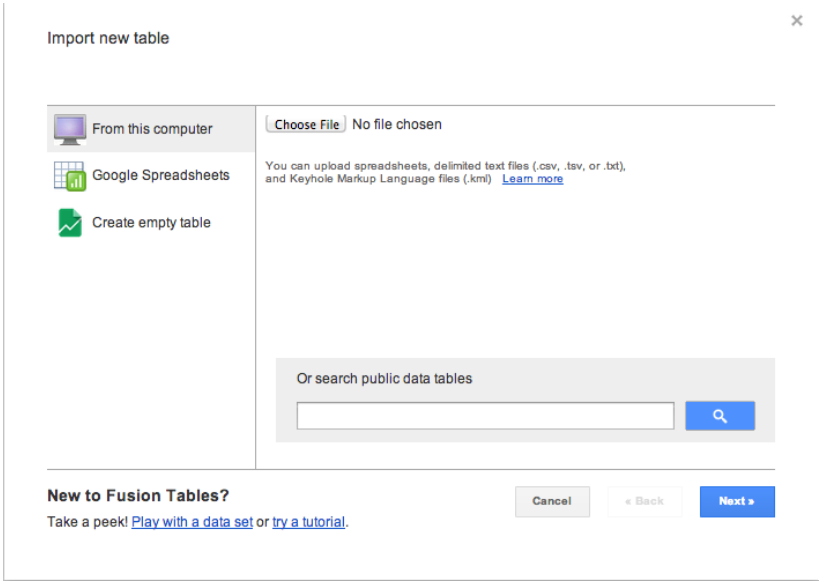
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Potential Candidate	Photo	Date of visit	Location name	Address	Notes	Source
						Paul spoke at the New	http://www.concord95/in-concord-

The address column is especially important. That's the information Google will merge (or fuse) with its vast repository of geographic information.

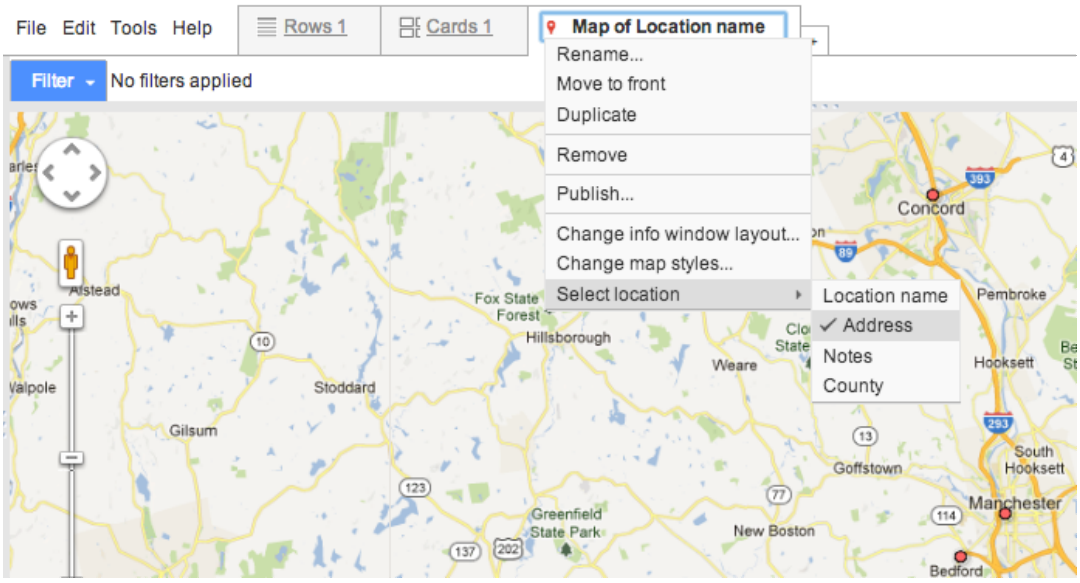
STEP 2: Upload the data to Google Fusion. First, open your Drive account and create a new Fusion Table:



When prompted, upload your dataset. As you'll see, you can pull in a file from your computer or from Google Drive:



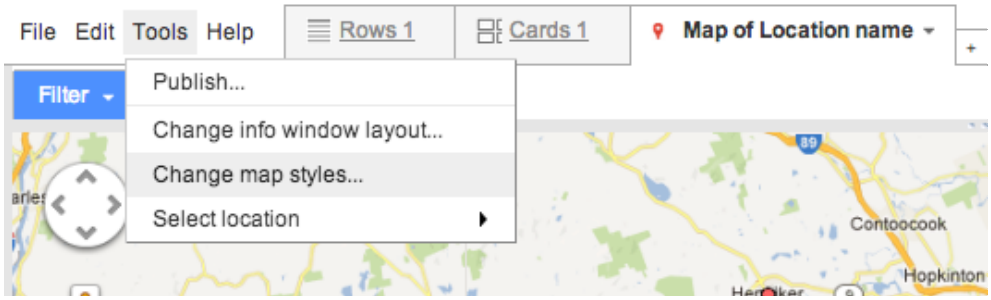
STEP 3: Tell Google what to look for. Once you've checked the data and uploaded the information, it's time to tell Google which column is the most important for creating the end product. Select the map tab, then choose the appropriate data source in the dropdown menu. In this case, we want Google to pay attention to the addresses where the candidates spoke.



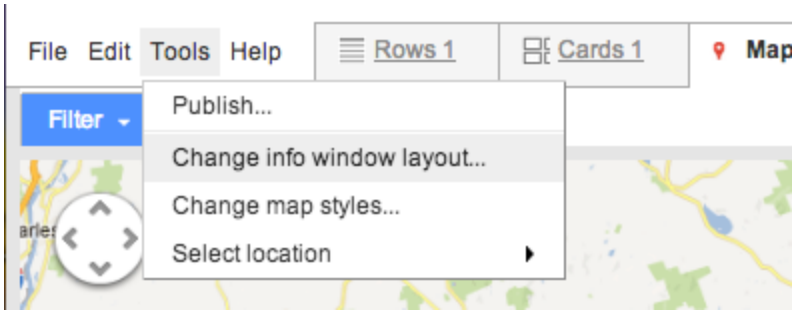
Google will geocode your data and drop points on the map. In this case, they're small, red dots.

STEP 4: Make it pretty. There are a million ways you can polish a Google Fusion project. Here are a few techniques to get you started.

Change the pins: Under Tools, select Change Map Styles. You'll be given the option to change the size, color and shape of the location pins on the map.



Change the info boxes: Each pin on the map is designed to display an info box when hovered over with the cursor. You have some control over what information displays in that box.



STEP 5: Share your project. Make sure your table is set to public (click the blue share button in the top right corner if you're unsure.) Under Tools, choose Publish and follow the instructions there. You can embed the map directly in most websites (although not -- alas -- some WordPress blogs.) You can also link to the chart.

MULTI-SHEET PROJECT:

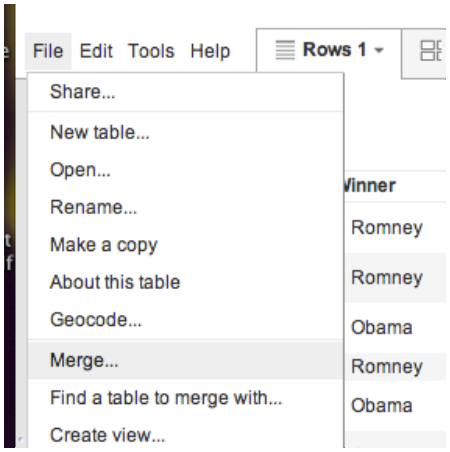
Making maps like the one above is pretty cool, but Google Fusion can do a lot more. Lets say I want to show

which presidential candidate won each of New Hampshire's 10 counties in the 2012 general election. I'll need two sets of information: election results by county and geographic details about each county. And -- this is the important part -- those two data sets MUST have something in common.

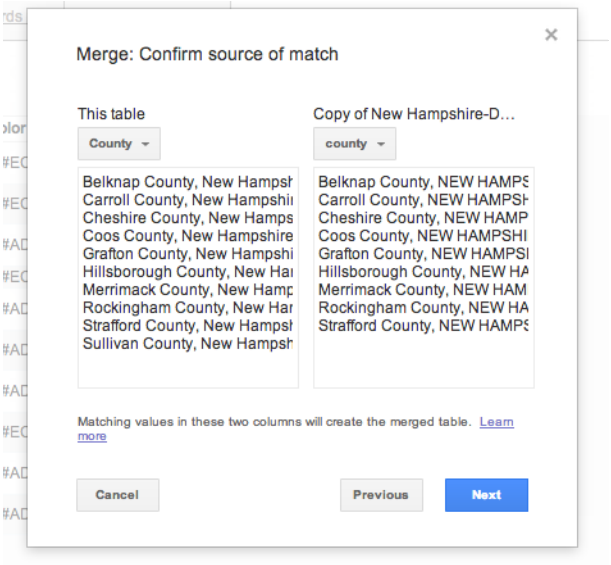
STEP 1: Identify your common element and make sure it's formatted identically in each of the two sets. In this case, it's the county name. In both sheets, it's formatted like this: "County Name, New Hampshire."

STEP 2: Upload your first data set to Fusion. To do so, follow the instructions above.

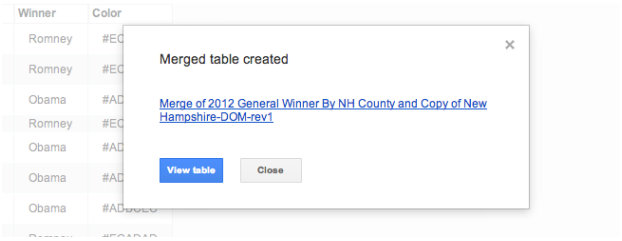
STEP 3: Merge the data. Under File, choose Merge.



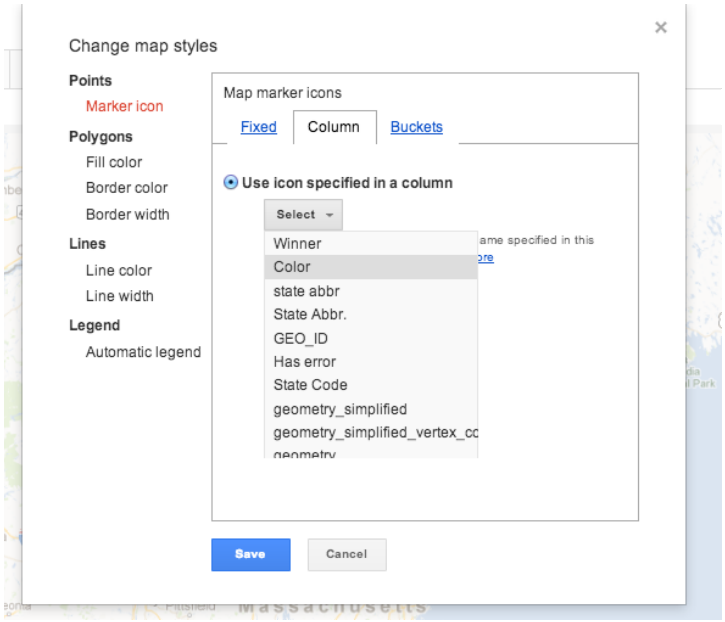
Make sure Google is merging the right columns:



Fusion will then produce a new, merged file. To see it, click on the link provided.



STEP 5: Style the map. In addition to the steps outlined above, it's possible to change the color of certain geographic areas by inserting HTML color codes in the source data. (There are dozens of websites that generate color codes. I used this one.)



STEP 6: Share your project using the steps outlined above.