

*tip!*  
A Crucial ~~Step~~ in Creating  
Meaning in Power BI

# WHY THE BASE! LINE IS ESSENTIAL

*Just a couple of ideas for  
you power bi designers*

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# Highlight what matters — the baseline should have more visual weight than background gridlines.

According to best practices visual hierarchy is essential in charts: elements that carry meaning should be emphasized, while supporting elements such as gridlines should be visually subdued. **A zero reference line therefore deserves stronger visual weight than regular gridlines.**

How to do this in Power BI?



# No Zero Line on the X-Axis

In this situation, the chart does not display a clearly defined zero line. Although the data is technically correct, the absence of a visible baseline forces users to mentally estimate where zero is located. This increases cognitive effort and slows down interpretation.

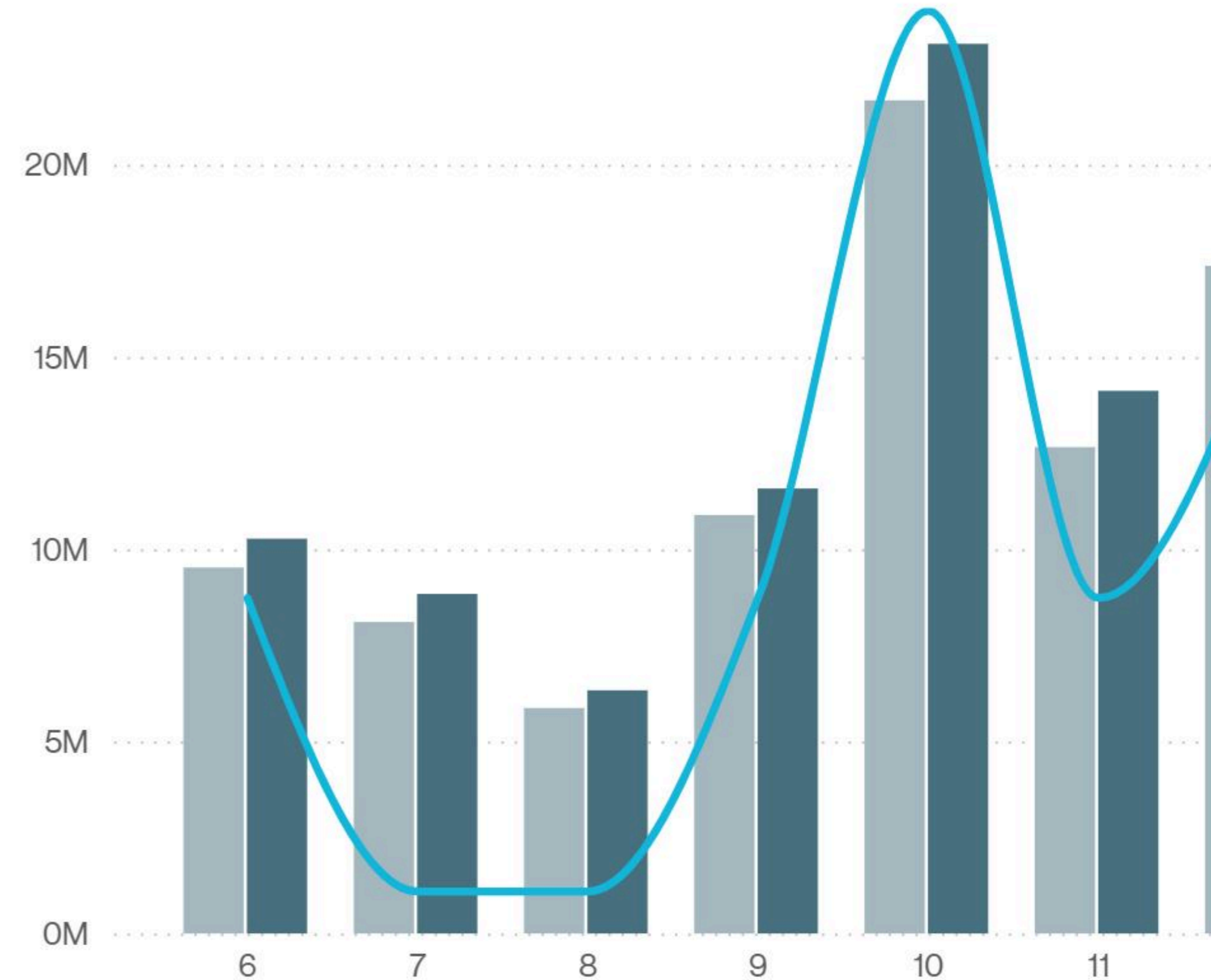
Without a zero line, it becomes harder to accurately assess whether values are close to neutral, strongly positive, or strongly negative. Small differences can appear larger or smaller than they actually are, which can unintentionally distort perception and affect decision-making.

For non-analytical users especially, this creates uncertainty and reduces confidence in the insights presented. The chart requires explanation instead of speaking for itself.



## Geen 0-lijn op de X-Axis

● Hier komt een titel 1 ● Hier komt een titel 2 ● Count of Profit



No Zero Line on the X-Axis (Current Situation)

# Zero Line created within Power BI

By adding a reference line at zero, the chart gains a clear and explicit baseline that serves as a visual anchor. It immediately separates positive and negative values, making direction, scale, and magnitude easier to interpret.

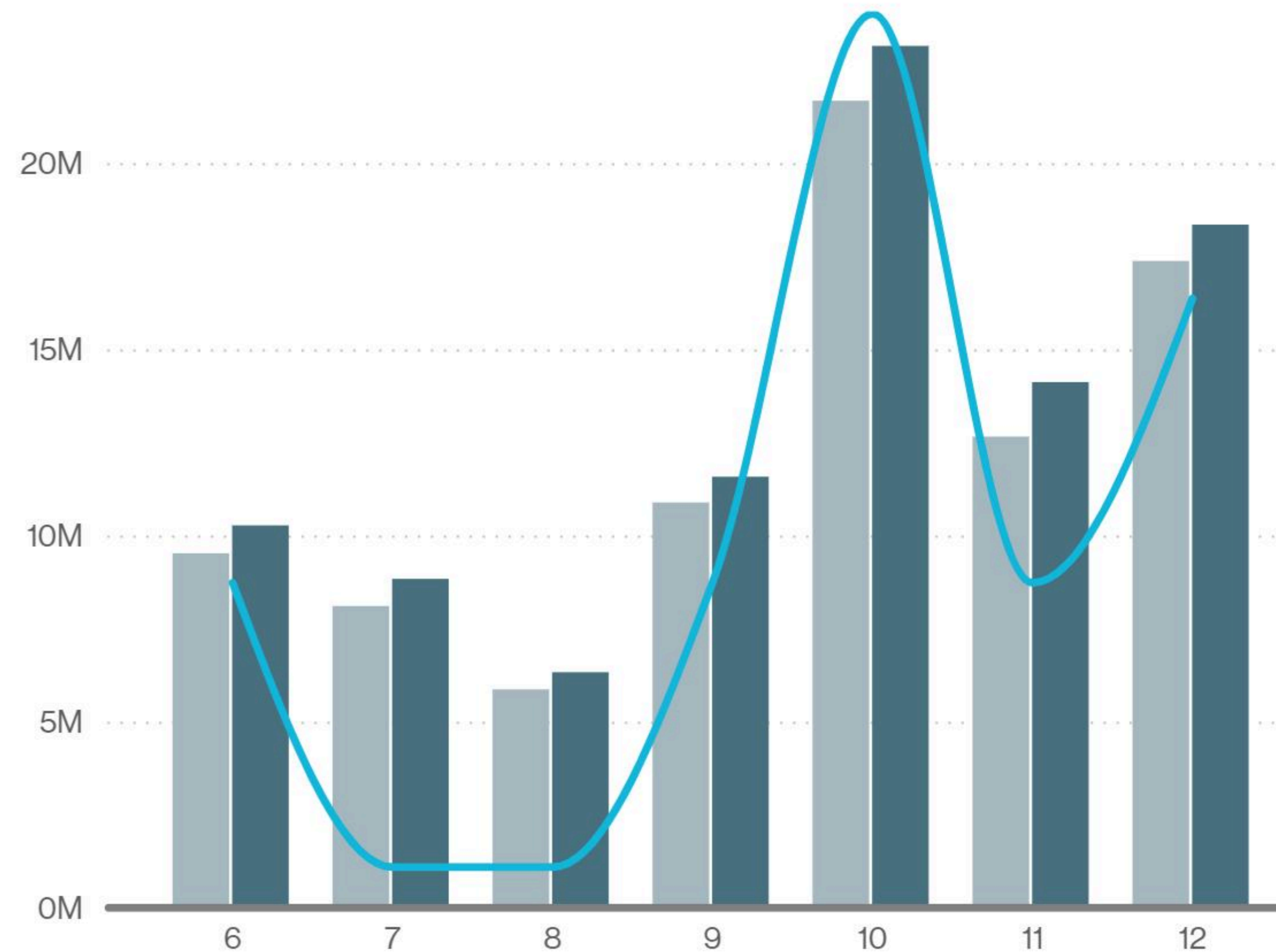
With a visible zero line, users no longer need to mentally estimate the baseline. This reduces cognitive load, improves readability, and speeds up understanding.

The chart becomes more reliable for comparison and interpretation, increasing trust in the data and supporting consistent, confident, data-driven decisions across different audiences.



## Reference line op de X-Axis

● Hier komt een titel 1 ● Hier komt een titel 2 ● Count of Profit



Zero Line created with a Reference Line



# Step 1

Apply a reference line to the visual you are working on.



Select the appropriate option — X-Axis Constant Line or Y-Axis Constant Line — depending on the axis where you want to define the zero baseline.

**Name it**


Reference line (1)

Apply settings to

+ Add line

0 - lijn  

Type

Y-Axis Constant Line 

**Choose where the new line should come**



## Step 2

Set the value to 0, or calculate it dynamically using FX.

Use a dark gray or near-black color instead of pure black, and set the line style to Solid with a width of 3.

Bring the line to the front so the zero line clearly stands out above the rest of the visual elements.

The screenshot shows a settings panel for a 'Line' element. The 'Value' field is set to '0' and is highlighted with a red box. A yellow callout box labeled 'Static or calculate' points to the 'fx' icon next to the value field. A large, stylized 'fx' is also present on the right side of the panel. The 'Color' field is set to a dark gray color. The 'Transparency' field is set to '0 %'. The 'Line style' dropdown is set to 'Solid'. The 'Width' field is set to '3 px' and is highlighted with a yellow callout box labeled 'Make it 2 or 3 px width'. The 'Position' dropdown is set to 'In front'. Three lines from the text on the left point to the 'Color', 'Line style', and 'Position' fields respectively.

Static or calculate

Line

Value

0

fx

Color

Transparency

0 %

Line style

Solid

Width

3 px

Make it 2 or 3 px width

Position

In front

fx

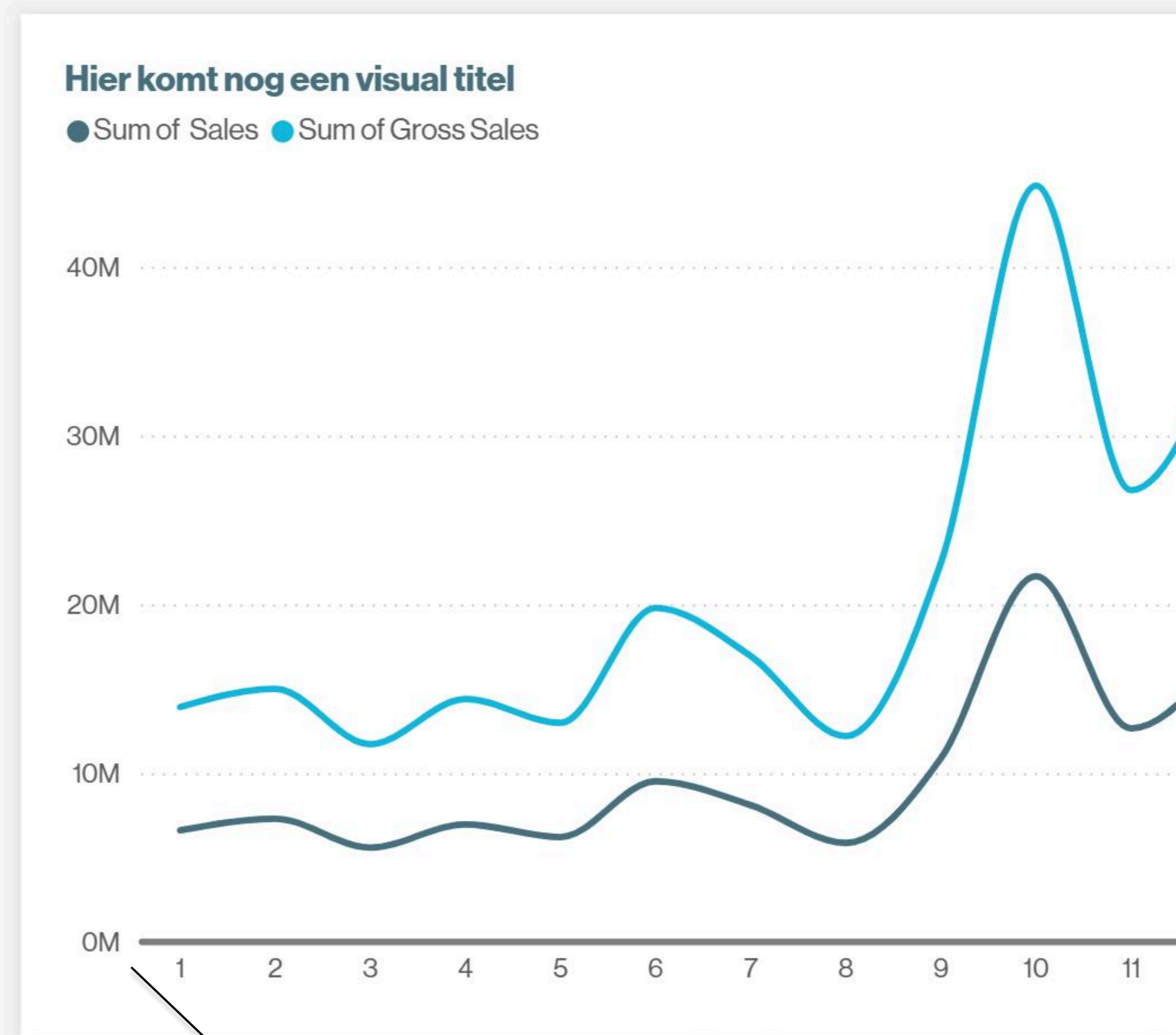


# Linechart

Line charts do not always need to start at zero, as their primary purpose is to show trends rather than absolute magnitude. However, a clear and explicit baseline is still essential.

By defining this baseline—often using a dynamically calculated reference line via FX—users can correctly interpret direction, scale, and change without exaggeration or ambiguity.

*fx*



The FX line makes the chart smile.



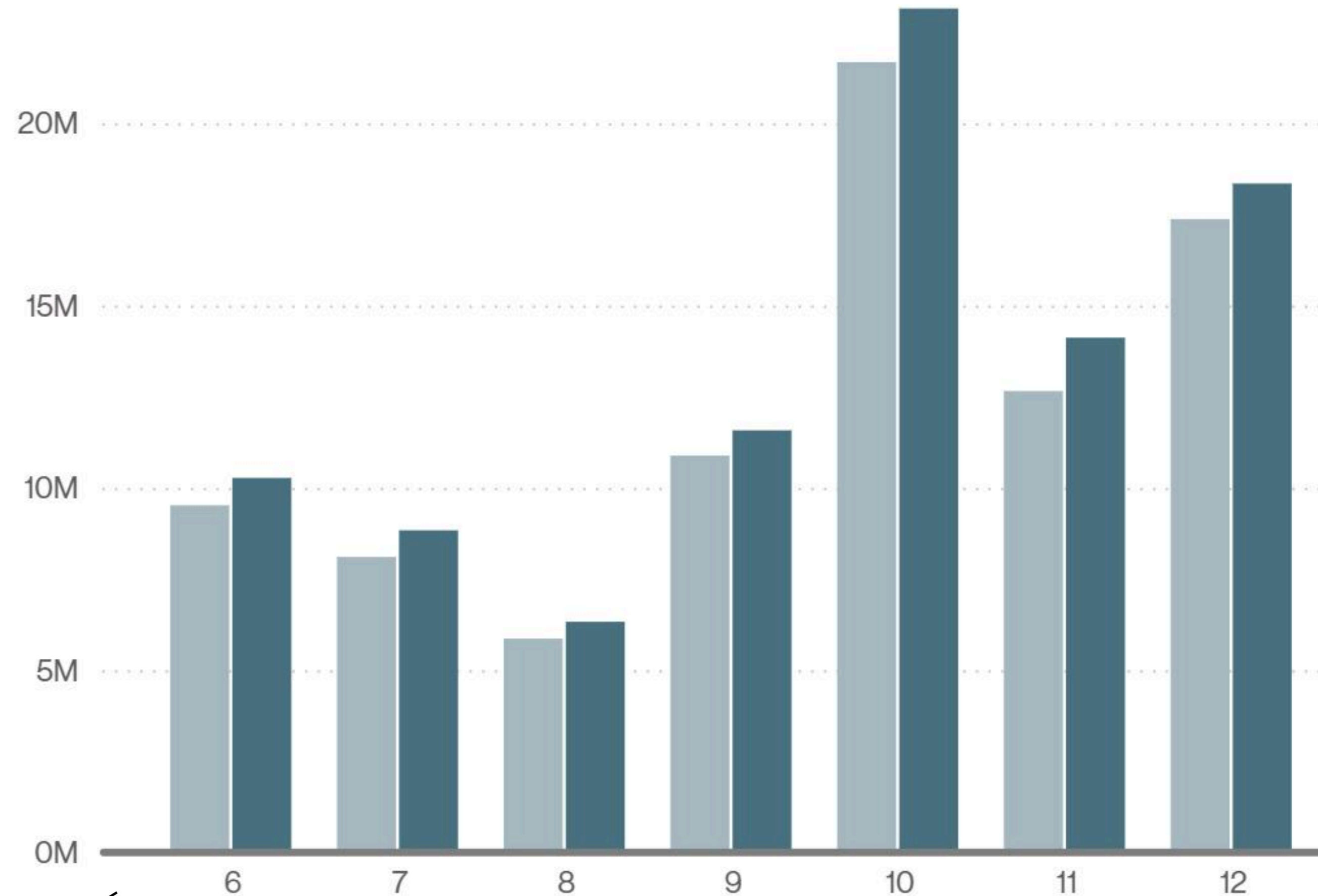
# Bar chart

Bar charts encode values by length. Starting the axis at zero ensures that differences are represented proportionally and interpreted correctly.

Any non-zero baseline exaggerates variation and risks misleading the viewer.

## Reference line op de X-Axis

● Hier komt een titel 1 ● Hier komt een titel 2



The zero line makes the chart smile.

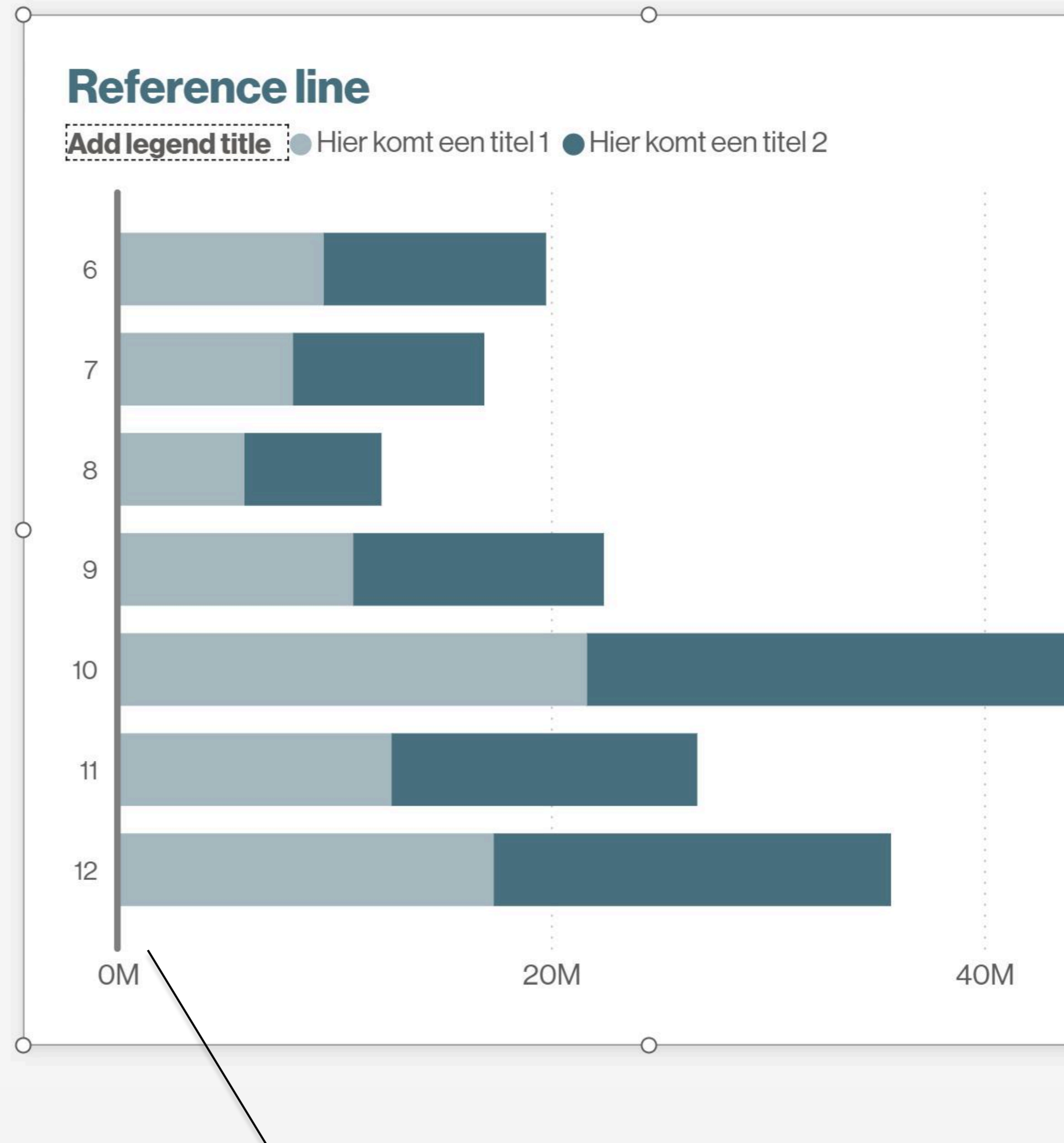


# Stacked bar chart

In stacked bar charts, a reference line can also be used to visually emphasize the baseline.

By applying a constant line at the baseline value and giving it extra weight or a distinct color, the baseline becomes more prominent than the surrounding gridlines.

This improves visual hierarchy, clarifies totals, and helps users interpret stacked values with greater confidence.



Horizontal or vertical? You can do it!

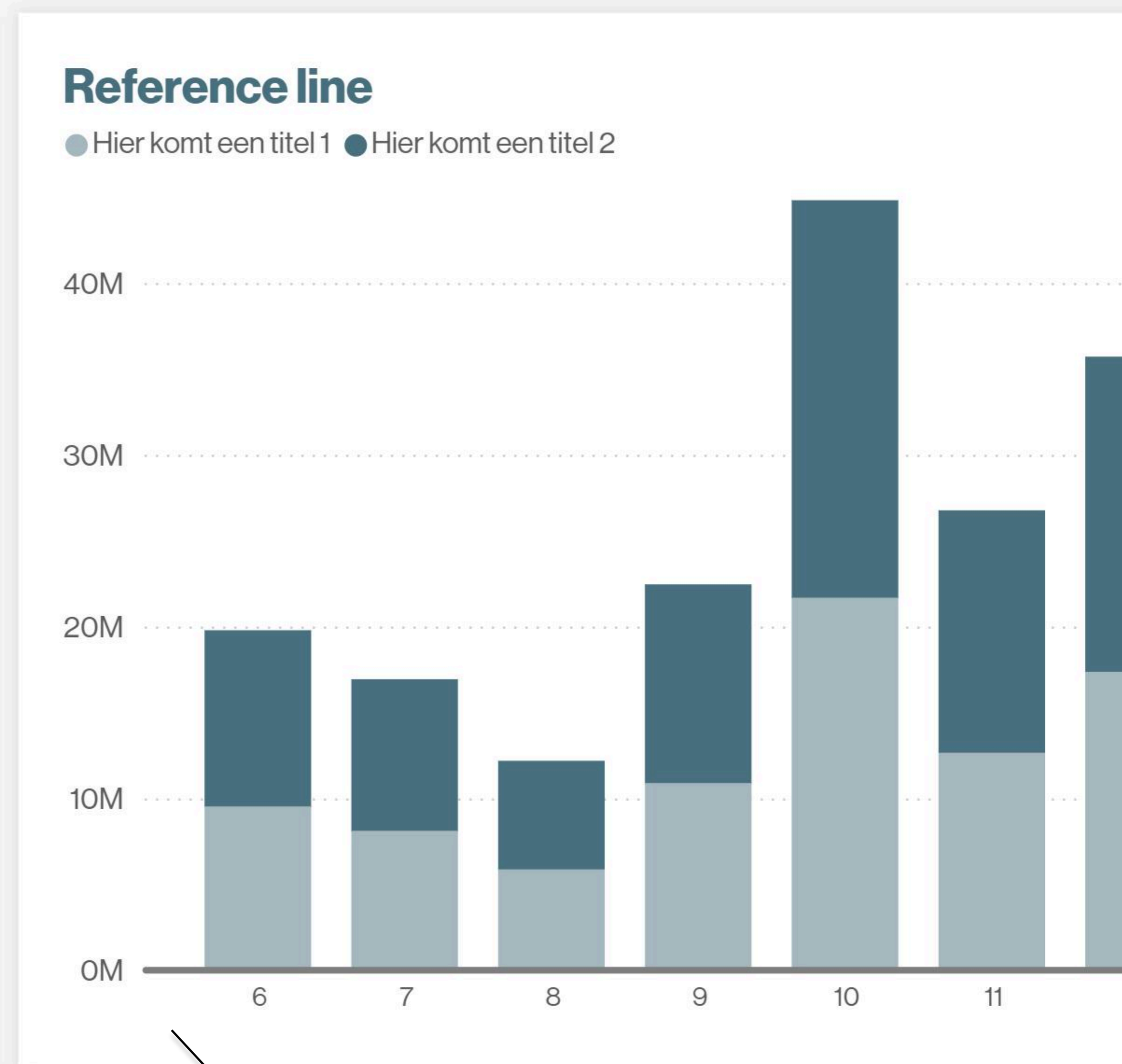


# Stacked column chart

In stacked column charts, a reference line can be used to visually emphasize the baseline as well.

By adding a constant line at the baseline and styling it with increased thickness or a distinct color, the baseline is clearly separated from background gridlines.

This strengthens visual hierarchy, improves readability, and helps users interpret stacked totals and contributions more accurately.



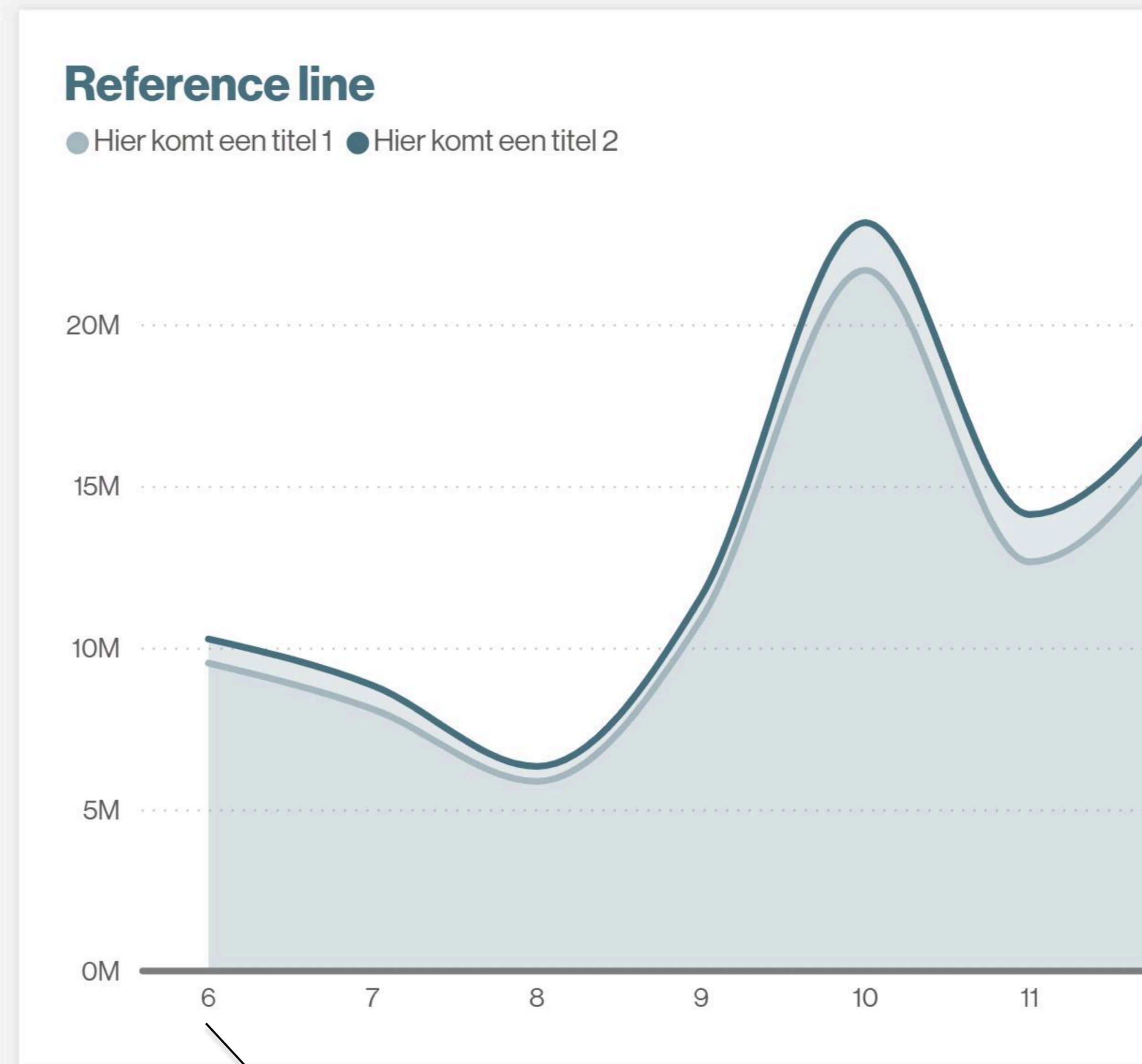
This is the best solution for meaning!



# Area chart

In area charts, a reference line can be used to clearly define the baseline. By adding a constant line at the baseline value and giving it more visual weight than the gridlines, the starting point of the filled area becomes explicit.

This prevents misinterpretation of volume and change, improves readability, and helps users correctly understand trends over time.



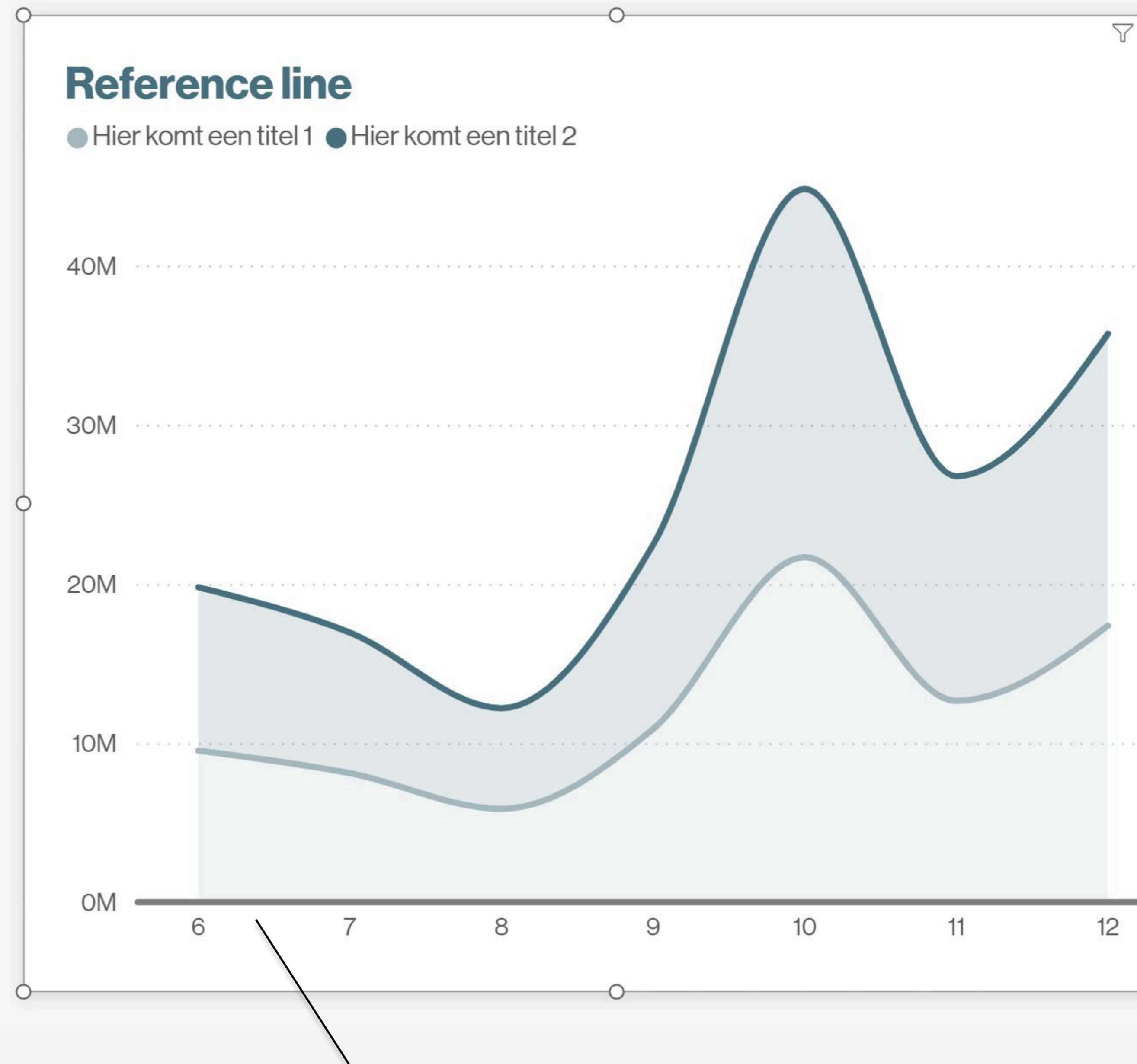
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# Stacked Area chart

In stacked area charts, a reference line can be used to clearly emphasize the baseline. By adding a constant line at the baseline value and styling it with greater weight or contrast than the gridlines, the starting point of the stacked areas becomes explicit.

This improves visual hierarchy, helps users correctly interpret cumulative values, and prevents misinterpretation of overall volume and contribution.



This is the best solution for meaning!



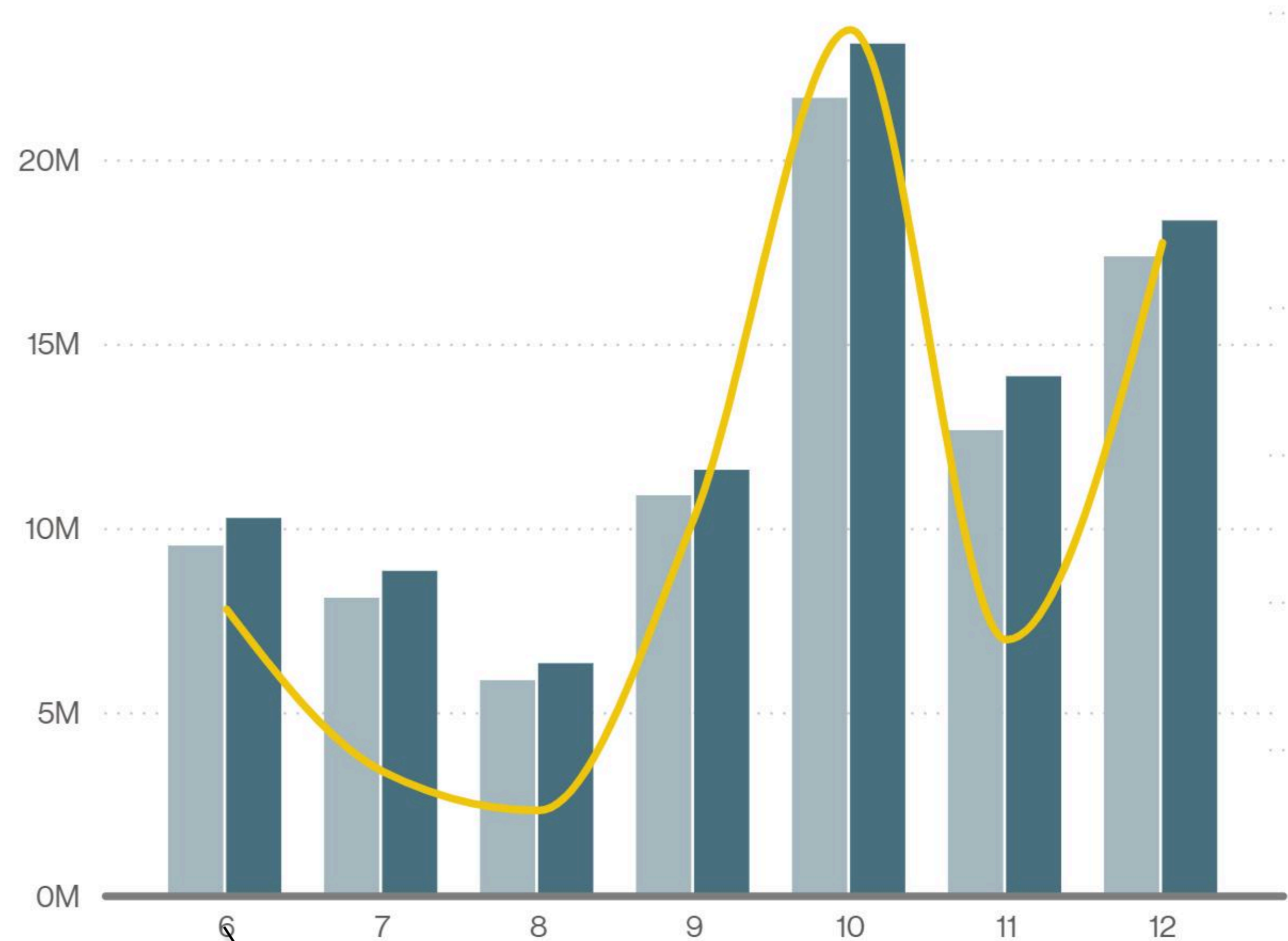
# Line and clustered column chart

In line and clustered column charts, a reference line can be used to clearly define the baseline for both chart types.

By adding a constant line at the baseline value and giving it more visual weight than the gridlines, the relationship between the columns and the line becomes easier to interpret.

## Reference line

● Hier komt een titel 1 ● Hier komt een titel 2 ● Sum of Profit



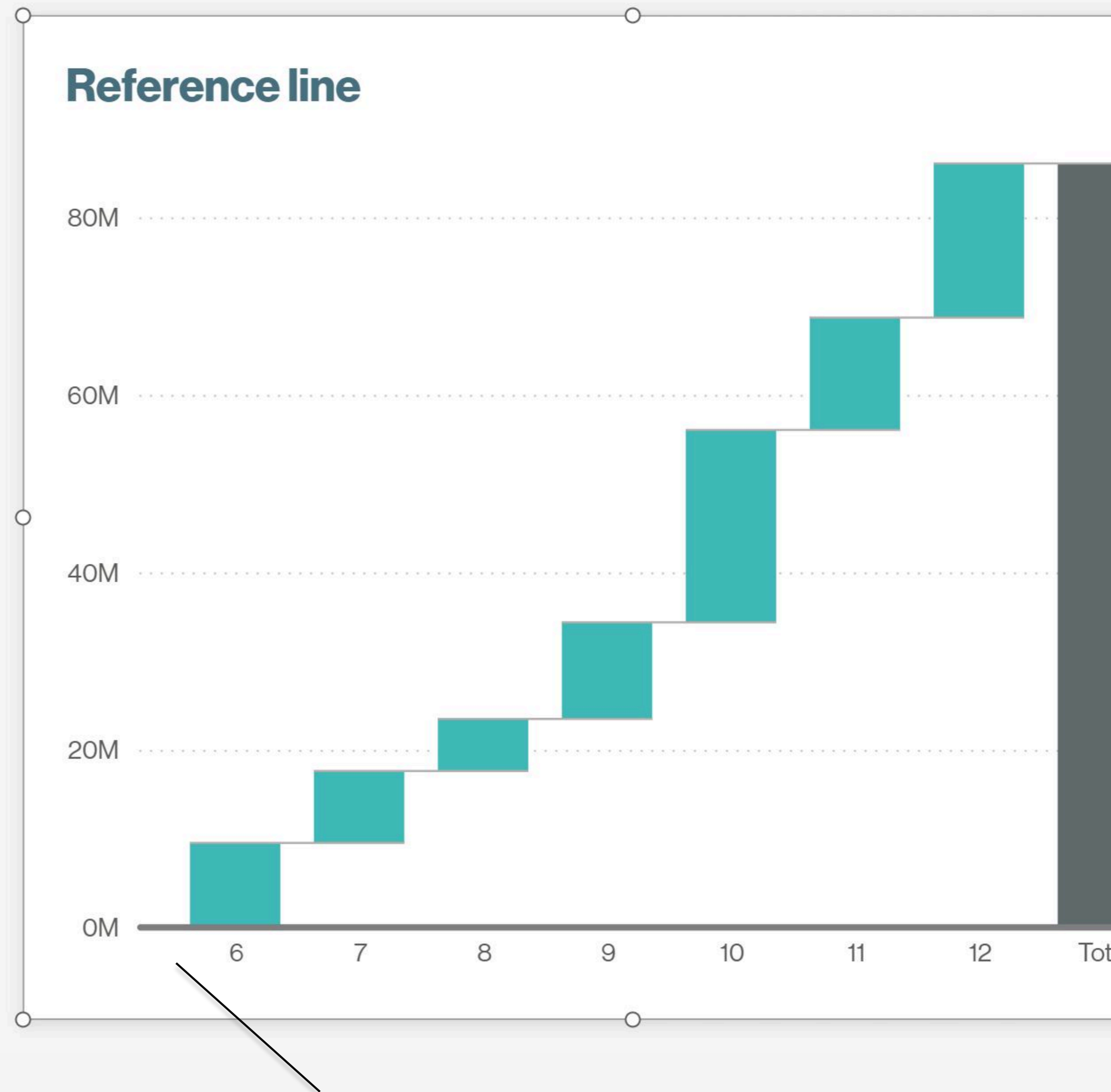
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# Waterfall Chart

In waterfall charts, a reference line can be used to emphasize the zero baseline or a key starting point. By adding a constant line and styling it with more visual weight than the gridlines, the distinction between positive and negative contributions becomes clearer.

This helps users better understand cumulative change, reduces ambiguity, and improves confidence when interpreting the overall impact.



This is the best solution for meaning!

*Thanks!*  
*You are*  
*amazing!*

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of you. Your support, enthusiasm, and positive energy make our community a truly special place. Together, we've created a space where ideas flourish, friendships grow, and support abounds. Thank you for being the heart and soul of this wonderful community.

Let's continue to thrive together, inspire one another, and make our community even more vibrant in the days to come.

With sincere thanks,  
Armand van Amersfoort  
Founder dexe.me



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