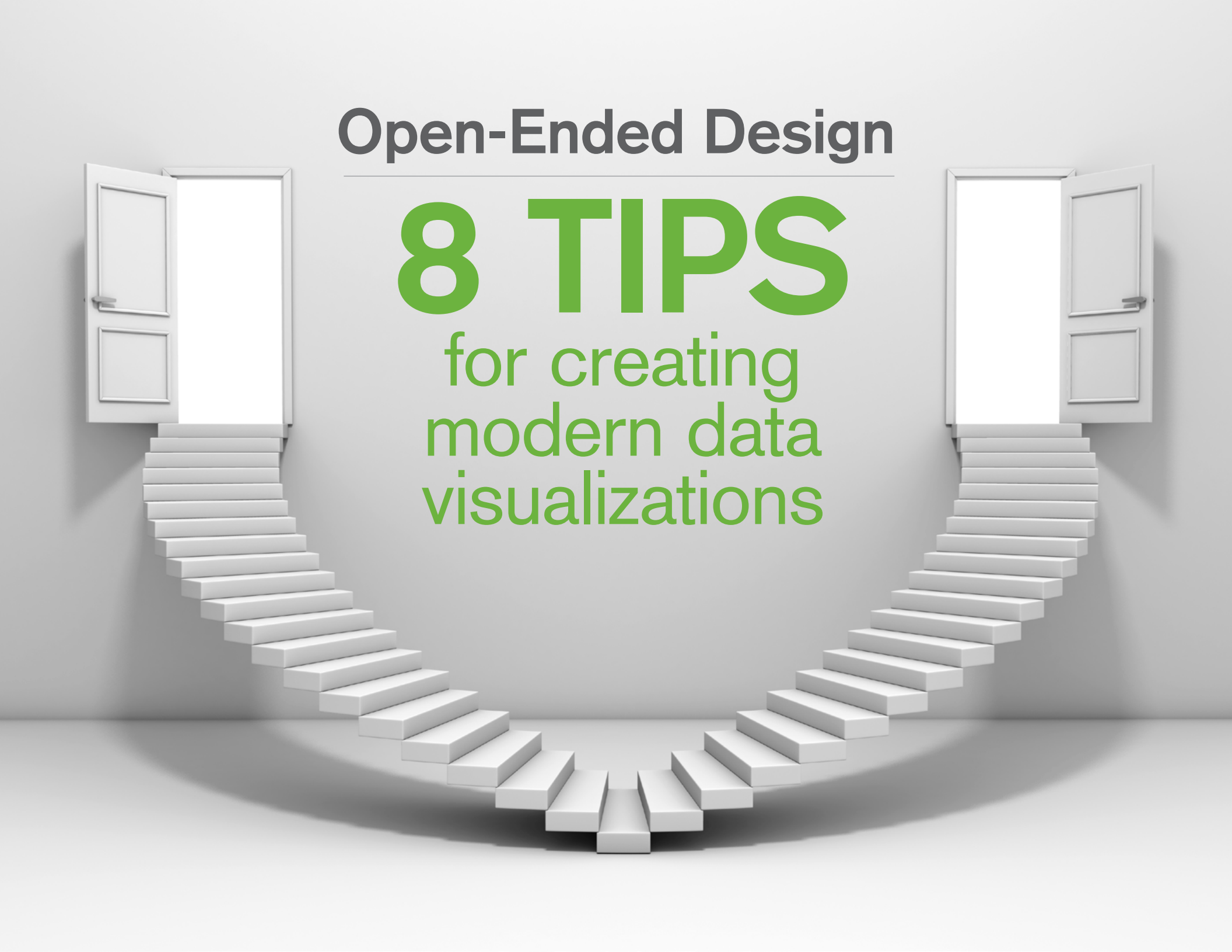
Open-Ended Design

8 TIPS

for creating modern data visualizations



Open-ended design

means allowing room for users to customize an application to meet their needs.

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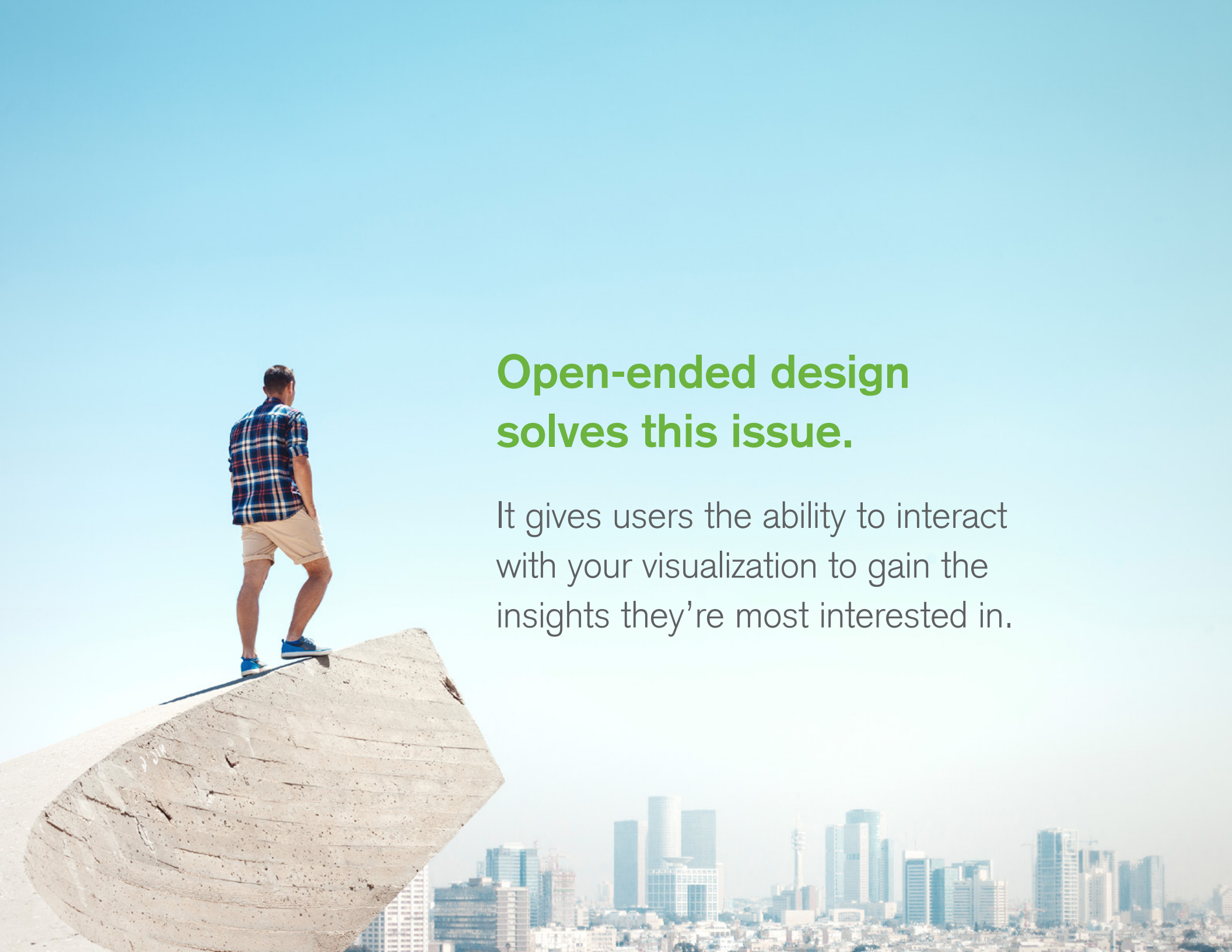
In the past, business analysts decided what data users could see and how they could see it—such as a chart of the company's most profitable customers printed in a report.

But this approach restricts users' view of the data. **What if users have other questions not answered by the chart?**



Open-ended design solves this issue.

It gives users the ability to interact with your visualization to gain the insights they're most interested in.

Say you create a visualization of your company's most profitable customers.

Then a user has the freedom to create a chart of the most profitable customers in Q1 vs. Q2. And then he could compare Q2 vs. Q3, all without having to ping you.

Open-ended design gives all users—from data novice to data expert—the ability to learn from data in many ways, thanks to a visualization designed without limits.

How can you take an open-ended approach to designing data visualizations that **boosts user adoption and satisfaction?**

1. Keep the user interface (UI) **simple**
2. **Prioritize** data discovery over aesthetic appeal
3. Provide a **consistent** structure, navigation, and look and feel
4. **Create** a data discovery journey with three steps: dashboard, analysis, report
5. Include **help** text within the application
6. Keep the Dashboard **high-level** including only the essentials
7. Strike a **balance** between flat design and usability
8. **Align** navigation to user expectations

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1 Keep the UI simple

Object overload, overuse of imagery, and color density can detract from the core quality of the user interface. If an element isn't adding value, adjust or remove it.

2 Prioritize data discovery over aesthetic appeal

Building a stunning design will generate a wow factor, but beauty alone won't drive usage. Instead, focus your design on the primary reason users came to your application in the first place: **to find answers in data.**

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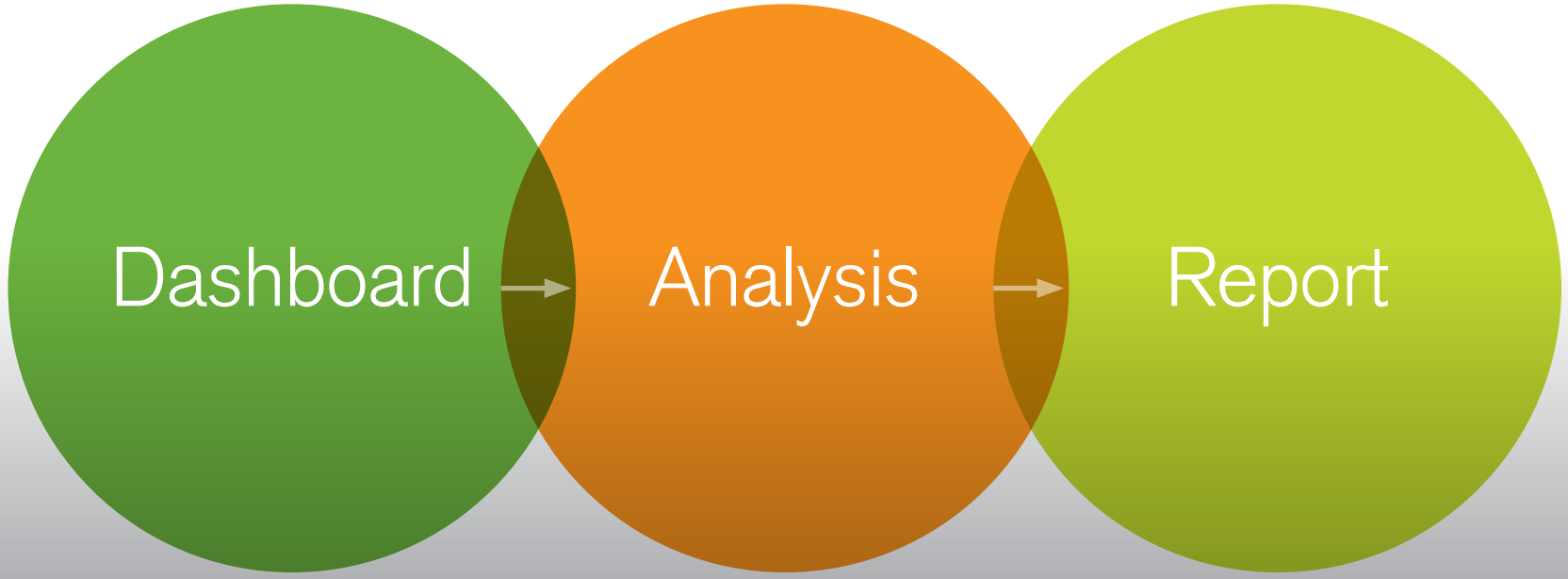
3 Provide a consistent structure, navigation, and look and feel

Users should feel comfortable knowing that they understand how to use the application each time they fire it up. Place objects (i.e., search bar, help icon, etc.) in the same position on every screen.

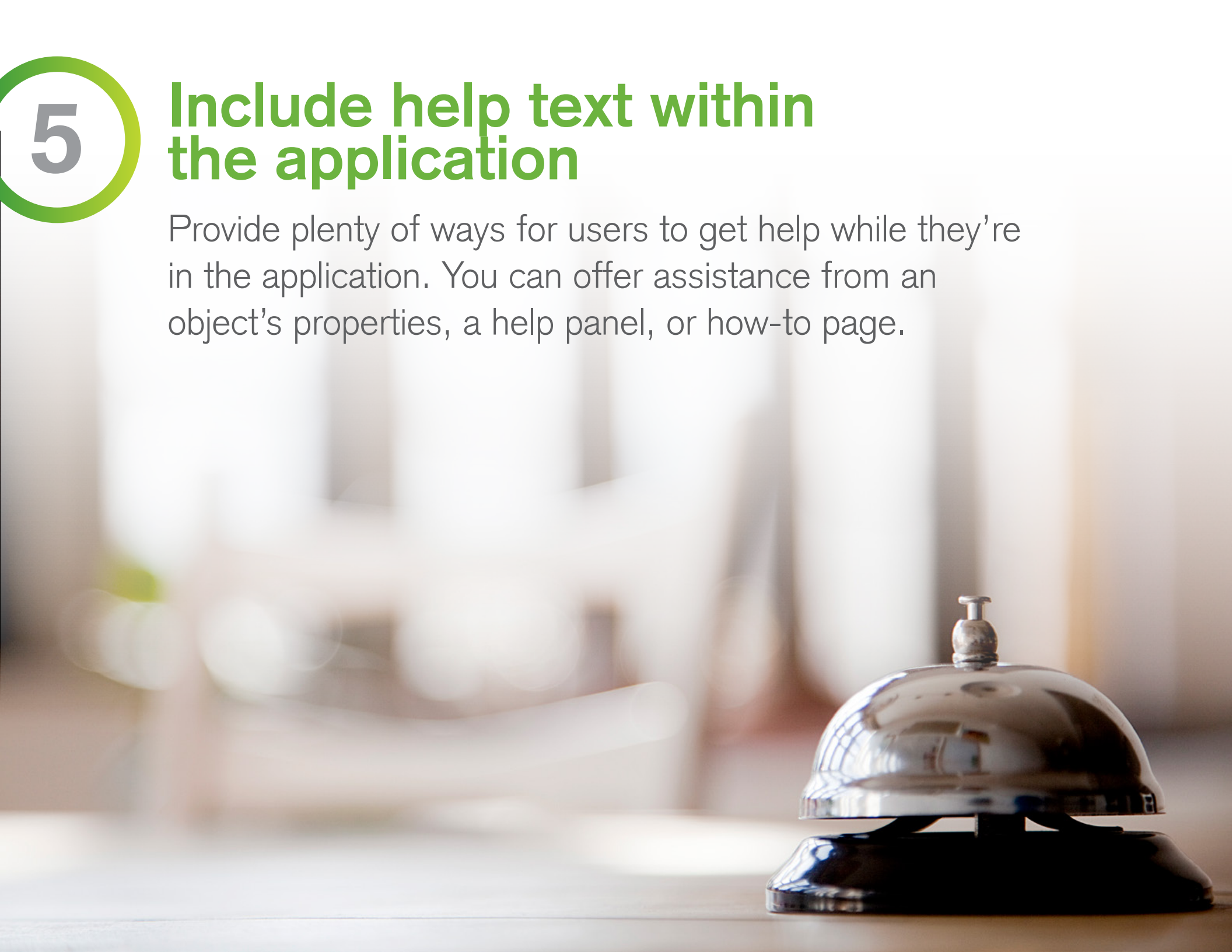
4 Create a data discovery journey with three steps: dashboard, analysis, report

The D-A-R (dashboard-analysis-report) methodology gives users context for discovering information. Users start at a high level with a dashboard, then drill into other areas of interest or concern through analysis pages, and finally can dig into the most granular details on a reporting page.



5 Include help text within the application

Provide plenty of ways for users to get help while they're in the application. You can offer assistance from an object's properties, a help panel, or how-to page.



6 Add as many objects as you need to the dashboard, and no more

The dashboard is a launching pad to other content in the application. Keep it concise yet thorough. Provide an object/KPI for each major tab, and link to each tab for further analysis.

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7 Optimize interactive elements in a flat design

Even though flat design is popular, interactive objects can sometimes look static.

A few easy ways to make interactive elements look inviting are

- Emphasize text links in body copy by changing their color or underlining them
- Use well-known icons to make functionality immediately apparent
- Add labels to icons to indicate actions
- Consider adding a small amount of shading

8 Align navigation to user expectations

Use common, straight-forward names for tabs. Names that are abstract or too similar to one another create confusion and users hesitate to make a selection. Make the navigation work the way users anticipate

Now you know our tips and tricks for creating modern data visualizations.

Ready to learn more? Check out these resources:

- What Is the Future of Open-Ended Design?
- 5 Data Visualization Pitfalls (and How to Avoid Them)
- Qlik Design Blog

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