

Escape Excel Hell!

Are manual spreadsheets slowing your business down? Discover the smart way to automate reporting.

Consolidate and automate your data into one central platform for seamless, real-time reporting. A centralised solution eliminates manual spreadsheet work, reducing errors and saving time, while enabling your team to focus on actionable insights. Empower your business with tailored data solutions that ensure the right information reaches the right people quickly and efficiently.

An increasing number of businesses are recognising the benefits of using data to influence decision-making – it has become a differentiator across all industries as thriving organisations look to take their business strategies to the next level.

With more data being generated than ever before, the constant need for up-to-date information has inadvertently led to businesses relying heavily on Excel for reporting to compensate for shortcomings in key operational systems such as CRMs or ERPs.

Whilst Excel is perfect for certain tasks, an over-reliance on it for formal reporting creates a number of challenges for businesses that prevent the right information reaching the right people at the right time.

This approach has become known as 'Excel Hell', a scenario where data from different systems is extracted into spreadsheets and then manually manipulated into reports for different audiences. These reports often take days or weeks every month simply to create them, to then be

scrutinised by recipients who don't trust the information they present.

The current state of play

With the capability to manipulate data, implement formulas and perform calculations, Excel was originally designed for financial modelling purposes. Since then, spreadsheets have become a staple within any business, often bridging gaps in the reporting options provided by day-to-day systems such as Sage or SAP.

While this approach can be beneficial, the reality is that most business departments have become over reliant on Excel to perform business critical functions. The freedom and versatility it provides has led to its widespread adoption as a tool for managing all kinds of processes that are way beyond its capabilities.

For example, in a 2020 software study commissioned by PayReview, almost 80% of companies admitted to using Excel for their annual pay review despite only one out



of the ten critical features receiving a higher than 50% satisfaction rating. The fact of the matter is that Excel was never built for such a purpose, yet businesses are attempting to use it as such, a lot like forcing a square peg into a round hole.

It's perhaps this flexibility that is also its biggest vulnerability, as it opens the door to increased human error, with users able to apply their own interpretation of key reporting metrics.

Over the years, there have been a string of high-profile incidents where Excel Hell has caused significant financial damage to companies, as simple mishaps like faulty formulas and cut-and-paste errors have led to inaccuracies during the reporting process. Unlike other dedicated software, Excel doesn't automatically enforce data quality and validation checks, and so incorrect information isn't identified until it's too late.

Not only this, but the time-consuming nature of manually collating and maintaining data from different sources places an unnecessary strain on company resources – automation is key within all thriving businesses and cannot be understated in the context of providing businesses with important performance information. The amount of effort that goes into regular reporting is often hidden from management, who are more focused on the reports they receive than the time and steps required to create them.

Overcoming these issues

In our experience, systems such as CRM and ERP play a big part in the day-to-day operations of any business and are specialist systems for managing specific processes. With each system containing only the data it requires, they do not typically specialise in the type of reporting a business needs to understand the overall performance of its operation, which results in the Excel-based approach.

To combat this, the implementation of a centralised data platform is extremely effective, collecting data from all necessary systems into a consolidated and easy to use location that can be the single point of access for analysis and reporting.

The centralised data platform is an automated solution, removing the need for days and weeks of employee time simply to create reports, and empowering the same report creators to pro-actively influence the business with their analysis.

From a security perspective, a centralised data platform also ensures that information is stored and protected appropriately, with the necessary checks in place to ensure sensitive records are not accessed by individuals lacking the required permissions – this is particularly important given the increased focus on GDPR and regulatory compliance.

Data Chaos

Extracting and manipulating data from multiple systems into spreadsheets creates confusion and inconsistency.

Lost Productivity

Endless hours spent on manually compiling reports, month after month.

Risk of Errors

Human intervention increases the likelihood of data mistakes, leading to mistrust.

Delayed Decision-Making

Critical business decisions are postponed due to slow, inefficient reporting processes.

Lack of Real-Time Insights

Data is often outdated by the time it reaches decision-makers.

Version Control Issues

Different versions of the same report can circulate, creating further confusion.

Resource Strain

Constantly pulling data from multiple systems exhausts internal resources.

Wasted Time

Reports that take days or weeks to create, draining valuable employee hours.

Most importantly, the responsibility of implementing such a solution can be outsourced to teams of experienced technical specialists with the knowledge and experience needed to ensure a smooth transition. Following a consultative approach, these specialists can design a solution tailored to specific business needs and assist with training to ensure the solution is thoroughly adopted.

With a centralised data platform in place, all of the required reporting metrics and business rules can be defined consistently, providing a single version of the truth for all audiences and data that people can trust.

With data automatically available in nearer real-time, it can be visualised and consumed in a number of Microsoft tools to make important business decisions. Whether its interactive dashboards in Power BI, dynamic Board presentations in PowerPoint or financial pivot-table analysis in Excel (yes, Excel still has its place!), the implementation of a centralised data platform empowers people across an organisation to become data-driven and perform their roles more effectively and collaboratively.