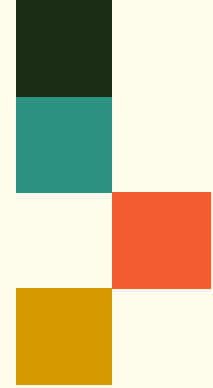




 quickbase

The Hidden Cost of Spreadsheets

How They Hold Your Business Back



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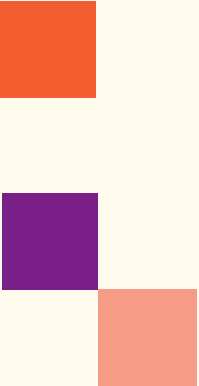
What your business gains when you leave spreadsheets behind



Introduction

To move fast and keep costs low, many business professionals turn to spreadsheets and email to access and manage data, processes, projects, and people.

Despite their availability, familiarity, and ease of use, spreadsheets restrict the ability to work together—whether it's internally across teams, divisions, and the enterprise, or externally with partners, suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders. They also do little to reduce manual tasks and don't have the flexibility or scalability to adequately address bigger teams, regulatory complexity, changing needs, or growth.



In this eBook we explore what makes this tool unsuitable beyond a few team members, and how online application platforms can transform your business into a more productive, agile, and efficient enterprise.

Why Spreadsheets Are an Expensive “Free” Business Solution

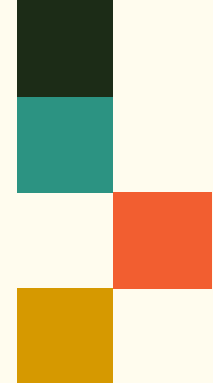
Spreadsheets are everywhere. They cost nothing and almost everyone knows how to use them—and they do. On the surface they might look like a sensible and economical option for sharing information, managing processes, and collaborating with others. But delve a bit deeper and you’ll find many hidden costs and risks that collectively make them a bad bargain for your business. Let’s look at some of the most common business drawbacks of spreadsheet use.

1. They’re not built for multi-user access.

The spreadsheet was originally designed to be a personal productivity tool and can still only be accessed by one person at a time. That means users must adhere to time consuming—and often frustrating—check-in and check-out requirements. Even if you take the extra time to create a shared workbook on a network for multi-user editing, conflicting changes must still be overseen and resolved by hand.

“Spreadsheets are not a database. They are too limited and can’t be updated by multiple people at the same time. If you can track it in Excel, you should be tracking it in Quickbase instead.”

- Hunter Walker, CTO, Atlantic Research Group



2. Data consolidation is a manual task.

Spreadsheet copies are commonly emailed to members of a team or division to secure the latest data. Once received, the master spreadsheet must be updated, and any inconsistencies resolved. The more people involved in this manual, time-consuming, and often error-prone process, the more burdensome data consolidation becomes. For managers who would rather focus on the work and getting results, the hours of time wasted on low-value administrative tasks can be particularly frustrating.

3. They don't support seamless workflow.

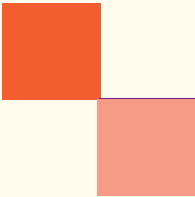
Processes and projects often involve a complex series of interrelated activities. Staff members need to know when it's their turn to do their part, which usually involves a manager who must check a spreadsheet and send an email. That's because spreadsheets aren't designed to enable workflow. As a single, static file, a spreadsheet doesn't have time- or activity-based alarms or triggers. To keep things moving, messages must be manually sent back and forth on everything from assigned tasks and deadlines to status updates and changes.

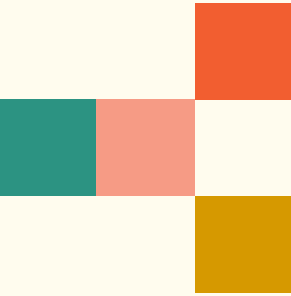
“The [Excel] system worked well for the first couple of years of business, but it soon became very difficult—too time-consuming and laborious.”

- Daniel Pries, Founder and Principal, ProPoint Graphics

4. Remote access is difficult.

Since the spreadsheet is a desktop application, information is largely inaccessible to employees who are working remotely, for example, at a customer site. A file posted to a shared network drive can be accessed through a virtual private network (VPN), but many small- and medium-sized companies don't have VPN infrastructures, and even when they





do, they're not always the most reliable. In addition, posting to a shared drive may not provide access to all stakeholders, like external vendors, partners, or contractors.


5. They're not scalable

Some project spreadsheets can be as large as 30-100MB—a size that won't transfer across standard email systems. Many popular online document collaboration applications have size limits of 100 MB. To reduce file size, information must be managed using multiple spreadsheets, adding unnecessary complexity. Many IT departments also make it standard practice to strip macros from spreadsheet attachments when they are emailed. On the other end, receiving a large spreadsheet often means a long wait, especially if a team member is working remotely

6. They pose data integrity challenges

According to a MarketWatch, as many as 88 percent of all spreadsheets contain errors. One inadvertent, undetected keystroke can trigger a chain reaction of data errors that are difficult or impossible to detect. It's also common for different team members to modify a spreadsheet personalized to their preferences, such as adding or changing formulas. Multiple spreadsheet versions increase the likelihood that the data won't be in sync across a team or teams which can lead to errors in decision making, missed deadlines, or dropping the ball on important details.

“Spreadsheets, even after careful development, contain errors in 1% or more of all formula cells. In large spreadsheets with thousands of formulas, there will be dozens of undetected errors.”



- Ray Panko, Professor of IT Management at the University of Hawaii



7. There's no audit trail.

Spreadsheets provide no historical auditing functionality to track changes—including deleted data. When a user makes a change to a spreadsheet, it's not recorded or timestamped.

Who changed the delivery dates? Who assigned task responsibilities? When did it happen? It's anyone's guess. This lack of auditability is unacceptable and risky in a time of greater regulatory scrutiny and corporate governance.

8. Document management is challenging.

Spreadsheets are good for storing data—not images, word documents, PDF files, etc. When using a spreadsheet, you cannot attach associated documents, like requirement descriptions, to keep all the information in one place.

9. Security is lacking.

Information in a spreadsheet is very portable and not very secure, except at a basic level. Emailing files and/or saving them on laptops and USB drives present security risks. While you can hide, lock, and password-protect a workbook or worksheet elements in a spreadsheet, they're not intended to help secure or protect any confidential information. They only obscure data or formulas that might confuse other users or prevent them from viewing or changing that data.



10. They don't have permission controls.

With spreadsheets, there is only one way to access them—and you either have the password to make changes or you don't. You can show different information to different users by creating multiple versions of the spreadsheet, but again, it adds more management time and complexity, and often introduces confusion.

The Dreaded Spreadsheet Shuffle

Using a spreadsheet to track, update, consolidate, and report on business information requires spending valuable time on administration—and that means less time for high-value activities that drive the business forward.

Average time spent per week on project administration:*

- **6.00 hours—Manually notifying team members of project changes, reminding them of due dates, and alerting them to new tasks (via emails, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, etc.)**
- **4.75 hours—Consolidating data from multiple spreadsheets**
- **4.16 hours—Searching for the most current project information**
- **3.83 hours—Chasing down status updates**
- **3.67 hours—Waiting to update a shared project spreadsheet**

*Recent survey results from 702 people who use spreadsheets and traditional communications to manage projects and collaborate with 10 or more people

Growing Organic Retailer Trades Spreadsheet Chaos for Greater Efficiency, Visibility, and Agility

Earthbound Farm

When Earthbound Farm grew from a simple raspberry field with two founders into one of the world’s largest organic retailers with over 1,000 workers, keeping up with its 2,200 grocery customers and contacts became a challenge.

By moving away from spreadsheets and building their own customer relationship management (CRM) application on Quickbase, the company was able to:



Business Impact:

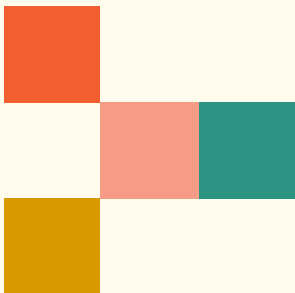
- Reclaim an estimated 160 hours annually on customer database updates and 4 hours weekly on sales report generation.
- Secure a better solutions fit, and for 88% less than a proposed point solution.
- Fast-track responses to customers and improve business decisions with real-time access to sales and customer data.



“We love that Quickbase lets our employees do what they need to do without being hindered by complexity.”

Sherry Parsons

Executive Administrative Manager, Earthbound Farm



Weighing in on the Hidden Costs and Risks of Spreadsheets

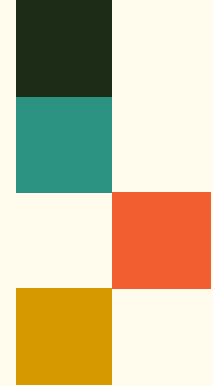
Viewed in entirety, it's clear that spreadsheets are not the most effective tool for supporting modern business, and they're not "free" by any stretch.

Consider the ongoing overhead costs related to expending hours of time hunting for status updates; building and sending reports to team members and management; correcting data inaccuracies; manually consolidating data; constantly notifying stakeholders of project changes, due dates, new tasks; etc.

Then there are the soft costs. Those are more difficult to measure, but perhaps more costly. They include security and compliance challenges that can put your business at risk; lower quality results due to missed deadlines and details that fall through the cracks; and the consequences of poor decisions and missed opportunities due to data inaccuracy and lack of visibility.

Now imagine a spreadsheet alternative that provides the same benefits—availability, ease of use, quick setup, and cost efficiency—with the added advantages of a flexible, highly secure cloud-based solution that supports many users.

Read on and find out how online application platforms like Quickbase can transform your business in ways far beyond the reach of simple spreadsheets.

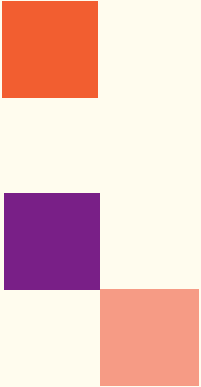




Taking It to the Cloud

Without forsaking the simplicity and cost effectiveness of spreadsheets, online application platforms give you the means to create and use customizable business applications in a collaborative, secure workspace where everyone can accomplish more, with greater ease.

Helpful wizards, menus, and point-and-click functionality, coupled with your spreadsheet skills and knowledge of your data and processes, make it easy to build or customize online business applications that optimize, automate, and accelerate the way work gets done. Simply upload a spreadsheet, tailor a ready-made app, or create a completely new app to match your workflow.



Online application platforms also give you the freedom to solve for tomorrow. Adjust new apps based on user feedback in real time and continue to evolve them as needs grow and change to make room for more people, processes, features, functionality, and more.

What your business gains when you leave spreadsheets behind

We offer these 10 motivations for saying goodbye to the spreadsheet shuffle in favor of online application platforms:

1. Productivity will climb with multi-user access.

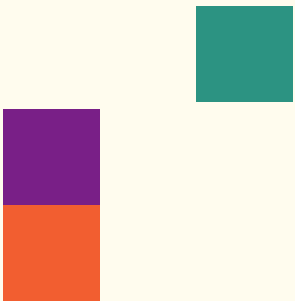
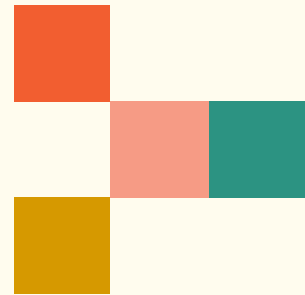
Cloud-based solutions put an end to the time wasted manually collecting, consolidating, correcting, and reporting on information from individual spreadsheet entries. With anytime/anywhere access to up-to-date, centrally located information from all contributors across teams or departments, the focus returns to managing the process and project—not searching for status updates and consolidating spreadsheets.

2. Drive greater insight with consolidated data.

Often, managers lack real-time visibility into the performance of work activities or projects, and have concerns over the validity of the data, especially when they must present it to senior management or project stakeholders. With online application platforms, you can easily track the latest information from one place—such as budget, scope, people, content, timelines, and action items—allowing for greater efficiency, more precise reporting, and better results.

3. Stay on track with seamless workflows.

Workflow automation enables you to set up alerts, notifications, and report subscriptions to keep your team on track and stakeholders informed. Everyone from internal team





members to remote staff, partners, and others can update their status online in real time, so there's no waiting to get the big picture. With the ability to instantly see up-to-the-minute project status, for example, you can more easily spot potential deadline slippage or resource constraints. And you can identify opportunities to improve performance.

4. Collaborate beyond the enterprise with ease.

Online application platforms make it easy to share information and collaborate with everyone—from any place or time zone—with a tool they already have and know how to use: a standard web browser.

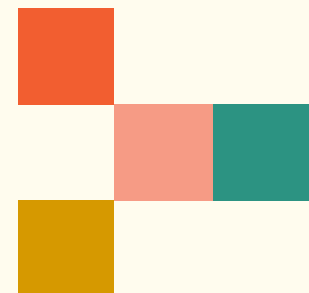
5. Forget maintenance and welcome on-demand performance and scalability.

Most online application platforms are application Platform-as-a-Service (aPaaS) offerings hosted by a third-party vendor on a secure server in a robust data center. As such, there are no upfront investments or maintenance required. Instead, you pay a small monthly per-user fee. Therefore, online application platforms can be deployed without adding burdens to often already busy IT departments. Software upgrades are automatic, and performance and capacity can be seamlessly and cost-efficiently scaled, enabling you to grow unimpeded, adding new apps, more users, and more data as needed.

6. Improve data accuracy.

When you trade spreadsheet data integrity, security, version control, and accessibility challenges for online applications that enable you to simply automate processes and facilitate controlled yet seamless access to a real-time single source of truth, human error is dramatically reduced. Fewer inaccuracies translate into less risk to the business and more opportunities for gain through greater clarity and insight.





7. Track everything with an automated audit trail.

Strong governance is possible when you have a centralized online application platform and connected apps capable of tracking tasks and approvals and recording every data and document change. In a time where proof of accountability is vital for regulations compliance— in and outside of the company—this functionality is critical for keeping your business safe. Spreadsheets just don't cut it.

8. Effortless document management.

Collaboration becomes easier when documents, images, PDFs, and other types of files can be organized and accessed from one central location—not just text in a standalone spreadsheet. Online application platform features such as version history/restore, overwrite, and temporary lock make it easy to manage and protect these assets.

9. Your data stays safe.

USB drives, email attachments, and laptops are vulnerable to data loss, theft, and other security risks. Using an online application instead of spreadsheets means your team doesn't have to store or send information. Instead, your data resides within a cloud platform in a secure, managed data center.

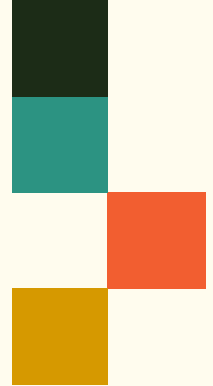
10. You control the flow of information.

Online application platforms include role-based permissions that let you assign different levels of access to different team members in and outside of your organization. You control who can see or change information—all in one place. This eliminates the need to circulate different versions of the same spreadsheet to restrict viewing or editing of certain information.



Supply Chain Service Provider Swaps Spreadsheets, PDFs, and Emails for a Mobile-Ready, Cloud-Based Collaboration Platform

Turtle & Hughes Integrated Supply



Successfully managing the buying and procurement activities of customers' MRO (Maintenance, Repair, & Operations) supply chains requires fast and effective communications. But as Turtle & Hughes Integrated Supply (THIS) continued to grow, spreadsheets, PDFs, and emails were becoming bottlenecks to information exchange between the business, its decentralized workforce, and its customers.

An alternative to these slow and cumbersome business tools, the company's new Quickbase platform appeals for many reasons:



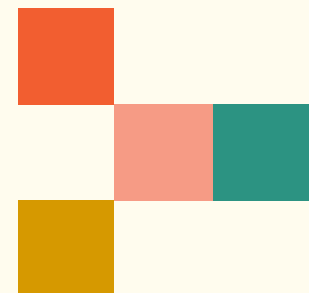
Business Impact:

- It's cloud-based and mobile-ready. Information can be stored and accessed by the staff at any time from anywhere, on any device, and easily manipulated to quickly create reports.
- It simplifies the ability to securely import and aggregate data from ERP and other systems (including those of customers) on one centralized platform.
- Automated alerts, processes, and workflows have improved the company's supply chain analysts' efficiency to such a degree that they can easily manage three or four accounts instead of just one.
- Project management apps can be spun up on demand and efforts seamlessly tracked for consistently reliable outcomes—no micromanagement required.

“Quickbase has enabled us to raise the bar on accountability, continuity, and responsiveness... Our customers also benefit from greater visibility across everything from how much they are spending to what we're saving them each month.”

Joseph Gill

Manager of Business Reports & Analytics at THIS



Cloud-enabled businesses go farther

Easily tailored to the way you work, online application platforms make it possible to cut hours of administration time out of daily processes by streamlining and automating data gathering, tracking, and communications.

Managers and teams in every division across your organization, along with stakeholders outside of the company, can collaborate more effectively. They can leverage the latest and most correct version of data, when and where they need it, in a format that works best for them.

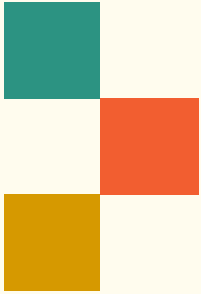
Your business benefits from dramatic improvements in performance, faster response times, fewer errors, lower operating costs, and better decisions.



Tips for Evaluating Online Application Platforms

When assessing online application platforms that will deliver the most impact, you should look for the following features and functionality.

- **Centralized, instantly updated data to ensure access at any time from any place**
- **Easy-to-use wizards, menus, and point-and-click functionality that enable you to create business apps that match your processes exactly**
- **Interactive, simple-to-build dashboards and reports to deliver real-time access to essential information**
- **Workflow automation: automated actions, alerts, notifications, and reports for streamlined process and project management**
- **Support for multiple data and attachment types so you can manage with a single tool**
- **Easily assigned role-based permissions for uncompromised data security**
- **Simple, real-time app updating to keep pace with new regulations, processes, partners, suppliers, customer requests, and more**



About Quickbase

Quickbase provides a cloud-based platform that empowers problem solvers to quickly turn ideas for better ways to work into apps that make their organizations more efficient. For nearly 20 years, people of all technical backgrounds have been using the Quickbase platform to create solutions that streamline processes, capture real-time data, and improve company operations, all while working in concert with existing IT systems. Based in Cambridge, MA and a former division of Intuit, Quickbase has a 6,000+ customer universe of app-enabled businesses that spans all industries and company sizes and includes half of the Fortune 100.

To learn more, visit: www.Quickbase.com

