

The art of sharing a spreadsheet

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You stayed awake half the night pounding calculations into your keyboard. You birthed a spreadsheet that tells it all, in a wide range of colors, fonts and border styles. But when you proudly unveil your masterpiece to the people who will benefit most from its ingenious tables and graphs, all you hear is, Thud. That's the sound of a pin dropping, which you can hear because your colleagues are staring at your spreadsheet, silent and confused.

Getting people's buy-in on a spreadsheet takes forethought and finesse. First, it has to be useful and unique. Then it has to be their spreadsheet, too. And finally, it has to be current.

"Too many spreadsheets!" one executive exclaimed. The number of grids floating around is often in direct proportion to the size of a project. Yet, the bigger the project, the more critical it becomes to streamline processes and resources. Before opening a blank worksheet, ask, "Is it unique?" Or is there some way to pull the information you need from an existing file?

If a new, entirely unique document is warranted, then creating it must be a group effort. Get cooperation early on from others who will be using the information or who might be contributing data. Worksheets can easily be passed, allowing others to add data, columns or formatting. As soon as someone gets involved in creating a spreadsheet, their ownership attitude goes way up, which means my interest in utilizing the information goes up, too.

The best worksheets are kept current. Upload relevant data regularly. Reviewing the same spreadsheet as it evolves over time increases familiarity and a willingness to use the file.

Those who use them find a quality spreadsheet is like a rare painting: the more I look at it, the more involved with it I become, and the more meaning it has for me personally. One doesn't need a gilded frame to recognize when people appreciate something that makes their work life better.

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