BUSINESS
MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Work Schedule Templates: An Inadequate Solution for Modern Employee Scheduling

Start saving time and money with Snap Schedule employee scheduling software!

Spreadsheets can be a good thing—or not

Inexpensive and easy to use for basic functions, spreadsheets help you create everything from an amortization schedule to a Zip Code table. Having been around for over 30 years, spreadsheets are good at what they are designed to do: simulating, extending and automating what can be done on a paper worksheet.

Looking through a list of application programs from Quicken® to CRM solutions, we see that the early stages of each application were at first doable on a paper worksheet, then later in spreadsheet programs like VisiCalc, 1-2-3, Quattro and now Microsoft Excel®.

But in every case, as the applications became more complex, the inherent "flat" nature of spreadsheet software fell short. Today, wherever data relationships are complex, where information needs frequent restructuring, or needs to be viewed and reported in many ways, dedicated applications shorten chores, increase management visibility and optimize retained income.

When companies first computerize employee work schedules, they usually replace paper worksheets with Excel. Managers often adopt spreadsheet scheduling templates crudely modeled a scheduling white board with employee names down the left, dates across the top, and color coded cells representing assigned shifts. As time passes, the spreadsheet expands in its number of cells, formulas and calculations, all of which increase the complexity and maintenance required to meet the changes in business, employees' and scheduling needs. Even with the staff time that complex spreadsheets consume, they are better than reverting to manual processes, so the scheduling spreadsheet and its templates live on—though not efficiently.

Almost every scheduling manager has a "war story" about spreadsheet mishaps that caused serious employee grievances, substantial financial loss, or embarrassing mistakes.

Overwriting a formula with data, adjusting the wrong cells, forgetting to hit F9 to recalculate, hiding cells and rows later needed, and inadvertently copying the wrong formula are everyday spreadsheet hazards.

"We had been coping with these scheduling complexities in a very time-consuming way using Excel templates for shift work and task assignments," said Dean Morrison of Excell Cleaning Services Ltd. "We manually gave some cells little dots and manually color-coded cells by employee. Even with all our ingenuity, load-balancing was very difficult. The process was error-prone and we spent many unnecessary hours in administration."

Hidden danger in "familiarity"

The perception of saving time due to spreadsheet familiarity is illusion. The ongoing overheads of maintenance and constant attention to these spreadsheets drain resources that could be used more profitability elsewhere. Do any of these scenarios ring a bell?

- The numbers don't add up because you accidentally wrote over a formula with data.

- You spend too much time re-sizing, aligning, formatting, updating, and re-entering data onto spreadsheets.

- You cannot roll up figures from department-level spreadsheets into company-wide work schedules.

- Extra time is spent entering the same data into separate spreadsheets to see information in different views or create and print different reports for HR, payroll and management.

- Employees are confused about what those little dots, numbered notes, and different colors mean. Does that red dot mean jury duty or personal time off?

- Employees don't have the software to open Excel spreadsheets and faxing obliterates your colored symbols.

- New business needs require purchase of new templates—without solving the underlying problem of spreadsheets being the wrong tools for a task as multi-faceted as employee scheduling.

Because business changes and staff growth are normally gradual, spreadsheets are often retained, overused, and stretched far beyond what they were designed for, without due regard to potential risks.

Excel formulas and functions are inadequate to handle complex applications like employee shift scheduling. Therefore, according to Professor John Nash of the Telfer School of Management, University of Ottawa, Canada, "…somebody thought it would be neat to allow users to write little programs in something like BASIC and introduced macros."

But these ad hoc macros are seldom designed, coded and tested according to sound software development standards employed in commercial software packages. As Nash pointed out in an interview after his keynote discussion on *Dealing with Spreadsheet Addiction*, "…these macros can do things like delete files and format disks. And they often run as soon as you open a spreadsheet file unless you are careful."

When "free" spreadsheet scheduling templates become costly

People commonly perceive the cost of scheduling spreadsheets to be minimal since templates are available as free downloads and their basic functions can be accomplished by novices. Call it free, but it will cost you dearly in lost productivity and opportunities to retain income.

Snap Schedule is the cross-industry application software for employee scheduling. Compare spreadsheets' false economies to what you easily could have achieved with Snap Schedule employee scheduling software:

- Using spreadsheets, you'll spend more administrative time handling the scheduling process. This takes hours away from more important activities and value-added tasks like working with your employees and customers.

  But Snap Schedule gives you an easy-to-use graphical user interface and powerful tools that make scheduling, editing information, analyzing data, and distributing schedules easy and simple. You can drag and drop whole sections to easily assign shifts, mark time off, and move or copy assignments.

- Using spreadsheets, it is often impossible to detect scheduling conflicts and inadequate shift coverage—which usually leads to over or under staffing and/or higher attrition.

  Snap Schedule alerts you to scheduling conflicts and helps you avoid unexpected overtime, overworked staff, unfilled posts/positions and unpleasant surprises. It displays the number of people scheduled by their position, skill, or "assignment reason" for each shift. It lets you quickly see any over/under staffing condition while making shift assignments. Snap Schedule automatically computes and displays the assigned head counts and variances for comparison with required head counts.

- Using spreadsheets, you are limited to a fixed schedule and a small number of employees and shifts.

  Snap Schedule supports unlimited employees and shifts and comes with an expanding set of pre-designed schedule plans to speed up scheduling challenges such as a compressed work week, 8-, 10-, 12-, and 24-hour fixed and rotating work schedules. This built-in flexibility helps meet the scheduling needs of virtually all shift-based businesses.

- Using spreadsheets, it's difficult to schedule employees based on their specific skills sets, so you don't know if you have the right people scheduled. That means you can end up overstaffed on employees with Skill Set "A" and understaffed on Skill Set "B."

  Snap Schedule lets you schedule employees based on their position/job title, skill, availability, cost, seniority, and other criteria, resulting in more efficient staffing and higher service levels with fewer people. Snap Schedule also warns you of expiring skills or certifications to help you comply with rules and regulations.

- Using spreadsheets, you only see a single view of employee scheduling data in a fixed format without reporting capabilities that could help you make informed decisions.

  Snap Schedule reporting provides you comprehensive reports in multiple categories, by shift, position, location, daily, weekly, monthly work schedules, time-off, costs, etc. You can pick any date range and filter the report by employee groups, shift types, the level of detail and data order. You can also print, export to various file formats, publish, or e-mail any schedule or report. Schedules can be sent as PDFs, plain text, spreadsheets or tables.

- Using spreadsheets, you cannot efficiently store detailed employee information and preferences once and use them repeatedly for scheduling, reporting and contact purposes.

  Snap Schedule is "Write-Once." Typing or importing an employee's information into the employee record just once lets you manage employee records and use employee contact information, availability, position, labor rate, authorized work locations, skills and certifications. Use Snap Schedule's 25 customizable fields in each employee record to track information that is unique to your business.

Try Snap Schedule for scheduling relief

Starting at only $450 USD for a single-computer license, Snap Schedule is affordable even to mom-and-pop businesses, yet it offers unmatched employee scheduling benefits and a rapid return on investment. To see how quickly you will jettison your scheduling spreadsheets, download and try Snap Schedule for FREE for 30 days just like thousands have done! Visit http://www.BMScentral.com to download it today.