

The Truly Open Office - How to use Excel to Effectively Share Data

Without a doubt, the Internet is one of the most amazing feats of human achievement. It stands as the modern equivalent of the Library of Alexandria, only far more gargantuan than even the imaginative Greeks could ever have dreamed up, and accessible to just about everyone in civilised society. It's amazing to think that people can now log on to this wireless ether with appliances as ubiquitous as the mobile phone and instantly hook up to the sum of almost all human knowledge.

And Facebook, obviously.

A bi-product of our information age is having to manage such huge volumes of data. This monumental chore (and finding ways to do it efficiently) has given rise to multi-billion pound industries. In the average office setting, good data management is also of monumental importance, since effectively sharing information between a team can directly improve overall efficiency.

One useful program for data management and interpretation is Microsoft Excel. It's capabilities are limited only by whoever is using it, and on an individual level it is a great tool to keep yourself and information organised. However, it can also be utilised to share important data between departments - we're going to show you how to set up a shared workbook in Excel which will let you do just that (and probably earn a few brownie points with the boss in the process.)

Sharing a Workbook in Excel 2007

This task is remarkably simple and will take roughly one minute to complete by following these quick steps:

- 1) Open the workbook you wish to share in **Excel**
- 2) Click on the **Review** tab in the menu bar, followed by the **Share Workbook** icon in the Changes group.
- 3) Go into the Editing tab and select the check box labelled **Allow changes by more than one user at the same time.**
- 4) Technically, you're done at this stage, but you'll probably want to have a look at the options in the **Advanced** tab. Here you can set things such as how often document changes are updated, etc.

Your workbook is now ready to go, but you'll need to place it in a shared location which can be viewed by others on a network. Also, do be aware that certain functions can't be used while a document is shared - the following are some of the main functions which will be disabled:

- **Tables**
- **Deleting cells**
- **Cell merging**
- **Chart creation**
- **Drawing tools**
- **Macros**
- **XML data**

If you desperately need these functions, don't panic - many can be added before

you turn on document sharing.

Now you have your workbook prepared, what are the possible applications of this? Somewhat obviously, it allows two people to carry out work on the same document at once. If you have a large amount of data inputting to do for instance, you could flutter your eyelashes at someone and get them to help you out. Without workbook sharing, you would have to do a load of inputting then e-mail the document to your co-worker so they can do some and send it back to you. This is a pointless division of labour, as it would take just as long to work this way than if you just did it all yourself. With workbook sharing turned on, you can both access the same workbook and see each other's changes in (relatively) real time.

When sharing information, it's important to protect it from unwanted changes. You can password-protect the document by going into the **Protect Workbook** dialogue box which can be found in **Review > Changes** group. The handy thing with this option is that you can lock certain functions such as moving or deleting information for a group of people working on the document, and administrators can override this by inputting the correct password. This can be useful if you wish to leave data fields open for editing but don't want the layout of the document altered.

Another useful tool which can be utilised when sharing a workbook with large groups is change tracking - that is, all employees would be required to enter a password to access a shared document. Any changes they subsequently make will be flagged (this function cannot be turned off without an admin password, either) and these changes can be quickly reviewed, accepted or deleted. Excel's change tracking can be controlled with useful filters to assigned who can change the document, when it can be changed and even where - this is accessible once again through the **Protect and Share Workbook** options in the **Review > Changes** group.

With these tools at your disposal, you'll be able to effectively set up a framework for data management between employees on a network - no more e-mailing the same information backwards and forwards between departments every time someone creates newer versions.