Microsoft Excel

VS

Zoho Analytics

A detailed comparison study on why
spreadsheets are not best suited for analytics

Introduction

Some say that data is the new oil, and information is the currency of the future; and not without a reason. The data we utilize in our organizations come to us from various sources, and is becoming diverse. We save a lot of this data without analysing and transforming them into valuable insights that we can consider to make critical business decisions.

With every organization aiming to enhance productivity and provide great business value to their customers, deep analytics has become the backbone of businesses today.

Data crunching, reporting and analysis — for most organizations (big or small), the spreadsheet, especially Microsoft Excel, has become the de-facto tool for both business analysis and reporting. But, there are areas in which spreadsheets can be really limiting as your business intelligence and analytics tool.

In this guide, we shall discuss some of the major pitfalls you would face if you are using Microsoft Excel (and other spreadsheet software) as your analytics tool. We will also be presenting you with a detailed comparison study on how a specialized BI tool such as Zoho Analytics is better than Microsoft Excel.

Major drawbacks of Microsoft Excel

Wide range of data sources: The sources from which data can be fetched are limited. There are no direct integrations with third party business solutions (CRM, Helpdesk, Finance etc.,) which means one has to enter the either data manually or find ways to convert it into a file format that can be fed into Microsoft Excel.

Big Data: Business applications generate huge data which needs to be analyzed to make informed decisions. But, spreadsheets can't handle large amount of data as the maximum row limit in Microsoft Excel is just 1,048,576. Working with large datasets also means sluggish responsiveness.

Visual analysis & Exploration: Uncovering hidden insights is the ultimate purpose of data analysis. With Microsoft excel, user needs to know the end result he/she needs to achieve way before starting the analysis. Microsoft Excel does not support auto-analysis. In addition to that, the charts are static. User can't interact with charts, drill-down or slice and dice data. This model will only enable users to create reports which can help them find out - " the whats" instead of "the whys".

Collaboration: Once the data is shared, it is completely available to the person it has been shared with. The owner can't limit the access to a particular dataset or certain reports/dashboards. Setting permissions such as read-only/read-write etc is not possible too. This forces the owner to create multiple copies of the same piece of information to be shared differently with different users.

Detailed feature comparison

Features	MS Excel (Desktop)	MS Excel (Online)	Zoho Analytics
Data sources Different sources from which data can be added/imported. Integrations with external applications for analysis.			
Enter data / copy paste data	✓	✗	✓
Import data upto 1 billion rows	✗	✗	✓
Automatic synchronization	✗	✗	✓
Responsive and fast on large data	✗	✗	✓
Integrations			
Zoho CRM, Zoho Books, Zoho Projects, Zoho Desk, Zoho Survey, Zoho Recruit, Zoho Bug Tracker, Zoho Campaigns, Zoho Creator, Zoho People	✗	✗	✓
Salesforce CRM	✓	✗	✓
HubSpot CRM	✓	✗	✓
Microsoft Dynamics CRM	✓	✗	✓
Analyze other CRM data using Flatly	✗	✗	✓
Mailchimp	✗	✗	✓

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Google Analytics	✕	✕	✓
Google AdWords	✕	✕	✓
SurveyMonkey	✕	✕	✓
SurveyGizmo	✕	✕	✓
QuickBooks	✕	✕	✓
Xero	✕	✕	✓
Stripe	✕	✕	✓
Teamwork Projects	✕	✕	✓
Zendesk	✕	✕	✓
ManageEngine ServiceDesk Plus	✕	✕	✓
ManageEngine SupportCenter Plus	✕	✕	✓

Upload data from major cloud storage/drives

Zoho Docs	✕	✕	✓
Box	✕	✕	✓
Google Drive	✕	✕	✓
Microsoft OneDrive	✓	✓	✓

Dropbox	✓	✓	✓
Upload via Email	✗	✗	✓

Upload from files and feeds

CSV	✓	✗	✓
TSV	✗	✗	✓
Any version of XLS, XLSX	✓	✗	✓
JSON, XML or HTML files	✓	✗	✓
Data from Web URL	✓	✗	✓
FTP servers	✗	✗	✓

Pull data from relational databases

MS Access	✓	✗	✓
SQL Server	✓	✗	✓
Oracle	✓	✗	✓
MySQL	✓	✗	✓
Sybase	✓	✗	✓
PostgreSQL	✓	✗	✓
SQLite	✓	✗	✓

DB2	✔	✘	✔
DB2 AS/400	✔	✘	✔
FireBird	✘	✘	✔
SAP HANA	✔	✘	✔
Teradata	✔	✘	✔
Any JDBC Driver Supported Databases	✘	✘	✔

Connectivity to cloud databases

Microsoft SQL Azure	✔	✘	✔
Amazon RDS	✘	✘	✔
Amazon Redshift cloud databases	✘	✘	✔
Google Cloud SQL	✘	✘	✔

NoSQL databases

MongoDB	✘	✘	✔
Hadoop/Hive	✘	✘	✔
Cassandra	✘	✘	✔
JDBC driver supported NoSQL databases.	✘	✘	✔

Data Modeling & Preparation
Blending data from multiple sources, establishing relationships, and preparing them for meaningful analysis

Relating data

Auto-join	✗	✗	✓
Vlookup	✓	✓	✓
Data cleansing	✗	✗	✓

Queries and filters

Querying	✓	✓	✓
SQL based querying	✗	✗	✓
Filtering	✓	✓	✓

Visualization
Ability to create rich visualizations on collected data

Visualization

Interactive and intuitive	✗	✗	✓
Variety of charts and tables	✓	✓	✓
Pivot tables	✓	✓	✓
Summary views	✗	✗	✓

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Feature			
KPI Widgets	✔	✔	✔
Intuitive drag-and-drop interface	✘	✘	✔

Visual analysis

Slice and dice data	✘	✘	✔
Ability to do deep dive analysis by drilling down and deriving key insights	✘	✘	✔
View underlying data	✔	✔	✔

Dashboards

Combine multiple reports into a dashboard	✔	✔	✔
Choose from a variety of themes	✘	✘	✔
Add formatted text, images, and widgets	✔	✔	✔

Analytics
Methodologies to derive meaningful patterns and insights

Formula

Powerful formula engine to easily derive any business metric	✔	✔	✔

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Prebuilt Analytics

Domain specific prebuilt metrics, reports & dashboards (eg: Sales analytics, Finance analytics etc.,)	✗	✗	✓

Automated Analysis

Auto generated reports and dashboards	✗	✗	✓

Sharing and Collaboration
Ability to share and collaborate with peers/colleagues

Collaborative Analytics

Sharing data/reports/dashboards without duplicates	✗	✓	✓
Share data/reports/dashboards to a specific user	✗	✓	✓
Share data/reports/dashboards to a group of clients/colleagues	✗	✗	✓
Co-admin	✗	✗	✓

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Publishing

Publish Accessible URL of your Reports & Dashboards	✗	✓	✓
Make views public	✗	✗	✓
Embed reports & dashboards in applications, blogs and websites	✗	✓	✓
Display as a slideshow	✗	✗	✓

Exporting

Export as PDF, CSV, PNG, JPEG and XML	✓	✗	✓
Scheduled Emails	✗	✗	✓

Security
Ability to assign different roles and permissions to different users

Views and permissions

Data access upon login	✗	✓	✓
Only shared reports and data are viewable to the respective users	✗	✓	✓
Grant fine-grained permissions like read-only, read/write, etc	✗	✗	✓

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	Cost Pricing and plans		
Free plan	✗	✓	✓
Upgrade/Downgrade to any plan anytime	✗	✗	✓
Buy individually for every machine	✓	✗	✗
IT maintenance cost and upgrades	✓	✗	Not required
	Others		
Accessibility from mobile devices	✗	✓	✓
API availability	✓	✗	✓

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Top takeaways in favor of Zoho Analytics

Connects to different types of data sources and has direct integrations with popular business apps.

Big Data handling: Zoho Analytics is fast, responsive and handles large volumes of data with ease.

Visual analysis: Enables you to visualize data by creating rich reports and dashboards through easy-to-use drag and drop interface.

Powerful formula engine: Allows you to build KPIs, derive business metrics and carry out in-depth analytics.

Sharing and collaboration: Zoho Analytics lets you share specific reports/dashboards to certain users/groups. You can publish and embed reports/dashboards on your blogs, websites and applications.

Data integrity: Everyone works on the same file without any duplicate copies.

Secure and safe: The fine-grained acces control lets you set permissions such as read only, read-write etc ensuring your data is safe and secure.

Analysis on the go: Mobile App means you can access your data/reports/dashboards no matter where you are.

In conclusion, Microsoft Excel is meant for simple analysis. When it is used instead of a BI & Analytics tool, it can result in lost productivity and slower time-to-insight and human-errors. It's time to make the switch to a powerful, full-fledged BI tool. Go beyond Microsoft Excel, carry out in-depth analysis, and make data-driven decisions with Zoho Analytics.

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