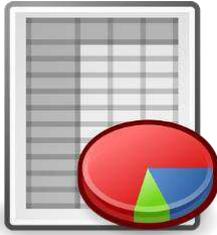# Top 3 Reasons to Leave Spreadsheets

Executive Summary: *The electronic spreadsheet is arguably the most common tool used in the industry for everything from construction documentation to estimating to human resources. Here's the top three reasons not to use them in some instances.*

What you're using them for currently. *You probably left a spreadsheet to read this article – I left one in order to write it. As a technical guy I love spreadsheets. As a manager and engineer I need spreadsheets for estimating, engineering, survey, submittals, financial analysis, and even my Christmas list.*

Here's the top three reasons you should leave them behind in some instances.

#1 Reason – it's not the cost. *Yeah, get over it. Wikipedia's top billionaire of 2017 (scan the QR) made all that cash by producing a spreadsheet so simple and powerful that everyone on the planet uses it. And at $500/unit versus $10,000/unit like many specialty softwares, the cost comparison is futile.*

#2 Reason – bulletproofing mistakes. *A very common reason for contractors leaving spreadsheets behind is the inability to check their work. In, say, estimating, between looking up labor rates, assigning taxes and fee, and even adding up five cost types in one row for a couple hundred rows, the human factor always comes in to play. Humans make more mistakes than computers – canned softwares prevent that, while spreadsheets are doing only what you told it to do even when it's wrong.*

#3 Reason – speed of production. *Spreadsheets are fantastic for "one off" type uses and certainly for repetitive work, but there still is often an element of redo for each construction project. The job title, engineer, labor rates, material unit costs, et cetera, each must be addressed from job to job. Having to jockey between tabs on a spreadsheet, versus rigid templates provided in specialized softwares, slows down the assembly line of document production you need job after job.*

Bonus Item! #4 Saving your work. *Since I kinda shorted you on #1, here's a bonus. Saving your work with spreadsheets is a bear because each time you have to rename the file. Saving and renaming sounds simple, but each of us has forgotten to rename a file and saved over our previous work. Specialty softwares often have a more frequent saving (each time you leave a project it saves for you, plus often times you can only be in one project at a time).*

My Story. *As usual, this article is mostly a recap on my own experiences. One of the biggest mistakes I can recall was in a cost projection where I had a hundred cost codes listed on a hundred rows. Each of the rows had its five costs to date comprised of labor, equipment, material, subcontractor, and other. I had a mistake in my spreadsheet and passed on a cost projection with about $600,000 of overstated fee. It worked out in the*

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end, but it was embarrassing and did little to instill confidence in my work to my superiors as well as the accounting department.

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