



Live and Die By Excel? Here's the "Die" Part

By Susan Saldibar

Show of hands. Who loves getting out your Excel spreadsheets and crunching budget numbers? Okay, there are some out there who love the process. Those of you who do crazy things with your fingers; two keys held down to move something somewhere else, or make a column disappear or re-calculate a number so that it pops up somewhere else. For the rest of us, Excel can be, well, daunting.

To be clear, I'm not here to throw Excel under the bus. I still use it for lots of things. But there are tools now available, such as the Budgeting tool from [RealPage](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner), that are reported to be saving 50-80% of the time spent inputting and finalizing budgets. That gets my attention, does it yours?

I spoke recently with Christine Bright, VP of Operations for RealPage and, among other things, we commiserated about the days when Excel was the only show in town for number crunching.

Fast forward to today's senior living communities, a complex environment that is arguably becoming more so. I asked Christine, why Excel, once the darling of number crunchers, is starting to take a back seat to other, more agile, integrated platforms.

Your world is getting more complex, not less. Excel is dropping behind and taking you with it.

Like myself, Christine still sees plenty of uses for Excel. "If you are a small community, you can probably use Excel without too much pain," she explains. "But for most communities, budgets are getting more complex, not less. Operators need to track by different levels of care, as well as adding in amenities that may differ from site to site. That's where new tools can really make a difference," she adds.

Here is where the limitations of Excel are being felt in senior living:

- **The increasing diversity of senior living community levels of care, services and amenities.** “Our industry has become so much more complex, even within the last five years,” says Christine. “Those complexities bring with them the need for a deeper level of calculations that, frankly, push the generic limits of Excel,” she adds. The experience required to move Excel to a level to handle these increasing complexities is not trivial. Most people who are working on budgets lack the skill depth, so it takes more time and is more prone to error.
- **Confusion due to incorrect versions.** Christine sees this a lot (so have I). “An earlier version of a spreadsheet can get passed around,” she tells me. “We often hear of people working hard on a given version, only to be told it is the wrong one, having to re-input all their information,” she adds.
- **Increasing cost of human capital.** “Many people continue to have the perception that Excel is virtually ‘free’,” says Christine. “And yet the time and effort spent to conform Excel to handle a heavy amount of data and diversity is significant.” Anyone who has spent hours upon hours in front of Excel knows what she’s talking about.

Enter automation, integration and web-based ease of use.

Here is what’s really cool about the RealPage Budgeting tool:

- Created for Senior Living. Finally something other than a generic tool that needs to be re-configured.
- Robust enough to handle the myriad of calculations that are needed to get an accurate budget in senior living: accounting data by level of care, daily/weekly/monthly calculations by census, etc.
- Multiple people can work on the budget simultaneously. That means Accounting, HR, Operations; all can be inputting, calculating and reviewing.
- Lock and control feature that keeps people focused on their own areas.
- Automatic version updates ensure that the latest version is always the accessible one; no more wrong versions being passed along.
- Highly customizable to your unique needs.
- Instantly shows historical comparisons and trends.
- Dozens of reports to choose from; plus, you can create your own.
- All web-based, easy to use.

What I think is great is that RealPage has created its Budgeting tool to stand alone, meaning you can upload your data into it and use only this module. You don’t have to purchase an entire platform. That makes it even easier to make the transition without breaking the bank. And it can be deployed very quickly. Christine tells me it takes about 4-5 WebEx calls to get a client up and running.

“Think of the collective time your department heads are taking just to try to make Excel conform to your needs,” says Christine. “Tools like ours give your key people their time back. And that, most agree, means a pretty strong ROI.”

To learn more about RealPage Budgeting, [watch this on-demand webcast](#).



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