

# Why translation agencies need to move away from Excel to keep track of projects and finances

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All the information related to the work of your translation agency — orders from clients, invoices, payments, jobs for translators with deadlines, files and financial information, etc. — needs to be kept track of in some way. This is self-evident and does not require further explanation. And unless you have a super power, there is no way you can keep all this information in your head.

For this small companies usually use spreadsheet applications such as Excel or Google Spreadsheets. But upon closer examination, it turns out that they are most likely more detrimental to companies than beneficial. How are they inferior to dedicated translation business management systems?

## Collaboration and access rights

If your agency has more than one manager, information needs to be shared. Either all the information entered by managers needs to be stored in a single file, or clear rules set for managers to work together on a shared online document.

The more people are involved, the more difficult it is for them to follow the rules and not step on each other's toes. This made even more complicated if different employees require different access levels (for example, a manager is allowed to view financial information in his or her projects, but not of projects performed by other managers).

In dedicated translation business management systems, all users work efficiently and accurately within a common database. In such a system it is not possible to accidentally delete or change information entered by another manager. If necessary, different user accounts can be isolated from each other, and then each manager is given access only to his or her own projects.

## File storage

Almost any translation project involves work with any files — the source text, reference materials, glossaries, etc. But such a file cannot be copied into an Excel spreadsheet. As a temporary solution, you can provide a link to the file, but it will no longer work when the file is moved or deleted.

There are, of course, ways round this. You can, for example, create a folder and project file architecture on a central computer, set strict rules for how they are named, and enter only their names in the spreadsheet. But one way or another, the project files end up in a separate location from the project information.

With translation business management systems, no such problem arises: the project files are stored directly with the project, so there is no need to remember on which computer and in which folders they are located. They are accessible directly from the system at any time: they can be sent directly to translators and clients.

## User accounts for translators and clients

Such accounts do not exist in spreadsheet applications. In project management systems user accounts are created for translators and clients, and they can then communicate with managers directly within the system.

Examples:

- A manager assigns the translator work; the system automatically sends a notification to confirm this; the translator, having received the notification, downloads the files from the system, performs the translation and uploads them back into the system upon completion. Finally, the manager receives an automated notification that the job has been completed.
- The client sends the manager files for translation directly in the system and in the same way receives the completed files in the system.

- The translator independently creates a job invoice, the manager creates the corresponding purchase order and enters the corresponding information into the system, which notifies the translator that the payment has been effected.

There are dozens of such examples. Crucially, translation business management systems not only serve as a database, but also a tool for communicating and coordinating work. It is quick and easy to perform routine tasks such as sending reminders, transferring files, identifying inconsistencies in financial records, etc.

If your office never got past Excel spreadsheets, then you are doing tasks by hand using e-mail and file explorer that could all be fully automated. For business this is a waste of resources and driver of financial losses.

## Email

This has already been mentioned above, but we will discuss it further here. Unlike Excel and Google Spreadsheets, business management systems can work with emails. A properly configured management system will automatically send a message about an assigned task, notify the translator about an upcoming or expired work deadline, and the manager about a project deadline, send out invoices to clients, etc. Automation frees up the precious resource of time for both managers and translators. Which enables them to work more efficiently.

## Creation of financial documents

Translation agencies have to create large numbers of documents and invoices for clients, purchase orders for translators, commercial offers and much more. In business management systems, all these are generated instantly based on templates: there is no need to waste time editing a document in Word or in a separate accounting program.

And having being created you cannot lose these documents: they are stored in the system indefinitely. Even if several years have passed, you can easily see who created the document and when, to which project it related to and who it was sent to.

## Automation

As already mentioned, a spreadsheet consists of scattered data entered manually, and this data on its own is of no use. It is only of any value when you utilize it in some way. But if it is stored in Excel, it will have to be utilized manually.

A translation project management system is called a “system” because the information contained within it is systematized, and the actions it performs are automated. It knows how to perform numerous operations with data independently: It reminds the translator about any expired work deadlines, transfers the file sent by the translator to the editor, etc.

In other words, the system saves project managers from the most boring and tedious work, freeing up their time to deal with issues that require a creative approach.

## Business reports

It is impossible to manage a proper company on intuition alone. This is only possible in Hollywood films. Management involves planning, on concrete measures.

Neither operational nor strategic planning is possible without access to information on the current state of your business. And for this you need to have easy access to reports on profit, sales, expenses for the month, the quarter, the year, for a specific client, by language, by subject, etc.

On top of this, there are issues that constantly arise in the planning process. Which of the translators working in the A-B languages has the worst price-quality ratio, and which has the best? How much profit has manager Y earned over the past X months by completing projects for client Z? Which projects are the most costly in the current year? When did your agency make more money — in the last quarter or the quarter before last?

If your translation agency works in Excel, it would take far too long to find answers to such questions: extracting and processing information from spreadsheets takes time. Most likely, you will simply decide against the whole thing. In professional management systems, this is all done in a matter of seconds, and so the decisions you make are based on concrete numbers rather than intuition.

## Integration

With Excel spreadsheets for storing and keeping track of information about orders you can only store a small amount of information about your company. And the problem is not only the limited functionality. An Excel spreadsheet is not connected to information in other databases: for example, an invoice entered into Excel will not be automatically displayed in your accounting program, a deadline entered into the spreadsheet will not be automatically transferred to the calendar, and project files will not be uploaded to the CAT program. You will have to repeatedly enter the same information into different databases. Such limitations do not detract from the merits of Excel: it is a great program, but one which is designed to address other problems. And management systems are intended for business management. They are able to, for example, exchange information with other online systems through an API. By creating a project in one system you can create the same project in another system with a single click of a button and without manually having to transfer all the information.

## Holistic picture

We have provided a brief overview of the most important functions that are not available in programs such as Excel. The translation business management system combines disparate pieces of information about the company's activities into a single platform and performs numerous routine tasks, thereby saving your time and money.

Keeping track of projects and finances with Excel is akin to building a bridge with a hammer. If that's what you want to do, it is probably possible. But there are much easier ways to build bridges.



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