Preparing Journal Entries with Pivot Tables

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While pivot tables provide an efficient way to summarize data, their final format is often less than useful. The blank cells used in the outline format make for easy reading by a human, but they make the data unsuitable for importing to other computer systems. This month's article will examine the steps required to make pivot table output useful for further analysis.

Consider a pivot table used to summarize travel expenses. The original data set contained 3,400 rows of travel expenses by date, company, cost center, and account. In an effort to build this month's journal entries, the pivot table shown in Figure 1 is created. The row area of the pivot table contains Company, Account, Account Description, Cost Center, and Cost Center Description (CC-Desc), while Amount appears in the data area.

The initial pivot table contains 222 rows of summary data. Collapsing 3,400 rows of details into 222 rows of summary information in nine clicks is an impressive feat, but it still leaves several problems in the presentation of the report. First, Excel automatically adds subtotal rows for all of the fields in the row area, which leads to unnecessary totals for Company, Cost Center, CC-Desc, and Account. As can be seen in Figure 1, rows 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, and 16 are all extraneous and need to be deleted. Also, the pivot table includes a final Grand Total, which isn't needed. The number format for the data in column F is general instead of fixed to two decimal places. And perhaps worst of all, Excel left blanks in columns A, B, and C. You'll need to copy values into these blank cells to create the final report. Luckily, there's an easy way to do this.

Removing Extra Totals

More than half the rows in the report are extraneous total rows. To remove these rows in Excel 2003 or earlier, follow these steps:

1. Double-click the Account heading in cell D4.
2. Change the Subtotals setting from Automatic to None.
3. Click OK to dismiss the Pivot Table Field dialog.
4. Repeat Steps 2-4 for the CC-Desc heading in C4, the Cost Center heading in B4, and the Company heading in A4.
5. Right-click anywhere inside the pivot table, and choose Table Options.
6. Uncheck the setting for Grand Total for Columns.

In Excel 2007, follow these steps:

1. On PivotTable Tools, Design tab, open the Report Layout drop-down. Choose Show in Tabular Form.
2. On the same tab, choose Subtotals, Do Not Show Subtotals.
3. On the same tab, choose Grand Totals, Off for Rows and Columns.

After these steps, your 222-row pivot table will be reduced to 90 rows of actual data. As shown in Figure 2, however, the annoying blank cells where Excel chooses not to repeat data are still there.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Changing the Number Format of the Amount Field

At this point, you could simply select the cells in column F and use Format Cells to apply a numeric format with two decimal places. But if you would prefer a number format that will persist beyond future changes to the pivot table, try these steps:

1. Select the first cell in column F containing an amount.
2. Choose the Field Settings button. In Excel 2003, this is the second-to-last icon on the PivotTable toolbar. In Excel 2007, it's found near the left side of the Options ribbon tab.
3. Click the Number button in Excel 2003 or the Number Format button in Excel 2007.
4. Set the format to Number, with two decimal places.

Filling in the Blank Cells

There's a cool trick for filling in the blank cells, but you'll have to convert the pivot table to static values before you can use it. To convert the table to values:

1. Select from A1 through the end of the pivot table. Note that although your pivot table appears to start in row 3, the two blank rows above the pivot table are considered part of the table. Your selection must include these rows, or Step 3 will fail.
2. Click the Copy icon (or press Ctrl+C) to copy the pivot table to the clipboard.
3. Open the Paste dropdown and choose Paste Values. This will convert the pivot table to static values.

The final part of the trick involves selecting only the blank cells from the pivot table. Follow these steps:

1. Using the table Figure 2 as an example, you would select cells A6:C94.

Figure 3
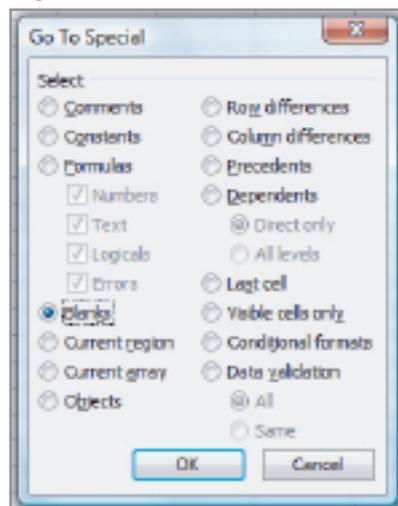
2. Press Ctrl+G to display the Go To dialog.
3. In the lower left corner of the dialog, choose the Special button.
4. In the Paste Special dialog, choose Blanks, as shown in Figure 3. Click OK.
5. Type the equals sign (=), then the up arrow. Press Ctrl+Enter. Like magic, the entire pivot table will fill with the value immediately above.
6. Reselect the range from Step 1.
7. Use Ctrl+C to copy. From the Paste dropdown, select Values to convert the formulas from Step 5 into values.

Step 5 requires only three keystrokes and appears to do all the work. The act of typing equals and the up arrow sets up a formula that points to the cell directly above the active cell. Pressing Ctrl+Enter will enter a similar formula in all of the cells of the selection. Thanks to Step 4, the selection contains only the blank cells. ∎

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