EXCEL ‹‹‹‹‹‹

By Bill Jelen

Leveraging Excel for the iPad

I love Excel for the iPad. After suffering through the horrible Excel for the iPhone, I was expecting to hate the iPad version. But when it debuted in late March 2014, I was impressed by the set of features that Microsoft was able to make work—and work well—on the iPad.

Pricing

Excel, Word, and PowerPoint are free for the iPad in read-only mode. This allows you to open workbooks saved to Microsoft's cloud-based OneDrive, scroll around the workbook, and view results. In order to edit or create new workbooks, you will need a subscription to Office 365, which costs $9.99 per month or $99.99 per year. There are many scenarios where sending workbooks for consumption on the iPad will be sufficient. If your sales force already has iPads, they can start using Excel in view-only mode for free.

No VBA Macros or Power Pivot

No one expected Excel for the iPad to support macros, and it doesn't. While macros can't run on the iPad, I still expect to use macros on the PC to generate reports that will be consumed on the iPad.

There can be no external data connections, which means no links between workbooks. It also means that you can't run a Power Pivot workbook on the iPad.

Creating Workbooks on the iPad

The Excel interface on the iPad offers a touch-capable ribbon and a special formula keypad (see Figure 1) that make it easy to generate new workbooks on the iPad. It's easy to enter and format data. While Excel for the iPhone offered four colors, the iPad supports all 16 million colors. The Cell Styles gallery introduced in Excel 2007 becomes more important, as it provides a quick way to format cells with a couple of taps. You can enter new formulas and use a double-tap menu to fill the formula down a column.

Supported commands include inserting or deleting columns, rows, or worksheets, plus sorting and filtering. The Fill Handle works. Table styles work. You can create charts on the iPad and format them using the impressive new built-in formats introduced in Excel 2013. But there are some chart formatting edits that you won't find on the iPad.

Odd Features

There are some features that I don't think I would ever use beyond a demo. For example, you can insert a shape, add text, or rotate the shape. You can insert a picture from your photostream and apply any of the Excel 2007-era picture styles to it. The Excel team also chose to include a button to Merge Cells instead of the best-practice feature to Center Across Selection.

Create on PC, Render on iPad

In most cases, you will be generating content on the PC, saving it to the OneDrive, and then reading the report on the iPad. For these situations, there are many features that you can use on the PC that will render properly on the iPad. For example, you can micromanage chart formatting on the PC, but it will render properly on the iPad. Pivot tables, sparklines, custom number formats, conditional formatting, and data validation created on the PC will work properly on the iPad.

Array formulas will calculate properly on the iPad, but you can't edit or create a new array formula.

There are several Office features that are more important in Power-Point than Excel. Although these were probably included because they were important to the PowerPoint team, your SmartArt, WordArt, and Screen Clipping objects created in Excel on the PC will render properly on the iPad. Even the arcane Camera Tool will render a static image. (In other words, if you Paste Picture Link, it will behave as Paste Picture on the iPad.)

Slicers and Hyperlinks Missing

Slicers are those great visible filters introduced in Excel 2010 and expanded in Excel 2013 with timelines. It's disappointing that these don't work on the iPad. Pivot Table slicers, Table slicers, and Pivot Table timelines aren't supported. They would have been excellent on the iPad because they would have provided the perfect touch interface.

Also missing is support for hyperlinks for navigation within a workbook. Since there's no macro support, hyperlinks

Figure 1

would have provided a really convenient way for the report user to jump from report to report in the workbook. The team at Microsoft wasn't able to get hyperlinks to work in time for the release of the product. Updates for the Excel app will be pushed out monthly, however, so there's hope that this feature will make it to the product soon.

Another oddity is that there's no easy way to jump to the bottom of the worksheet. This can be a problem if you load a workbook with 50,000 rows. The only

workaround is to use the Search feature to search for the word "Total." But that only works if there's a total row at the bottom. For about $30, you can buy a Bluetooth keyboard. I found myself using the Bluetooth keyboard just so I could press Cmd+DownArrow to move to the bottom of a large workbook. Although my keyboard offers both Ctrl and Cmd keys, Excel for the iPad came from the Apple Experience team at Microsoft, so you have to use Cmd+Arrow to navigate.

An Impressive Start

Excel for the iPad offers enough tools for you to create useful spreadsheets while being mobile. The real strength will be the ability to render reports on the iPad that were created with Excel. Over time, the capabilities will improve, such as adding support for hyperlinks to allow easy navigation. **SF**

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