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The Five Hidden Costs of Spreadsheets and How to Avoid Them

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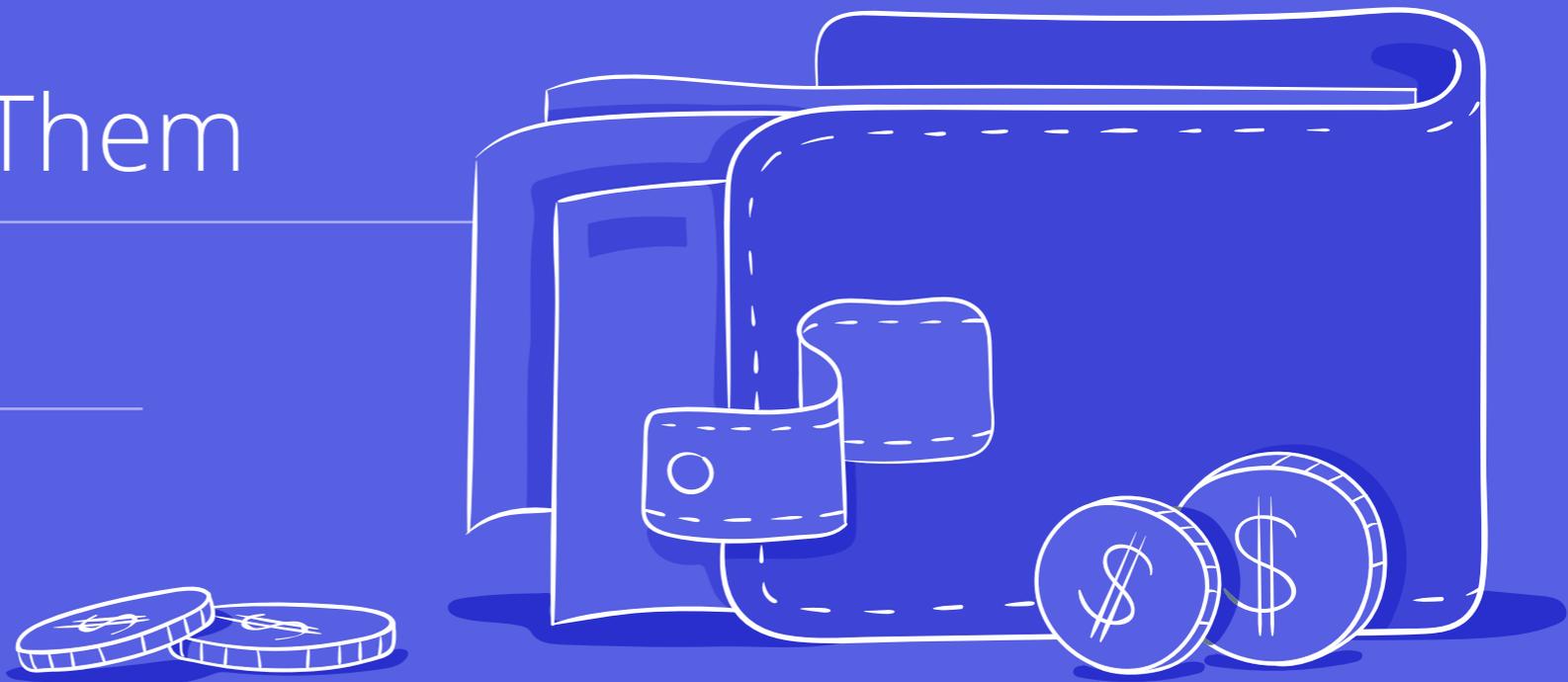


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The Spreadsheet: A Tool Whose Time Has Passed

For four decades, the spreadsheet has been the go-to tool for organizing work, arranging data, and sorting stuff. But experience has shown that it's not very good for managing projects, especially in the digital age.

Sure, when you need to quickly structure project information, a spreadsheet is good. It even works reasonably well for small, less complex projects. But with larger projects that involve cross-functional teams and hundreds of action items that require intensive interaction, cooperation, and coordination, it quickly runs out of gas. It's a static platform that makes accurately managing a dynamic process incredibly difficult. Even with online spreadsheets, which allow for limited real-time collaboration, it's still not a scalable solution for growing teams.

Today's teams—from marketing to creative to operations to project management—are more complex than they were when the spreadsheet was born decades ago. And the projects that teams now have to tackle are too dynamic and multifaceted to be squeezed into the rows and columns of a spreadsheet. Managing complex projects using spreadsheets is a boondoggle that will end up costing you plenty in wasted time and resources. As evidence, here are five ways that spreadsheets are costing your organization and how to avoid them.

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Delays and Low Output

Spreadsheets give you a static snapshot of where things were, not where they are now at this very minute. Time gaps between hand-offs, schedule conflicts, and project overlaps don't show in a spreadsheet. If you don't have visibility into bottlenecks developing at this moment, you can't quickly detect and eliminate them. That leads to missed deadlines, budget overruns, and avoidable mistakes.

TGI Friday's had this very problem. Spreadsheets weren't cutting it with all the complex projects needed to serve more than 900 locations worldwide. And it wasn't just the Marketing department involved in many of these initiatives. Strategic Ops, Development, Finance, Sourcing, and even IT had major roles to play. Using email, Word, and Excel to manage the hundreds of tasks required for each project was far too unwieldy.

Mission-critical tasks were lost in massive spreadsheets with dozens of tabs. Important messages and instructions were buried and forgotten in endless email chains. People couldn't see where projects overlapped and schedules clashed. The cost of even the smallest errors added up to significant losses in time, money, and wasted talent.

	7 days	! OVERDUE	
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How to Avoid This Cost

Ultimately, they jettisoned their old tools for Wrike.

Wrike took their projects to another level, keeping track of every detail and every task to ensure all elements are in place on launch day. Now they can get more accomplished at a much lower cost.

“It’s been night and day. Being able to manage dependencies in the timeline view [in Wrike], identify the critical paths, and take a snapshot of the timeline and share that to get sponsors on the same page,” says Meredith Selden, Director of Process Integration at TGI Friday’s.

Selden and team streamlined the complex launch process for new menu items with Wrike. Now 900 restaurants receive their new menu items and all the accompanying marketing assets on time. More importantly, it’s all done with much more accuracy.

“The benefit is more around the quality of the implementation,” says Kimberly Otte, TGI Friday’s Menu Innovation Project Manager.

“Wrike takes things to another level. Keeping track of every detail and every task to ensure all elements are in place on launch day was a challenge. Wrike enabled us to do it more accurately, thereby decreasing our cost.”

What’s more, they’ve been able to increase the number of active strategic projects by approximately one-third without adding any staff. It’s worked so well that TGI Friday’s will soon use Wrike for all their projects in the United States, not just their marketing ones.

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At one time I was managing one file with 15 tabs, but I wasn’t able to understand how projects overlap and understand the critical path of projects...

— Kimberly Otte, Menu Innovation Project Manager,
TGI Fridays

Poor Quality Control

Delivering an outstanding customer experience requires exceeding expectations with a high-level of service and quality. Superior execution depends on creating an environment dedicated to [Operational Excellence](#), a commitment that must permeate the entire organization.

Distilled to its basic components, Operational Excellence is the ability to plan, complete, and manage projects at the highest level. Execution is flawless across the entire organization, from start to end. And the results are impactful to both the customers and the company. A [Harvard Business Review 10-year study on Operational Excellence](#) found companies with a high standard of excellence delivered \$15 million in larger profits, a 25 percent higher growth rate, and a 75 percent increase in productivity on average.

Operational Excellence starts with providing every team member with precise requirements and timely approvals to minimize errors and ensure consistent results.

Every project is a dynamic process with many moving parts. Since a spreadsheet is basically static, it's incapable of automatically following the process. What's more, it doesn't provide visibility into the process to enable everyone to see, follow, and monitor progress. The result is that quality inevitably suffers.

Airbnb faced this problem when they wanted to expand their Trip Experiences platform. After the initial success of Trip Experiences, CEO Brian Chesky wanted to scale up production four-fold, expanding from the initial 12 cities in the program to 48 cities. Creative Production Manager Hoon Kim immediately realized that he had to streamline the production process in order to create thousands of assets, including photos, videos, and massive print posters.

But the huge online spreadsheet template they had been using for managing projects clearly wasn't up to the task. It couldn't handle the rapid iterations and versioning created by hundreds of simultaneous users. Moreover, it couldn't manage the detailed workflows and handoffs for each of the three production teams.

"It (the spreadsheet) was constantly crashing," Kim said.

"People ended up creating duplicates...to deal with their own small world of data, which quickly became outdated since they weren't connected to the original doc. There were massive amounts of confusion. We know it wasn't the solution."

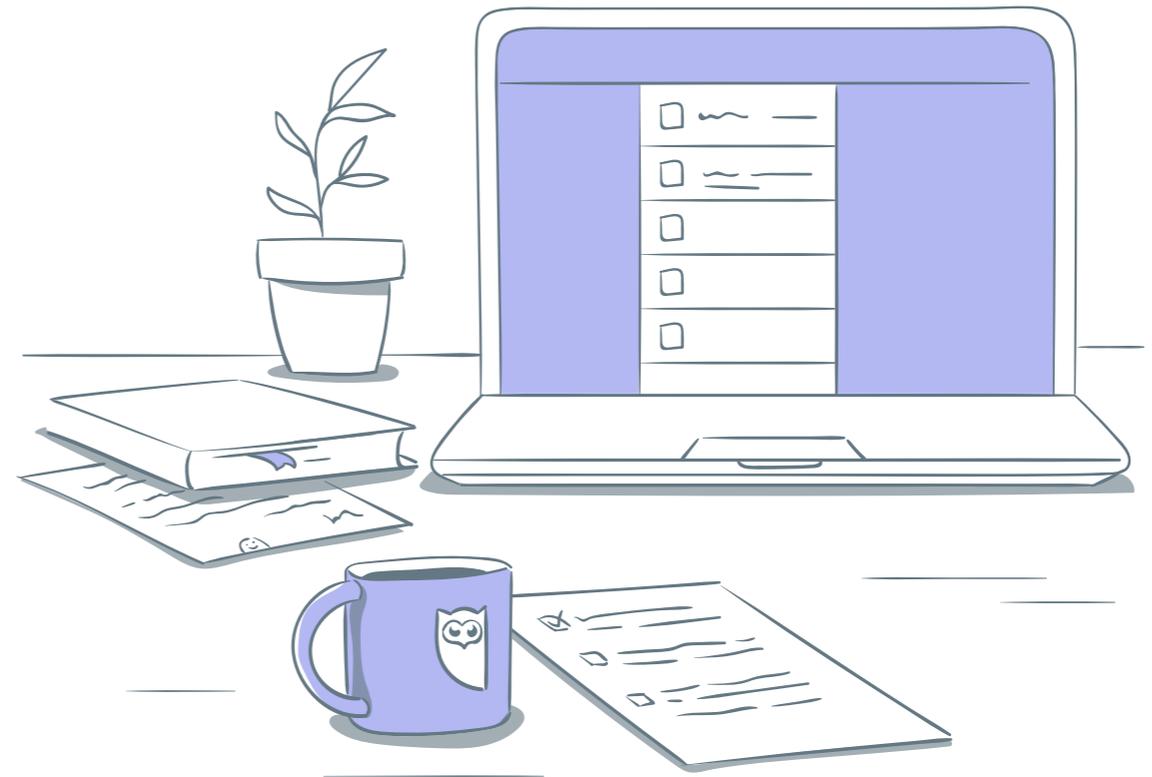


How to Avoid This Cost

Airbnb's search for the optimum solution led them directly to Wrike, the collaborative work management platform that can rapidly scale to handle the magnitude of any project.

Wrike automates many project functions, including work intake, choosing the correct project template, delegating assignments, and much more. This automation allows you to delegate repetitive, mundane, time-consuming administrative tasks to the app, so that you can focus more of your valuable time developing strategic initiatives and being more creative. And that'll allow you to scale and accelerate what you produce.

Greater quality control is why the marketing operations team at Hootsuite—a widely popular platform used to manage all your social media channels — [chose Wrike](#). Now the team has a central platform accessible to all stakeholders and content creators that's a quantum leap forward in greater efficiency and accuracy. For a recent email campaign, Wrike enabled them to rapidly collaborate, coordinate, and manage translation and design for hundreds of local markets worldwide. They launched the campaign on time worldwide—something that would be impossible using spreadsheets.



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Wrike helps us prioritize what's important and helps us de-prioritize things that can be shelved for a later time when we have time to do it.

— Brian Lam, Marketing Project Manager,
Hootsuite

Damage to Professional Credibility

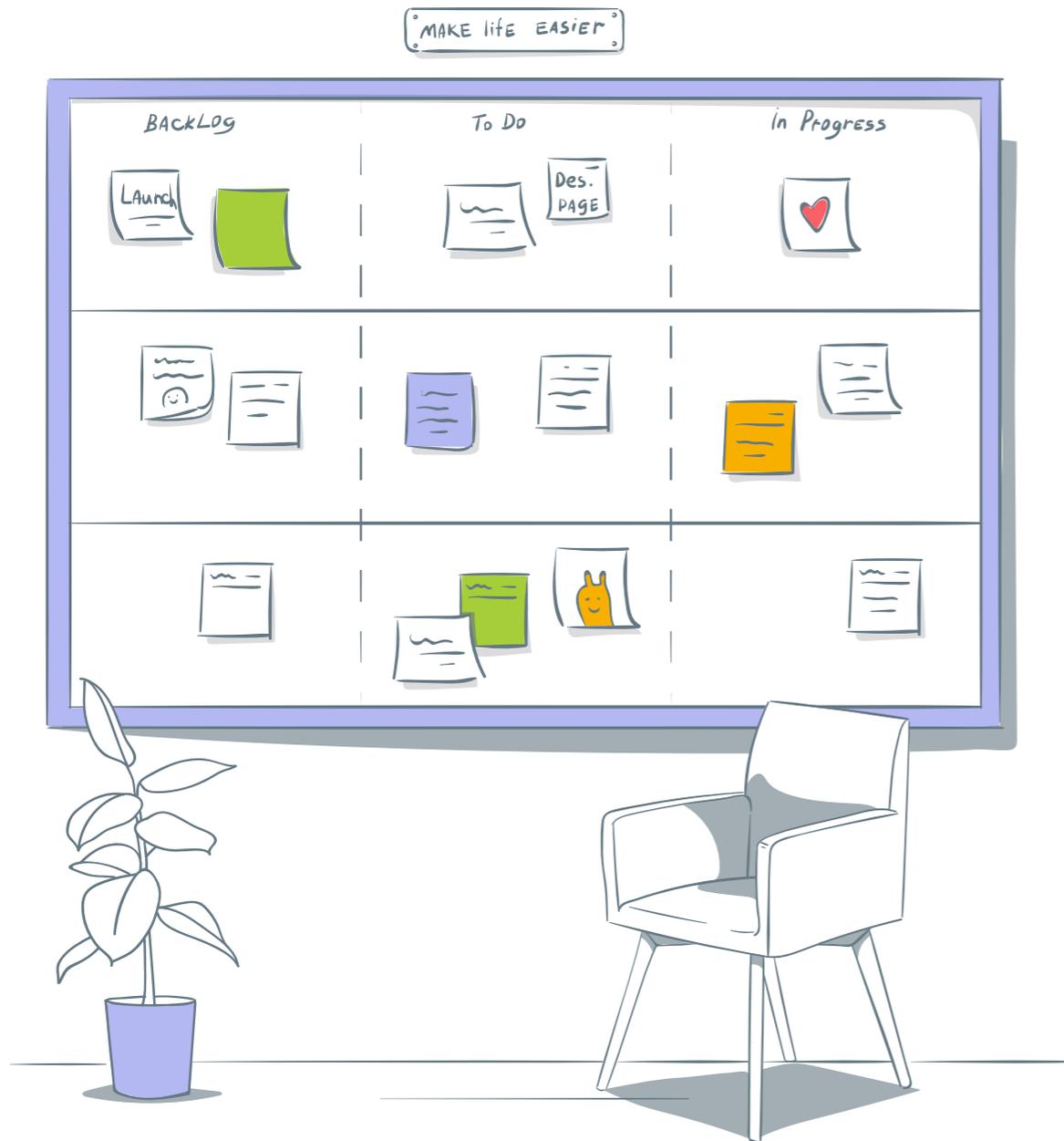
Every project manager wants to give accurate estimates for deliverables and initiatives. The spreadsheet approach makes that extremely difficult. Spreadsheets don't provide visibility into critical project overlaps, workloads, dependencies, work status, and bottlenecks. What's more, when you miss deadlines, it not only negatively impacts the project, it damages your effectiveness and credibility with your team, peers, and superiors.

Without visibility into projects, you are likely to feel your employees aren't meeting expectations and doing their best. You lose trust in their ability to deliver high-quality work and results.

Likewise, your team will sense your frustration and will also feel overloaded, undervalued, and unfulfilled themselves. Disillusioned and unengaged employees contribute to staff turnover. The bigger the team, the bigger this problem can become. And as your team grows beyond a dozen people, you need a better way to structure work that provides transparency into schedules, workloads, and roadblocks.



How to Avoid This Cost



Depending on your team size and process, you may want to implement an agile method of working, such as scrum or Kanban. Agile enables teams to be more nimble, efficient, and effective at coordinating work and intra-day task planning by giving everyone instant access to up-to-the-minute project status information. So nothing is lost and everyone can see what's being worked on.

In order to increase project transparency, TGI Friday's created several executive dashboards and reports in Wrike to keep executives and cross-functional teams up-to-date on project status. They can now quickly generate and share performance metrics, including a chart of total tasks completed and overdue. They do this for all brand initiatives, and include IT, Finance, and Digital teams, to closely monitor workloads and measure overdue tasks.

"We're here to make life easier for those in the restaurants. If we don't deliver all elements on the live date, they lose trust in us," says Kimberly Otte, Menu Innovation Project Manager at TGI Friday's.

This fast, high-quality execution is definitely paying off. Take-out sales at TGI Friday's are up 30% since they launched an online ordering campaign in 2016. Even better, over 70% of online orders come from new customers.

Miscommunication and Duplication

You can't project manage with spreadsheets alone.

Communication and documentation happen outside the grid.

There are emails. IMs. Creative briefs. Requests for Proposal.

Product Requirements Documents. You juggle multiple tools just to communicate, coordinate, and plan next steps.

But the biggest communicator killer is the creation of siloes.

Spreadsheets force team members to work in their own information silo. The result: No one knows who is working on what. Next thing you know there are conflicting team priorities, expectations, and project updates. Critical players are out of sync.

And the entire project is off the rails as more time is wasted hunting for assets and critical information in email threads with dozens of replies and old Slack messages.

That's not only frustrating, it's incredibly inefficient and costly.

A [McKinsey study](#) found that the average employee spends 28% of the work week just managing email and nearly 20% looking for internal information. That's a large chunk of change when you multiply that across a team and the entire company.



How to Avoid This Cost

Let's take a look at Hootsuite again. The marketing operations team at the social media platform faced this very challenge. Managing the increasing volume of projects and tasks became a major headache as the company grew. Spreadsheets and countless email chains didn't make it any easier.

"We had no way to pull reports, so there was no way of knowing how many projects we were doing, who we were doing them for, or how long it was taking us," said Kate Chalmers, Hootsuite's Director of Marketing Operations.

To solve this problem and reign in the cost on the company, Hootsuite knew they need a centralized location to manage all their projects. Wrike provided them that single source of truth. It's not just the tool, but what they did with it.

Once Hootsuite moved to Wrike, they instituted a centralized location for handling any volume of projects and tasks. And they created a system that automatically generates productivity reports with just a mouse click.

"Without Wrike, it becomes threads and threads of emails," says Brian Lam, Marketing Project Manager. "Sometimes you might have five or six threads of emails about the same project. With Wrike, we have a central location for the stakeholders and all the content creators to communicate; work out the timeline, content, design, or copy issues together."

The Hootsuite team was able to put their all of their data into one place, plus streamline their work and provide greater visibility into projects. Instead of starting from scratch on repeated tasks, they're able to duplicate them and assign them quickly. The marketing ops team can now analyze campaigns each quarter, compare quarterly results, and track productivity over time. Not only that, every quarter they can provide accurate, up-to-date reports to the executive team showing how productive they are, how many projects they've completed, and how efficiently they went to market with each one.

Mobile Ineptitude

Smartphones are everywhere. And mobile is quickly becoming a staple of project management. It's estimated that people who use mobile devices for work will jump to 105.4 million in the U.S. by 2020, accounting for 72.3 percent of the total workforce.

We conducted our own mobile productivity study. 43 percent of 850 business professionals surveyed said mobile is critical to getting their jobs done. 44 percent of those also said they check the progress of their projects more than 20 times a day. In addition, mobile increases productivity for 82 percent surveyed. 40 percent save up to two hours of time spent on work. 29 percent save three to four hours. 13 percent save five or more hours. It's clear from these results that mobile speeds up productivity for individuals and teams, and offers time back to employees.

However, it's painful to use a spreadsheet on a mobile device. First, spreadsheets are hard to view on a smartphone. Spreadsheets contain cells and cells of intricate data, which requires a lot of pinch and zoom to read on small device. Second, you can't really enter

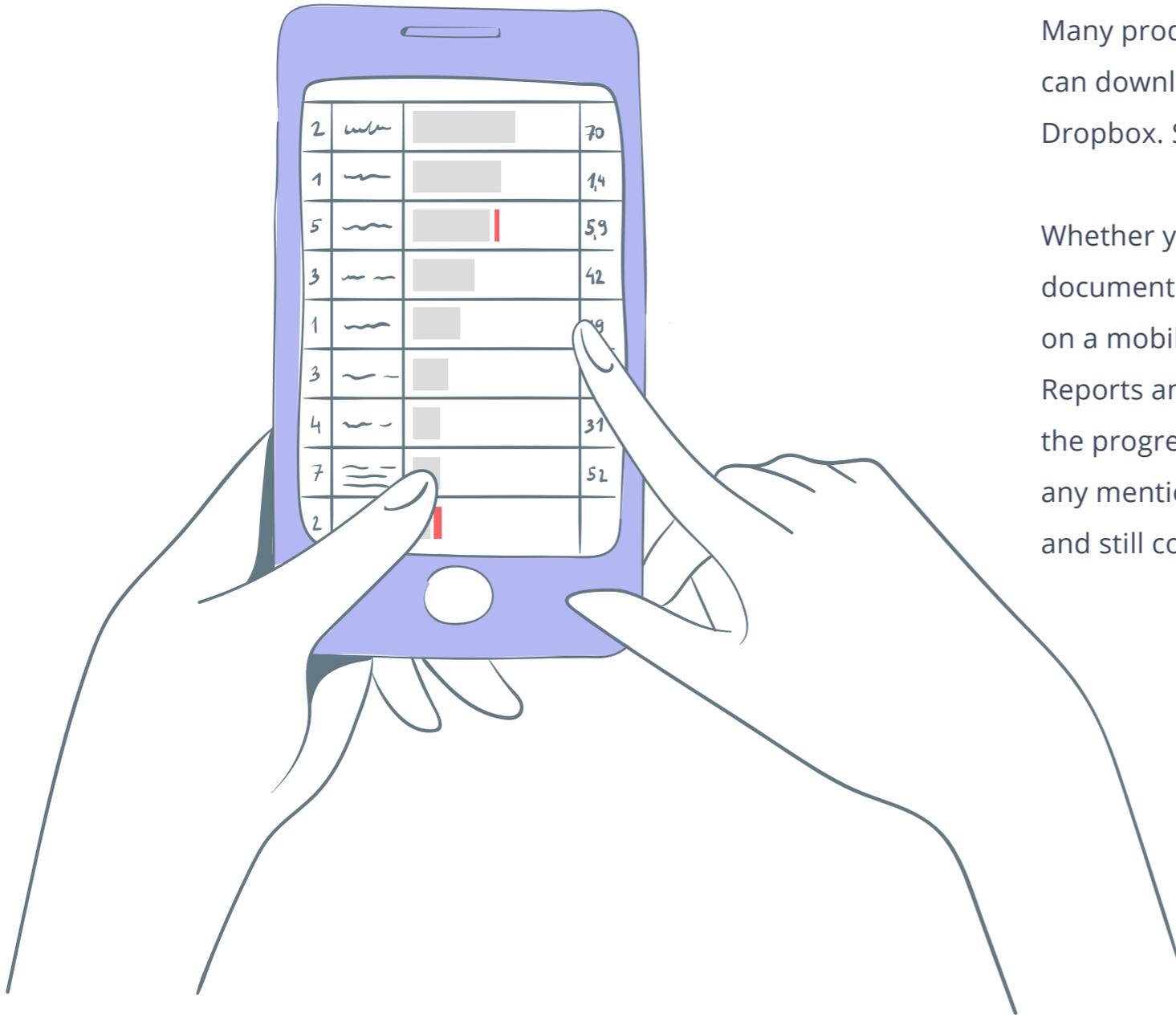
information into a cell from your device. (Well, you could but you'd have use one or two typing fingers and be extremely patient.) When it comes to creating a spreadsheet, it's far easier and faster to use a laptop or desktop.



How to Avoid This Cost

Many productivity tools and channels have apps that you can download on your smartphone. Gmail for... well, email. Dropbox. Slack. So does [Wrike](#).

Whether you're working on an iPhone or an Android, you can check documents, dashboards, and access reports. Unlike a spreadsheet on a mobile device, you can create and edit tasks from your phone. Reports and dashboards are viewable on the app, so you can track the progress of your projects. And you can get notified whenever any mentions you in Wrike. The app allows you to be on the go and still collaborate with your team.



Make the Right Move in Project Management: Wrike

Today thousands of businesses worldwide, including innovators such as [Stitch Fix](#), [Airbnb](#) and [TGI Fridays](#), have made the move to Wrike. If you're ready to up your game, you're ready for Wrike. You can start right now with a free trial of our award-winning project management app. Experience first-hand how the right tool can help you streamline processes, meet deadlines, and save huge amounts of time and money.

Get started *for free*

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Once we actually started to utilize Wrike and its full functionality that single ecosystem became more of a reality. The team can concentrate on their own work stream, while staying plugged into the greater project

— *Hoon Kim, Creative Production Manager, Airbnb*

