



Taking the hint

Don't lose your cool when you're up against it in Excel. Stephen Wells presents some sharp tips to help you work with spreadsheets faster.

This month I have looked at a range of the most effective ways to use spreadsheets without losing your mind. Here are some of the best Excel hints and tips around.

➤ **The difference between the FIND and SEARCH functions:** You can use either to find one string of text within another, but FIND is case-sensitive (it knows the difference between capitals and lower case) and SEARCH allows wildcard characters (? and *).

➤ **How to enter,** say, a nine-digit part number as 012345678 and have it display as 0 123 45 678:

Create a custom format for the column using 0 0## ## ###. The first zeros let you start with zeros if required. This format is a number, not text, and in other cells you can add and subtract from your entries.

➤ **How to save** a workbook to the

➤ **VIA EXCEL HELP, YOU CAN GO TO THE EXCEL WEB SITE FOR THE LATEST DEMOS AND DOWNLOADS OF PATCHES AND TEMPLATES**

Desktop:
Choose
File, Save.

Excel, by default, saves files in the My Documents folder. In the Save In list box, click the Up One Level button three times. Now the Desktop folder name displays and you can save your file.

➤ **You can display** a date as 5/7/98 rather than 05/07/98:

This is one of the standard offered Date formats but not Excel's default version. Right-click and choose Format Cells, Date and then pick the right type.

➤ **How to get** a record of the files initially installed by Office 97: In the directory C:\Program files\Microsoft Office\Office\Setup look for the file ACME.LST. You can open it with WordPad.

➤ **You can display** two Excel worksheets at once:
Choose Window, New Window, then

Window, Arrange.

Choose among the arrangement options, then OK.

Select from the tabs at the foot of one Window to pick the second sheet to display.

To show more tabs, hold the mouse button and slide the vertical line to the right of the visible tabs.

➤ **Reverse the order** of two displayed worksheets:

When one is active, right-click on the Title Bar of the inactive sheet and choose Arrange, OK.

➤ **To jump from** one Window to another:
Press Ctrl+F6.

➤ **The fastest way** to insert a block of cells: Select the range where you want the new block inserted. Hold down the Shift key, then drag the fill handle at the lower right of the range.

➤ **The fastest way** to copy a range of cells to several worksheets: Hold down the Ctrl key and click the tabs of the sheets to which you wish to copy the range. Select the range. Then choose Edit, Fill, Across Worksheets, All.

➤ **And the fastest** way to total a range of figures: Click the cell where you want the total then double-click the AutoSum tool. This bypasses the step where Excel normally outlines the cells to be totalled.



LANGUAGE BARRIER

In the May '98 column, reader Steve Lyons had a problem with Excel 5.0: he works in England for a company which also has offices in Switzerland, and was experiencing problems opening some spreadsheets from the Swiss branch.

William Crichton, at Kodak, throws some more light on the matter: "With reference to your article in the May issue, I have experienced this language problem — exchanging Excel files between offices — because I deal with other European countries. The simple fact is that all the other



language versions of Excel include the English DLLs, and so on, but the English version *only* has the English ones.

"This means that if the macros are written in an English version, all other European versions can run them but not vice-versa. Therefore, international companies should standardise on the English version."

PCW CONTACTS

Stephen Wells invites feedback on the Spreadsheets column. Write to him via the PCW Editorial office (address, p10) or email spreadsheets@pcw.co.uk

Questions & answers

Q You have previously described using the SUBTOTAL function for Excel, Lotus and Quattro Pro. But is it possible to use a variable number of rows in the SUM or SUBTOTAL functions? This might be used where columns of data are slowly increased in length as new entries are added. In Excel, the SUM function might read =SUM(A1:A10) after one iteration, but will then need to read =SUM(A1:A11) after the next. Can I vary the length of the SUM command?

JEFF DUNN

a The traditional way around this is to select your current range plus another row at the bottom (blank) and give it a Name. Then write your SUM function using the Name.

Q I have one machine running Windows 3.11/Excel 5 and another running Windows 95 and Excel 7. After loading some spreadsheets in v7 and then back into v5, I get the error message "File format no longer supported". It only seems to happen for files containing macros, and I get the same error message when I try to record any new macro in v5. Re-installing Excel 5 doesn't help. It's rendered v5 useless and is driving me mad.

JIM POLMEAR

a You can save an Excel 97 file in the dual format: "MS Excel 97 & 5.0/95 workbook", or "Excel 5/95 workbook", or "Excel 4", but there is no option to save in Excel 5 for Windows 3.11. You should probably

save it in Excel 4, then open that file in Excel 5 (although I don't have Windows 3.11 around to try it for you). As for macros, it is two different systems. VBA has changed too much between versions for backwards compatibility. And lot of people, I have realised, suffer these same problems when they have an up-to-date platform at home, when their office, because of potential multiple-unit hardware costs, lags behind.

Q Owing to changes in my business, I have re-read your *Financial Analysis* series of articles. Did the templates, especially for the service company, ever get onto a PCW cover CD?

PETER HARRIES

a This series appeared in PCW from the September '94 to January '96 issues. The templates were repeated on the cover-mounted CD-ROM on our May '97 issue (see p10 for how to obtain back issues).

Q In Excel 97, is it possible to change the format of a cell within a formula? I have a column of dates and a lookup table of payment dates. If the date in the cell matches a date in the lookup table, I want to be able to format the text in red. I'm sure you used to be able to do this in SuperCalc.

Also, I picked up a nice little World Cup spreadsheet the other day, and in the background there was a wallpaper effect with France 98 on it. I can't figure out how this is done. It doesn't appear to be in the cell formatting. Do you have any ideas about this?

ANDY BETES

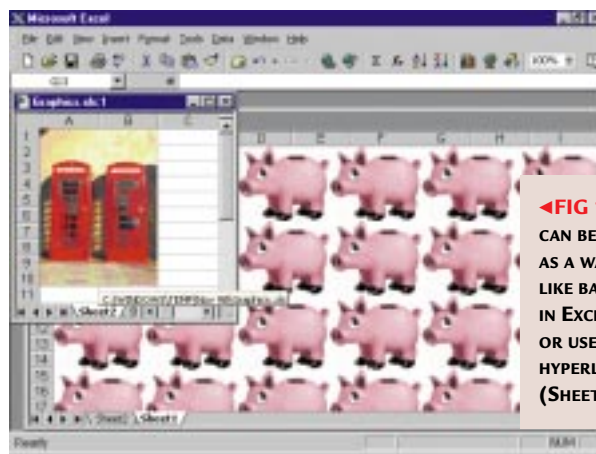


FIG 1 A GRAPHIC CAN BE REPEATED AS A WALLPAPER-LIKE BACKGROUND IN EXCEL (SHEET 1) OR USED AS A HYPERLINK (SHEET 2)

a To format text red under certain conditions, choose Format, Conditional formatting. And also read "Apply conditional formats to cells" in the Help file. To add a background graphic, choose Format, Sheet, Background and select a graphic like the pigs in Fig 1 from, say, the Office CD-ROM. If you want one large scene, not repeated on the page, resize the graphic before you import it or pick a large graphic (Fig 2). To use a graphic as a hyperlink — meaning, you can click on it to go somewhere else — choose Insert, Picture, ClipArt, like the phone boxes in Fig 1. Resize with the corner handles, then press Ctrl+K and assign the hyperlink.

Q Is it possible in either Excel 95 or Excel 97 to put a line feed within a cell so that a long sentence wraps around onto a new line but within the same cell, like word wrap?

ANDREW JOHNSON

a To display multiple lines of text within a cell, first select the cells you want to format. Then, in the Format menu, click Cells and then click the Alignment tab. Under Text control, select the Wrap text check box.

To start a new line of text at a specific point, you just click in the formula bar — or cell, if you are editing in the cell — where you want to break the line, and then press ALT+ENTER.

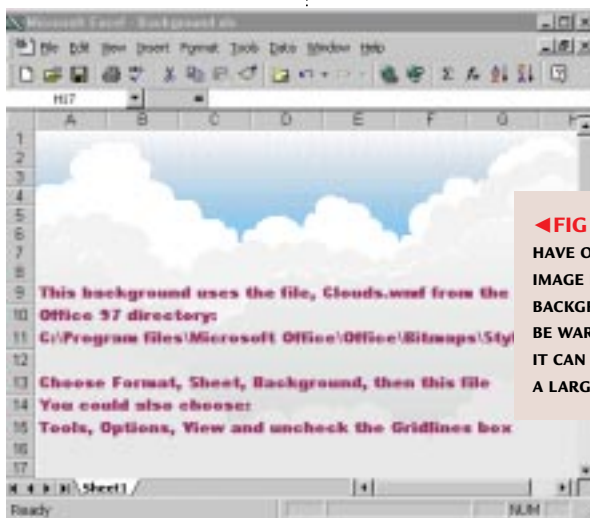


FIG 2 YOU CAN HAVE ONE LARGE IMAGE FOR THE BACKGROUND, BUT BE WARNED — IT CAN MAKE FOR A LARGE FILE