

FREE BUSINESS RESOURCE

Excel, Access or Google Sheets Decision Guide

A practical comparison for choosing the right platform for a small-business workflow.

Use this guide to compare Excel, Microsoft Access and Google Sheets. The best platform depends on the workflow, number of users, record relationships and software already available.

01 Start with the workflow

Mark every statement that applies.

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|--|---|
| ☐ The process is mainly lists, calculations and reports | ☐ Users need forms and linked records rather than direct spreadsheet editing |
| ☐ Several people need browser access from different locations | ☐ Macros or desktop automation are important |
| ☐ The business already has Microsoft Access for Windows | ☐ The team prefers Google Workspace and Apps Script |
| ☐ The data contains related customers, jobs, products or transactions | ☐ Offline desktop use is important |
| ☐ Formal permissions and controlled data entry are required | ☐ The system must remain simple for a small number of users |

02 Platform indicators

These are practical indicators, not absolute rules.

- ☐ **Excel:** familiar tables, calculations, dashboards, desktop forms and VBA automation
- ☐ **Microsoft Access:** structured related records, forms, queries and reports on Windows desktop
- ☐ **Google Sheets:** browser access, simple sharing, connected forms and Apps Script workflows
- ☐ **Consider another platform:** complex permissions, high transaction volume, mobile-first use or large multi-site operations

Your non-negotiable requirements

PLATFORM COMPARISON

Compare the strengths and limitations against your actual business requirements.

Decision area	Excel	Microsoft Access	Google Sheets
Best suited to	Calculations, trackers, dashboards and familiar spreadsheet workflows.	Related records, forms, searches, queries and reports.	Shared browser-based trackers and connected Apps Script tools.
Typical users	One person or a small desktop team.	One person or a small Windows team; multi-user setup needs planning.	Small distributed teams with Google accounts.
Data structure	Flat tables and formulas; relationships can become harder to maintain.	Strong for customers, jobs, products and other related records.	Mostly table-based; relationships require careful design.
Automation	VBA and formulas on desktop Excel.	VBA, macros, queries and reports.	Apps Script, formulas and web-app interfaces.
Browser access	Limited for macro-enabled desktop tools.	No native browser front end.	Strong; designed for browser access.
Compatibility	Desktop Excel and macro settings may be required.	Microsoft Access for Windows is required.	Google account and authorisation may be required.
Watch for	Duplicate files, broken formulas and uncontrolled editing.	Deployment, backups, network use and Access licensing.	Permissions, Apps Script setup and internet dependency.

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Decision record

Record the chosen direction and the reason before starting implementation.

- ☐ Preferred platform: _____
- ☐ Main reason: _____
- ☐ Required software confirmed: _____
- ☐ Data owner: _____
- ☐ Backup approach: _____
- ☐ Review date: _____