

Automate Manual Tasks With Microsoft Office Macros

Are you familiar with the phrase 'all the gear, but no idea'? This is very fitting for many Microsoft Office owners. As I'm sure most of you will agree, Microsoft products can be extremely powerful but at times incredibly frustrating too.

It is of little use having lots of cool tools, but not being able to use them properly and being completely unaware as to the ease of automation for routine manual tasks.

If this sounds like you, fear not, you are not alone! Most people use Microsoft Office to only a fraction of its full potential. You needn't be an expert to benefit from the automation of highly labour intensive manual tasks.

Excel is more than just a Glorified Calculator

Contrary to common belief, Microsoft Excel is more than just a glorified calculator and Word has come along leaps and bounds since its early word processor days. In fact, all the Microsoft Office programs offer an array of advanced features including programmable macros that can be used to automate a variety of tasks - and you don't have to be a whizz-kid programmer either!

Of course, the hard part is deducing what can and what can't be automated and then learning how to automate what can. If you are not that technically savvy, then it may be a wise investment of time to attend an instructor-led training programme.

Professional trainers often have development experience and are able to communicate technical jargon in plain straightforward English. That's their job, that's what they do best!

Creating Macros for Every Day Boring Manual Tasks

All Microsoft Office programmes allow you to create macros, which are shortcuts to tasks that you do repeatedly. You can approach macros one of two ways. The first is by programming lines of hand code, Eek! If this sounds like you, then you may like to go down the more technical route of Visual Basic for Applications (VBA) training.

Fortunately the second option is much simpler, whereby you are able to record a common task through the use of a macro. It's similar to recording a T.V. programme on your VHS player, simply hit record, then demonstrate the task and then click stop when you have finished. No programming to learn here!

For example, you may have an Excel document where you manage data every week or month and you organise or analyse the data the same way every time? Or you regularly apply the same combination of formats and styles? Macro's can help; they will be your new best friend!

This easily automated process works by recording mouse clicks and keystrokes that can be played back and applied to new sets of data whenever required - it really is that simple! The series of commands are then played in the exact order to perform a specific task, which can be run on a regular basis.

Example of How to Setup a Simple Macro

Please follow these guidelines to see how to setup a simple macro. You could start off by trying it in Microsoft Word or Excel.

- * Tools | Macro | Record New Macro
- * Enter the Macro Name in the Record Macro dialog box
- * Click OK, you will notice a Stop Recording toolbar appears
- * You are ready to Record. Enter the commands and keystrokes in the same order required to complete the task.
- * Click the Stop Recording button when you have completed your task and Voila - you are all set to finally say NO to boring manual repetitive tasks!

Running the Macro

There are several ways you can run your brand new macro. If you use your macro frequently, you may decide to create a button or keyboard shortcut to execute it. Failing that, you can just use the menu system - here is a breakdown of what is involved with each:

Using the Tools Menu

This is the simpler but slightly long winded approach:

- * Select the cell where you would like the formatting to begin

- * Tools | Macro | Click the Name of the Macro

- * Click Run

Assign a Keystroke to Launch your Macro

- * Tools | Macro | Click the Name of the Macro

- * Click Options and in the Shortcut key box, enter Ctrl + another character

- * You can then enter the Shortcut combination e.g. Ctr + J to run the macro at any time

Be careful not to use a keystroke that already exists such as copy, Ctr + C.

Using a Toolbar Button to Run your Macro

This is probably the clearest way if you are creating a macro that is intended to be run by anyone else:

- * Tool | Customise | Select the Commands tab

- * Under Categories, select Macros

- * You can then drag the Custom Button onto the toolbar where appropriate

- * In the Customize Dialog box, select Modify Selection

- * Click Assign Macro and then click the name of your Macro

The Microsoft Office suite is packed full of features to save you time and effort. Macros are a great way of minimising the time spent on repetitive mundane tasks. If you require more information on macro development or other time saving Office activities there is now a wealth of resources online, or if you feel a more interactive approach would suite you enquire with a Microsoft training company.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

About the Author

Author is a trainer with a Microsoft Office training company, the UK industry leader in its sector. For more information on Microsoft Office Training, visit <http://www.microsofttraining.net>.