

## Excel at 25: Company History

'Mighty oaks from little acorns...'



Nearly all large successful businesses start out as small hopeful ones, and the 25-year history of Excel shows it was no exception.

While today's Excel is a trusted IT infrastructure and support partner to some of the world's leading global corporations, this is just the latest chapter in a story which started in 1989 with plans spread out across the company's first 'office', a Billerica kitchen table.

The transformation from micro-enterprise to global company has been quite a journey. At times the growth has been steady, at other times spectacular. Success has been achieved through commitment, hard work, great people and, inevitably, the occasional moment of good fortune. But it has also been achieved without ever sacrificing the fundamental values which characterised the business in those early years.

### 1989 to 1994: the early years

The Excel story started, as did many similar stories from the early days of IT, with a BT apprenticeship. While the vast majority of technology from those days ("IBM cabling with huge connectors") has gone for ever, the training and the relationships forged in those early years were pivotal to the founding and early development of Excel.

While some apprentices chose to stay with BT on completion of their apprenticeships, and others chose to move to established competitors, Mark and a colleague decided instead to go it alone. Excel was born, initially under the name Excel Communications.

The company's first opportunity came through a chance encounter with another

former BT apprentice, now working with a global financial services business in the City of London. While this opportunity turned out to be a three-month cable tidying operation ("12 weeks ruining a cheap suit by crawling under desks with cable ties and velcro tape," recalls Mark), it quickly led to an expanding portfolio of work. Their first new cabling job was to install a single 10 pair voice cable for a new trading position; then a year later it was a 100 pair cabling job – for which a quick bank loan was required to buy the cable!

On the back of successful projects the team was asked to implement desktop moves and changes, and then from 1991 to provide end-to-end managed services.

These were exciting, and daunting, times for anyone involved in IT connectivity. 1991 saw the publication of the new cabling standard EIA/TIA 568 – effectively the birth of the modern structured cabling system. The Cat 3 cabling standard was quickly followed by Cat 4 and Cat 5, and with no internet for anyone to learn from, this meant that everyone was doing a lot of on-the-job learning, a lot of reading and a lot of Europe-wide trips to new technology and best practice conferences.



**Photo above:**  
Pioneers – team members Steve Cox, Gary Jeffreys, Terry Guy and Steve Morement get to grips with an early project

"It's always been important to me that 'big Excel' has the same values that 'little Excel' had.

"We successfully operate in huge global corporate spaces now, and I'm really proud of that. But knowing everyone's name still really matters."

**Mark Smith, Founder**

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In 1993, the still-young Excel got its first chance to deliver a major project to showcase its growing expertise in this new technology – the installation of the structured cabling for an entire new trading floor. Although the three-man Excel team had to work gruelling 18 hour shifts to deliver the project alongside their existing business-as-usual support commitments, it was a breakthrough achievement.

Within a year the business was reformed as a limited company with Gary Jeffreys joining Mark, the name Excel I.T. Limited appeared for the first time, and the company was celebrating its first job on mainland Europe – a modest project in Frankfurt.

### 1995 to 2008: to Europe and beyond

If growth had been steady and evolutionary through those early years, a single telephone call in late 1994 was all it took to set the company on a path towards rapid, and pan-European, growth. The call was an opportunity to tender for a major cabling project for a financial services facility 'outside of London'. This turned out to mean Moscow, and after "the most daunting and confrontational selection and interview process of my life", Mark was celebrating the company's biggest-ever overseas win – and its first million dollar contract.

Delivering such a major project, from 1995 to 1997, turned out to be nearly as gruelling as the company's first trading floor job had been just 18 months earlier. At the height of the project, Excel was keeping five apartments for staff in Moscow (a situation further complicated

when one burnt down), and Mark himself was making up to three trips a week to bring across parts and review progress.

But, critically, the framework and infrastructure of a more established company were now falling into place. Administration staff were appointed to leave the technical and project teams to focus on what they did best; four people became eight became 16 and more; and the distinctive processes and methodologies on which the company had built its success were becoming formalised for more rapid deployment. New contracts were secured, now not just in London but across the major financial capitals of Europe.

Moving into the new millennium, the business was becoming what Mark had always hoped it might – a large global business which had nevertheless managed to retain within it some of the unique character and the bonds that are characteristic of a smaller business. This provided the platform for a successful period in which the business passed a number of key milestones:

- In 2002 we celebrated our 100,000th MAC (moves, adds and change).
- 2003 saw the team move into new office space in Grays, a building which remains HQ thanks to some significant extensions.
- By 2006 we had completed 2,000 server migrations across a myriad of blue chip customers.
- Gavin Burger joined bringing strong managerial experience to drive managed services and client relationships.
- Our 100th employee joined in 2008



**Photo above:**  
'The Dirty Dozen' – the nucleus of the 1995-97 Moscow team

"Excel's reputation for unrivalled service and its blue chip customer base combined with its impressive track record laid the foundations for the investment opportunity to grow Excel to the next stage of development."

**Barry Horgan, Director**

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### 2008 to 2013: investing for the future

2008 would be a pivotal year for Excel, with ambitious plans for growth falling into place. A senior team with the experience and skills necessary to take the company to yet another level was coming together. With a solid reputation and client base already in place, Barry Horgan and Jakob Moeller-Jensen were pivotal in securing the investment of significant capital and resources to build on those foundations. Together, Mark, Barry, Gavin and Jakob targeted key areas for that investment.

To meet expanding demand across the UK and Europe, the company opened new offices, first in London, Birmingham and Edinburgh, and then in Frankfurt.

In 2010 the company welcomed its 150th member of staff, and launched Xact™, the powerful MIS tool which underpins Excel's integrated service delivery model, Xceed™.

2013 saw the launch of DeskQUERY™, Excel's uniquely powerful workspace and desk optimisation toolkit, and throughout this whole period the company secured more and more major contracts – including, with pleasing symmetry, one of the company's largest to date, which just happened to be back in Moscow where the global Excel story had really taken off in 1995.

### 2014 onwards: further opportunity

No one can know what the next 25 years will hold, but rest assured that whatever else changes, Excel's commitment to innovation and excellence won't. We firmly believe that the coming decades will see more dramatic change than ever across everything from technology to organisational structure, and that the best way to meet that challenge is to continue to invest in people, toolsets and processes so that we are always in a position to deliver "next generation" service and support to our clients.

As we celebrate 25 years of Excel, everyone here is proud to have played their part in this journey from the kitchen table to the heart of global corporate enterprise. We are proud of the long-standing client and supplier partnerships we have forged; proud of our reputation for delivering outstanding managed services and projects; and above all proud that no matter how much else has changed through success and growth, the business still feels uniquely 'Excel' after all these years.

We look forward to continuing on this exciting journey with all our staff, customers and partners.



Photo above:  
One of our first UTP patching frames, in the heart of the City of London

### Excel in 2014:

- » BAU support partner to blue-chip organisations across EMEA and beyond
- » Market leader in infrastructure projects
- » Pioneers in workspace and occupancy optimisation
- » Nationwide support to major organisations
- » Bespoke MIS tool, Xact™, that underpins our service delivery
- » 200+ staff across 5 offices
- » Staff retention at all-time high
- » Longest serving employee – 18 years' service
- » 30 staff with 10 years'+ service

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