

Delivering Successful Projects Starts With Sound Scheduling

The *right* scheduling solution will help keep projects on track, drive successful delivery and improve project profit margins.



Deltek

Imagine this: you're the project manager for a major project your organization is undertaking. You've planned the schedule down to the last detail, using an Excel spreadsheet, the method you've used for many years. A few weeks in, the project hits a snag. A vendor was unable to deliver important materials, and the necessary approvals to change suppliers could not be easily attained.

The project spreadsheet didn't account for these hiccups; the lack of foresight brings the project to a halt. Budgets and deadlines won't be met, your firm will eat the cost of budget overruns, and your client will be frustrated and unlikely to work with you in the future.

It's estimated that poor scheduling and project management practices cost organizations around the world about [\\$1 million every 20 seconds](#) in lost revenue, according to the Project Management Institute. Unfortunately, these mistakes also lead to more than one-third of projects failing to meet goals, and close to half (48%) of those are not completed on time.

Projects of all sizes often have numerous moving parts, and a deviation from the schedule of any of these pieces can lead to cost overruns, supply-chain bottlenecks, missed deadlines, and dissatisfied clients—all of which can affect a company's profit margin and reputation. Effective scheduling provides a critical foundation for the successful delivery of any project.

THE PROBLEMS OF POOR SCHEDULING

There are many factors that can lead to scheduling problems, including lack of a focused or flexible scope of the project, inability to forecast uncertainty and manage risk, inaccurate time reporting, and inefficient communication and decision-making channels. There are many reasons why poor or uncoordinated scheduling practices lead to problems, including the following:



Inexperienced project managers

Generational turnover and increased competition for talent has led to an increase in inexperienced project managers and schedulers across industries. Project managers that lack a foundational knowledge of business acumen can struggle to communicate project challenges to stakeholders, or worse, fail to recognize them, resulting in cost overruns and unsatisfied customers.



Risk management failures

Project risk exists throughout the project and dissipates once the project is complete. Strategic risk management must be an ongoing effort that meets basic standards and prevents putting project scope and costs at risk. A mature scheduling solution can help organizations predict and mitigate risks.



Lack of solution maturity

Manual methods of scheduling and project accounting can lead to a lack of confidence in project plans and provide few mechanisms for accountability. While some companies still feel confident using Excel and email to manage projects, companies often take on projects that are more complex than their software tools can handle. All it takes is one missed variable to lead to a work stoppage and a downstream effect on a company's profitability.



Industry variables

Schedulers in different industries often use various tools and methods for scheduling. What works for construction, for example, might not work for the oil and gas industry, or aerospace and defense. The right software can help ensure that industry standards are met and government regulations are followed.



Unforeseen schedule problems

Try as firms may to keep things rolling as planned, more times than not an unplanned error will lead to a schedule crash, especially in projects that can contain hundreds of thousands of individual project activities. A longer than planned lead time in manufacturing, a lag in supply chain and productivity, and unsigned documents can all lead to scope creep inherent in poorly managed projects. It is essential that scheduling tools anticipate and make corrections for even the smallest scheduling snafus.

THE BENEFITS OF USING SCHEDULING SOFTWARE

At its core, scheduling software helps schedulers and planners keep projects on time and on task. For some smaller projects, a simple Excel spreadsheet and email might suffice. At the end of the day, Critical Path Method (CPM) is nearly impossible to execute without CPM supported scheduling software and project delivery suffers as a result.

Enterprise-class project management technology allows planners and schedulers of any size project to create and track schedules, as well as make organizational improvements by implementing company best practices, establishing consistent standards, or providing simple reminders of issues to be addressed. Over time, these changes will result in better company reputation, happier clients, and higher profit margins.

Scheduling solutions, for the most part, are designed to handle projects of any size. Whether it's a smaller-scale project, or one with tens or even hundreds of thousands of activities, a more mature scheduling tool can handle the details and ensure the success of any project. Choosing the right solution for project scheduling can deliver many significant benefits.

Schedule stability and scalability

A scheduling tool has the ability to handle many thousands of scheduling activities to prevent catastrophic stoppage of a project. In addition, PPM software can help smaller organizations succeed and scale as their business grows.

Organization and accountability

Project success hinges on the ability to track many variables and key milestones, and being confident in the planned schedule. It can help ensure complicated industry and government standards are being met—in some industries, there are more than 500 metrics that must be followed to maintain compliance. Scheduling software can manage these moving pieces, detect and deal with any deviations, and adjust the schedule to keep the project moving along, no matter what.



Help set standardized practices

Scheduling software can help companies make their scheduling (and overall business practices) more efficient. When someone new takes over the role of scheduler, continuity of practices is essential. Entire companies can enjoy the benefits that come with standardizing scheduling practices across entire projects and departments, leading to more efficiency and future business success.

Risk mitigation and cost management

Schedule diagnostics software can help companies gain even more confidence in their plans by identifying the most likely risks to occur. The next step is to properly mitigate the risks, which helps firms meet project deadlines and manage costs and resources. Efficient risk management helps control costs, which in turn drives project profit margins. Sound and reliable software can help identify alternatives proactively to avoid disaster.

Ease of communication

Standardized forms and digital communications allow for easy sign-off of documents and hand-off of steps; that means no more looking for the proper person to make decisions on crucial tasks, especially when key players are in different geographic locations.

Simple-to-use dashboards

Interactive and clear visuals help schedulers keep tasks simple and organized, while allowing consistent accessibility of information even with multiple schedulers working concurrently in a single project. Scheduling solutions also have the ability to customize and automate repetitive tasks to keep any size project with multiple or repetitive tasks organized.



WHO USES SCHEDULING SOFTWARE?



There are many use cases in which scheduling software can be beneficial. Any organization that require meticulous choreography of the various moving parts in projects can take advantage of the various features offered.



Government contractors

Projects involving contracts with the government—for instance, the Department of Defense (DoD) or Department of Transportation (DoT)—require rigorous adherence to standards and regulations. Time frames, quantities, contacts, and milestones can change frequently and some PPM scheduling software solutions can keep track of more than 500 metrics needed to stay in compliance.



Schedulers

PPM solutions are the scheduler's best friend as they are the personnel responsible for creating a full schedule from a task activity level. They will enjoy the level of schedule control as well as the ability to review, allocate, and manage resources and budget, while minimizing risk.



Analysts

Schedule diagnostic software can perform schedule risk analysis on an ongoing basis over the course of a project, instead of intermittent or occasional analysis that can lead to execution problems that throw a project off track. For projects that have many thousands of activities, it's much easier and much more accurate than a human auditor poring through Excel spreadsheets.



Leadership

For the executive who needs to see things on a long-term basis, and how different projects work together at an enterprise level, scheduling solutions can provide realistic planning through rapid data entry, analysis and reporting at the portfolio level.

STEP UP YOUR SCHEDULING GAME WITH A MATURE SOLUTION

The time has come for organizations to stop accepting production delays, disgruntled clients, and smaller profit margins as a given factor in project execution. Instead, the goal should be to improve processes, increase successful project completion, and grow the company.

A more mature scheduling tool offers a logical way to create accountability, enable standardization, and establish best practices across the organization. Businesses will enjoy bolstered confidence in project schedules that complete within budget and on time—and that's what will keep happy customers coming back for more.

For more information about Deltek's industry-leading Project & Portfolio Management (PPM) solutions for scalable scheduling, effective cost management, and reliable risk evaluation, visit our website at www.deltek.com/ppm.



About Deltek

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