SMB Intelligence
Budget Planning

Introduction

As an Excel-based data entry tool with a flexible SQL Server database and a powerful companion report writer (SMB Intelligence Reporting), SMB Intelligence Planning can be used to automate budgeting and forecasting as well as other business processes that require data entry and a database. In other words, think of SMB Intelligence Planning as an automated way to save any data from Excel into a structured SQL database. For most people, budgets and forecasts are the first processes that come to mind, but in reality, most organizations have numerous manual data collection processes that could be automated with SMB Intelligence Planning.

The Planning module is Excel-based and it is one of four SMB Intelligence modules. The other three modules are:

1.) SMB Intelligence Data Warehouse Manager
   • Required, this is where the Planning module stores all data from Excel

2.) SMB Intelligence Reporting
   • Used if you want to create dynamics budget templates
   • Used as a report writer to report on all the data that Planning store to the Data Warehouse Manager database

3.) SMB Intelligence Dashboard module
   • Provides a dashboard interface with the data stored to the Data Warehouse module

As you will learn later in this document, administrators first configure the Planning module and the Data Warehouse database for the Excel model where the data entry and write-back will take place. The Excel template(s) is then provided to the end-users for data entry. After the users have entered and saved their data, managers can start reporting on the entered data. Finally, if desirable, the data can be transferred from the Data Warehouse database and back to other source systems such as a budget table in the general ledger.

User Interface Overview

SMB Intelligence Planning is a modern Excel add-in that has been designed with the latest Microsoft technologies and follows Microsoft best practices for interface design and usability. The interface was designed to maintain similar look and feel to the Office products, including the use of a ribbon and Outlook-style menu bar as the main navigation components.

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Planning Components

SMB Intelligence Planning is an Excel add-in just like SMB Intelligence Reporting. As you see in the image below, both Planning and Reporting are located right next to each other on the Excel ribbon. Reporting and budgeting are available side-by-side without the need to leave Excel.

SMB Intelligence Planning consists of two menus: the Excel ribbon and the Excel task pane. The latter is only used by administrators for setup and maintenance Planning.

Excel Ribbon:

• View, Check-in & Check-out Assignments
• Save data
• Update model settings from the server (the SMB Intelligence Data Warehouse Manager)
• Connection information (to the SMB Intelligence Data Warehouse Manager database)
• Access to administrative functions (task pane)
• Direct link to resources (Including SMB Intelligence documentation, videos and samples)

Excel Task Pane:
SMB Intelligence Planning task pane features the popular Microsoft Outlook-style menu bar. It has three main menu items:

1.) Data Settings

This is where the administrator performs the initial configuration by providing Planning with vital information about where data and dimensions are located in the underlying spreadsheet. Depending on how well organized and structured your Excel model is, SMB Intelligence Planning can be quickly configured to handle unlimited data input sections in one or multiple worksheets in a workbook. SMB Intelligence Planning can also automatically adapt to spreadsheets that "grow" (e.g. a new row or column that gets inserted in the Excel model) or "shrink" without the administrator having to update the settings. If there is a significant structural change to the company's Excel model, then the administrator can make the necessary changes to the Planning Data Settings that the end-users will see next time they open the Excel template (if the same Excel template is accessed centrally by all users) or if the Excel model has been distributed to end-users, they

simply click the "Update Settings" button on the Planning Excel ribbon and it will retrieve the latest settings from the SMB Intelligence Data Warehouse database. Part of the data setting setup is to choose where in the SMB Intelligence Data Warehouse database the data from Excel should be stored based on the type of data. For example, data (like budgets) related to Accounts is stored to the Finance (General Ledger) Module, detailed revenue data is stored in the Revenue Module, detailed employee/position data is stored to the Payroll Module, etc.
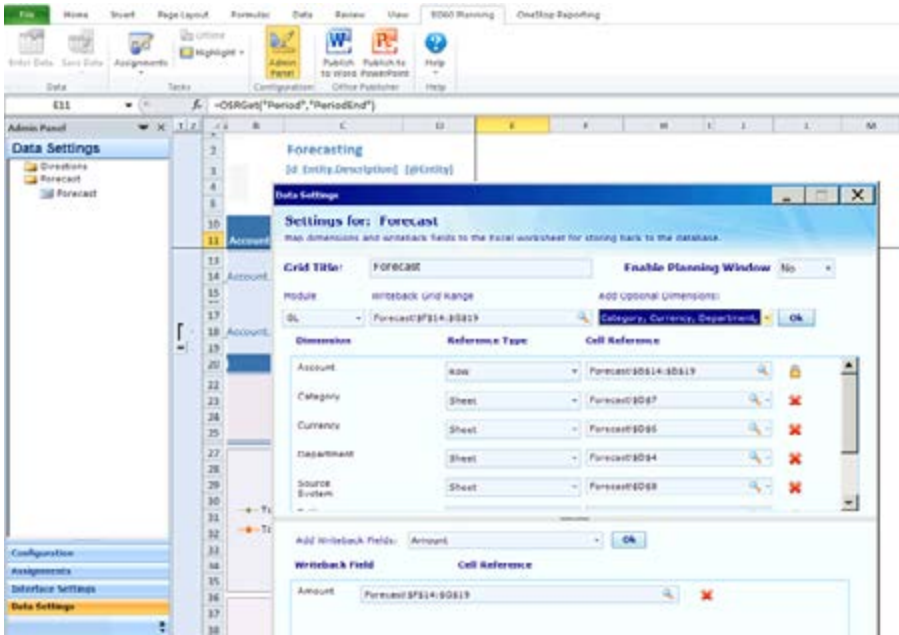

2.) Interface Settings

The Planning Interface Settings (see screenshot below) are directly related to the Planning Data Settings. While the Data Settings are focused on what sections of Excel should be saved where in the Data Warehouse and with which dimensions, the Interface Settings are focused on what you want the end-users to see if they use the Planning data entry screen (shown in the next paragraph).
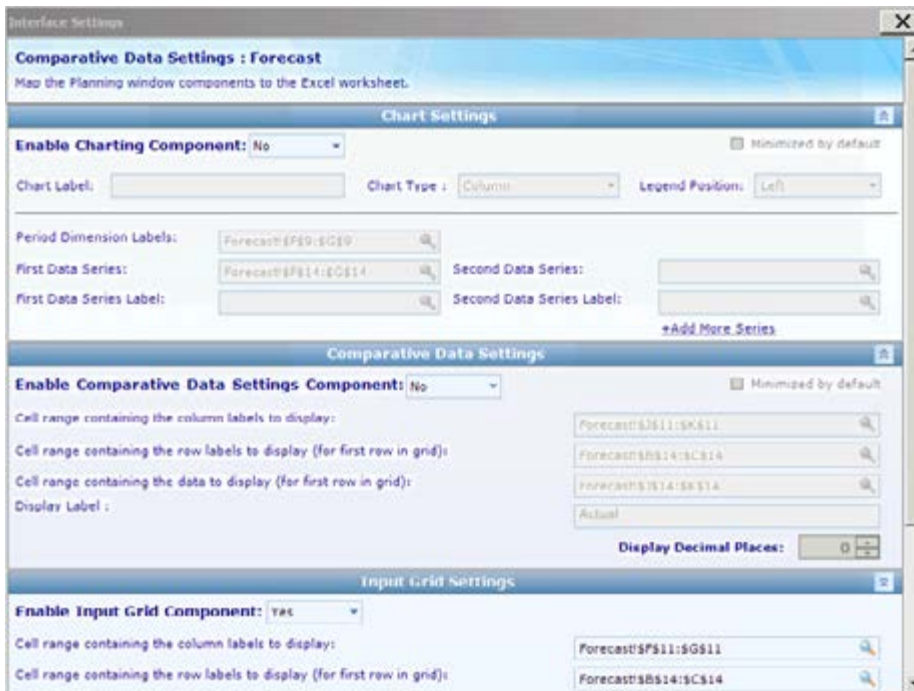
3.) Data Entry Window

The Planning data entry window (see image below) is an optional way of entering data in Excel. Users can type information directly into Excel, or they can open the SMB Intelligence Planning data entry screen and enter it there. When the data has been entered into Excel, it is automatically saved into the underlying row in Excel and then can be saved to the Data Warehouse database. The Planning data entry screen is a powerful tool for:

• Automatic spreading of numbers across many cells in Excel. Many spreading rules are available, including rules that can use prior year actuals or seasonal trends as a base

• Input of text comments at the row or line item level

• Input of many rows of line item detail below a single row in Excel (e.g. the user can list many business trips that automatically will roll up to a single travel expense row in Excel)

• Automatic charting of the current row in Excel and comparison to e.g. another row with historical data

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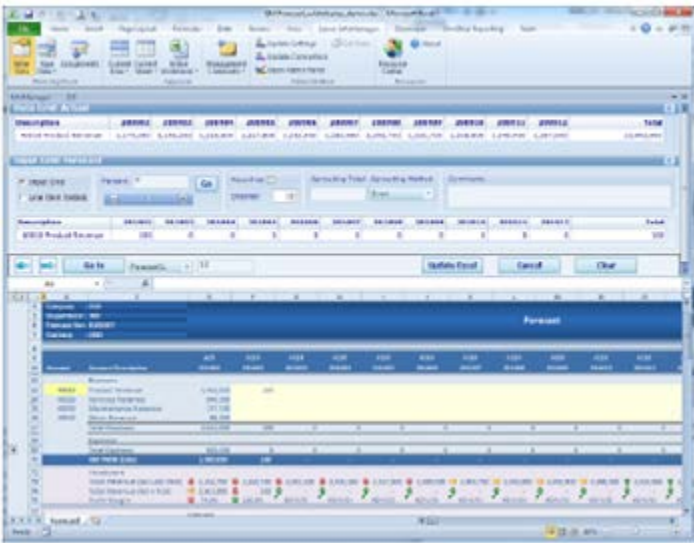
In short, SMB Intelligence Planning can store data (numbers and text) from any Excel spreadsheet. The data will always be stored to the Data Warehouse database. From there, the stored data can be sent back to Microsoft Dynamics GP, reported on or even processed into OLAP cubes for advanced analysis.

Practical Usage Examples

In most cases, Planning will be used as a budgeting and forecasting tool. Below is a list of the most typical variations of Excel budget models that SMB Intelligence Planning can handle.

Note that the Excel "input forms" can either be your own "static" Excel files or dynamic Excel templates that you design with SMB Intelligence Reporting or with similar Excel-based tools:

Excel Configuration and Input Type	Usage Examples
Modeling	Create a product or service model in Excel. Use SMB Intelligence Planning to store each scenario to the SMB Intelligence Data Warehouse module and use SMB Intelligence Reporting to output reports/ charts.
Break-back Analysis	Use one of the SMB Intelligence Planning's special break-back template (or design your own) to simulate items such as Net Profit and use SMB Intelligence auto-generate the related revenues and expenses based on historical trends

Excel Configuration and Input Type	Usage Examples
Allocations	Create the allocations model in Excel (you may use the SMB Intelligence Reporting module to to create automated, parameter driven allocation calculations), use SMB Intelligence Planning to store the allocated number to the SMB Intelligence Data Warehouse. From there use the allocations in SMB Intelligence Reporting or transfer the allocated numbers back to Dynamics GP.
Electronic Data Entry of: • Statistics • Key Performance Indictors (KPIs) • Other Organizational Information	Create input forms with Excel for any text or numerical information and SMB Intelligence Planning to store it in the SMB Intelligence Data Warehouse. From there create reports with SMB Intelligence Reporting, create OLAP cubes for analysis, or transfer the collected data to other systems.
Commentary Input for: • Monthly Actual/Budget Variance Reports • Scorecard KPIs • Quarterly/Annual Reports	Add comment columns to your Excel based financial statements or scorecards (e.g. generated dynamically with SMB Intelligence Reporting) and use SMB Intelligence Planning to save the text to the SMB Intelligence Date Warehouse. Use SMB Intelligence Reporting to create reports that pull the text comments from the database.

Here are examples of other uses of Planning as a data collection tool.

Note that the Excel "input forms" can either be your own "static" Excel files or dynamic Excel templates that you design with the SMB Intelligence report writer or with similar Excel-based tools:

Excel Configuration and Input Type	Usage Examples
Modeling	

Typical Implementation Process

A typical implementation process of SMB Intelligence Planning would look like this (in this example assume that SMB Intelligence Planning is being used for budgeting):

1. Train power users.
2. Identify budgeting needs.
3. Preparation of the SMB Intelligence Data Warehouse.
4. Populate the Data Warehouse with historical figures and dimensions from your General Ledger (and if needed also from systems like Payroll and Fixed Assets). Examples of dimensions are: Account, Department, Project, Product, Employee, Asset, etc.
5. Enter any other dimensions or historical data directly in the Data Warehouse if they do not already reside in another database from which they can be imported.
6. Preparation of Excel budget templates.
7. Design your budget templates (or use SMB Intelligence's pre-defined templates) with SMB Intelligence Reporting. In most cases, you can also use other Excel add-ins to produce your Excel templates. They will now be dynamic and parameter driven based on the dimensions and data you populated to the Data Warehouse in step one above.
8. Manually created Excel budget workbooks will also work (As a best practice, make them as structured as possible and make sure all dimensions are listed somewhere).
9. Planning Setup (as explained earlier in this section).
10. Train end users.