



rethink compliance.

Competent Compliance: 3 Ways to Move Beyond Spreadsheets

Webinar – Executive Summary

Overview

When companies embark on a compliance program, they often start by using an Excel spreadsheet to track simple compliance requirements. While Microsoft Excel is flexible and powerful, it's not designed to track compliance initiatives. As organizations mature, they find that they need to move away from Excel and towards a compliance software solution. Knowing when you need to make the leap to a more sophisticated compliance management process and a comprehensive GRC tool can make a huge difference in terms of audit costs and a pass or fail outcome.

What are the signs that using spreadsheets to track your compliance program has become totally impractical? And how do you know when you've outgrown Excel?

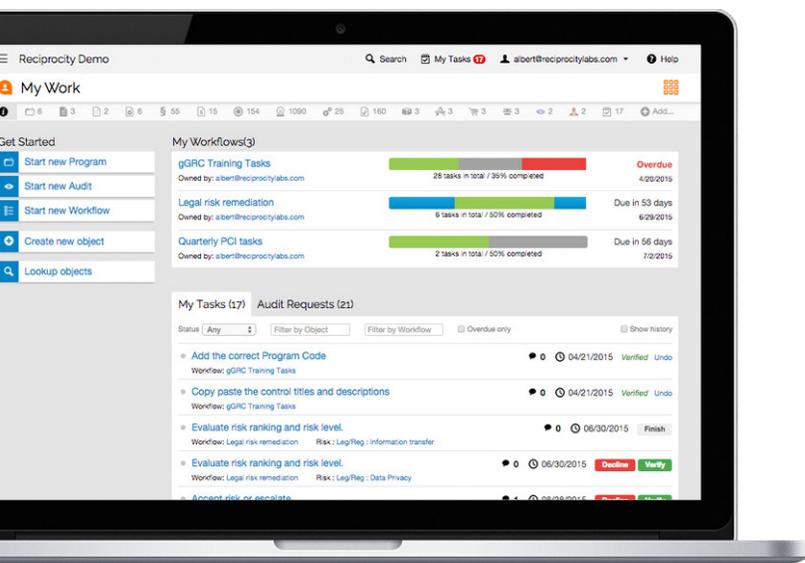
Aaron Kraus, Head of GRC Services for Reciprocity, and Timothy Schmutzler, Global Practice Director at OneGlobe, offered insights on how to overcome the early hazards of running a compliance program, the pitfalls of Microsoft Excel as a compliance tool, and when and how to move to a cloud-based GRC tool.

Key Learnings

Every Compliance Program Will Eventually Outgrow Excel

When companies start a compliance program, they often rely on spreadsheets, typically Excel, to manage their program. While Excel has many strengths, we've found that those strengths often end up turning into weaknesses. Case in point: in order to take advantage of all the rich features in Excel, you need to use the on-client application--the actual desktop program. Unfortunately, not all of those features are available across all platforms, so you can run into compatibility issues between Windows and Mac and find that the features you built into your workbook on a Windows computer won't work for a Mac user.

On the other hand, Excel is infinitely flexible. You can model just about any information in a spreadsheet, and sharing a workbook is as simple as attaching it to an email or dropping it into a file sharing program. Everyone can edit an Excel spreadsheet. But that flexibility comes with a hidden cost. A recent survey found that nearly 90% of spreadsheets used in



corporate environments contained errors. Excel offers very limited input validation and data integrity controls. Thus, the more people that edit your spreadsheet, the higher the risk of faulty data.

There's a common misconception that everyone knows how to use Excel. Most of your colleagues can probably kick the tires, bang around a little bit, but they may not know how to use the advanced features that are required for managing a complex compliance program such as pivot tables, feed look-up, index, or match.

As your compliance program grows, you're managing very complex workbooks that are also very brittle and can easily be changed or "broken," particularly as you add new team members or collaborators to your program. Excel can be a great solution if you have one or two compliance programs and a small team. As your compliance requirements grow and you add more compliance frameworks and build out your compliance team, what happens to your Excel-based program? Excel simply does not scale to keep up with your needs.

The Challenge Isn't Excel Itself, But a Manual Approach to Compliance

By using Excel to manage your compliance program, you're taking a labor-intensive, manual approach. One of the biggest challenges to a manual approach is the duplication of effort and the inconsistency of data. In large organizations, in particular, compliance data is often managed in silos--by business unit or geography. With spreadsheets it's impossible to get a centralized, singular perspective on your overall compliance program. And it's a lot of extra work to keep all those spreadsheets aligned.

It's also a challenge to provide timely updates. When management needs to understand, "Where do we stand in our testing for the year or our compliance program? Where are we on our outstanding issues?" it can be a major scramble to find that information. The reality is that compliance is changing all the time and a manual, spreadsheet-based compliance program simply isn't responsive to change.

Best Practices for Managing your Compliance Program More Efficiently

Consolidate your compliance controls. For example, most information security frameworks include a requirement for strong passwords. If you have a SOC2, a PCI, and an ISO 27002 compliance program, there's no reason to write three separate password controls to meet each of those separate program requirements. This requires you to rationalize the requirements across your various compliance frameworks. Not only does this result in reduced work, but it also allows you to get visibility into your compliance activities simply and easily. A unified control set can help you to relate current audit work with past audit work and reuse evidence, cutting down on the number of repeat requests that you have to submit to your evidence owners or control owners.

Focus on compliance ROI. Compliance is not a revenue-generating activity, but it does serve a very important value protection purpose. Compliance is crucial to the continued success and growth of your business, and as the manager of a compliance program you need to be able to communicate effectively the value of your contribution to the organization. And you need to communicate the value in terms that your management can easily understand. Interestingly, when we polled the audience we found that 56% of attendees said they don't know their compliance-related total cost of ownership and don't know how to figure it out.

Use a SaaS-based GRC tool. Cloud-based GRC solutions offer greater agility than an on-premise or Excel-based compliance solution and they can help your compliance program be more agile. The right tool allows you to adjust to changing business needs and objectives, and your GRC tool has the ability to keep up. When you're looking at a SaaS-based tool, the "time to go live" is crucial. This is a measure of how long it takes you to have a GRC tool that's up and running and functioning. A lengthy implementation, or a long time to go live, can mean that once your tool is finally available for use, it's irrelevant.

Moving from Spreadsheets to a GRC Tool. Where to Begin?

So you're ready to move your compliance management from spreadsheets to a SaaS-based GRC tool. Now what? We recommend avoiding a big bang implementation. If you have multiple geographies, multiple business units, multiple compliance needs you have to address, trying to shift the program all at once to a GRC tool can end up being a very complex, large, complicated endeavor.

First, start by developing a roadmap. Then identify a smaller scope to start--a single geography or business unit as the starting point for using the new tool. Choose an area where you can get traction quickly and leverage positive word of mouth to expand the use of the tool from there.

Change can be painful and communication with management, internal audit, risk owners, control owners, and external auditors is absolutely critical to the success of your GRC tool implementation and your compliance program.

Ready To Learn More?

Check out these additional resources:

- Watch the "[Competent Compliance: 3 Ways to Move Beyond Spreadsheets](#)" webinar replay
- Download the eBook, [Compliance Management Best Practices: When Will Excel Crush You?](#)
- Get the [Quick Guide to ZenGRC](#)

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