

Labour-saving devices in the home have been developed over many years. One, however, seems to have been overlooked by many people: the not-so-humble spreadsheet on their computers.

Ceri reminded us of what they can be used for and how much work they can save. This was done by explaining the way they work and showing how easily one can be set up.

They can be used to list a collection of items such as books; DVDs; foreign stamps or whatever you want to list. If you want to use numbers, it can add or subtract; multiply or divide them in any way you choose. Spreadsheets were invented to help with the calculation of numbers. They are fast, accurate, tireless and never get bored, no matter how mundane or repetitive the work.

A spreadsheet can be a single page (“worksheet”) that is divided into over 16,000,000 boxes (“cells”) that are stacked into 256 columns (A,B,C,D,E,F) and over 65000 rows (1,2,3,4,5,... to form a grid. (You do not have to use all of them!)

Each cell is identified by its column and row number, so the first cell will be A1 indicating it is in column A and Row 1.

Information can be stored in any cell in the form of a number, text, date or instruction. What is more, it can be arranged in numerical, alphabetical or date order if you wish.

The real power of the spreadsheet is its ability to store instructions to do things to the contents of selected cells and display the answer. A simple instruction would be (to display the answer of) multiplying the contents of one cell by the contents of another cell.

There is practically no limit to how complicated an instruction you could construct; but for more complicated ones, the spreadsheet has a large range of pre-formed instructions (functions) ready for you to use. There are groups of functions related to databases; date and time; engineering; finance; mathematics and more

...To save writing the same instruction many times, there are effortless procedures for copying instructions from one cell to many others so that a spreadsheet can be created very quickly.

For easier reading of a large array of numbers there are facilities to modify the appearance of cells by selecting different lettering size, style or colour. Similarly it is easy to apply lines to cell borders as well as background colours or shading – all in a selection of styles.

Ceri then gave a quick demonstration of converting the information from groups of cells into customisable charts for ease of reading.

She also showed that it was possible to tell the spreadsheet to filter the contents to, say, list all the numbers from a group of cells that meet a certain rule; such as between 50 and 120.

Once you become familiar with the basics of a spreadsheet there are many more features that can be brought into use. No matter how complex a spreadsheet you might eventually construct, there will be many labour-saving ways available to do so quickly and easily.

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In Brief

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