Argestus

Efficient and Error Free Data Handling in Excel

What is Argestus?

Ever had the feeling that you're spending too much time gathering the correct information from all available data, with the result not having time enough to figure out what exactly the outcome means for your company? For example compiling a sales report or specifications for the monthly closing If this sounds familiar, Argestus might be the perfect solution for you!

In many organisations MS Excel is (still) used a lot to convert Data from various systems into usable Information. Not only for reporting, but also for compiling specifications for the monthly closing, collect data to feed into other systems etc. Argestus is a Tool to automate these processes, reducing the time spend compiling, while checks on process- and data integrity warn the user of any mismatch that should be addressed. Argestus models can be adapted easily to adjusted requirements, and new 'reports' can be build by the users themselves without IT or consultants.

Argestus is built as a regular MS Excel AddIn. As an analogy; it functions much like the engine- and process-controls (steering/gas and brake levers, oil warning light etc.) of your car. You can drive your car without having any knowledge of what is under the hood. In Argestus everything that should be done is specified in Excel-sheets (where to go, what route to take, and warnings if you have to take a detour or fill up with gasoline). So the client can adopt the model by changing those specifications without the need to have any knowledge of VBA (what's under the hood of the car).

Advantages using Argestus

✓ *Efficiency*: Known reductions in time are easily over 60%. One of the highlights was a report which was made only twice a year because of the huge amount of labour it took (2,5 days) is now a weekly report made within the hour. This is a reduction of 95%! Such an efficiency gain leaves employees a lot more time to do what they should be doing. That is to analyse, draw conclusions and propose changes based on the information.

✓ *Error reduction*: When collection of data from various systems is done manually (and believe it or not, this still happens a lot!), it's hard to avoid errors in 'copy-pasting'. When discovered, it takes even more time to manually adjust these errors. Argestus automates these processes thereby eliminating the chance of copy-paste errors. Also, users get warned when Argestus can't find the data it needs.

✓ *Checks:* Data integrity checks can be specified to catch unexpected data. This means that any number of checks can be build in to prevent likely to highly unlikely changes/errors in input or output data. A good example occurred a while ago. One of the checks build in a model was made for a situation which 'could not occur'. But with Murphy's Law in the back of my mind, the check was build in anyway. A simple addition to the process, made within 5 minutes. And what do you know, some months later the situation which presumably could not occur, did occur! The build in check resulted in a warning and prevented an error which probably nobody would have noticed because it just 'could not happen'!

✓ *Flexibility:* Using Argestus is a very flexible way of gathering information for existing as well as new reports. The tool can handle a variety of sources (Excel/Databases etc.). With Argestus, changes in input do not affect the process. For example shifting or adding rows or columns, does not cause the process to go haywire and changes in fieldnames and output sources are easily adopted.

Sources are filtered to import only needed columns (fields), and row-filtering is easily specified (e.g. take only data from European clients, with revenue over EUR 1 mln). Furthermore, needed changes in data (e.g. map a specific Dutch exporter to Russia instead of the Netherlands) can be specified. When exporting data, unneeded rows/columns are deleted automatically, so the number of rows/columns in an export is flexible without compromising the final formatting.

Existing models are easily adjusted to new requirements and new models and reports can be build by employees themselves without the help of IT or consultants. And as a bonus, because of the standard approach, it's easy for team members to take over each other's work.

✓ *Argestus is alive!:* The tool is continuously being updated. New functionalities are incorporated and when new versions of Excel become available, changes to the tool are made allowing the users to use Argestus without needing to hire another consult or buy a new version of the tool. In developing new functionalities, great care is taken to keep 'old models' compatible with new versions of Argestus.

User skills

The needed Excel skills of the user varies. Some users only know 'what buttons to press' and to solve common data issues. Others can 'read' the models, and adopt them to suit changed requirements. And users with average Excel knowledge, that are familiar with Argestus, are able to build new models for new reports etc., using tricks that they learned from other models. So, no extensive knowledge of IT, or for that matter Excel, is needed to use the tool.

For whom is Argestus useful?

Argestus is usable from the simplest to the most complicated requirements, using various sources (Excel/Databases etc.). For the simplest processes, developing a new model can be a matter of minutes. It is not only suitable for large organizations with complicated data handling processes but also for small organizations which have a need for a monthly or weekly report of some kind. Everybody spending more than an hour a month of (repetitive) data processing in MS Excel can make good use of Argestus and will find themselves with more time and less processing errors.

Argestus can also be used to gather specifications and testing for the development of an Application by the IT department. Not only for the combination of data sources, but also for checks to build in and guarding that the resulting Application is flexible enough to adapt to common changes in requirements without the need of changing the application. So it may be used by Business Analysts to provide a 'mock up' that Business Owners can accept before starting to build an IT project.

Interested?

If you recognize some of the data handling problems mentioned here and could do with more time to analyze the company's results, Argestus might be the answer to your problems. If you're interested, contact me at info@aadevries.nl or call +31 6 28 28 88 08.

Anne de Vries

Anne de Vries (1970), developer of Argestus, studied applied physics at Twente University, specializing in Systems Control. In his first job as an Energy Business Consultant he quickly realized that 'it's all about the money'. Since then he 'measures' and 'controls' money. In 2003 he completed the postgraduate programs: Certified Management Accountant and Financial Management (CMA/CFM) at the VU University Amsterdam. In 2006, after several years of working as a corporate finance professional and controller, he decided to become a freelance financial interim professional. Ever since he worked in a variety of companies helping them to make their financial processes more efficient and less error prone. These experiences resulted in the development of Argestus.