

## Upload Excel Data to SAP: 7 best practices

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Upload Excel Data to SAP: 7 best practices Even with the standardized business processes and centralized data stores provided by SAP, much corporate data still resides in spreadsheets. Taking data in these spreadsheets and putting them into SAP remains one of the thorny challenges facing many corporate IT departments. Many business departments are wasting resources in manually reentering this data into SAP while introducing errors due to manual data entry. Functional and technical analysts in the IT departments are inundated with requests from business users to automate the upload of Excel data into SAP.

? Are you an SAP business user looking to reduce manual data entry for mass uploads or mass changes to SAP data, particularly when the data already exists in Excel?

? Are you an IT functional or technical analyst looking for ways to service the end-user requests for data upload more effectively?

? Are you looking for ways that your company can save time and resources in SAP data management?

If you answered ?Yes? to any of the above questions, then this article is for you. This article describes 7 best practices in automating the upload of Excel data into SAP. Adopting these best practices will alleviate many of the pains that business users and IT analysts face in uploading Excel data to SAP.

1. Avoid Programming. With the several non-programming choices available to connect Excel and SAP, custom programming in ABAP or VB should be the absolute last resort for ad-hoc uploading Excel data to SAP. Not only programming is expensive and time consuming, a program that will be used only once or even once a year is particularly wasteful. Further, creating robust programs require a fair bit of testing and if a program has not been well-tested, it could be dangerous and cause irreparable data damage.

Use a scripting or a non-programming approach as much as possible. SAP provided tools such as BDC, CATT, LSMW, and third party tools such as Winshuttle?s TxShuttle will allow you to avoid programming to a large extent.

2. Do not Upload Directly to SAP tables. While this point is very obvious, it cannot be overemphasized. Writing directly to SAP tables avoids all the data validation and checks and balances that happen when creating data through the normal SAP transactions. So, avoid using any method that writes directly to SAP tables.

Always upload data via the pre-configured SAP transactions or BAPIs. Again, using tools such as BDC, CATT, or LSMW, or TxShuttle will allow the upload of data via SAP transactions instead of writing directly to SAP tables.

3. Choose a Record, Map, and Run strategy. A record, map, and run strategy generally involves first recording an SAP transaction where data needs to be uploaded. The recording step is followed by a mapping step where the SAP data fields captured during the recording are mapped to the Excel fields. Finally, the transaction is run over and over again with the different rows of data in the Excel file. A Record, Map, and Run strategy is similar to recording and running macros for automating routine tasks.

The advantages of choosing a record, map, and run strategy are that (a) it is very general and can work well for many different upload tasks and many different SAP transactions, even with custom transactions, (b) it is a very easy and intuitive approach and saves a lot of time making a mass data update, (c) it is something that even the business users can do themselves without requiring much IT support.

A record, map, and run strategy should be used for uploading data from Excel to SAP. Again, the SAP provided tools, such as BDC, CATT, and LSMW all support such a strategy and can work for many different upload applications. The TxShuttle tool simplifies the mapping recording and mapping tasks a lot and makes it even easier for business users. Also, for applications that require upload of transactional data containing header and line-items, such as journal vouchers, invoices, purchase orders, sales orders, etc., the TxShuttle tool has features that make it really useful.

4. Choose a Secure and SOX Compliant Method: Make sure the method you choose is secure and preserves SAP?s

role-based security. In these days of Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) audits, this point cannot be overemphasized. One key aspect of section 404 is checking that rights and duties are separately assigned to different individuals so that no individual has the power to divert business or transactions in a fraudulent manner. One of the most common open SOX audit issues is that users in the IT departments have very broad access to production data in SAP. Therefore to ease compliant with SOX, any mass changes or uploads should ideally be performed by the business users who are already authorized to make the change.

To allow business users to perform the upload via SAP-provided transaction-based tools, they would need extra authorizations to use these tools. If your company is not able to provide such authorizations, the use of Winshuttle's TxShuttle product may be more appropriate since it lives outside the core SAP system and generally does not require extra authorizations.

5. Keep the data in native Excel format. If the data to be uploaded stays in the native Excel format, rather than being converted to comma-delimited or tab-delimited text file formats, it makes the upload process much simpler. One less step for the users to worry about. The use of Winshuttle's TxShuttle product allows the users to keep their data in native Excel format.

6. Select an outside-in approach: The two approaches to bringing outside data into SAP are: (a) an inside-out approach where the data import tools live inside SAP are used to bring outside data into SAP, and (b) an outside-in approach where the tools living outside SAP are used to bring outside data into SAP. An inside-out approach typically requires all the data import scripts and programs to live inside SAP and therefore need to be maintained as SAP versions are upgraded, even when the scripts are one-time-use only. Thus, these one-time use scripts clutter the SAP system when using the inside-out approach. An outside-in approach offers a cleaner alternative that can be used with the user's existing security profiles.

The announcement of Microsoft and SAP's joint product, Mendocinno, recently validates the importance that both companies give to an outside-in approach. Other add-on products such as TxShuttle also take an outside-in approach to connect to SAP.

7. Empower business users: On a final note, one of the best practices in uploading Excel data to SAP is to empower business users to do the upload themselves. The choice of the right tool for the business users which will enable them to easily upload data without requiring any programming will go a long way to freeing up IT resources for more mission-critical applications. Letting business users take control of their own data also makes SOX compliance easier.

An easy to use product such as Winshuttle's TxShuttle which will let business users upload their own data from Excel to SAP allows the empowering of these business users. In summary, the best practices in uploading Excel data to SAP proposed here involve choosing non-programmatic, easy-to-use approaches, and this will enable your company to save large amounts of time and resources in day-to-day SAP data management.

To learn more about SAP tools, BDC, CATT and LSMW, visit [www.sap.com](http://www.sap.com)

To learn more about Winshuttle tool, TxShuttle, visit [www.winshuttle.com](http://www.winshuttle.com).

At this site, you can download a FREE WHITE PAPER describing this problem and how the TxShuttle tool works at uploading Excel data to SAP. You can also download a FREE 15-day evaluation version of the TxShuttle software for connecting SAP and Excel.

### **Short note about the author**

Vikram Chalana is the SAP product specialist at Winshuttle, Inc. He has helped many clients automate their SAP business processes, in particular processes dealing with the connecting spreadsheets and SAP. He has been in the IT industry as a data mining, business intelligence, business process automation expert for over 10 years.

To learn more about Winshuttle, please visit [www.winshuttle.com](http://www.winshuttle.com)

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