

# **XL Cubed 10**

10 Reasons to Use XLCubed For Managed  
Self-Service Business Intelligence



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# Introduction

## Excel at the centre of the solution

If you handle reports and dashboards, you already know Microsoft Excel, like 750 million other users. The amount of data produced and available has increased exponentially through social networks, controllers, management systems, results of surveys, etc. Everything has become measurable.

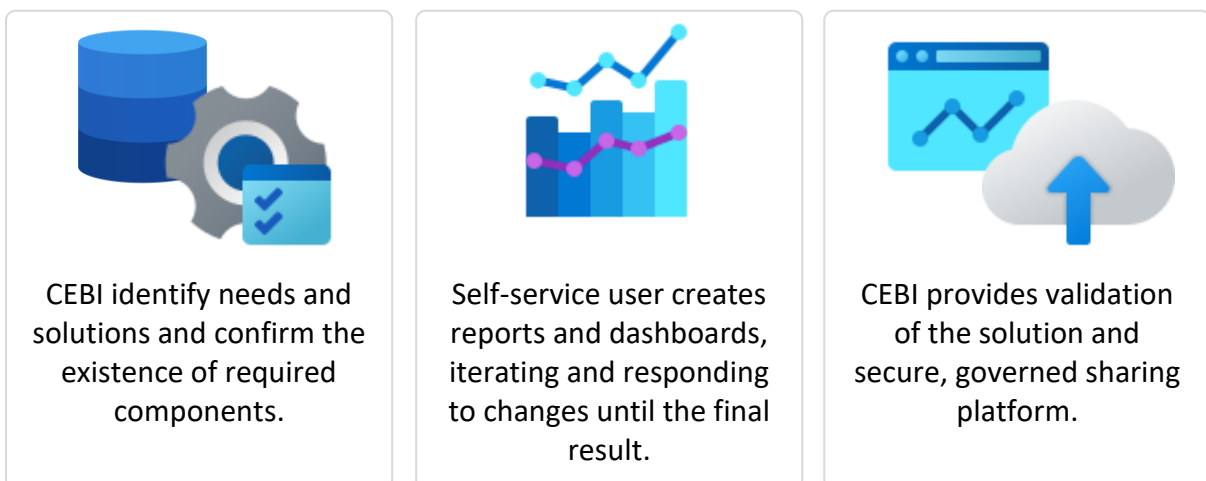
Long reserved for the IT department, Business Intelligence has now proved its worth for many organisations. BI has long required complex and expensive tools, but recent years have seen the arrival of new tools combining both simplicity and power. Today, demand for Business Intelligence is exploding, caused both by the needs and demands of users and the democratisation of tools that serve them.

XL Cubed is unique as it transforms the most popular data analysis tool of all, Microsoft Excel, into a rich front-end BI tool for the analysis and visualisation of data, operational reporting, and dashboards.

## Managed Self-Service BI

The search for Agile BI, or Managed Self-Service BI, is an organisational response to the increasing demands of users. It is also a recognition that queries are best answered, and indeed best asked, directly by the users themselves. This enables faster development and delivery of reports critical for informing business decisions.

Self-Service BI is a powerful resource, but to maximise the efficiency and value created from the solution, the autonomy of the users is best supervised and supported. This may be done by the IT Department, or, for more mature organisations, a Centre of Expertise for BI (CEBI).



There are many reasons why XL Cubed can prove a good fit for organisations aiming to provide a managed self-serve BI environment to their users, ten of which are outlined here.

## Reason #1 – No matter how good your BI tools, users will want the data in Excel

It's a recurring message whether working with Business Analysts, Financial Controllers, Category Managers or Sales Managers: Excel is their productivity tool, period. XLCubed gives users data in the Excel environment they want, but with hugely improved query, analysis, and data visualisation possibilities. Sophisticated analysis, report books and pixel-perfect dashboards can all be designed using XLCubed in Excel.

For example: I need to conduct sales analysis on a list of 500 clients I've been provided with, with sales figures of 200 products classified into 20 subcategories and 5 years of monthly history, and a sales budget for comparison.

In this kind of situation, the use of an OLAP cube or Tabular model will render data instantaneously. XLCubed can link the query to Excel ranges which can be a significant time-saver, as you can update the ranges which drive the query through copy-paste rather than searching for hundreds of specific clients.

Vital data remains centralised, but ad-hoc analysis remains local and I don't have to involve the IT Department for this type of requirement. I can publish my analysis to the Web portal to share more widely with just a few clicks.

## Reason #2 – Overcome the restrictions of Pivot Tables

Pivot tables are fine for the basic requirements of a simple data-pull, but they have many limitations which can make them cumbersome and time consuming in many business situations.

XLCubed Grids are designed from the ground up with multi-dimensional analysis in mind. They provide advanced selections, embedded visualisations, simple user calculations and full interactivity.



### Advanced selections and filters

Flexibility in selecting members and sets of members from the hierarchies are key in multivariate analysis. XLCubed gives powerful but intuitive ways to filter the selection as needed, sort results and select the customers or products which meet the criteria of your business problem.



### Embedded charting

Data can be visualised directly in the grid using a rich in-cell chart library, with the charts based directly on the cube data and fully dynamic.



### User-defined calculations

User calculations are added using standard Excel formulae but become an embedded part of the grid and available for further slice and dice analysis.



### Interactivity

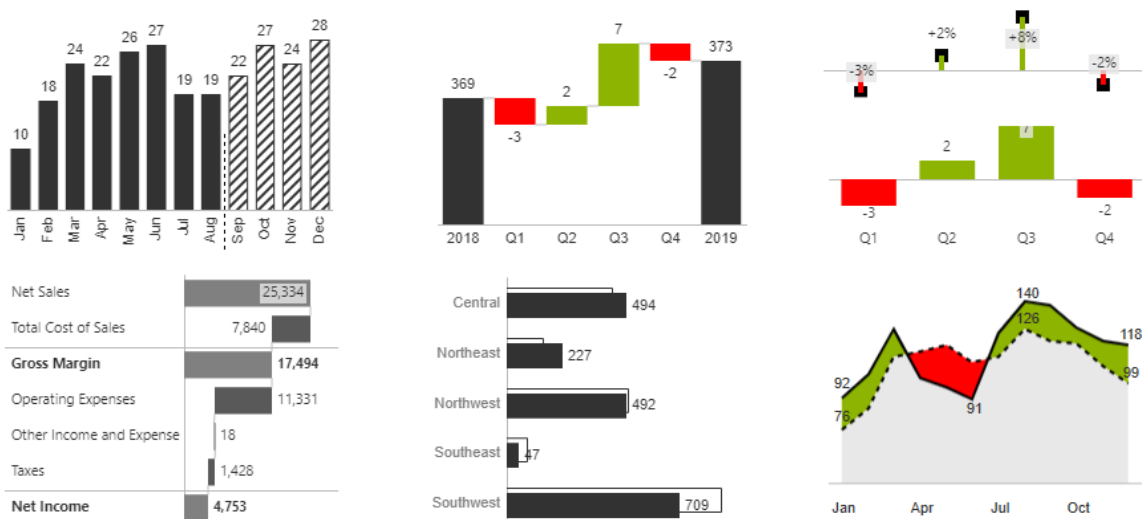
All XLCubed components can be controlled by slicers, or by Excel cells and ranges, opening up the full scope and flexibility of Excel to the XLCubed BI tool.

## Reason #3 – Visualisation leads to understanding

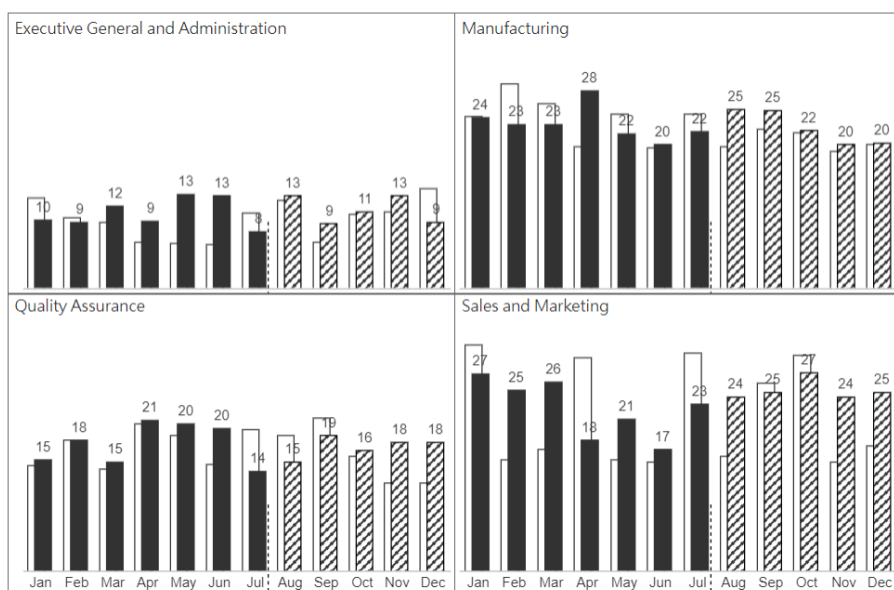
Excel visuals are restricted to data in the worksheet and can be difficult to format. XLCubed provides a number of additional visualisations that are directly connected to your data. This approach avoids the manual process of maintaining complex ranges of data within Excel and enables further exploration of the data directly through interactive charts.

### Dynamic charts

XLCubed's Dynamic Charts help users rapidly and easily create best-practice, visually effective charts, providing viewers a deeper understanding of the data more quickly. Drawing on the best-practice visualisation approach of the International Business Communication Standards (IBCS), our chart library helps communicate key business trends and comparisons clearly, effectively and professionally.

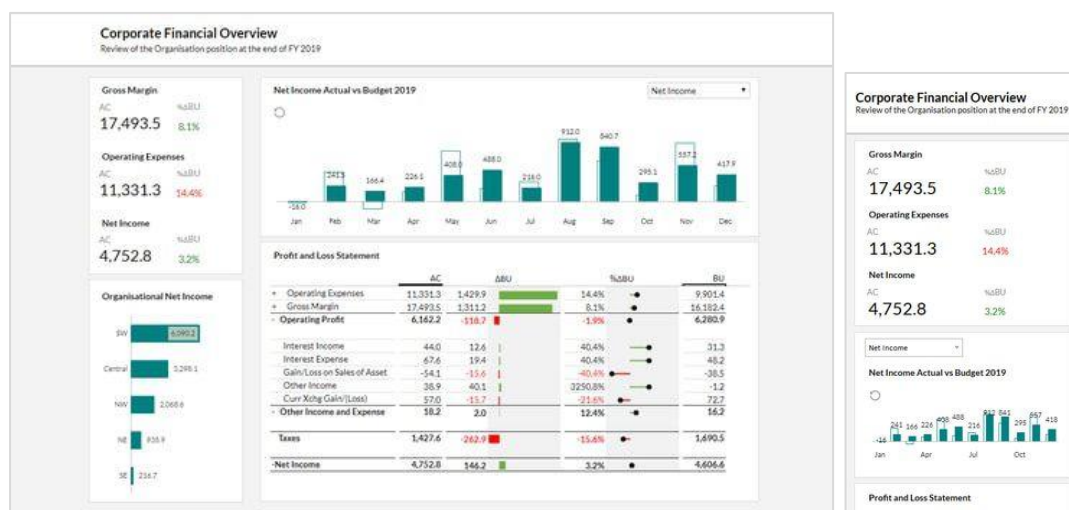


Charts connect directly to corporate data and can be further explored as required by drilling to a 'Small Multiple' view of the contributing categories or zooming to specific areas of interest.



## Responsive dashboards

XLCubed allows for the creation of special sheets which are responsive to any screen size. Any XLCubed component can be added to the sheet to create highly dynamic and interactive dashboards suitable for viewing on any device. Different layouts can be designed for optimal viewing on any screen size and orientation.



## Reason #4 – Freedom of formula reporting

Formula reporting provides a perfect solution for Financial and Management Controllers. This approach gives total control over layout, formatting, and dynamic reporting with conditional statements.

XLCubed provide a number of formulae that can connect directly to multidimensional cubes or Tabular models to retrieve values and hierarchy members, as well as a others that can:

- dynamically display rows, columns or XLCubed objects
- link to another location in the workbook while passing parameters
- retrieve cube and member properties
- run SQL stored procedures
- open published web reports

The combination of these creates highly customisable, sophisticated, and dynamic reports otherwise impossible in Excel. They are especially effective in formal financial reporting where layout is key.

Formulae are easy to understand and can be inserted and edited with simple user dialogs. The simplest approach to create a formula report is to create a grid and then convert to formula.

## Reason #5 – Best practice financial reporting

Consistent communication practices are essential for effective business intelligence. The way a report is formatted has a huge impact on its understandability.

First, Excel, by nature, requires no framework but provides a free canvas, unlike most other reporting tools. Each element can not only be formatted properly (even dynamically with conditional formatting) but each of these components transfer seamlessly to XLCubed Web Edition when the report is published.

XLCubed also implements the best practice rules of IBCS. These are practical proposals for the design of business communication, applied to conceptual, perceptual, and semantic design of charts and tables.

Business Rules can be added to and shared across workbooks. These rules allow users to map data to common financial reporting types, including actual/plan/forecast scenarios and revenues/expenses. Any XLCubed chart or table will use these rules to apply the correct IBCS formatting automatically.

A choice of template tables can be quickly created for displaying numeric and chart-based comparisons of dates and scenarios.

	PY	AC	AC-PY	(AC-PY)%
+ Trade Sales	440,614	489,268	+48,654	+11
+ Intercompany Sales	17,624	29,356	+11,732	+67
<b>= Gross Sales</b>	<b>458,238</b>	<b>518,624</b>	<b>+60,386</b>	<b>+13</b>
- Returns and Adjustments	6,609	9,785	+3,176	+48
- Discounts	111	11	-100	-90
<b>= Net Sales</b>	<b>451,518</b>	<b>508,828</b>	<b>+57,310</b>	<b>+13</b>
- Standard Cost of Sales	95,800	129,640	+33,840	+35
- Variances	11,015	7,339	-3,676	-33
<b>= Total Cost of Sales</b>	<b>106,815</b>	<b>136,979</b>	<b>+30,164</b>	<b>+28</b>
<b>= Gross Margin</b>	<b>344,703</b>	<b>371,849</b>	<b>+27,146</b>	<b>+8</b>
- Labor Expenses	100,402	132,101	+31,699	+32
- Travel Expenses	2,354	4,226	+1,872	+80
- Marketing	790	1,097	+307	+39
- Telephone and Utilities	4,499	6,801	+2,302	+51
- Depreciation	3,177	5,249	+2,072	+65
- Commissions	13,218	8,807	-4,411	-33
- Office Supplies	565	958	+393	+70
- Professional Services	527	734	+207	+39
- Other Expenses	368	587	+219	+60
- Rent	1,283	2,025	+742	+58
<b>= Operating Expenses</b>	<b>127,183</b>	<b>162,585</b>	<b>+35,402</b>	<b>+28</b>
<b>= Operating Profit</b>	<b>217,520</b>	<b>209,264</b>	<b>-8,256</b>	<b>-4</b>
- Taxes	44,406	39,504	-4,902	-11
+ Other Income and Expense	94	132	+38	+40
<b>= Net Income</b>	<b>173,208</b>	<b>169,892</b>	<b>-3,316</b>	<b>-2</b>

## Reason #6 – Governed sharing & scheduled distribution

A few clicks and it's published! Any report or dashboard developed in Excel can be published to the XLCubed Web server, which can be hosted on-premise or as an Azure Web App. Users in your organisation can view and interact with the published reports directly from a browser. The reports are dynamic, secure, and always connected to their data source.

Our use of Excel as the presentation layer and not the database ensures that existing corporate security within the data is fully respected. Existing Active Directory roles and groups or SSO authentication can be quickly assimilated into XLCubed Web for folder level access rights.

Reports can be viewed from phone or tablet devices through any web browser or our dedicated mobile app.

The server also provides a platform for ad-hoc analysis, report automation and scheduling, and for integration to SharePoint and other custom portals.



## Reason #7 – Wide range of data connectors and Office support

XLCubed connects Excel directly to trusted corporate data sources, removing the risks of Excel as a database while extending its capabilities in reporting, analytics, and data visualisation. XLCubed connects to a wide range of sources including:

- Microsoft
  - SQL Server Analysis Services (Multidimensional and Tabular)
  - Azure SSAS
  - Power BI
- IBM TM1
- SAP HANA
- Oracle Essbase
- ...and many more.

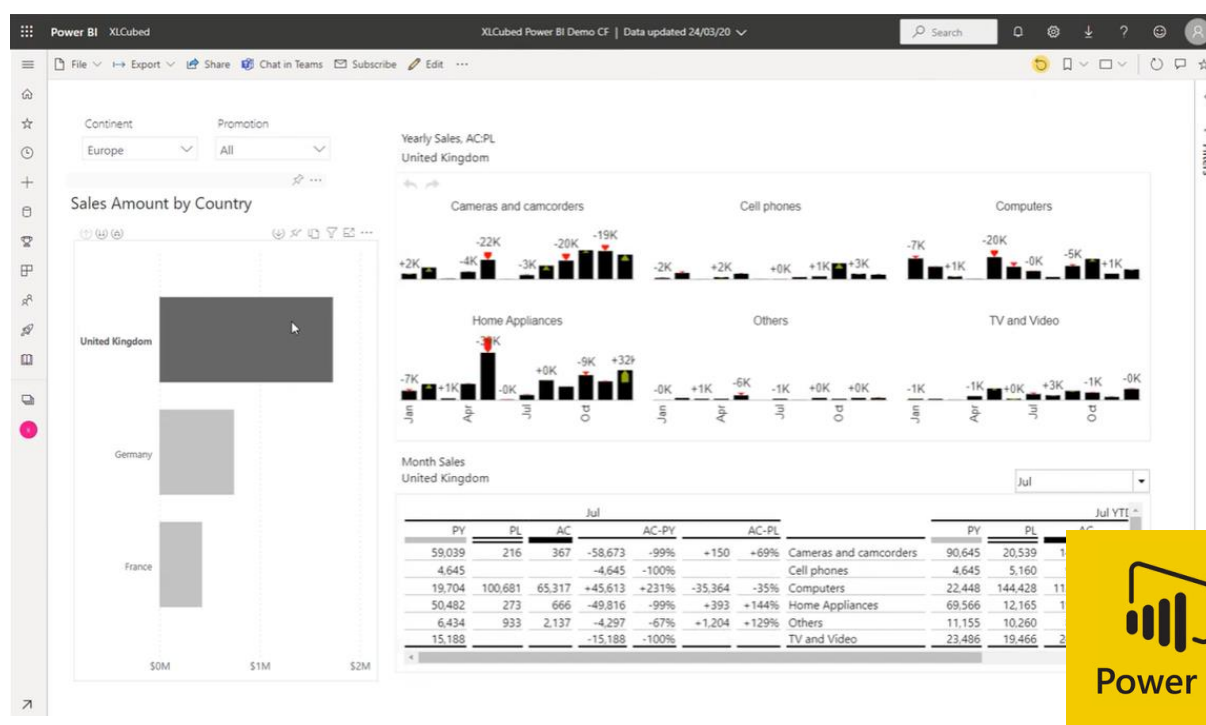
Regular patches and major version releases mean we are always up to date and compatible with the latest Microsoft Office versions.

## Reason #8 – Self-serve reporting for Power BI

Power BI is a great platform for sharing interactive dashboards and visual reports. However, for more analytical use-cases, users will often export the data to Excel for analysis, which can be a tedious and cumbersome process.

XLcubed provides an extended model which connects Excel directly to Power BI data, avoiding the need to save into Excel, and adding a wealth of functionality over and above what's available in Pivot tables. Users can connect directly to Power BI data models held in Power BI.com or Premium then use XLcubed to perform ad hoc analytics or create formal reports.

XLcubed also has a Power BI Custom Visual to help enrich Power BI reports with XLcubed content. Grids, charts, or entire reports can be embedded in Power BI and used interactively with other Power BI components. This helps address the limitations of Power BI as formal or financial reporting tool.



## Reason #9 – Low learning curve & experts on hand to help

Users already know Excel, and this is a big advantage when it comes to learning XLcubed as they are already comfortable in the environment. 80% of the functionality of XLcubed can be learnt in a single day of training. We provide online or on-site training sessions tailored to your organisation and use-case, covering all aspects of the product. Video training and extensive help pages are available to explain, step by step, all facets of the product.

Our team of experts are always on hand to answer your individual questions and assist you in your report creation.



## Reason #10 - Price

XLCubed is priced based on an affordable annual subscription model.

*Why?*

XLCubed relies on existing solutions: no need to reinvent a table or database engine it connects to well-established and proven database technology. No need to completely reinvent an entire user interface. XLCubed is in Excel.

The price takes this into account, but also maximises the investment already made in the implementation of the overall technology platform.

On the other hand, the licensing model is extremely simple. XLCubed Excel Edition is by named user and XLCubed Web Edition is based on the number of servers and number of users.

## Summary

XLCubed fits perfectly in a managed self-service model, with an Excel component for creation and XLCubed Web Edition for wider distribution.

XLCubed can span and link different data sources in a single report or dashboard. Data is brought into the report with dynamic grids which greatly improve upon pivot tables, or with formulae for fine-grain control over layout and formatting. Additional visualisations such as dynamic charting are interactive and follow best-practice standards. It is a powerful solution with a low learning curve which users accept and embrace quickly.