

Microsoft Excel v. Microsoft Project v. Primavera P6

Executive Summary. In the construction industry, there are three main tools used for scheduling. Pros and cons of Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Project, and Primavera P6 are all briefly discussed.

The Three Main Options. I still see schedules done on paper in the industry, and it works too, but here we review the three most common products in the industry.

	Microsoft Excel	Microsoft Project	Primavera P6
Contractor size	Small, unsophisticated contractors.	Small to large contractors.	Medium to mega-sized contractors.
User	Superintendent to company owner.	Project engineer, superintendent, and project manager.	Requires a specialist devoted to the task, experienced or expert.
Project Owner	Small, unsophisticated owners. Allowed when a scheduling specification doesn't exist.	Up to large owners. Sometimes required by the owner.	Required on many larger projects by larger owners.
Ease of Use	Easy. Most people on the globe know enough basics to make a schedule.	Easy to medium. Plenty of complexity available, but usually used as a "down and dirty", yet still professional, solution.	Training required to function at a fundamental level.
Use as Daily Tool	Yes, use daily to help manage your crews.	Weekly is the most common use.	No, better as a monthly tool.
When and where do I use it?	Use it everyday to help manage your crews and to update the project owner.	Use it weekly to manage your crews and update your client.	Use weekly as a 10,000' to track project performance. Necessary in a claim situation.
Resource Loading	No.	Yes, basic but functional.	Yes, everything you need.
Cost	\$	\$\$	\$\$

Ideal Usage. Paper and Microsoft Excel, frankly, aren't that far apart. This should be the minimal product you use and if this does the job and the client does not require you to "upgrade", use it.

My rule of thumb has always been that Microsoft Project should be on every job of any size. It's powerful and simple to use. It can be used as a true tool for superintendents and their staff. It can be used by just about anyone – even your employees who can barely find the power button on their laptop. Spend the couple hours teaching these less experienced users, it will empower them and serve a true function.

Primavera P6 is to be used when you have the skillset in house to use it right. I'm not saying use every function in the software, but I am recommending you get basic training so that you can be proficient enough to use it effectively. But, at the end of the day, if you must use it, hire it out to a professional and budget accordingly; scheduling services can be spendy.



My Story. I'm strong at Microsoft Excel and pretty strong at Microsoft Project. Primavera P6 is something I am weak in – I stopped my Primavera development at P3. My recommendations are above. The bottom line is that field ops should use Project on the job as a true tool - Primavera should be used to track larger projects globally once it's tacked on the wall, and then as your Exhibit #1 in a claim situation.