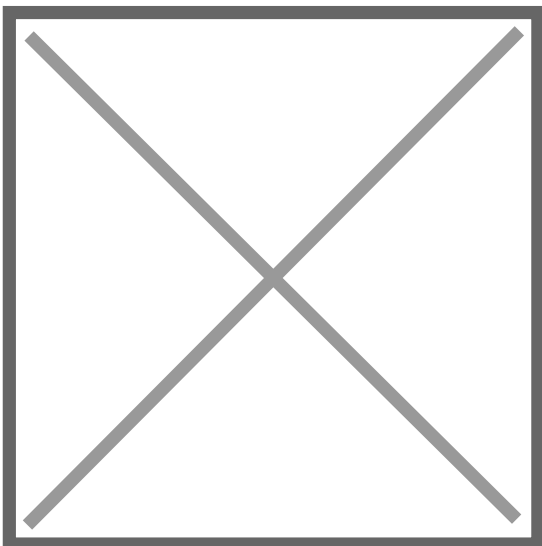


Effective Month-End Reporting



Are you burning the midnight oil to complete your month-end reports? Has this task become a 3-day battle against a monster-sized data set that requires too many manual corrections? Ready to put an end to the madness?



In the typical organization, “mission-critical” data is frequently used information that supports strategic business processes. Areas can include revenue tracking, bookkeeping, regulation, customer service, and compliance. If your month-end reporting takes too long to complete and includes tasks that you’re unsure the

value of – it is time to question whether this time-consuming task still observes the best practices for your business.

Unless you are a founding partner of your firm, you've probably inherited some tasks that you didn't originally assign or include in your month-end reporting protocol. When is the last time you asked why this data needs to be generated? Who originally assigned this task and are they still using data – do they even still work here? By tracking down the originator requesting this data you can confirm that the reporting metric still serves a purpose. Maybe the original use-case for the report was to hold a former vendor accountable, or to hold employees accountable, and over time the need for this accountability has naturally faded. However, until you know if the request's originator still needs the report data – you might as well save the time and cut the report from your month-end protocol. Alternatively, you may discover that the originator isn't reviewing the data monthly and uses it only for an annual review.

You might find that the data being generated during your month-end reporting process isn't being reviewed, rather it gets stuck in some file until it's needed. If that is the case, prompt the request's originator to revise the frequency for how often they need updated report data. You might find that they require this data only quarterly, or annually, or only as-needed, and you should no longer include this report in your regular protocols. In the inverse, the originator may prefer more timely reporting and could better analyze the data if presented in smaller chunks – maybe weekly or daily? Perhaps the data would be more useful if presented in an alternate format that highlights different data within the set, or outlines trends your firm wasn't previously tracking. Assessing the value each report provides is a key indicator as to whether you should continue to produce, reformat, or altogether drop this report from your monthly protocols.

To determine what reports are mission-critical for your firm, you start by asking key stakeholders to identify exactly which data they need to keep producing. One could ask, "If this data was weeks/months late, would this undermine or altogether disrupt the stakeholders process?" Engaging stakeholders in this way enables you to weigh and classify the priority of all data generated through the monthly reporting process. The ultimate goal in this is to classify each reporting task as follows:

- **Vital:** Its absence would be felt after a few weeks, up to a month.
- **Sensitive:** It would be one to several months before its loss had any effect on the business.

- **Non-critical:** If the data was generated less than quarterly, the impact would be minimal.

A tiered approach allows you to clearly delineate between the data that is critical, and those you can potentially drop from your month-end reporting. Once satisfied that the stakeholder's need is critical, you are assured that the reporting task has value and is therefore time well spent.

Not every data-point or report is going to be a business-critical game-changer for your organization – and that's okay. This continuous updating and decluttering of your month-end reporting protocols will ensure that your business always has optimal access to the data it needs, when your firm needs it. Hopefully, with these changes implemented, you'll find your month-end reporting protocol a satisfying exercise in practice improvement rather than being tied down to busy work and outdated requests.