



X L E R A N T

Case Study

Palm Beach Atlantic University says:
BudgetPak really helps everything flow much more smoothly and collaboratively.

The Customer

Located in gorgeous ocean-front West Palm Beach, Florida, **Palm Beach Atlantic University (PBA)** is an interdenominational Christian liberal arts school that offers more than 50 undergraduate and graduate majors to over 3,900 students of all faiths and backgrounds.

PBA was founded in 1968 by a local pastor and lay persons with strong commitments to the central role of the teachings of Christ in higher education. The University's core guiding principles are centered on its mission to instill a love for country, traditional American values, an understanding of and appreciation for the free enterprise economic system, and the importance of student involvement in community service outreach.

In addition to these guiding principles, PBA has adopted a distinctively Christian operating style that recognizes the importance of the individual as the key element in the collective community. This principle is woven throughout every aspect of the University's culture – including its budgeting philosophy.

Anne Ilcus, Budget Administrator and Investment Analyst has been with PBA for ten years, the past eight focused primarily on budgeting. Anne describes the University's recent transition to a more user-centric budgeting style: *"Over the past few years we've been striving to make our budget process more decentralized by placing more of the responsibility and ownership of the budget in the hands of the people who are actually using the budget."*

The Problem

With the financial pressures inherent in higher education, PBA is under pressure to control tuition costs and keep the college as affordable as possible for students.

"Annually we are always facing the challenge of improving our financial results," says Anne. *"Frankly, we're continually looking to increase and improve our offerings, but we are very mindful of the need to do this in a cost-effective way for the students. It's a constant balancing act."*

Like most higher education institutions, PBA has relied on Excel budgeting for many years. Anne had been maintaining a master Excel spreadsheet that she would break up into countless sub-spreadsheets and distribute to numerous departments, and then collect everyone's data and reenter it onto her master. Anne explains her frustration with this process:

"The length of time that it took to simply enter all the data was very, very time consuming. Things might get missed, a department might forget to submit a certain part, or in collecting the various spreadsheets I might very well overlook something. There was always a little bit of fear throughout the community that the budget they submitted would not ultimately be reflected accurately at the end of the process."

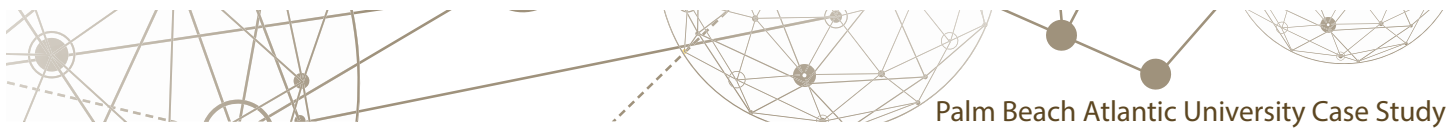
Another downfall of Excel was that it did not allow for collaboration between PBA's budget holders and leadership, so it was nearly **impossible to tie the strategic plan to the numbers.**

"Budgeting is a communication process," says Anne. *"We want open communication between the departments and with the business office so that everyone understands the expectations and the challenges. We certainly tried for many years to be as collaborative as possible using Excel. What we found however is that it required a lot of one-on-one meetings with each department, which was quite time consuming. And the fact of the matter is that some people just weren't comfortable using Excel."*

Anne began to realize that in order to foster a truly collaborative and strategic budgeting culture, PBA would need a solution to replace Excel.

The Evaluation

Anne assembled a task force of some of PBA's main budget holders to review software options. *"We looked at a number of different systems including our general ledger's budgeting tools, and what we found was we wanted something to compliment our general ledger but also something user friendly. Our users felt very strongly about which systems were more friendly to them and which were less so."*



Ease of use became one of the deciding factors in PBA's purchase. Anne explains, "To us, collaborative budgeting involves active participation both from the finance department and from various departments in the University, so we really need a system that is user friendly. Personally I love Excel, and I use Excel constantly on a daily basis, but I recognize that the majority of our deans are not so thrilled with Excel. We need a way to talk to one another in the same language, so that we're able make informed financial decisions."

When Anne and her review team test-drove **XLerant's cloud-based BudgetPak software**, they felt that it would be a great fit for PBA. Anne says, "I had one person who pulled me aside and asked, 'Is it true I'll never have to use Excel again?' This woman was quite delighted, and I was delighted to say if she didn't want to she didn't have to. We did have a few people who actually preferred an Excel-like format, and the nice thing about BudgetPak is that users have the option to choose a row-and-column view, so it really is the best of both worlds."

The Solution

PBA is in its third year of using BudgetPak, and the results have been nothing but positive. Anne comments on the depth of **insight and oversight** that the software provides: "Increasingly it is becoming more important to have a good sense of where everybody is in the process and to know what the expectations are. So where it used to be a cumbersome effort of printing out reports and sending them to different people – and in the approval process it was even worse because you were doing that times five or ten for each department – now it is fast and convenient because everybody is in the same system. VPs can instantly see where the department heads are in their budget process, and each department can see where their budget is in the approval process. BudgetPak really helps everything flow much more smoothly and collaboratively."

The system's **cloud-based design** has provided convenience and efficiency for Anne and her budget managers by facilitating real-time problem solving. "If somebody for example is having an issue signing off on their budget, I can log in from my desk while we're on the phone and say, 'Oh, you haven't done the monthly spreading yet,' talk them through how to do it, hang up the phone, and the problem is solved in five seconds as opposed to back-and-forth emails or an office meeting. When I was traveling last week, somebody sent me a password reset request that I was able to resolve from out of town in a matter of seconds. It has been very convenient for us."

PBA's **ability to forecast** has improved by leaps and bounds. "With BudgetPak, we have much more accurate monthly budgets than ever before. In the past with Excel we pretty much did annual

budgets, and we would attempt to pull data out based on prior year's spending, all done manually, mind you. It was not the best forecasting system because you had to assume that any spending was going to be done the exact same way it was done the year before. Now with our monthly budgets, we can check year-to-date actuals compared to year-to-date budgets, so we're in a much better place to see where we stand and also do a rolling forecast for the end of the year. With BudgetPak, we have much more confidence in our numbers."

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Anne says that BudgetPak is providing PBA a platform for **effective communication and strategic planning**. "Communication is at the heart of any good collaborative budgeting, and when everyone understands the University's goals and strategic initiatives, the whole budgeting process becomes a lot more effective. BudgetPak includes a notes section for users to indicate which area of the strategic plan is being considered within their budget requests. The fact that we've been able to really tie the strategic initiatives to the annual budgeting process has improved communication, it's improved understanding of the budgeting process, and it's helped us to manage expectations so that everybody is on board with the same goals for moving the university forward."



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