TECH UNVEILED BY VEILSUN | EPISODE 2

Stuck in Spreadsheets

Spreadsheets can be useful, but when entire business processes depend on them, things can quickly become complicated. In this episode, James Cosman and Billy Gerard discuss why businesses become dependent on spreadsheets, how to recognize when they've become a problem, and what it takes to move toward more connected, efficient workflows.

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PART ONE

Why spreadsheets take over

BILLY GERARD

Welcome to the VeilSun Podcast. I'm Billy Gerard, and I'm here with James Cosman, the president and chief solutions architect here at VeilSun, where we build intelligent apps and orchestrate people, systems, and AI. We're answering your questions, questions James hears literally all the time. James, today's question is: "Our team lives in spreadsheets and emails. Our team uses spreadsheets and emails to track jobs, and things keep falling through the cracks." What should a mid-sized company do?

JAMES COSMAN

That's a really common one that we get. The first thing most people want to do when they talk to us is show us their really massive spreadsheet. The first thing I'd tell you, and this is going to get a little touchy-feely, is that you're not alone in this problem. We've worked with top 10 U.S. companies that are running billions of dollars' worth of spend and revenue-generating activities on spreadsheets. So it is endemic.

JAMES COSMAN

The second thing is that you have to admit you have a problem. Spreadsheets are a symptom in a company of something else. They feel good. They put things in nice columns. They make you feel like you're in control of what's really going on. They give you a sense of comfort, but in a way, it's a secret cancer in a company, because spreadsheets, by definition, are not collaborative. They have many limitations. They don't manage or enforce workflows. They're very difficult to connect with the other systems you need that data in, and quite often they become a straight-up data silo in the organization. Not enough people have purview into the data in really important spreadsheets.

> **"Spreadsheets give you a sense of comfort, but in a way, it's a secret cancer in a company."**
>
> JAMES COSMAN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF SOLUTIONS ARCHITECT

JAMES COSMAN

So, one, no, you're not alone. Two, admit that you have a problem.

PART TWO

A faster way to build

JAMES COSMAN

Now, the good news. We lived in a world for a long time where spreadsheets were the only way possible. We all bought a bunch of large pieces of software, thinking they were going to solve our business's problems, and then quickly realized they don't work the way we work, and all of that work got pushed into spreadsheets. Now we live in a world where custom software can be built lightning fast. Ten years ago, if I needed a really custom application that connects to all of my major systems, that was a year-long project, and by the time you were done, it wasn't even relevant anymore, because business changes so quickly. With the advent of AI, we can build custom applications in a fraction of the time and keep them up to date as your business changes.

JAMES COSMAN

So the third step is to find the most mission-critical spreadsheet in your organization. Look for the one that really shouldn't be on a spreadsheet, that a lot of people need purview into, and that has a lot of business processes probably being worked through email around it. Realize you don't have to live that way, and start to think about replacing it with a custom app that connects into everything. It's really not as painful as it used to be. We're coming into a world where your company will have maybe five, maybe seven really large pieces of purchased software, and everything else between those will be custom, interconnected applications.

PART THREE

Life without the spreadsheet

BILLY GERARD

What would life look like without a spreadsheet? Help me understand. I go to the spreadsheet. That's where I go. What might that look like?

JAMES COSMAN

Well, if you're the person going to the spreadsheet and seeing data from it, that part might not look a whole lot different. You can build interfaces very quickly that operate and feel like a spreadsheet. What's going to look very different is how everybody else who is a source of data for that spreadsheet works. If it's data coming in from the field, you'll have mobile apps automatically feeding into it. Or it's people high above, in the C-suite, using pieces of that application to see executive dashboards that give them full sight into the project.

JAMES COSMAN
You might also find yourself not having to get data from as many places. Say I'm running a costing and estimating process right off a spreadsheet so I can understand past estimates. Wouldn't it be magical if all of your past costing information could flow right into Oracle, right into this application, so you can see it in real time? It's a world where data is at your fingertips as quickly as you need it, reported the way you want to see it, and where everybody's looking at it on the same sheet of paper, but in their own unique way, the way they need and want to see it.

> **"Everybody's looking at it on the same sheet of paper, but in their own unique way."**
>
> JAMES COSMAN, ON LIFE AFTER THE SPREADSHEET

PART FOUR

Bring your spreadsheet

BILLY GERARD
What's the first step in getting started with VeilSun, knowing that I'm a little apprehensive about this?

JAMES COSMAN
We say bring your spreadsheet to us. Let's talk about it. Let's look through it. Let's talk about the business processes underlying that spreadsheet and start to figure out the answer. It seems daunting, but that's why companies like us exist. Let's talk business process, let's talk about what's behind that, and then we'll figure out the right set of software solutions to solve that problem and get rid of that spreadsheet.

BILLY GERARD
What if we've looked at ten solutions before, and all of them have fallen short? That's why we're still on this spreadsheet. We feel like we've tried many times, and we're here because we've never seen another option.

JAMES COSMAN

What I'd tell you is there's always been another option, but it's a lot more accessible now with the advent of AI and AI building. A lot of companies are operating off the idea that there's some easy button they can push. I could go out to market and find a piece of software that exactly fits my business, and the truth of the matter is, it doesn't exist. Large SaaS programs and large pieces of software are built to reasonably please about 60% of the people who use them. It's like a poorly tailored suit. It'll keep me dressed. I can make it to the wedding and not be naked, but I'm not going to look good at all.

> **"It's like a poorly tailored suit. It'll keep me dressed, but I'm not going to look good at all."**
>
> JAMES COSMAN, ON OUT-OF-THE-BOX SOFTWARE

JAMES COSMAN

That's what out-of-the-box software is like. So I would say you just haven't been looking at the right things. Dip your toe in with one small use case. Pick a small, important use case, and that's usually when the light comes on.

READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP?

Your Systems Should Work Together.

Not sure where to begin? Our App Checkup is a good first step toward identifying what isn't connecting and where to focus first.

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