
Rationale for Excel Based KISS Software

There are many general- purpose statistical packages written by statisticians for statisticians. Some of the packages have target audiences of statistics students in colleges and universities and the industrial statistician. Our Air Academy Associates' software was created by statistical practitioners specifically for the Lean Six Sigma practitioners (Black Belts and Green Belts, both in manufacturing and transactional) and is therefore not a general-purpose statistics package. Our software was designed for ease of use and thus does not include many of the extraneous tools that only PhDs in statistics might be able to use appropriately (i.e., at the right time and place). Many of the commonly used software packages were developed before Six Sigma practitioners came into vogue and have been retrofitted to accommodate the recent industrial emphasis on Six Sigma. Our software is integrated into our training material and was concurrently developed along with our Lean Six Sigma materials. In other words, it was designed to support the material. We are the only company known to have concurrently developed Lean Six Sigma software and materials in an integrated fashion.

When we started teaching Process Improvement it became clear that too much time was spent teaching people how to use software instead of teaching people the concepts of Six Sigma. Initially, the need for custom software wasn't as clear as it should have been. Many of us have a statistics background, and to us using Minitab, SAS, Statgraphics, or Statistica was easy. However, to the students it was not necessarily easy. We spent more time answering questions on software than we did on concepts. As a result, we decided to create software that specifically met the needs of a Lean Six Sigma practitioner. Our belief is that software should be so easy to use that it is a natural extension of the material, and that we should not have to spend excessive time in the classroom teaching the student how to use the software.

The reason we chose to host our software in Excel was ease of use. Many people are already familiar with Excel, and therefore using Excel's familiar environment was an easy decision. In the mid-1990's, we considered moving our software out of the Excel environment. We asked our customers what they wanted, and we received an overwhelmingly negative response to the idea of leaving Excel. Our customers love working directly in Excel. They can perform analysis and e-mail the results to anyone with Excel. To view the statistical analysis, one need not have our software, only Excel.

For several years we have had a strong following in the Six Sigma software market. However, over the years the sales unrelated to Lean Six Sigma have been growing rapidly as well. Now, over 75% of our software sales are unrelated to Lean Six Sigma and the training we provide. The reason this phenomenon is occurring is that our software is easy to use but still extremely powerful, with many of the extraneous features that one might never expect to use simply not available to complicate any decisions. Just the existence of a myriad features complicates the use of a software product. Our KISS (Keep It Simple Statistically) principle should not be misinterpreted to mean "lack of power." In our software, KISS means "ease of use."