

Sending Spreadsheet Data with Outpost

Jim Oberhofer KN6PE
March 2004

Introduction

Because Outpost can send (and BBSs can store) messages consisting of ASCII characters, it is possible to send information from a wide range of applications that store their data in ASCII. This application note focuses on 2 methods for how you can send spreadsheet data using Outpost.

Method #1 – Sending “Cut-and-Paste” Data

One method for sending spreadsheet data is to copy the cells you want to send, then paste them into a message form. Here’s the step-by-step method on how this would work.

For this example, let’s assume the following scenario. A shelter requires a list of material to be delivered from a regional Red Cross Material Replenishment Center. A spreadsheet is used to track what the shelter has and the items that they need.

Item Number	Description	On Hand	Units	Qty needed	Req Date	Req Time
1	cots	30	ea	25	18-Mar	18:00
2	blankets	45	ea	15	18-Mar	18:00
3	water, 12 oz bottles	200	bottles	100	19-Mar	12:00
4	First Aid kits	3	kits	12	ASAP	
5	Toilet paper	50	rolls	250	19-Mar	12:00
6	tooth brushes	10	ea	50	ASAP	
7	tooth paste	5	ea	55	ASAP	
8	note pads	0	ea	25	19-Mar	18:00
9	pencils	0	ea	25	19-Mar	18:00
10	MRE	10		300	18-Mar	18:00

- Once the spreadsheet is created, move a copy of it to the PC where Outpost resides.
- At the Outpost PC, open the spreadsheet, highlight the data to be sent, and either press **CNTL-C** or select **Edit->Copy** from the spreadsheet menu (highlighted area is indicated by the shaded cells on the top right figure).
- Go back to Outpost. Open an Outpost message form, position the cursor in the message area, and press **CNTL-V**, or select **Edit-> Paste**. Add whatever additional message text as required.
- As you look at the message form, you will see that the data is not necessarily aligned to the column as it was displayed in the spreadsheet.

John,
Please advise as to when we can expect the following material.
Jim KN6PE

Shelter: Quinlan Center
City: Cupertino, CA
Request: Material replenishment
Date: 3/24/2004

Item Number	Description	On Hand	Units	Qty needed	Req Date	Req Time
1	cots	30	ea	25	18-Mar	18:00
2	blankets	45	ea	15	18-Mar	18:00
3	water, 12 oz bottles	200	bottles	100	19-Mar	12:00
4	First Aid kits	3	kits	12	ASAP	
5	Toilet paper	50	rolls	250	19-Mar	12:00
6	tooth brushes	10	ea	50	ASAP	
7	tooth paste	5	ea	55	ASAP	
8	note pads	0	ea	25	19-Mar	18:00
9	pencils	0	ea	25	19-Mar	18:00

- If the information is to be imported into a spreadsheet at the receiving station, **DO NOT CHANGE THE SPACING BETWEEN THE DATA ITEMS!!!** This will misalign the data during the recovery process at the receiving station (this process relies on one TAB between each column data entry).
- If the information is to be only viewed or printed at the receiving station, you can “clean up” the look of the report by entering additional tabs to re-align the data to columns. Press **CNTL-TAB** to enter tabs into the message window.

- When done, press **Send** to move the message in the Out Tray.

Receiving “Cut-and-Paste” data

Lets assume this data is to be imported into a new spreadsheet at the receiving station.

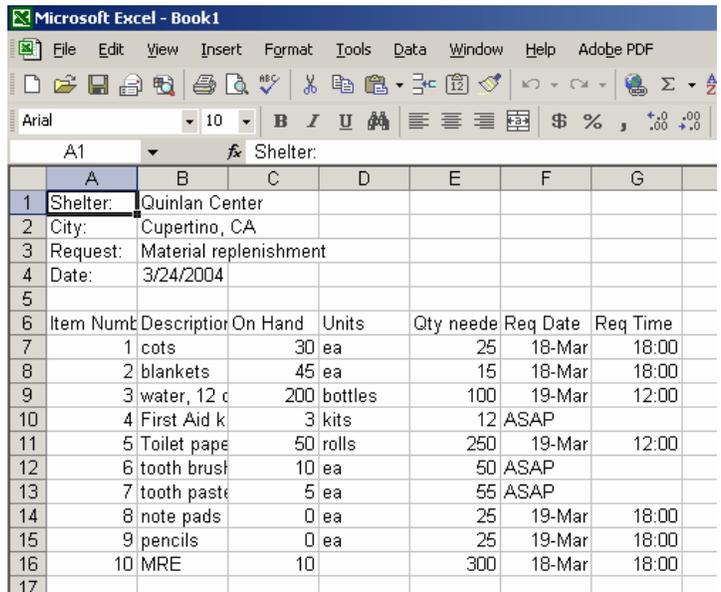
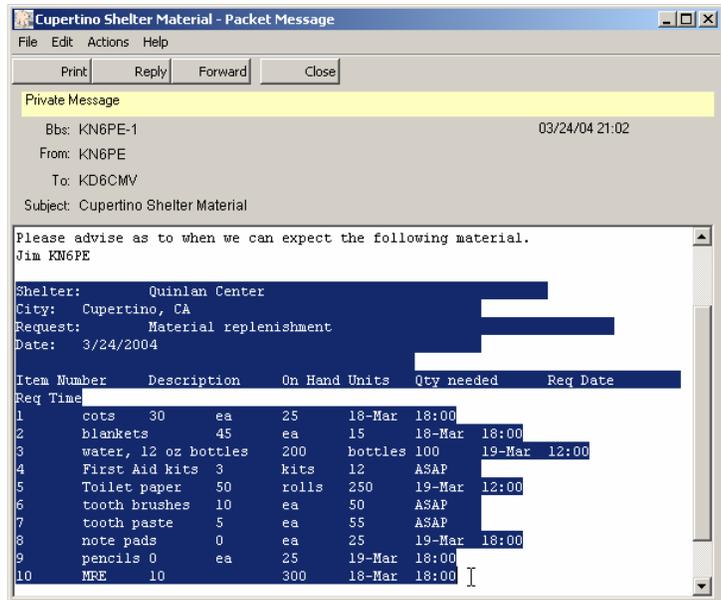
1. Once the Outpost message arrives, open the message, highlight the data that was sent, and either press **CNTL-C** or select **Edit->Copy** from the message menu.
2. Open the spreadsheet; position the cursor in the first upper-right cell where the data will be inserted, and press **CNTL-V**, or select **Edit-> Paste**.
3. Save the spreadsheet, and deliver the file to the intended user.

Considerations

Take a look at the spreadsheet and note that the formatting is not preserved when compared to the source spreadsheet. Formatting that will be lost includes:

- the **Bold** cells
- column width spacing
- position alignment within the cell (left, right, or centered)
- cell formulas

One decision that Operational Area Responders should make is how data should be passed and in what format. Resolving up front whether the data will be printed or imported into another application will reduce the amount of data reformatting later on.



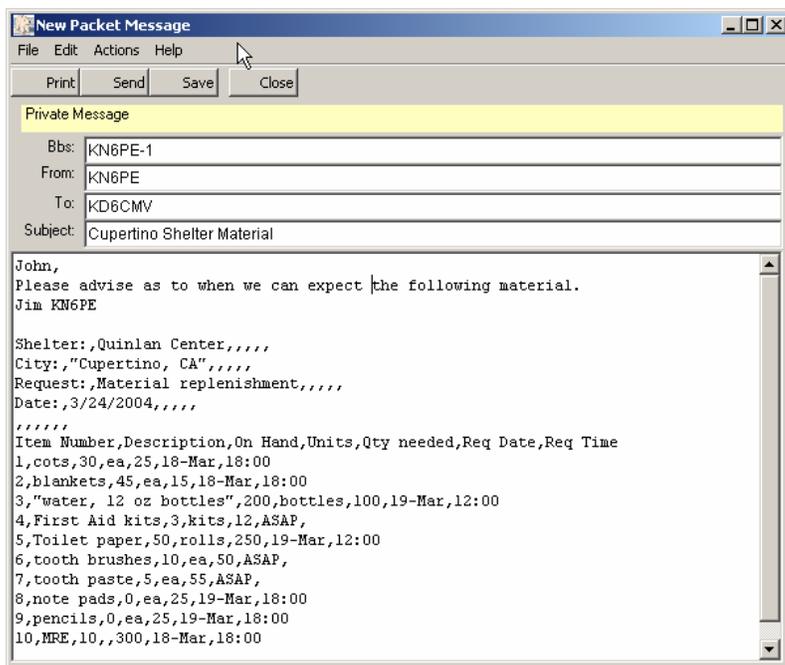
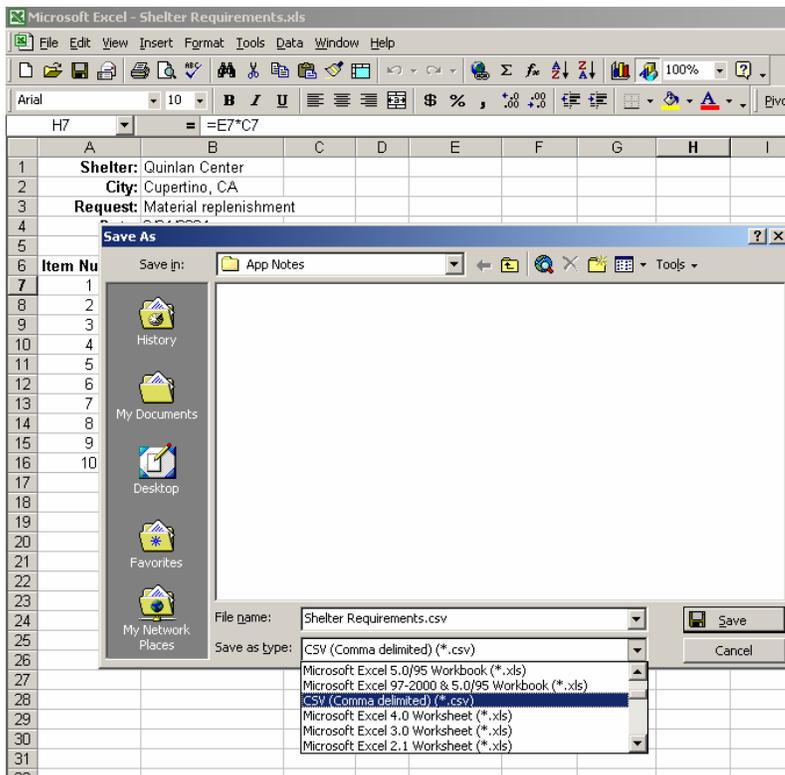
Method #2 – Sending a spreadsheet file

Attempting to send a standard spreadsheet file may cause Outpost, the BBS, or both, to hang because of embedded binary content in the spreadsheet.

However, most spreadsheet applications support a means to export spreadsheet data into one or more ASCII formats that are compatible with Outpost and the packet environment.

While the following example demonstrates one approach using Microsoft Excel, the concept applies to other spreadsheet packages as well.

1. Once the spreadsheet is created, move a copy of it to the PC where Outpost resides.
2. At the Outpost PC, open the spreadsheet, press **File->Save As** from the spreadsheet menu.
3. Change the “Save as Type” to “Comma Delimited (*.csv)”. Press **Save**. A file with a *.csv extension is created.
4. Go back to Outpost. Open an Outpost message form. Press **File->Open** from the Outpost message menu.
5. Change the “Files of Type” to “All files (*.*)”. Change the directory to where the *.csv file is located, select the file, and press **Open**. The *.csv file is written on to the message form
6. Take a look at the example to the right. Note that all fields are separated by commas, and fields with embedded commas are surrounded by quotes.
7. When done, press **Send** to move the message in the Out Tray.



Receiving a spreadsheet file

Continuing with the above example, proceed to recover the file as follows:

1. Once the Outpost message arrives, open the message. Note the BBS header that was added above the message.
2. Press **File->Save As** from the Outpost message menu.
3. Enter in a file name with a *.csv extension. Press **Save**. Close the message.
4. Open a blank Excel spreadsheet.
5. Press **File->Open** from the Excel menu. Change the “Files of Type” to “Comma Delimited (*.csv).” Locate the file saved by Outpost. Press **Open**.
6. The entire message is brought into the spreadsheet. Note that it includes more than was sent:
 - a. An address header added by Outpost (1st four lines in the example)
 - b. An address header added by the BBS (3 lines, rows 6-8)
 - c. The message text as entered by the sender (3 lines, rows 10-13).
 - d. The original spreadsheet data.
7. If desired, delete the added rows above the original data, in this case, rows 1 through 13 (highlighted in the example, ready for deleting).
8. Correct the formatting – **Bold** headers, fix column widths, correct cell alignment (not shown) – and save as an *.xls file.

