When words, structured data are placed on single canvas
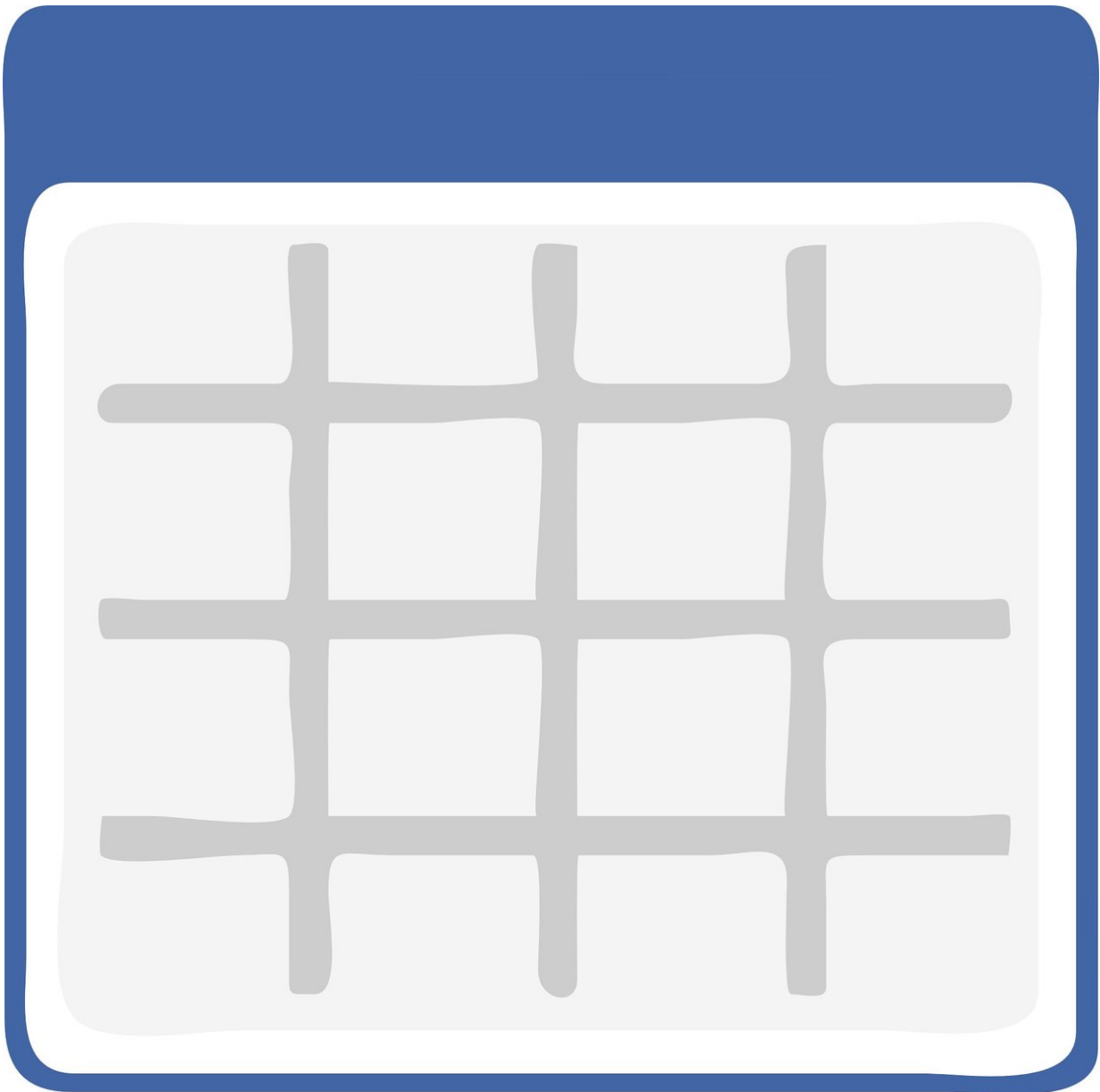
October 22 2017, by Nancy Owano

If "ugh" is your favorite word to describe entering, amending and correcting data on the rows and columns on spreadsheets you are not alone. Coda, a new name in the document business, feels it's time for a change. This is what they have to say, or rather, exclaim:

"Documents haven't changed in 40 years. The first spreadsheet was built for accountants in the 70s. Since then, we've updated the interface and piled on features. But it's still just cells in a spreadsheet."

They are offering a refreshing alternative to the accountant's grid to list and watch over activities in the workplace.

Their next-generation spreadsheet is in the wings. Its makers are confident there are people out there who will be happy to get hold of a tool with a more modern "language" for management.

Shishir Mehrotra used to work in YouTube as head of product, said *The Verge*, and he wondered what would documents and spreadsheets look like if they were invented today? Together with another Alex DeNeui, he co-founded Coda.

They have announced they built Coda and now are inviting others to see what it can do for them and their teams. What is it?

The co-founders call it nothing less than "a new day for docs."

Primarily, it combines your words and data and parks them in one place; no more cross opening between spreadsheets and text docs. As Mehrotra said in a blog, it combines "the flexibility of writing words on a page

with rich, structured data formed on tables."

Call it a tool or consider it a single new canvas. Coda "makes a collaborative document editor that combines a word processor and a spreadsheet," said Casey Newton in *The Verge*.

Who wants such a thing?

Given today's collaborative nature of office work, Mehrotra had in mind diverse teams in companies. After all, he blogged, "the way we use documents has completely shifted. We aren't trying to digitize physical analogs any more; we're using documents as tools to run our teams."

Casey Newton in *The Verge*: "Open it for the first time and you'll see a blank canvas that will be familiar to anyone who has ever used Google Docs or Microsoft Word. But drop in a table, add a few rows and columns, and you'll find a powerful engine underneath."

Other services can be integrated in the spreadsheets. "Enter 'GoogleDirections' into a formula, for example, and Coda will insert a Google Map with directions from an origin location to a destination," Newton said.

One of their early users referred to it as "Minecraft for docs." Perfect," said Mehrotra.

He wrote about what happened with other users:

"As usage grew, Coda docs started taking on lives of their own. Our recruiter Raechel made an elaborate wedding planning doc. A hundred-person team uses Coda for one of its biggest projects. And my eldest daughter just onboarded her Lego robot league team in hopes of winning another championship this season."

What's next? "We don't even know everything this doc can do. Help us figure out its potential."

Coda is offering a fill-in bar where you enter your email to request an [invite](#).

Matthew Lynley, *TechCrunch*: "Time will tell whether or not Coda proves out to be as [flexible](#), or more, to satisfy the needs for a wide array of teams that all have different demands."

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