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Subject: Creating an effective WBS

Question: My schedules don't always give me the information I need to manage my project. Any hints you can give me to help me with this problem?

Answer: This is a subject that can fill a book to answer. Creating an effective Work Breakdown Structure is essential to a well managed project schedule. Here are some hints that could point you in the right direction.

1. Ask yourself – what would I like my schedule to tell me? What information would I like to learn from managing my schedule? You will have to build that information in to gain results later.
2. How will I track this project – this could have impact on how it is built.
3. Every project will require different levels of information. Do you need the same information from your kitchen rehab project that you would need from a Microsoft software upgrade project?
4. Too much detail in a WBS will make the project schedule the project. What you are trying to achieve is that the project schedule will aid you in managing the project. Someone asked me once if 15 levels deep in the WBS was too deep?
5. The WBS is the backbone to your project schedule – incomplete WBS, incomplete results.
6. Real life is complicated. Do not try to have your schedule mirror real life. You will spend a lot of your time correcting the schedule and less time managing your project.
7. In MS Project you have multiple task types. Use those task types to help you create your WBS structure. See below:

Summary task	Title only – no resource assigned
Detail Task	
Detail Task	Actual work task of project. Assign resources.
Detail Task	
Milestone	Zero duration task, no work, no resources

Group detail tasks into groupings within Summary tasks. Use a naming structure also as an aid to creating the WBS:

Summary tasks – Use nouns – Report, Build, Location, Refine Design
Detail tasks - Use action verbs – Purchase supplies, Program section A, Clean up database
Milestones - Past tense – Report completed, Location found, Refine design done

Once you have the above structure it will be easy to get high level milestone reports using filters. You will also have the ability to sort, filter, and group just the work tasks.