SAMPLE · FICTIONAL BUSINESS

Where the office's week goes

Pellow Exhibitions builds exhibition stands from Birmingham, for shows in the UK and across Europe. One crew coordinator and three project managers keep 64 builders, the exhibitors and the owner in step, using an Airtable base, WhatsApp, email, Dropbox folders, a notebook and Xero.

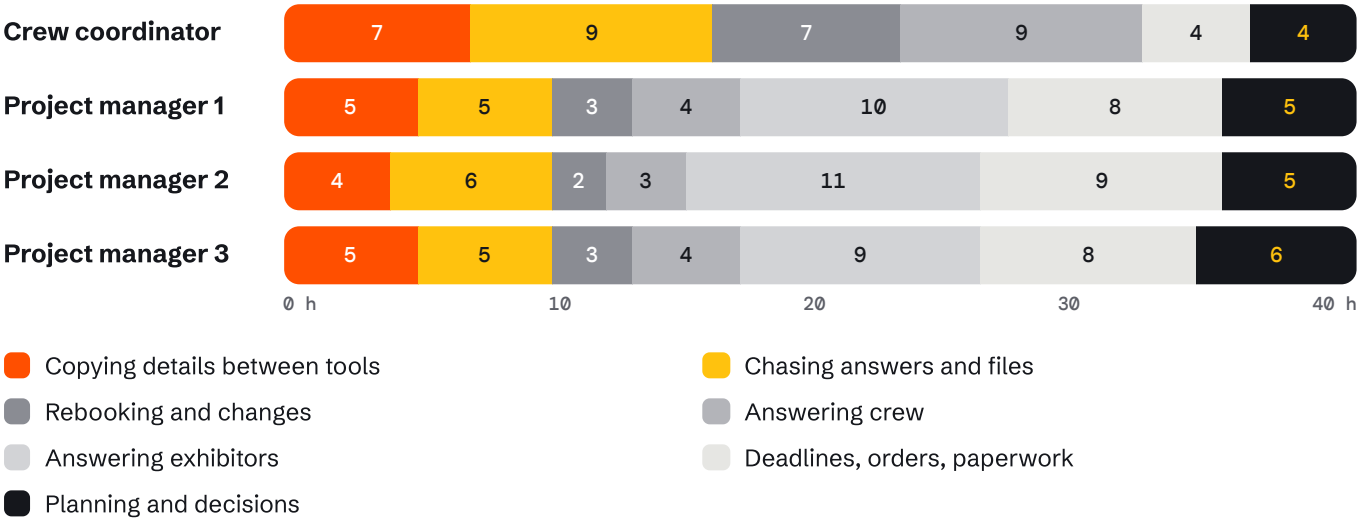
4
people in the office doing the coordinating

64
crew, staff and freelance

11
shows to build for in April

6
tools, none connected

A typical week, hours per person (40 h each)



THE FINDING

2,210 h

a year spent copying details between tools and chasing answers.

46 hours a week across the four of them, more than a quarter of their time. Only 20 hours a week go to planning and decisions, the part of the job that needs them.

Most of the copying happens because one booking lives in four places: the Airtable rota, the coordinator's notebook, a WhatsApp chat and, at the end of the week, Xero.

How it was measured: in February 2026, a day with the crew coordinator, a day with each project manager and a morning with the owner, plus a short time log each of them kept for the rest of that week. Yearly figures assume 48 working weeks.

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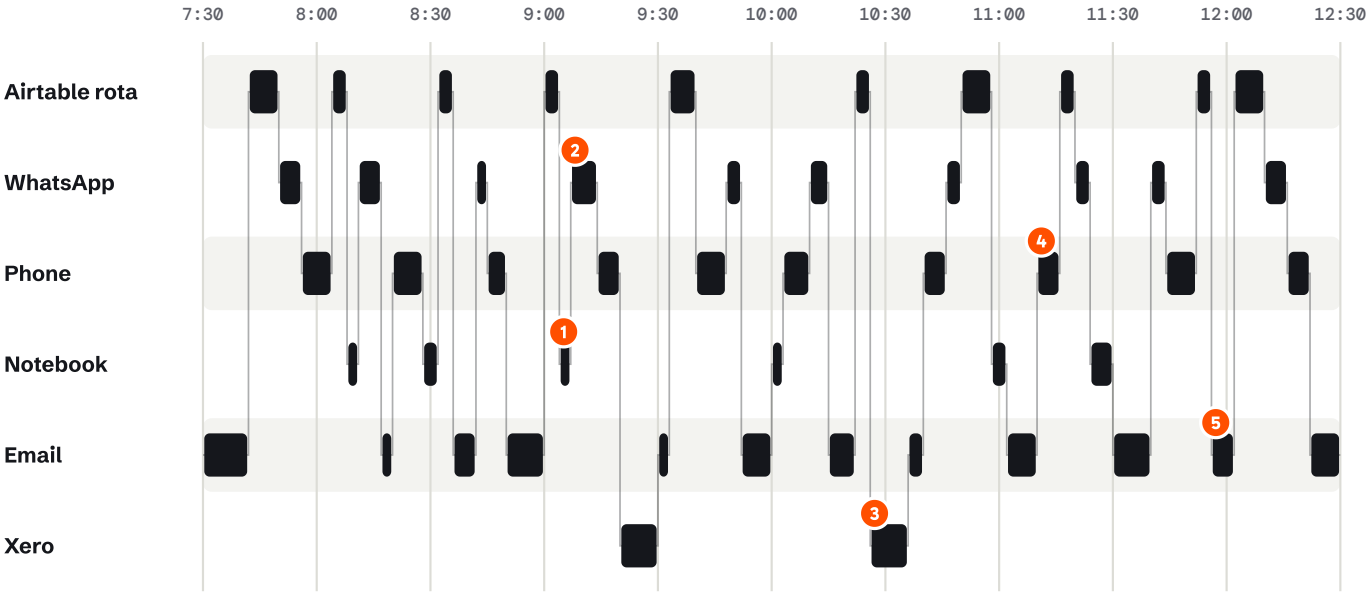
Monday morning with the crew coordinator, tool by tool

Each block is time spent in one tool. Every change of row is a switch. Orange markers are the moments where something went wrong, or nearly did.

49
tool switches in five hours

6 min
average time in one tool

14
tables in the Airtable base



1 **9:04 · phone → notebook**
Answers in a notebook. Crew answer this week's shift offers by phone and WhatsApp, and the answers go into a paper notebook. The project managers can't see who said yes, so they call to ask.

2 **9:07 · WhatsApp → Airtable**
Certificates by photo. Working-at-height cards arrive as WhatsApp photos, each saved and uploaded to Airtable one at a time. Before a big show, this takes most of a Monday.

3 **10:26 · WhatsApp → Xero**
Timesheets retyped. Last week's timesheets, photos of paper sheets, are typed into Xero line by line: bills for freelancers, hours for staff.

4 **11:10 · phone**
A double booking. A carpenter calls to ask which stand he's on on Thursday. He's on two. The rota accepted both bookings without a word.

5 **11:56 · email**
An expiring certificate. An electrician's qualification, found by chance in an old email, runs out halfway through build-up at a Frankfurt show he's booked on.

Where the hand-offs break

HAND-OFF	HOW IT WORKS TODAY	WHAT GOES WRONG	HOW OFTEN
Shift offer → answer → booking	Calls and WhatsApp messages, answers in a notebook, then the Airtable rota	Nobody else can see the answers; double bookings slip through	2 found in a week
Stand drawings and briefs	In each project manager's own Dropbox folder	When one is away, nobody finds the latest drawing	every holiday
Organiser deadlines	Read from each show's exhibitor manual into personal calendars	A stand plan or electrics order is late	1 this season
Exhibitor questions and graphics	Email to the project manager, files forwarded to the printer	Files at the wrong size, noticed days before build-up	~2 a show
Certificates	WhatsApp photos, uploaded one by one	Expiry dates are typed by hand, or not at all	every big show
Timesheets → pay	Paper sheets, photographed, typed into Xero	Mistyped hours, late pay for freelancers	every Monday

Routine enough to automate

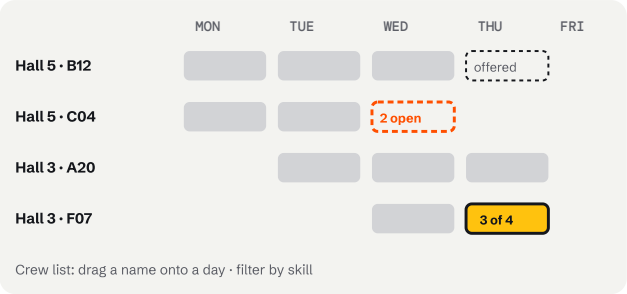
Shift confirmations and reminders to crew	**~8 h/wk**
Deadline and file reminders to exhibitors	**~5 h/wk**
Replies to routine exhibitor questions, approved by a person	**~4 h/wk**
Timesheets into Xero	**~4 h/wk**
Certificate expiry checks	**~2 h/wk**
Hotel room lists for each show	**~2 h/wk**
Estimated time back	**~25 h/wk**

Stays with people

- Choosing crew leads, and the teams that build well together
- Design decisions with exhibitors
- Dealing with organisers and venues when plans change
- Signing off a finished stand with the exhibitor

THE CLICKABLE FIRST SCREEN

The crew board: who builds which stand, each day



Stand jobs down the side, days across. Each cell shows who is booked, who has been offered a place, and how many more people the job needs that day.

THE VERDICT

Build, starting with the crew board.

The industry packages Pellow looked at plan stands well, but not a crew of 64 that is half freelance, booked day by day, with certificates that have to be valid on each of those days. That part is what makes Pellow work, so it's worth building. The Airtable base keeps running, filled by a nightly copy, until nobody needs it. The three-month plan, in the feature ledger, starts with the crew board, the show calendar and the stand jobs.