

Modeling Structured Finance Cash Flows with Microsoft® Excel®

A Step-by-Step Guide

KEITH A. ALLMAN



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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

Wiley Bicentennial Logo: Richard J. Pacifico.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Allman, Keith A., 1977-

Modeling structured finance cash flows with Microsoft Excel : a step-by-step guide /
Keith A. Allman.

p. cm.—(Wiley finance series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-470-04290-8 (paper/cd-rom)

1. Cash management—Mathematical models. 2. Cash flow—Mathematical models. 3. Microsoft Excel (Computer file) 4. Corporations—Finance—Mathematical models. I. Title.

HG4028.C45A454 2007

658.15'50285554--dc22

2006025757

Printed in the United States of America.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Preface	xi
Acknowledgments	xiii
About the Author	xv
Introduction	1
The Three Basic Elements of a Cash Flow Model	3
Inputs	3
Cash Flow Structure	4
Outputs	5
The Process of Building a Cash Flow Model	5
Plan and Design	5
Obtain All Necessary Information	6
Construct Basic Framework	6
Develop Advanced Structure	6
Validate Assumptions	6
Test Model	7
How This Book Is Designed	7
CHAPTER 1	
Dates and Timing	9
Time Progression	9
Dates and Timing on the Inputs Sheet	10
Day-Count Systems: 30/360 versus Actual/360 versus Actual/365	11
Model Builder 1.1: Inputs Sheet—Dates and Timing	12
Dates and Timing on the Cash Flow Sheet	14
Model Builder 1.2: Cash Flow Sheet—Dates and Timing	15
Toolbox	18
Naming Cells and Ranges	18
Data Validation Lists	19
EDATE	21

CHAPTER 2**Asset Cash Flow Generation 23**

Loan Level versus Representative Line Amortization	23
How Asset Generation Is Demonstrated in Model Builder	27
Asset Generation on the Inputs Sheet	27
Fixed Rate Amortization Inputs	28
Floating Rate Amortization Inputs	28
Model Builder 2.1: Inputs Sheet Asset Assumptions and the Vectors Sheet	29
Asset Generation on the Cash Flow Sheet	33
Model Builder 2.2: Notional Asset Amortization on the Cash Flow Sheet	33
Toolbox	39
OFFSET	39
MATCH	40
MOD	41
PMT	41

CHAPTER 3**Prepayments 43**

How Prepayments Are Tracked	43
SMM: Single Monthly Mortality	44
CPR: Conditional Prepayment Rate	44
PSA: Public Securities Association	44
ABS: Absolute Prepayment Speed	45
Historical Prepayment Data Formats	46
Building Prepayment Curves	46
Prepayment Curves in Project Model Builder	47
The Effect of Prepayments on Structured Transactions	48
Model Builder 3.1: Historical Prepayment Analysis and Creating a Projected Prepayment Curve	48
Model Builder 3.2: Integrating Projected Prepayments in Asset Amortization	53
Toolbox	56
Weighted Averages Using SUMPRODUCT and SUM	56

CHAPTER 4**Delinquency, Default, and Loss Analysis 59**

Delinquencies versus Defaults versus Loss	59
The Importance of Analyzing Delinquency	60
Model Builder 4.1: Building Historical Delinquency Curves	62
Deriving Historical Loss Curves	64
Model Builder 4.2: Building Historical and Projected Loss Curves	67
Analyzing Historical Loss Curves	69
Model Builder 4.2 Continued	69

Projecting Loss Curves	70
Model Builder 4.2 Continued	71
Integrating Loss Projections	73
The Effects of Seasoning and Default Timing	75
Model Builder 4.3: Integrating Defaults in Asset Amortization	76
CHAPTER 5	
Recoveries	83
Model Builder 5.1: Historical Recovery Analysis	85
Projecting Recoveries in a Cash Flow Model	86
Model Builder 5.2: Integrating Recoveries into Project Model Builder	87
Final Points Regarding Recoveries	88
CHAPTER 6	
Liabilities and the Cash Flow Waterfall	89
Priority of Payments and the Cash Flow Waterfall	89
The Movement of Cash for an Individual Liability	90
Types of Liabilities	91
Fees	91
Model Builder 6.1: Calculating Fees in the Waterfall	91
Interest	94
Model Builder 6.2: Calculating Interest in the Waterfall	95
Principal	100
Model Builder 6.3: Calculating Principal in the Waterfall	100
Understanding Basic Asset and Liability Interactions	105
CHAPTER 7	
Advanced Liability Structures: Triggers, Interest Rate Swaps, and Reserve Accounts	107
Triggers and Their Affect on the Liability Structure	107
Model Builder 7.1: Incorporating Triggers	108
Swaps	113
Model Builder 7.2: Incorporating a Basic Interest Rate Swap	114
Final Notes on Swaps	117
Reserve Accounts	117
Model Builder 7.3: Incorporating a Cash-Funded Reserve Account	118
Conclusion of the Cash Flow Waterfall	122
Toolbox	123
AND and OR	123
CHAPTER 8	
Analytics and Output Reporting	125
Internal Testing	125
Cash In versus Cash Out	125

Model Builder 8.1: Cash In versus Cash Out Test	126
Balances at Maturity	128
Model Builder 8.2: Balances at Maturity Tests	128
Asset Principal Check	129
Model Builder 8.3: Asset Principal Check Test	129
Performance Analytics	130
Monthly Yield	130
Model Builder 8.4: Calculating Monthly Yield	130
Calculating the Monthly Yield	132
Bond-Equivalent Yield	133
Model Builder 8.5: Calculating Bond-Equivalent Yield	133
Modified Duration	133
Model Builder 8.6: Calculating Modified Duration	134
Output Reporting	135
Model Builder 8.7: Creating the Output Report	136
The Importance of Testing and Output	140
Toolbox	140
Conditional Formatting	140
Goal Seek	141
Array Formulas	142

CHAPTER 9

Understanding the Model 145

The Complete Model in Review	145
Understanding the Effects of Increased Loss	147
Varying Principal Allocation Methodologies	150
Varying Prepayment Rates	151
Varying Loss Timing	152
Varying Recovery Rate and Lag	152
The Value of a Swap	153
Additional Testing	153

CHAPTER 10

Automation Using Visual Basic Applications (VBA) 155

Conventions of This Chapter	155
The Visual Basic Editor	156
The Menu Bar	156
The Project Explorer and the Properties Window	157
VBA Code	157
Simple Automation for Printing and Goal Seek	158
Model Builder 10.1: Automating Print Procedures	158
Model Builder 10.2: Automating Goal Seek to Optimize Advance Rates	161

Understanding Looping to Automate the Analytics Sheet	164
Model Builder 10.3: Automating Goal Seek to Perform Transaction Analytics	164
Automated Scenario Generation	167
Model Builder 10.4: Creating a Transaction Scenario Generator	167
Working with Macros in Excel	173
 CHAPTER 11	
Conclusion	175
The Investment Banker's Perspective	175
The Investor's Perspective	176
The Issuer's Perspective	176
The Financial Guarantor's Perspective	177
The Big Picture Perspective	177
 Appendix: Using This Book with Excel 2007	179
 About the CD-ROM	189
 Index	193

Preface

During my first analytics position after graduate school, I asked a vice president at our company what the best way was to learn how his group modeled transactions. He answered with a grin: “Trial by fire.” From that point on, I could not have counted the gray hairs that I developed trying to figure out the most precise and efficient method of modeling a transaction. I am pleased to say those days are behind me and it no longer takes me hours to construct a powerful, accurate model. Nevertheless I am dismayed when I speak with finance peers who convey their desire to learn better financial modeling and are intimidated by the task or simply at a loss for where to begin. At those moments, I often think how I came to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to model a diverse array of financial transactions.

I recalled hours spent poring over “how-to” books about Excel that were filled with hundreds of functions and formulas and left me feeling like I didn’t have any idea where to start modeling a transaction. The how-to books provide excellent basics of application operation yet they do not offer any context for applying those skills. My next thought was graduate school, where many courses such as Statistics, Economics, Corporate Finance, Capital Markets, and Decision Making utilize Excel for assignments and examinations. Unfortunately, for everyday application, the graduate school classes provide context, but typically on very specialized subjects that still left me with no framework to build a financial model. The next step I took was to purchase more advanced books with the words “Financial Modeling” in the title. With these, I found the topics highly theoretical or applicable to extremely focused fields that do not translate into a practical model oriented towards cash flow analysis.

I realized that most of my knowledge, expertise, and fluidity in financial modeling came from working in analytics groups. There I focused on interpreting structures from documents and benefited by learning from others about how to convert the deal structure into a working model. Between the insurance and banking industries, I’ve seen and built numerous models—from the very basic that are little more than a balance sheet with formulas to incredibly complex models involving stochastic simulations. With every model on which I have worked, I have tried to take away what I have felt to be the best attributes and incorporate those features into my current modeling.

As my experience with financial models continues to grow, I definitely feel that I am at a point where I have worked with enough models to distinguish trends, common practices, and characteristics of exceptional financial modeling. My personal experience has been with cash-flow-based models seen in most fixed income, structured, asset-based, or project finance transactions. To avoid trial by

fire, this book teaches the framework and specifics of cash-flow-based modeling using structured finance as a context. If examples are followed from beginning to end, the result will be a fully operating cash flow model that the reader built step by step.

Aside from being able to create a model from the ground up, understanding how each component is built and interacts will aid a reader who needs to work with other peoples' models. I often find working with another person's model more difficult than building a new one from scratch. It takes time to discern the core components and functionality of the model. However, most well-thought-out models have similar basic elements that can be understood and manipulated. This book intends to cover each of those elements and provide the reader with enough depth to proficiently work with existing models.

Looking back at the moment when I had that trial-by-fire response, I certainly do not feel that has to be the standard that anyone should have to rely on. Regardless if the reader is a new finance professional who wants to learn how to build a model, a seasoned professional who works with others' models, a structured finance professional looking for analyses specific to the field, or simply anyone interested in understanding financial modeling better, I feel that passing on my experience in the form of a book with practical examples can help make the learning process easier and more efficient.

KEITH A. ALLMAN

New York, New York
December 2006

Acknowledgments

My career in finance began at MBIA, Inc., a leading financial guarantor and provider of specialized financial services. There three individuals provided an excellent introduction to financial modeling, namely Henry Wilson, William Devane, and Melissa Brice-Johnson. In particular, I would like to thank Henry for giving me the opportunity to work on a variety of transactions and William for showing me many fundamental techniques. After leaving MBIA, I wrote the first three chapters of this book as part of a proposal to John Wiley & Sons, where I would like to thank my peer editors Maria Costa for her in-depth review as well as Lionel Beehner for his editorial suggestions. Further editorial suggestions were made by Omar Haneef and Matthew Niedermaier as the book developed, both whom I would like to thank especially for their work on the text and Model Builder exercises. Also, this book could not possibly have been brought to market without the amazing support of William Preinitz, who read through, approved, and was a driving force in receiving Citigroup's compliance approval. Lastly, I am very grateful for Siobhan Devine, whose patience and encouragement kept me centered throughout everything.

Also at Wiley, I would like to thank Bill Falloon for working with me from taking the proposal to a signed contract, Emilie Herman for her consistent involvement in every aspect, Laura Walsh and her team for the cover and marketing work, and Mary Daniello and her team for copyediting such a detail-oriented book.

K. A. A.

About the Author

K eith Allman is currently a vice president in the Global Special Situations Group at Citigroup, where he focuses on emerging market analysis. He has created, audited, and used hundreds of cash flow models for mortgages, autos, equipment leases, credit cards, project finance, and multiple esoterics. Prior to his current role, he worked in the Structured Finance group at Citigroup modeling transactions for their conduits. Mr. Allman began his career in finance at MBIA, Inc., a leading financial guarantor, where he was a senior analyst in its quantitative analytics group. Outside of corporate work, Mr. Allman has written computer curriculum and provides instruction for low-income individuals through Streetwise Partners. His education includes a master's degree in international affairs with a concentration in finance and banking from Columbia University and bachelor degrees in political science and psychology from UCLA.

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Introduction

The basic idea behind any financial model is to bring order and understanding to the numerous variables and complex information that financial transactions present. Learning to build one from a blank spreadsheet is often a daunting task to newcomers because of the sheer amount of information and nearly infinite methods of manipulating data. This book seeks to bring a systematic, well-explained method to constructing a particularly popular and adaptable type of model—the cash flow model. Through the use of thorough explanation, graphical examples, and the simultaneous application of learned methods featured in the *Model Builder* exercises, anyone with a background in finance and basic spreadsheet understanding can develop and understand a fully functioning financial model.

The most significant aspect of the model that will be created is that it is constructed within a real-world context focusing on the structured finance industry. Many other financial modeling books explain either application functions or specific theoretical concepts. These books are good for learning a program or understanding an academic topic, yet they are difficult to translate into a functioning financial model. By combining specific application instruction with theory, this book teaches skills that can be applied instantly to professional level modeling.

While the book focuses on structured finance analysis, the model created here can be adapted for use in other fields. A fundamental question is whether a cash flow model is the appropriate choice for the transaction under consideration. With cheap memory, powerful processors, and constant evolutions in financial analytics, a multitude of models are available ranging from real-time market value models to code-intensive Monte Carlo simulations. The cash flow model is primarily used for transactions that involve assets generating cash flow, which is applied against a set of liabilities. These transaction types are often encountered in structured, asset-based, and project finance and typically include the following asset classes:

- Automobile loans and leases
- Residential mortgages
- Commercial mortgages
- Equipment leases
- Credit card receivables
- Insurance/annuity arbitrage
- Emerging market remittances
- CBO/CLO/CDO
- Small business loans
- Timeshares

- Infrastructure (toll road, airport, etc.)
- Resources (oil, timber, etc.)

Naturally this list is not exhaustive. It covers a majority of asset classes that use a cash flow based model. It is possible to merge types of models such as using a Monte Carlo model to determine defaults and then running the results through a cash flow model. The key to deciding on whether a cash flow model is necessary depends on the desired result.

A cash flow model takes in asset assumptions, runs the generated cash through a series of liability assumptions, and determines where and how much cash was allocated over time. This type of modeling is used from many different perspectives, with many different results in mind.

One of the most common uses is an issuer that needs to fund the generation of assets. A company such as Toyota, which has a finance division, may want to fund leases for their own vehicles. Toyota needs to raise money to provide the leases. It could do so in the capital markets by asking a bank to loan funds against the leases by either having a bank directly issue money or sell debt in the term market. Toyota's cash flow analysis would have to focus on how much cash its leases would generate over time to determine the amount of debt that can be issued. A Toyota analyst would want to build a cash flow model to project the expected cash being generated by the leases over time and how that cash would be allocated in a structured financing. The purpose of his or her analysis would be to understand the cash flow well enough to make sure they are receiving as much money as possible for the lowest cost.

The bank would do a similar analysis in more detail. It would want to know how typical Toyota leases perform over time in terms of delinquency, default, and prepayment. No bank would want to issue a billion dollars only to find that the assets will pay back anything less. Also, transactions typically have to be structured to a certain credit rating level set by the three primary credit rating agencies (Standard & Poor's, Moody's, and Fitch). To do this, a transaction has to withstand a certain amount of stress as dictated by the rating agency. The only way to do this is to build a dynamic model and stress it according to rating agency standards. In the bank's cash flow model, it would want to see how much cash the assets generate under stressful situations and whether that is enough to cover the financing costs imposed either by the market or by the bank itself.

In addition, a surety provider might provide insurance on the issuance. It would be extremely analytical in its decision because, if an interest or principal payment is missed on the financing, it would have to pay an insurance claim. A surety would use a cash flow model to ensure that, when variables are stressed, the interest and principal of the debt they insured is paid.

Finally, there are many other related parties that need to know what the issuers and the banks are doing. Credit rating agencies need to model the transactions to make sure that they support certain ratings that the bank and issuer desire. An auditor may want to make sure all the data in a prospectus is correct by modeling