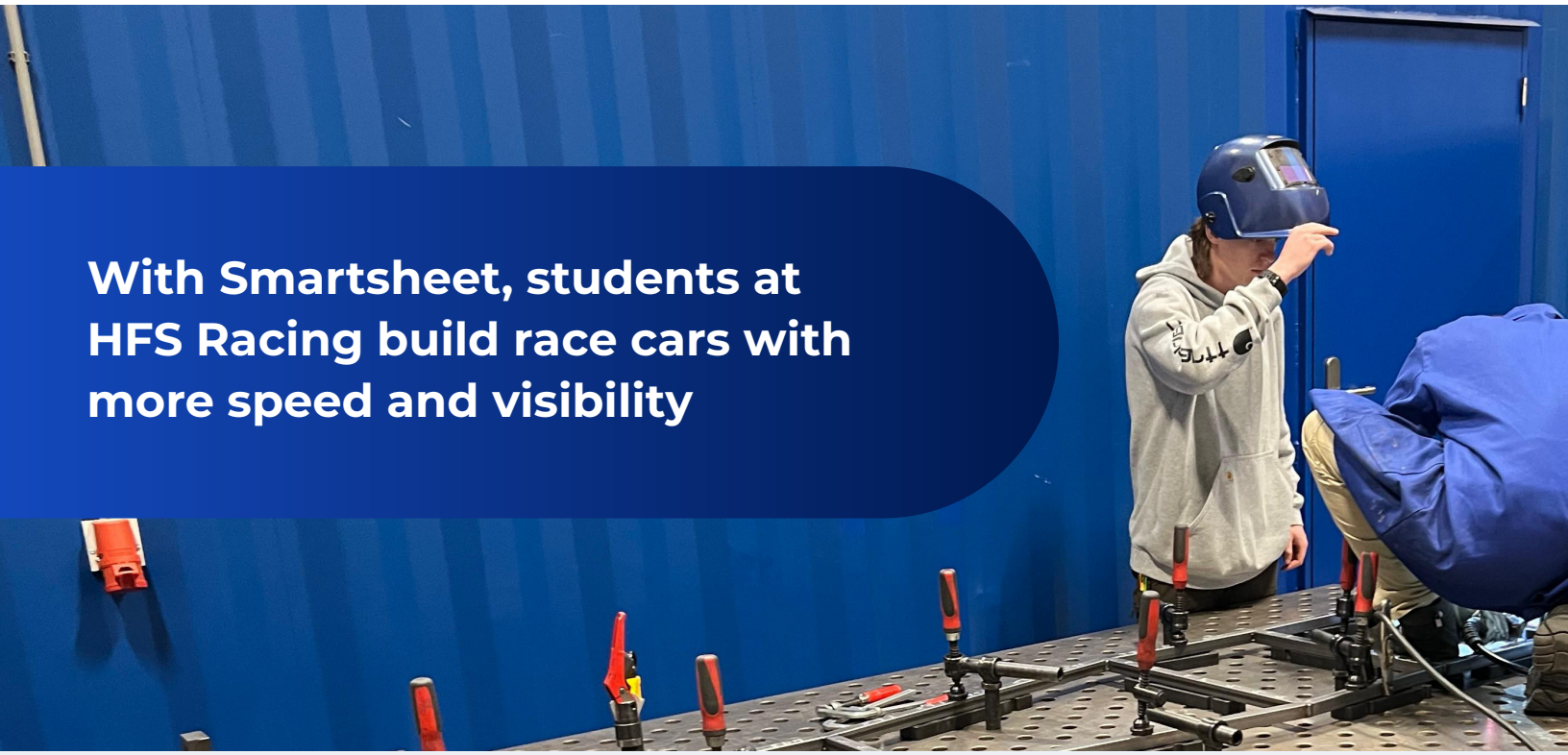

With Smartsheet, students at HFS Racing build race cars with more speed and visibility

HFS Racing students had to coordinate their efforts to build a race car from scratch. With help from Smart4B, they deployed Smartsheet, bringing the visibility and speed needed for meeting deadlines.

“In just four to five months, we have already built an entirely new car. We’ve made more progress this semester than we did in the last two years.”

Souliman Alchikh,
Team Manager at HFS Racing.

Customer:
HFS Racing

Industry:
Education

Organization Size:
Emerging and SMB (1-199 employees)

Website:
hfsracing.nl/

Region:
EMEA

Smartsheet Aligned

While most students focus on textbooks and lectures, a group of engineering students at HAN University of Applied Sciences set out to do something far more ambitious—building a race car from scratch. With no prior experience in full-scale vehicle production, they took on the challenge of designing, testing, and assembling every component themselves, all with the goal of competing at Formula Student Netherlands. Now known as HFS Racing, the 24-member team is driven by a shared belief: “Through collaboration and communication, we can achieve great things together.”

Siloed, unstructured workflows

The team quickly realized that engineering the car was only half the challenge—coordinating the people behind it was just as complex. Members were assigned major tasks with distant deadlines but were given little direction. This caused many to put off their work until the final weeks when they had to bring everything together in a rush. Teams also worked in isolation, sometimes duplicating efforts without realizing it. Although they were using a project management tool, it wasn’t fully integrated into their process and couldn’t help the team identify task dependencies. “Since no one was keeping track of how things fit together, by the time we tried assembling the car, nothing lined up,” says Souliman Alchikh, Team Manager at HFS Racing. “Over the past two years, these inefficiencies piled up, and we weren’t able to make it to the competition.”

Thankfully, Maaik Meijerink, a team member’s uncle and the Chief Executive Officer at Smart4B, heard about these struggles. He decided to not only sponsor the team but also provide Smartsheet licenses and guidance. “I knew that their existing solution couldn’t handle such a project,” he shares. “I wanted to help, but I didn’t want to just take their task list and drop it into Smartsheet—I wanted to teach them how to use it effectively, in a way that worked for them.”

Introducing rigor and clarity

HFS Racing decided to overhaul its workflows. It introduced the Scrum framework, an agile approach to project management, and deployed Smartsheet to put it into practice. The team also introduced Gantt charts to map out dependencies, progress bars to track individual task completion, and role-specific reports to give each department a clear view of their responsibilities. Automated notifications kept students updated on new tasks and shifting deadlines, helping them catch delays early. “Smart4B’s support was a real turning point for us. They introduced features in Smartsheet that we didn’t even know existed, which made everything so much clearer and more interactive,” adds Alchikh. With better visibility, the team began holding weekly meetings to track progress, identify bottlenecks, and adjust workloads as needed.

HFS Racing also started using Smartsheet as its internal audit tool. “We have to design and build our car around very strict rules. Every single part, down to the smallest screw, has to be checked for compliance,” shares Alchikh. The team imported all compliance requirements into Smartsheet and linked them directly to relevant

Use cases

→ Business PMO

Capabilities

→ Automation

→ Dashboards and Reporting

→ Project Visibility

tasks. This way, if a student was working on the suspension, they could instantly access the rules they needed to follow, making compliance a seamless part of the workflow.

More transparency, more collaboration

With the new setup, HFS Racing has a holistic overview of the project. The team can tell at a glance whether they're on schedule, behind, or ahead. They can track milestones, identify bottlenecks, and make quick adjustments. "This visibility has made a huge difference for us managers," says Alchikh. "Before, we had to physically walk around asking everyone for updates, which took an entire week. By the time we had gathered all the information, new developments had already happened, making our data outdated. With Smartsheet, we now have real-time visibility into everything. This has made our workflows more efficient and engaging."

These changes have brought about a more collaborative culture in the team. Before, people worked in isolation, focusing only on their part. "Now that multiple people are working on the same task, they have to collaborate. They're actively discussing progress, ensuring everything fits together properly and aligning their work with the final design," notes Alchikh.

A well-oiled A-team

This transparency has also brought accountability for the group. "Every person's work impacts the next, and they have to collaborate to keep the whole thing moving. If set up correctly, Smartsheet becomes a system that helps them react to changes and understand the impact of delays," explains Meijerink.

Most importantly, HFS Racing can now meet competition deadlines successfully. "After adopting a new framework and deploying Smartsheet, we can work much faster and more efficiently for future competitions," adds Alchikh. "In just four to five months, we have already built an entirely new car. We've made more progress this semester than we did in the last two years."

"Smart4B's support was a real turning point for us. They introduced features in Smartsheet that we didn't even know existed, which made everything so much clearer and more interactive"

Souliman Alchikh,
Team Manager at HFS Racing.