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From the November 2006 Issue

Timesheets, in some form or another, have probably been around for millennia. From cave drawings that showed how long it took to create weapons and clothes from animal carcasses, to slate-based etchings of stone age service professionals. By the 1970s, this process had evolved into Post-It notes stuck on every corner of a professional's desk, waiting to be translated and placed onto a spreadsheet that later would find itself becoming an invoice. Of course, my hypothesis is purely comic conjecture with absolutely no tangible paleontological or archeological evidence on which to base it. But the point is, as long as professionals have billed others based upon their time, they have used some form of recording device to track it, and unfortunately, these methods have generally been inefficient.

We have continued to evolve somewhat since that bygone Post-It era of bellbottoms and corduroys, but many professional accountants continue to poorly manage the time and expenses they incur that should be passed along to their clients. And there's no excuse for it now that there are numerous programs on the market that help automate this task, while providing other valuable features that can actually enhance and streamline the professional office.

Although time and billing software may not seem as dramatically influential to productivity as full-fledged practice management systems (reviewed in our October 2006 issue and available online at www.cpata.com/pm2006), this isn't necessarily so. The amount of time spent manually managing billable and non-

billable time, performing write-ups and mark-downs, applying taxes where necessary, and all of the little tasks involved can eat up even more of a professional's work day. But with modern programs such as the ones reviewed here, many of the workflow tasks are automatically performed by the system, from preparing invoices

automatically or on an as-needed basis to added features like productivity analysis

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integration

with e-mail and calendaring systems like Outlook. Some of these programs provide analysis and forecasting capabilities, due-date tracking, enhanced client contact management, support for multiple currencies and advanced AR features that can supplement or even replace the one currently in place by the firm. This allows the firm to keep clients down to a budgeted amount of time or billings without having to write off an excessive amount. They can then integrate with third-party packages for accounting, payroll and other functions. Also of value to the increasingly

out-of-office professional is remote data-entry functions, whether through web-based interfaces or PDA synching.

So there it is, and it's pretty much a no-brainer when you look back on it. Better management of time and expenses, with the addition of productivity enhancing tools and analytical capabilities, as well as integration between programs, enhances the workflow of the modern accounting practice. The systems here were evaluated based on the following criteria:

Ease-of-Use/Navigation Features. How easy is it to use the program and become comfortable with it? What notable features enhance navigation and workflow, thereby making the system more intuitive?

Management Features. While all of these programs enable users to track time, some provide additional managerial functions. Such functions include executive dashboards that show at-a-glance summaries of key business indicators, advanced tracking and review tools, HR and payroll functions, calendaring

and scheduling features, enhanced contact management, and analytical capabilities

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applications can significantly enhance productivity by reducing redundant data entry. Do they share data with third-party accounting, contact management, communication

tools and even payroll systems? Additionally, this section looks at remote data-entry capabilities such as web access and PDA functionality.

Support/Help. This section looks at how well the built-in assistance features do what they're supposed to do. What general Help features are available, and what additional resources does the vendor offer through its website? User manuals, FAQs, online support communities, tutorials and training all play an important role when it comes to the continued usability of a system.

If you believe there is an aspect of time and billing applications that we should include in our future reviews, please e-mail us at editor@cpata.com. We will consider including your suggestion in next year's review.

□

BQE Software — BillQuick

Over the past few years, BillQuick has become one of the leading time and billing applications, due in large part to the developers' continued pursuit of integration with the major accounting applications on the market. With last year's debut of Microsoft's Small Business Accounting program, BQE immediately worked on integration there, as well.

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ImagineTime, Inc. — ImagineTime

Developed specifically for accountants by accountants, ImagineTime provides an integrated time-based billing system with practice management functions that support multiple billing methods; project-based time tracking and management; due-date monitoring; and a variety of budgeting, forecasting and analysis capabilities.

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LexisNexis Time Matters —

Billing Matters

The Billing Matters system provides a comprehensive time and expense management, client billing and accounting program that includes automated invoicing capabilities, recurring payables, check writing and customizable pre-bills, along with the ability to manage vendors, payables and other related issues.

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Office Tools Pro — Office

Tools Pro 2006

Office Tools Pro offers a time and billing suite that borders on practice management, providing a fairly comprehensive collection of tools for time and expense management, billing, calendaring/scheduling, contact management, due-date reporting, project tracking and paperless document management.

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[Software Technology, Inc. —](#)

[Tabs3](#)

QuickBooks Point of Sale – Version 5 is the newest release of this specialty product from Intuit. Designed to be a standalone POS solution, QuickBooks POS can also be paired with QuickBooks.

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[Tenrox](#)

[— Tenrox Timesheet](#)

Tenrox offers a browser-based time and expense management system in its Timesheet program, which can either be hosted as an online service that can be accessed from virtually any location or stored on a business' file servers for access across the network.

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[TPS Software — TPS Time](#)

[& Billing](#)

Designed specifically for small and midsize accounting firms, the TPS Time & Billing system offers time and expense management, contact management, invoicing with full histories...

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