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TECHNOLOGY

Software Technology, Inc. — PracticeMaster Premier

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From the October 2005 [Review of Mid-Range Accounting Software](#)

PracticeMaster and Tabs3 combine to provide a financial and practice management solution best for firms with one to 100 timekeepers. Integration is provided for QuickBooks, MS Outlook/Exchange, WORLDQX, iManage and CompuLaw, making for a complete timekeeping, research and file management solution.

The firm of Degnan & Shlafer, CPAs (www.degnan-shlafer.com), chose PracticeMaster based on the reputation of the company and its software, the large and diverse user base, its open architecture, and the ability to customize to the firm's needs. The firm is located in Jacksonville, Fla., and offers a full range of professional services with an emphasis in consulting on complex business and tax matters, computer system consulting and computer software installation, training and support. As well, the firm's law firm consulting practice has become regional in scope, covering many of the southeastern states. "PracticeMaster provides a uniform, integrated system that addresses many of the needs of our

business, such as calendaring, contact management, task list management and document assembly,” said Jim Degnan, CPA, a partner with the firm. “The fact that it seamlessly integrates with Tabs3 time and billing software as well as the accounting modules is extremely beneficial as is its integration with WORLDOX Document Management software.”

Ease of Use/Flexibility — 4.5 Stars

PracticeMaster Version 12 provides an intuitive interface that most users will find easy to navigate. Some may call it eye candy, but for firms with higher turnovers or fears of changing software packages, this can mean easier training and easier transitioning. A wealth of information can be tracked for each client and project, with separate tracking available for legal services. An endless list of task codes can be created.

Data is updated in real-time, though users may find the need to refresh reports and views. All clients and work codes can be grouped, and reports can be generated for groups or individuals. Timers for phone calls, research and other tasks can be set up, and you can enter time and charge it to the referenced client. As the program is entirely client-work driven, the organization of time-entry is by assigned fees and costs per client. A timesheet feature is available as the “fee sheet,” and timekeepers can also enter time by going to each client record and entering it as a fee item. When considered with the integration with calendars, timers and many firms’ desire to know their WIP status instantly, PracticeMaster has provided an excellent solution.

Calendars, tasks and alarms are easy to use, and management has the ability to review multiple schedules simultaneously. All data-entry forms are well designed. Getting up and running is not difficult, and a very thorough System Configuration manual is included.

Scalability/Stability — 4.5 Stars

Up to 999 timekeepers (active and inactive) can be recorded in the system, the number active being limited to the license purchased. Small firms with big projects will gain the most from the client-driven interface, though midsize organizations will likely be in a better position to take advantage of the integration features. In only a matter of hours, small firms can be up and running, managing their schedules and tracking projects. Further features can be explored as necessary, though work codes, clients and timekeepers should be set up as soon as possible.

Productivity Tools/Features — 5 Stars

The sample data that is included with the installation is adaptable to both law and accounting firms, and many of the tracking features for clients are best suited for firms that provide legal services. For instance, Client management includes tabs for details about pending or upcoming court cases and specific court issues (such as jurisdiction, judge and opposing counsel). Firms that have clients spread out across large areas will appreciate the integration with Palm and BlackBerry devices, and a great feature for client meetings is the map and weather buttons that bring up Yahoo! weather and maps for the specific client's location.

Another impressive feature is an inclusive web browser for storing and billing research. Stored research can be later shared with clients. A complete tasks section is devoted to calendaring, with the option of setting alarms; viewing daily, weekly and monthly calendars (by individual or group, with the opportunity to set up group events); and setting up Holiday Venues, which is important if you need to track state or international holidays.

Phone and e-mail notes can be created in the Client Journal feature, as can research notes and the time spent on each task. Hyperlinking is available from entered URLs and e-mail addresses, and firms with network-based phone systems may also make use of phone dialing features.

Document management allows for documents to be associated with clients, MS Word and WordPerfect documents to be assembled. The Briefcase feature provides a check-in/check-out function for practically everything except documents. A special DropBox tool has been added that acts as a local repository for reports that are output as *.PDF files. Users can also place other files such as Word and Excel documents in the DropBox for fast and easy access.

Reporting — 5 Stars

Nearly all reports are customizable, and new reports can be generated with the report writer. A wide selection of information is available, and Tabs3, the billing software component, offers numerous reports concerning firm productivity and WIP, as well as individual timekeeper productivity and status.

Support/Help/Updates — 4 Stars

The vendor's web site has several tutorials, a knowledgebase and offers several utility programs for testing networks and converting data files from

other products and accounting firm templates. A very helpful sales and support staff is available. Updates are not regularly scheduled, though new versions are generally released every 12 to 16 months. Degnan noted that technical support is excellent, usually producing immediate to near-immediate contact with a technician

who has support tools at their disposal. “Difficult issues sometime require consultation with higher-level support personnel or programmers, which is usually done during the first call,” he said. “And user enhancement requests are documented and submitted to R&D for consideration.”

Integration — 4.5 Stars

PracticeMaster can integrate with handheld devices for traveling staff, Outlook for e-mail and calendar items, with WORLDOX for further document management features, and QuickBooks for bookkeeping purposes. Other software supported for integration or import/export includes iManage (Word document assembly and further checking for conflicts-of-interest) and CompuLaw for court calendaring and reviewing jurisdictional rules. No tax software is presently integrated for easy timekeeping or task recording.

Relative Value

For pricing our prototype firm, a 19-timekeeper license would be necessary for the single-user model, with a price breakdown of \$1,645 for PracticeMaster Premier and an additional \$1,495 for Tabs3. Multi-user licensing for installation on a server can be purchased for approximately twice the cost of single-user licensing. Included with the price is 60 days of support; a one-year maintenance plan can be purchased for \$575 for PracticeMaster and \$320 for Tabs3. Maintenance plans are recommended for growing firms as they entitle you to free updates and to better pricing for future additional users, in addition to unlimited free telephone support for the maintenance period. Offers are also available for the Basic edition of PracticeMaster or if switching from competitive products.

Most small to midsize firms are in a position to take advantage of many of the features offered by Tabs3 and PracticeMaster. For those firms looking to better serve their clients’ needs, and where tax software integration is not as necessary as document management and research tools, look to this program as a cost-competitive choice.

2005 Overall Rating — 4.5 Stars

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