From
the Nov. 2006 Review of Time & Billing Systems

The Abak
Time and Billing system from Groupe AGI, Inc., provides an integrated time and expense management program for professional services firms. The system, which is offered in English and French, utilizes a variety of timesheets and expense reports and allows detailed management of productivity and pass-through billing of client-related expenses. Abak is available in Professional and Enterprise versions, which provide the same general functionality including integration with payroll systems, but with added features such as support for remote access and increased management reporting available in the Enterprise system. Either version of the system can support a virtually unlimited number of clients, staff, pay rates and expense items. The program's monthly service starts at $8 per employee.

Ease of Use/Navigation Features — 4.5 Stars
After initial setup of staff, clients, billing rates and expense codes, the user is presented with a customizable environment, which includes a navigation menu on the left-hand side that provides access to the system's primary functions. Primary functions include icons for going to timesheet entry, expenses, management functions, the user's datebook, which provides good appointment/task tracking, or any system shortcut the user wants to include. The datebook is useful for employee collaboration and to schedule meetings, etc. The system's menu-level customizability is also a great feature.

The program includes well-designed client and project screens that display information in a spreadsheet format with filtering and query capabilities. Likewise, all data-entry sheets are efficiently configured in a manner that greatly resembles

Outlook, offering tabs to move between functions, which speeds the process of

Management Functions — 5 Stars

As noted earlier, the system can accommodate virtually any number of clients, staff, projects, expense codes and rates per staff member, and offers the ability to set adjusting factors on a recurring or one-time basis. Abak supports time-based, flat-rate, consolidated and split billing options, with all data processed as it is entered, which speeds the management review process. New for 2006, users can also set minimum billable amounts for activities. In addition to traditional expense tracking and pass-through billing with markups, the program can track third-party expenses for outsourced or contracted parties.

Among the more notable management features, Abak includes a variety of tools that assist in monitoring employee time and efficiency, with an approval process that can help in maintaining client budgets. New features also provide enhanced review functions, including approval by project, project phasing, increased budget controls, and enhanced project management capabilities. A variety of tables and summary screens with drilldown functionality further strengthen the managerial focus of the program. The Abak system also includes HR-like functions including employee benefit tracking, which is a welcome addition to a time and billing application.

"Abak allows us to control which clients, and specifically, which projects one of our consultants enters their time for," said Bill Onion, managing member of BriteSkies (www.briteskies.com), a management and information technology consultancy in Cleveland, Ohio. "As a professional services firm, we rely heavily on billable hours as our source of revenue. Therefore, we must ensure that a consultant enters their time accurately (to the right client and project) and quickly (to make it easier to enter time and notes). We also keep detailed notes related to the work done for each timesheet."

Billing & Reporting — 5 Stars

can be set to automatically run. Abak also supports multi-currency invoicing.

Integration — 5 Stars
The system can integrate with many third-party accounting and payroll applications,
including QuickBooks, Sage Accpac, and ADP, enabling the quick transfer of GL, AR, AP and payroll data between the systems. Abak can also export data into and import from most plain-text formats.

User Support & Help — 4.5 Stars
The built-in Help functions in Abak are based on the traditional Windows Help system with indexed referencing, along with content-specific assistance and right-click menus. Abak also provides an online support center that includes FAQs and system updates. Support packages are available, and the company has a variety of training options that include on-site, phone and online.

2006 Overall Rating: 5 Stars

Technology