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Legal Time Tracking 101

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Benjamin Franklin famously said that "nothing is certain except death and taxes." If he had been talking about law firms, he would have also added: "and time entry."

We all know how tedious and frustrating time entry is, but it's, unfortunately, a necessary evil for nearly all lawyers at firms. Your law firm must bill to be paid.

The key to minimizing the frustration and allowing the lawyers at your firm to cut back on nonbillable time so they can get to higher-value work is to implement legal tracking software that actually works. Your firm administrators and bank account will also thank you for the heightened efficiency and accuracy.

As always, we have you covered on how to start making changes for the better.

Why are attorneys hesitant to change how they're tracking their time?

Change is hard! Many attorneys, particularly more senior attorneys, are reluctant to modify their time-tracking ways. "Why fix what isn't broken?" they might ask as they keep handwritten time-entry diaries.

There are a number of reasons why lawyers stick with tried-and-true ways of manual time recording: simplicity, efficiency, and accuracy. We understand that convincing holdouts to stop tracking time offline isn't an easy task, but we promise you that it's easier than deciphering your legal professionals' handwritten scribbles and going through call logs and calendars to manually enter their time at the end of each billing period.

Simplifying the time-tracking process and offering your attorneys a streamlined, integrated time-tracking tool may help to convert even your most adamant holdouts. At a minimum, it will make the process easier and less painful for administrators and staff who assist with time entry in your billing system.

What are some common time-tracking mistakes that attorneys make?

For lawyers, time is always of the essence. But when you have court in the morning, a filing for another client in the afternoon, and a conference call for yet another client in the evening,

simultaneously tracking, keeping, and entering time understandably slips.

The real issue is the culmination of those slips and delays that results, usually, in the attorney and their admin playing detective at the end of the week (or worse, month) and trying to piece together the story of their billable time from fragments in your legal billing software. This method almost always results in underbilling and loss of productivity (not to mention stress, frustration, and other headaches too).

Other offenses include simply not tracking time accurately or efficiently, which is a problem that tends to plague junior attorneys. They might lose track of the time spent on phone calls, forget to start their timer, forget to bill for time emailing or texting with clients, or underbill for a meeting that went long. These attorneys are trying their best but need a little help on the back end with better tech.

Luckily, all of these mistakes are easily remedied with time-tracking software and integrations.

How can legal technology help my law firm track time more efficiently?

We're so glad that you asked! Legal technology can transform the way the lawyers at your firm track their time, and a comprehensive, integrated legal tracking system is the best way to do so.

With so much on their plates, it can be difficult for lawyers to remember every time they perform billable work. In the middle of deadlines, they may lose track of the time they spent on research, emails, text messages, or phone calls. Travel time may slip through the cracks. An organized system helps prevent this chaos from occurring.

Additionally, productivity tools take the tedium out of billing, so lawyers feel more engaged. When your professionals feel better about their work, they do better work — which, in turn, affects your profitability and client satisfaction.

Not only can these tools help lawyers capture more of their billable time, but they can also help lawyers understand where they're spending most of the time. If that time happens to be nonbillable, they may need to rethink their workflow or approach to matters.

What are some tools for improving time entry?

Consider the following tools and features courtesy of tech:

- Better timesheets. Time spent keeping and entering time is nonbillable, distracting, and, frankly, not very fun. Helping your attorneys get to the important stuff by providing a convenient, easy-to-use timesheet template is the first step in helping them track more efficiently. No one should be using an Excel spreadsheet or handwritten diary for time management (or law practice management, case management, or document management for that matter!).

- Timers. Attorneys love timers. They're an incredible tool when working on multiple client matters in a single day. Providing software where attorneys can create client-specific templates and pre-written narrative entries for larger matters like ongoing document review or diligence will save them time and headaches.

- Mobile apps. Mobile applications for tracking and entering time, which are available for iOS and

Android mobile devices, provide more flexibility. Attorneys can enter time while away from their computers, at the courthouse, or when reviewing paper documents at home. More ways to enter time means more accurate timekeeping and billing. The time-tracking features in this type of legal billing tool have also become increasingly invaluable in an environment where attorneys are working remotely.

- Integrate your system. Automatically capturing time through system integration is a game-changer for your lawyers and administrative staff. There's no tool with functionality quite like it.
  o   Inbox and calendar entries. By integrating your billing software with Outlook, time spent drafting emails or attending appointments and meetings will be automatically captured as billable time. This will save the attorneys at your firm time by lessening manual entries and will heighten accuracy, making sure that all time is accounted for and properly billed. Automatic time capture from the right platform can help law firms bill, on average, an extra 8 hours every month.
  o   Individual tasks and documents. Your attorneys will be able to track their time right in Microsoft applications that they already use, such as Word or Excel, and can enter billable hours in real-time while working and switching between tasks and client matters.
  o   Calls and text messages. Your firm can track inbound and outbound phone calls made from integrated mobile apps or received from your clients. These calls are tracked and automatically recorded as billable events, so your attorneys don't need to manually enter them. Attorneys can also automatically capture text messages to clients as billable events. When you automate these integrations, you help attorneys bill more accurately by ensuring they're keeping track of every billable minute.

It's time to take your timekeeping to the next level

With the right tech, your legal practice will be off to greener pastures, both literally and figuratively. We know the process of getting the lawyers at your firm to bill in a timely and accurate manner can be a struggle.

By getting the right legal practice management software in place, you'll minimize friction in workflows, help lawyers enter time more regularly, and save the administrative staff at your firm time and headaches. Plus you'll increase your firm's profitability. It's a win-win-win-win.

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