Advanced

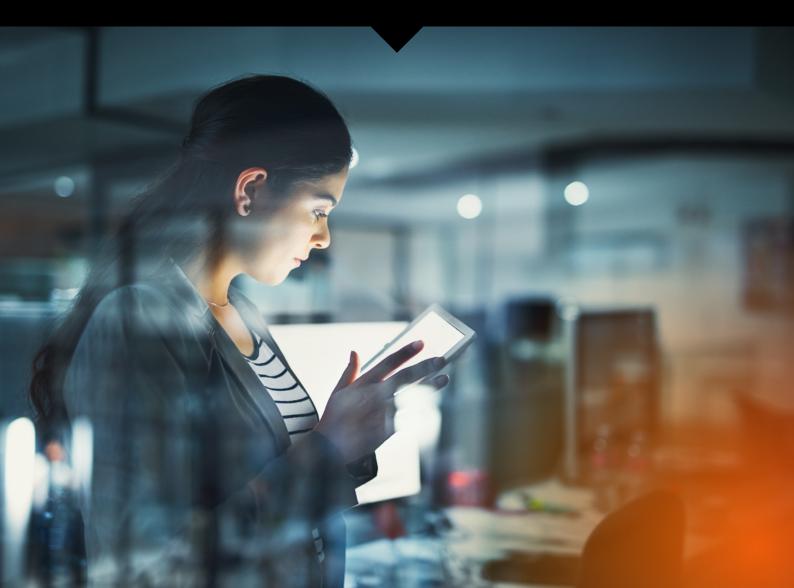# Time to focus: What to consider when choosing a time recording platform

How should law firms choose a time recording platform? It's a decision firms must get right, as it can have a big impact on revenue, profitability, client relationships, staff retention and morale.

In this whitepaper we adopt a fresh approach in relation to this question, by first recognizing that each stakeholder group has its own needs and priorities. By identifying and satisfying those in turn, any law firm can be confident they're choosing a time recording platform that will achieve widespread adoption, deliver on firm-wide requirements, and contribute to strategic goals. So, what are the different stakeholder groups, and which attributes will they need from a time recording platform?

Stakeholder groups and what they value

Attorneys

Time recording matters a lot to attorneys, because they're tasked with hitting aggressive daily and weekly targets. However, it's still an unwelcome distraction, with attorneys wanting to record as much time as possible in the shortest amount of time. They therefore care about:

1. Accessing the means of capture quickly
2. Capturing time easily
3. Getting help with capturing more time

Accessing the means of capture quickly

Capturing time quickly starts with having an easily accessible, web-based, time recording interface that is available via desktop, laptop, tablet or phone.

The interface should be visually consistent across devices, but also optimizable for each screen, and complemented by a modern native App.

Accessibility is also enhanced by integration, at user level, with other software used by the attorney. For example, having time recording hosted within a document management system, to record time as the attorney works on emails and documents relating to a matter without having to leave the document management system.

Meanwhile, biometric authentication and federated single sign-on (FSS) don't just mean enhanced security, but also simple user access to every application co-located in the domain without the need to sign on and off as the user moves between apps, including their time recording platform.

Capturing time easily

It should also be quick to capture time. The optimal arrangement for many attorneys is for time recording to always be in view on the screen they're using. For example, in a sidebar, docked, or in a floating window, so that time recording can be started and stopped easily as the work is performed.

In addition, Natural Language Processing should make it possible to dictate or loosely draft a time entry, using unstructured text that can be turned into a suggested time entry. It means users can have a timekeeping conversation to capture time quickly. In Carpe Diem, for instance, Time Pad emulates the traditional attorney's note pad to make the generation of time records from a timekeeping conversation a quick reality.

Getting help with capturing more time

Lastly, in the quest to hit targets, attorneys will welcome help with recovering time that's not been captured as they worked and has been forgotten. The best time recording systems on the market offer 'passive' capture. They can track the attorney's digital footprint as they go about their working day: viewing web pages, drafting emails or making phone calls.

At the point that a timesheet is being completed, the attorney can view these suggested time entries alongside time they've recorded, to help them fill in gaps in the time record. In Carpe Diem, this feature is called 'Timefinder'. It can be very valuable to attorneys who are looking to increase their billable time. Moreover, this 'found' time not only helps them to hit their targets, but directly translates into more revenue for the law firm.

Assistants

Our second stakeholder group is legal assistants. They're tasked with meeting the administrative needs of more fee-earners than ever before. Since they're very busy, they care about making the intricate work of time record generation and submission as quick and as efficient as possible.

They routinely receive unstructured time records in multiple formats from the attorneys they're entering time for. These can arrive in volume and at speed. Legal assistants will benefit from a facility like Time Pad, into which they can paste unstructured records from emails or word documents for example, that are then instantly translated into structured time entries. Alternatively, an Excel spreadsheet can be

formatted to pick up time records, and then exported into the time recording system as structured entries under the correct attorneys. This type of automation eliminates a lot of potential user error, plus it makes the process of assembling time records much quicker for legal assistants.

Billing and Finance

Like all other stakeholders, billing and finance want to ensure the firm is paid as much as possible, as soon as possible. But they also recognize that while it's important to maximize revenue through capture, time records also need to be compliant with Outside Counsel Guidelines (OCGs). Otherwise much of the captured time will be written down, or written off, eroding realization rates.

That said, OCG compliance isn't easy for attorneys. They're required to keep track of many different rules from many different clients, that also change over time. Therefore, billing and finance teams will want a time recording system that:

1. Makes attorneys aware of the relevant OCGs as they capture time
2. Validates compliance as attorneys submit time
3. Offers flexible and programmable validation

Awareness of OCGs

Compliance with OCGs begins with increasing awareness of the rules, at a time that's most important for the fee earner to know them. Carpe Diem, for example, will present an icon that alerts attorneys to the existence of OCGs relating to the client or matter for which they are entering time as the attorney populates each field.

Importantly, at this juncture of the process, the system doesn't attempt to enforce compliance by restricting or preventing time capture, even if the records are incomplete, partial, or non-compliant. This is because it's crucial that attorneys aren't impeded while entering time. If you construct a system that validates compliance at the point of capture, the danger is that you obstruct capture so regularly that it deters attorneys from entering time in the first place, particularly in smaller increments. This creates an additional danger, which is that they're tempted to pad out other entries to make up for the shortfall on their targets.

Validation and enforcement

Thereafter, billing and finance teams will look for a compliance validation 'safety-net', at the point when the attorney submits their time records. Enforcing compliance at the right juncture is important because a compliance breach caught at the point of submission takes just a few seconds of the attorney's time to correct. Any earlier than this can impede capture and any later takes more time to fix. This affects both the billing team and the attorney, as between them non-compliant entries are queried and re-edited.

It's even more expensive if non-compliance is picked up by the client. When a client queries a line item in the invoice, it costs the law firm time, and causes payment to be delayed. If the line item is subsequently adjusted, it will lead to reduced revenue too. Either way it affects the firm's reputation when invoices are issued that include non-compliant lines, especially if it happens on a regular basis.

Therefore, it's important not to validate compliance

too early or too late in the process, and to separate it from capture to maximize the value of each. Billing and finance stakeholders would appreciate a time recording platform that can do these things.

Flexible and programmable validation

As to what validation looks like, the best time recording systems on the market can be programmed to generate alerts that give attorneys 'soft' warnings. For example, it might warn that billing has exceeded 95% of the pre-agreed budget for the matter; or 'hard' notifications can prevent the attorney from submitting an entry that goes over 100% of the matter budget.

This type of system will also let the law firm program bespoke validation rules. An example might be to check for potential block billing by looking for certain words or characters within proximity of each other within a narrative. The idea here is that validation rules within the time recording system not only drive compliance with OCGs, but additionally drive behaviours that maximize the value the firm gains from the work.

Practice Group Leaders

Practice Group Leaders (PGLs) are tasked with making their practice area run as smoothly and efficiently as possible while maximizing its economic contribution to the law firm. This is facilitated by accessible, timely, reliable and actionable practice management data a lot of which will be time recording data. Therefore, in relation to the choice of time recording platform, PGLs care about:

1. Visibility of timekeeping performance data
2. Reporting that contributes to accurate forecasting

Visibility of timekeeping performance data

PGLs want systems that easily show the volume of time submitted across the practice and by attorney in each period, and via clear dashboards, who has met their targets.

It's also important for PGLs to see how quickly time is captured after the work is completed. This is called the velocity of capture. This matters because slow velocity results in less accurate records that are more vulnerable to client queries, write-downs and write-offs. The best time recording solutions therefore should easily surface slow velocity, so it can be highlighted and acted on.

In addition, PGLs want to understand the delay between time being captured, and its subsequent submission for invoicing. This affects the length of the billing cycle, which is bad for cash flow but can also hit realization rates. The perceived value of work declines very quickly and the longer the period between the execution of work and the invoice arriving, the less grateful the client will probably be about the work that has been done. They'll arguably be more likely to pick apart the invoice too and look for write-downs. This is why it's important PGLs have actionable insights in this area of time recording performance.

Forecasting capabilities

PGLs also benefit from time recording platforms that can help with accurate forward planning. By utilizing the same interface that attorneys use to enter time for past revenue events, they can just as easily enter forecasted time. Reporting on this forecasted time can help ensure the practice's resources are fully utilized, but not over-committed

going forward. It also enables future revenue forecasting, which helps with investment planning. Finally, PGLs will appreciate a time recording solution that helps them generate a variety of reports simply and quickly for submission up the management chain.

IT

The IT team cares about enabling the smooth, effective and cost-efficient practice of law across the whole firm. Therefore, they will want time recording systems that are:

1. Robust, reliable, secure and accessible
2. Cost-effective, future-proofed, elastic, and extensible

Robust, reliable, secure and accessible

The IT team will look for platforms that can be depended upon to deliver SLA uptime in excess of 99.5%. They will also want reassurance that any prospective Cloud-based time recording platform can demonstrate a track record of stable large-scale deployments. Being Cloud-based also ensures that the platform can be accessed anywhere, anytime, and on any device that the attorney is expecting to use.

Additionally, good data security has become a key requirement, both to ensure the law firm is complying with legal obligations, and because clients seek it too. So, IT staff will want to use a time recording platform that possesses world-class data security as standard. This is found in systems that encrypt every bit of data, at all times. They'll also maintain strict system access controls, and have industry recognized certifications (including ISO/IEC 27001 and SOC accreditations).

Cost effective, future proofed, elastic and extensible

Another advantage of Cloud-based systems is that they're more cost-effective (which IT teams will appreciate). Cloud solutions offer elastic capacity, and ensure the firm is only ever paying for what it's using. There's no on premises infrastructure to provision and maintain, and IT employees don't need to spend time worrying about what adaptations they'll need to make in the future.

They'll want to adopt a platform that is future proofed and extensible, whilst also having the flexibility to integrate easily with other solutions. In the context of time recording, that will likely include a document management system, practice management system and finance systems. A platform that can easily integrate with other systems in the future is key for IT.

Clients

Finally, clients care about being able to capture, control and assess the value for money when it comes to legal spend. They want to work with law firms that provide them with timely and accurate invoices that are compliant with their OCGs. This way they can compare the performance of different suppliers, and that of external legal services, against internal counsel. In choosing a time recording platform, firms must look for the best systems on the market that satisfy these client needs.

In summary

When choosing the firm's next time recording platform, it's critical to consider what stakeholders care about, need and want:

- **Fee earners** want easy and quick time entry
- **Assistants** want automation that will do the heavy lifting
- **Billing and finance** want high-quality and compliant time entry
- **PGLs want visibility** and oversight
- **IT** want low cost of ownership, business continuity, security and extensibility
- **Clients** want accurate and timely invoices

When a platform meets all these needs, the law firm can be confident that its new timekeeping solution will be widely adopted, and that stakeholders throughout the firm will see benefits to profitability, compliance, retention, security and competitiveness.

To learn more about our time recording platform Carpe Diem click here.

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Click here to find out why our solutions are trusted by legal teams around the world.

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