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Popular Threads on Solosez

NO FRILLS TIME & BILLING PROGRAM

I am looking for a no-frills, simple time and billing program. I am a solo with no other employees. Hopefully there's a time program that will allow me to record time, send customized bills, and will allow me to have multiple billing rates (for myself). I don't need the program to interface with my accounting program. I am currently using an Excel spreadsheet.

Thanks very much.

Curtis P. Patalano

I use Time59, it's a web based time tracking program as well, and I believe it's \$20 a year for the service. I've been very pleased with the service and their customer service is wonderful. www.time59.com

It allows you to input "projects" for each client, which allows you to even charge multiple rates per client if you so desire. There are also places to put in flat rate billing, like for costs and expenses, etc. You can email the bills or print them in a pdf version and mail them.

Elizabeth Robinson

I guess it depends on what you mean by "no frills" - Tabs3 in its \$295 2-timekeeper edition and similarly priced entry-level PC Law are really inexpensive systems - if by "no frills" you mean "cheap" - but are nevertheless high in functionality.

The most expensive billing system is the one that screws up and melts down your practice financially - or that you can't get support on if it breaks. So to me, m feeling is that anyone who can't find a way to swing \$300 for the most core software system that is the lifeblood of any law practice probably shouldn't be out on their own in a solo practice.

Ross Kodner

But why spend \$300 when you can get good functionality and what you need for \$20? Believe me, I'm good at spending money where I don't necessarily need it, but this time I'm happy with my cheap system!

Elizabeth Robinson

Because for \$300 for STI's Tabs 3 you get a program from a 29 year old company that leads its segment in the legal marketplace, has a stellar



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reputation for support (which, with annual maintenance is included free), a free copy of their terrific basic edition of the PracticeMaster practice management system, tight integration with Worldox, a network of highly experienced consultants nationwide to assist you if needed and train you as well. It also tightly integrates with Quickbooks Pro (or the company's own bookkeeping modules). It's proven and it works in thousands of law firms worldwide. To me it makes no sense to spend hours and hours of time on the "maybe" proposition of a \$20 program and then eventually end up moving to Tabs or PC Law anyway. It's not economical or sensible to experiment with something as mission critical for EVERY practice as your billing and bookkeeping systems. They just plain need to work.

Now on the other hand, if you're an obsessive bungee jumper, experimenting with your billing system could be the law practice equivalent of "extreme sports" and then, by all means, GO FOR IT!!! <g>

P.S. If mainstream proven products were, say, \$1000 at the entry point, and you were comparing that to \$20, it might make a little more sense to experiment (but you'd have a tough time convincing me). But when it's a \$280 difference? A couple of hours of billable time (or fewer)? Then it makes ZERO sense not to go with the sure thing. You might also want to read my post, derived from a Solosez conversation last summer about representing oneself "pro se" in DIY technology products - it's at <http://rossipsa.com/?p=39> and every bit as applicable today as last August when I posted it. HTH!

Ross Kodner

You can look at Toggl, a free web-based time tracking program. I use it quite a bit and think it's pretty cool.

Jay S. Fleischman

Because not having local software for time and billing is a dangerous proposition, for at least three reasons: 1) Your Internet connection can go down. If your connection is down and you cannot enter your time, you run the risk of failing to capture time accurately and missing out on money you should be receiving. 2) The online service's system and/or connection can go down. See above, coupled with the chances for data loss and/or corruption. 3) What happens if the online service goes out of business? What happens to your data? Even if the online service has an adequate privacy policy, what if they're sold off in bankruptcy? There's no guarantee that a purchaser in bankruptcy would choose to continue the prior policy. They might even see selling off your billing contact information as a way to make some quick cash after acquiring the company in bankruptcy.

Web 2.0 offers some great tools for collaboration, but I would hesitate to rely on a Web 2.0 service for Time/Billing. -- Aaron Rittmaster

Ok, you've convinced me. I'm off to shop!

Elizabeth Robinson

I totally agree with Ross and Aaron on this point.

Plus you never do know when you will suddenly want to do something for a new client or matter that your cut-rate app won't do.

At the risk of Ross accusing me of consulting malpractice, all of the response citing to web-based apps force me to observe that if you are going to do something wrong, well there's Wrong and Really Really Wrong. (Using a cut-rate web app for billing is RR Wrong.) So I will say that I know of several lawyers who swear by products from <http://www.chaossoftware.com/>

Their Contact Manager/Calendar/To-Do application, Time and Chaos, is \$29.95 and their Legal Billing is \$34.95. The company has been around for many years and both programs were updated in 2007. They are applications that reside on your PC, not web-based. Looks like they have added a souped-up version of T&C for \$59.95. Other apps to sync with Outlook or use on a mobile device cost more.

Putting client info that is private, and possibly confidential, on a web-based app that isn't backed by a well-known company is really, really scary.

Jim Calloway

To expand on what Jim said, Chaos Software also now offers a program called Intellect, which includes all the contact management and calendar functions of Time & Chaos, and also incorporates e-mail functionality (their stand-alone e-mail program is called Express Plus) (this is what Jim was referring to as the "souped up" version of Time & Chaos). The benefit of using Intellect is that, when an e-mail comes in from (or goes out to) one of your contacts, it is automatically associated with that contact (and each contact can have multiple e-mail addresses associated with it - e.g., home e-mail and work e-mail).

Although I have their Legal Billing program (it came in a package with a previous version of T&C), I have never used it ('course, I do my bills in a WP table, so you shouldn't judge by what I do on that score).

Intellect resides on my computers (the license is per user, and I use 2 computers, which I sync). However, they also have a separate ChaosHost product available, which allows you to sync with a web version of your data (helpful if you will be working with a virtual assistant, as I was for a while). Intellect also has the capability of putting the program and data on a memory stick (I think they call this portable apps).

Here's some info about Legal Billing from the Intellect Help menu:

Legal Billing Accessory Legal Billing software is designed for busy lawyers and other legal professionals who expect to spend their valuable time working on billable hours rather than struggling with hard-to-use

legal billing software.

This Legal Billing program offers simple tools you need to enter time and expenses, print invoices and get paid for the work you performed without a learning curve requiring extensive training! Even share the data with others on your network! The result is a flexible billing program ideal for small law firms and for sole practitioners.

Some key features: Timer - Billable time events can be entered manually or you can use the built-in timer to track your time spent automatically. You can also specify minimum increments, if desired!

Address Book - It has a built-in address book, or it can share the contacts with one of our popular contact manager programs: Chaos Intellect and Time & Chaos. Once a client's information is entered, you can avoid having to retype their information ever again on statements or documents. With just a click, drag and drop, you are managing your client's case and tracking your billable time!

Shared Data - Your information can be shared on a network without requiring any expensive server software. Multiple users can add new billable events, expenses, or enter payments, run reports or print statements, even as others are working with it at the same time.

Lisa Solomon

I would be interested in any thoughts on the relative merits of PC Law v. Amicus Small Firm, v. anything else. I'm leaning toward Amicus Small Firm for my soon-to-be solo practice, but not for any substantive reason since I know nothing about them.

Mitchell Matorin

I just took a look at Time59's website and read their security and privacy statement. I have two HUGE problems with this, regardless of how good the system might seem:

- 1) There is NOTHING about the company here - zip. Nothing about the history, who runs it, or anything that would give me any degree of confidence about their long-term viability or the funding available for business continuity, etc.
- 2) Security/Privacy statement - they say you can always export your own data. Great. What happens when they don't pay their bills and they shut down their site. And no one answers the phone. And they don't even bother with a bankruptcy because they can't afford it.

It's one thing using a piece of cheap software and having control of your own data. If the company goes belly-up, you still have the program and your data. But an unproven start-up billing company? Yikes.

To each their own of course, but this scares the heck out of me. Two words for those who know the history of outsourced application service

providers: "Red" and "Gorilla" - lessons were learned back then that appear to have been forgotten.

Ross Kodner

PClaw. www.pclaw.com

I think it's the most bang for the buck when it comes to practice management software.

Scott I. Barer

I agree with that recommendation.

Stacie E. Barhorst

<http://freshbooks.com> | Featured in law.com article here:
<http://www.law.com/jsp/legaltechnology/pubArticleLT.jsp?id=1178096676172>

Freshbooks includes time tracking, project management, CC and paypal payments, client login to view uploaded documents, submit trouble tickets, etc.

Also see: <http://blinksale.com> (Just won the Webware 100 award
<http://www.webware.com/html/ww/100.html>) <http://simplybill.com>
<http://www.getcashboard.com/>
<http://www.getharvest.com/> (time tracking only)
<http://slimtimer.com> (time tracking only)
<http://www.bambooinvoice.org/>

For the Mac lovers: <http://www.iggsoftware.com/ibiz/index.php> and
<http://clickablebliss.com/billable>

For the folks who favor off-line self-hosted apps:
<http://simpleinvoices.org/> Free and open source.

For CRM/Case Management

<http://basecamphq.com>
<http://highrisehq.com/>
<http://pipelinedeals.com>
<http://sidejobtrack.com>
<http://activecollab.com> (watch for new 1.0 coming soon)

For double entry accounting check out <http://moneydance.com>

My favorites: <http://heap.wbpsystems.com/> (includes Soundex search for contacts, export to vCard format, calendar, todos, correspondence, document management) \$9/month, <http://freshbooks.com> (billing/time tracking/client interface) Moneydance for accounting, then Google Apps for free web hosting, email, calendar

Concerning the fear that you might be stranded without an internet connection - true, but if your paying for a business connection (as you should be) your ISP will give you priority when an outage occurs. Never hurts to have a dial-up backup (unless you have voip, of course...). If that doesn't work, have a pen-and-paper backup plan. Worse comes to worse, go to the local coffee shop or fast food place, buy a pop and use their wifi.

Export your data regularly and always look for companies that offer excellent exporting options.

Hope this helped

Wm. Paul Slough

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