

Folks Who Do Mostly Flat Fees

What do you do for time management? I do a lot of federally appointed cases and we have our own excel spreadsheets that need to be filled in anyway. I have used Clio (which I do love) since I started as a solo, but I don't use all of the features and it has cost me more than it's worth to me. I don't do a ton of invoicing, but I like the time management features it has. Has anyone found a system that is cheaper and works as well for them? I just don't want to keep paying 44 bucks a month for a program that just isn't cutting it for me.

(but they did tweet me a coffee the other day when it was down!)

I don't track time on flat fee cases, it states that in my engagement agreement. Dismissal in 10 days costs the same as a matter that drags out over several months. Agreement states fee is not based on time or other metrics.

Duke Drouillard, Nebraska

I also use excel time sheets for federal cases where fee recovery is an issue. For flat fee cases, I'm generally mindful of hours spent in order to keep the fees accurate, but the whole point of a flat fee is to reduce admin costs and not track every single email and research trail.

Jordan Beckett

I don't track time on flat-fee estate planning - the only time I track time on a flat-fee basis is when I am doing "low-bono" guardianship/conservatorship work and I will get a flat fee from the County. I do this because I had a suspicion that I was spending more time on the IFP work (with the more time-intensive clients that it often involves) than I was spending doing regular fee-paying guardianship work. (I was correct). Then when I get an IFP referral I can more accurately gauge whether I have time to take it on.

Sonia Toomey, Minnesota

SoloSez Popular Threads, February 2014

What do you use when you track the time? Just a spreadsheet? Maybe I just need someone to teach me how to use excel.

Mirriam Seddiq, Virginia

IMHO you should always be tracking time. How do you know if you are charging the right flat fee amount?

Most of my 30 years in litigation have been representing plaintiffs on a contingent fee basis. I have always tracked my time (sometimes closer than others). helps me quantify which cases I should take and which I should not. Also now when I talk to an hourly fee litigation client I can give a reasonable estimate of what fees will be because I know how long it takes to litigate a similar case.

Al Baker, North Dakota

I used to use Grindstone free program that has a window on computer where it is very simple to stop start timer for clients that can be entered on the fly.

<http://www.epiforge.com/Grindstone/>

There are several similar programs out there.

Al Baker

We're not attorneys (as you know) but we do both flat-fee and hourly (depending upon the project). We DO track time on flat-fee projects, even though we don't bill it, because we're always trying to:

- 1) Confirm that the project was estimated properly. If we bid \$1000 and the project took 100 hours...then we bid it very badly.
- 2) Evaluate our efficiencies. If it's a project we do often we want to know that we're getting better/faster at it. We're all about continual improvement and that means we're often tweaking/refining our processes and it's helpful to know that the flat-fee project now takes .5 less for us to do than it used to. It's those measurements that help us know we're doing the right things to get more efficient.

Hope that helps.

Disclaimer: See the first sentence above...

Ben M. Schorr, Arizona

I bill most matters hourly, but some matters are flat fee. I keep track of time for everything, pro bono, flat fee, and hourly matters, using RTG Software. It uses 2 modules, Timer and Billing. I start the timer running as I start a task, and stop or interrupt it when I switch to something else. When I want to run bills, I release the timed entries and open the billing module and run the bills. It's simple, fast and fairly straightforward. Inexpensive, you buy it and it's yours. There is also a mobile version and I think they've added an online version. The company provides very responsive email support. I switched from TimeSlips in 1999 and was able to import clients and matters but not history at that time. I don't know how easy it would be to import data from other such programs now since all of them have become even more bloated and complicated in the last 15 years. Check RTG out. It may be the answer.

When I first started using computers, in 1983-84, I was using spreadsheets, but why have to invent a system when there's one that's already set up for you? The cost of purchasing RTG will be quickly offset by the time you'd spend fiddling with and getting to know a spreadsheet.

Miriam N. Jacobson, Pennsylvania

+1 for RTG. It works whether you bill flat fees or hourly (or a number of other methods). The only drawback I have run into so far is that you have to buy an additional module if you have clients that require e-billing (e.g., LEDES). Since the add-on is more expensive than the base program, I just enter those client bills manually. Seriously, it is a great program and created with the solo/small firm lawyer in mind.

Stephanie J. Hill

I would stick with Clio and learn to use their other features too. I don't take many flat fee cases other than criminal (which are all flat fee) and my fee is set as a combination of what the market will bear plus extra for those clients I anticipate will be a PITA. Sometimes I set the fee rather high in hopes they will hire someone else or not come up with the fee. For some perverse reason, they always seem to come up with the higher fee. I know my fees are competitive when I only lose about one in four PCs; if I am signing every PC, my prices are too low. Beyond that, I don't want to know how productive each individual case is; I just do the best I can do for each client until the case is dismissed or client is sentenced. Client's always pay my price or walk, I don't negotiate. If a client is willing to pay my price, I never think about the money aspect again.

D.A. "Duke" Drouillard

SoloSez Popular Threads, February 2014

I love Harvest for time keeping, invoicing, and tracking expenses. I have recommended it to others, and they like it, too. Try it for free, and if you use my invite, you get \$10 off one month, and I get \$10 off one month.

<http://try.hrv.st/2-81365>

Tracia Y. Lee, Texas

I'm not looking for a new time/billing system. Especially not a subscription-based one. I've paid for my software and it's mine. It's upgraded from time to time, and I get minor upgrades without paying. Major upgrades may have a small cost. And, as I mentioned, I've been using RTG for 15 years now, so I'd be very reluctant to have to port all of that data into another system.

I think it may make more sense for someone who's looking to start tracking time and doesn't have a system in place or is dissatisfied with what they are using.

Did I just answer a suggestion addressed to a different Miriam? I think so. Sorry.

Miriam N. Jacobson
