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Practical, inexpensive time-billing programs

K.I.S.S. (keep it simple, stupid) often is the best way to go with software in a small office



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[Ed. Note: Part One of this article (see Feb. 08) explained how keeping accurate time records benefits plaintiff attorneys and that failure to do so severely limits profitability.]

When buying time-billing software, many attorneys make the mistake of spending a lot of money on fancy programs, thinking that by doing that, they will be getting the best product for their needs. Other attorneys rely on high-priced consultants to tell them what time-billing program to buy. Still others purchase something from a large company, assuming that the larger the company selling the product, the better the product is.

The purpose of this article is to teach lawyers how to avoid making such costly mistakes and to provide information about affordable, simple time-billing programs.

The problem with most time-billing programs

It seems that many of the time-billing programs marketed for lawyers are complicated, difficult to use and expensive. If this is the case, accurate time records will be impossible to maintain because the attorneys and support staff will not be recording their time as often as they should. Tracking time and creating bills will be avoided, resulting in large amounts of time that is never captured in an invoice. The end result: the attorney or law firm loses money.

What lawyers must realize is that *simple* is often better when it comes to software. Most plaintiff lawyers do not need all of the features that are included in the large, standard, time-billing programs targeted to attorneys. Oftentimes, a straightforward, easy-to-use, inexpensive program works the best.

Which billing program should you use?

- **Billing Tracker Pro** (billingtracker.com)

The Billing Tracker Web site promises that “your time tracking has never been easier,” and this is certainly the case. Billing Tracker, a favorite program of sole practitioners and small law firms, is a time-billing and invoicing software program created for service industry professionals such as lawyers, engineers, accountants and programmers. Anyone who bills for their time or on a project basis will enjoy using Billing Tracker.

One of the main reasons Billing Tracker is so impressive is that it is easy to use. You won’t waste time reading complicated instructions or have to hire someone to *train* you how to use the program. All you have to do is download the program and start using it. It is straightforward and intuitive.

Billing Tracker comes with a built-in timer, enables different billing options for retainer and contingency fees, creates reports, and allows you to prepare professional invoices that your clients or the court will be happy to pay. Several invoice templates are included with the program, but for an additional fee of \$20, the company will design a customized invoice.



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However, what will really convince you to use this program are the glowing testimonials from the lawyers who currently use this program. Billing Tracker is “. . . the only billing program that I’ve ever found that is easy to navigate, uses the right terminology, and has the functions I need.”

Another attorney commented: “Ease of use is the number one reason I went with Billing Tracker. . . . It was turning out invoices within minutes of the install. The time-billing worked seamlessly and flawlessly. There was no need for extensive setup or user training. The Multi-User Module has also performed seamlessly. I don’t even have to think about it. I just start it up, and Billing Tracker does the rest.” (See http://www.billingtracker.com/billingtracker_case_studies_main.htm.)

The best part about this program is the extremely reasonable price. At a cost of \$89 for an individual user and an additional \$9.99 per month for online backup, support, and upgrades, you cannot go wrong. If you are still not convinced, visit the Web site and download the trial version free for 20 days. If you decide to buy the program after the trial period, the company will send you an unlock code to enter into the *register* screen. You can continue to use the software without losing any of your timesheet information.

•**Bill Quick** (billquick.com/Default.htm)
Another time-billing program fa-

vored by many plaintiff attorneys is Bill Quick. Bill Quick allows attorneys to track time, manage case tasks and costs and prepare invoices. This program has many other features that make it a practical choice for most small law firms.

Bill Quick allows you to manage trust fund accounts and retainer payments. Since mistakes involving trust accounts are a large source of State Bar complaints, anything that can be done to minimize mistakes is well worth having. Bill Quick also easily integrates with QuickBooks, another popular program used by many plaintiff attorneys.

Another useful feature is Bill Quick’s remote accessibility. Oftentimes, plaintiff attorneys are in the courtroom rather than the office. As a result, the lawyers may not accurately record their time or costs because the program to do that is only available in the office. Bill Quick provides several options that enable users to enter their time and expenses remotely or on mobile devices.

Bill Quick’s various templates include hourly, flat fee, and retainer invoices. The only negative feature about the invoice templates is that they do not look like a “traditional” attorney invoice. The invoice templates look more like something a vendor would send out, rather than a professional.

If you are interested in trying Bill Quick, you can sign up for a live demon-

stration with a trainer or download a free 30-day trial copy of the program. If you like Bill Quick, you can just buy the program and for a two-user license, it is just \$495. For an additional \$249 a year, you will receive 12 months Internet support, upgrades and 30 days of technical support. Another option is to try the Bill Quick Lite version, which is free and can be easily upgraded without any data loss. This version also requires an additional annual payment of \$249.

Conclusion

One of the best ways of increasing profits for your law firm is by keeping accurate time records and preparing detailed invoices. Whether you have hourly clients or use invoices to support attorney fee motions, you will benefit from using time-billing software in your practice.

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