

## Time In / Time Out

### Tracking time and profits

In today's world, business and design paths cross and merge frequently, proving the cliché, "time is money." Fortunately, there are plenty of tools on the market to help you track time, especially if you bill clients by it. Some of these programs have developed into full-fledged systems, some give you only what you need, but all of them help you translate time-tracking data into information to make your business more productive.

Before you narrow the field, identify what information and resources your firm is lacking. FunctionFox's Corina Rothlisberger suggests that creative companies, especially small ones, ask themselves a few key questions.

- Do I have accurate information on which clients are profitable (or aren't) and what projects make money for the firm (or don't)?
- Do my estimates accurately reflect actual time and cost put into projects?
- Which employees are busy earning the company money (on billable tasks), busy on non-billable tasks, and who's not busy at all? Is there a better way to distribute tasks?
- Do I spend too much administrative time gathering and formatting data for reports manually?

If these questions reveal problem areas in your business, check out these four popular systems.

#### **TimeFox by FunctionFox**

TimeFox is a simple web-based time and expense tracking system that helps companies get a better handle on workflow and increase billable time. Users log in online to post time and expense information on specific clients and projects. Once this data's entered, it's available immediately as management reports about clients, projects, and personnel.

TimeFox's interface is easy-to-use with customizable pull-down lists (this also helps reduce entry errors). The system allows you to build estimates and compare them through the life of a project against actual time and expenses. You can also analyze billable vs. non-billable time.

*Worth noting:* TimeFox was recently rated the No. 1 time-tracking system by *Creative Business*.

*Advantages:* Because TimeFox is web-based, employees can use it from multiple offices and loca-

#### **Get connected**

More information on these applications is available on the web:

- [functionfox.com](http://functionfox.com)
- [clientsandprofits.com](http://clientsandprofits.com)
- [rebus-software.com](http://rebus-software.com)
- [designsoft.com](http://designsoft.com)

#### **Details, details**

Basic prices and technical specs:

#### **TimeFox by FunctionFox**

- \$35/month for first user, \$5/month for additional users
- Compatible with PCs or Macs with internet access

#### **Clients & Profits**

- C&P Classic, \$3,500 for first user, \$350 for each additional concurrent user
- C&P Job Tracker, \$6,500 for first user, \$425 for each additional concurrent user
- C&P Pro, \$9,500 for first user, \$500 for each additional concurrent user
- Web-based software, My Clients & Profits!, \$2,495 for unlimited users
- Compatible with Windows (98, NT, 2000, ME, and XP) and Mac (OS 8.6 or higher, including OS X 10.2)
- Oracle and Microsoft SQL server-compatible versions available

tions. Set-up and training is quick and simple, with no hardware or software changes (you just need a web browser). And because it was initially created as a system for smaller design and advertising groups, it meets these organizations' needs well. Finally, it's considerably less expensive than other applications.

#### **Clients & Profits**

As a fully featured agency management system, Clients & Profits does much more than time tracking. It handles proposals, estimates, scheduling, job costing, check writing, and financial accounting with more than 300 built-in reports.

The time-tracking part of the system features a built-in stopwatch and toolbar. Users update job schedules and traffic, find work assignments right from their time cards, and log overtime. They can record the job number and task they're working on, their total hours worked, and add any special notes about the work (which can be included on reports).

C&P also has options to require users to enter time or account for a predetermined number of hours, to stop users from entering time on closed or over-budget jobs, or to get manager approval before logging job costs.

*Worth noting:* C&P's time-tracking gives you a lot of options when it comes to accessing your timecard: You can enter time from the desktop application, using a web browser, or from a handheld electronic organizer. That's handy for travelers.

*Advantage:* Lightweight software can be great for starting out, but often it needs to be replaced as a firm grows, costing headaches and money to switch over. C&P is a significant investment at first but easily updates to include all the features you'd ever need in an integrated, cross-platform application.

#### **Rebus**

Rebus is also a project accounting system, and includes integrated software for budgeting, client estimates, purchase orders, billing, and management accounts, in addition to time-tracking.

In Rebus' Time Recording system, standard working hours and individual productivity targets can be allotted to each employee (you can also track non-billable time), allowing supervisors to track