RANDOM THOUGHTS

I may be crazy, but I'm not stupid.

2003:05

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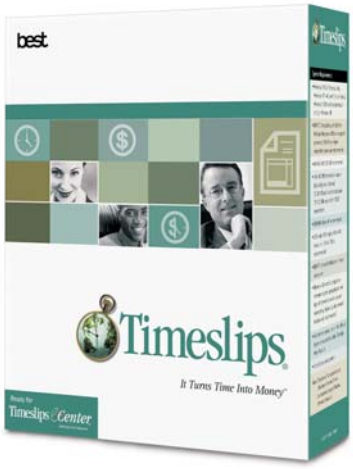
How much is your time worth?

Those who provide services often need to track the hours they've spent by project and by client and then summarize that time monthly for billing. Attorneys, consultants, researchers, and editors are just a few of the people who need to be able to track billable hours.

Timeslips has always been the application I recommend for these people because it's a complete, versatile solution that fits just about any company that bills for time. The only problem with Timeslips has been that it's rather expensive for small offices. The full application ($400) can handle 5,000 timekeepers (people who bill for their time), 25,000 clients, 25,000 timed activities, 25,000 expense items, and 20 rates each per user, client, or task. Timekeepers can have rates ($500 per hour for a senior partner or $100 per hour for a research assistant). Tasks can have rates ($150 per hour for proposal writing or $50 per hour for document copying). Clients can have rates ($120 per hour for the Consolidated Mammoth Corporation or $225 per hour for Joe's Pawn Shop). The upshot of all this versatility is that a company can negotiate any number of rates with a client and then have Timeslips calculate the correct fee — there is no need to constantly override the program's calculation, although even this is possible.

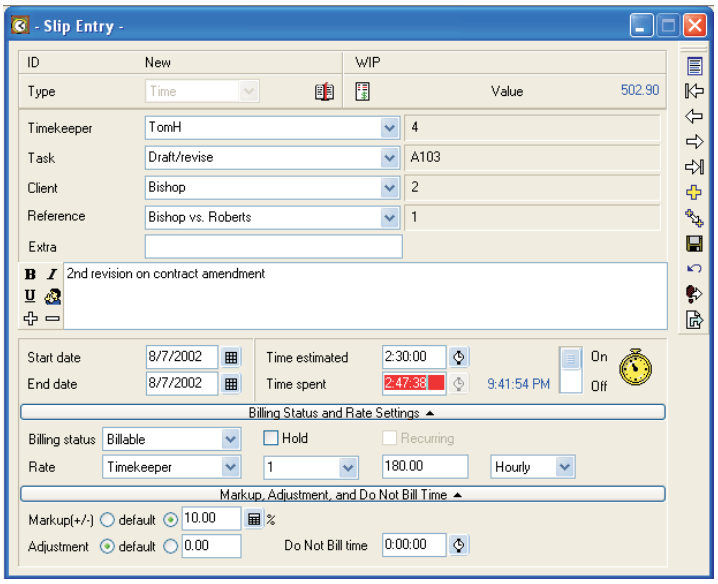


Even if you run a 1-person or 2-person shop, you probably understand how a program this versatile could help, but you may be put off by the $400 price tag.

New lower price for small shops

The good news is that Timeslips (now owned by Peachtree Software) has just released a new product — Timeslips for Sole Practitioners ($200) that can handle 2 timekeepers (people who bill for their time), 25,000 clients, 25,000 timed activities, 25,000 expense items, and 20 rates each per user, client, or task. The Sole Practitioner version cannot be run on a network and has 86 pre-defined reports, compared to the full version's 120 reports.

The full version also includes firm-wide budgeting, connected databases for other offices, full audit trails, "assistants" (like "wizards"), time sheet slip entry, alerts when billed time approaches specified limits, procedures (macros), practice management reporting, timekeeper histories and summary tables, "Mini Timeslips", and the ability to track overhead cost.



Keeping track of time in a way clients will understand when they see it on the invoice is easy with TimeSlips.

Timeslips Pr o also has the ability to use add-on products such as TAL Pro, the Timeslips Accounting Link designed for use with QuickBooks Pro; Timeslips Remote to track time and expenses while out of the office or in a non-networked environment; the ability to synchronize with Palm and Pocket PC devices; a legal dictionary for enhanced spelling checking; the ability to submit invoices to clients electronically; and a link to Crystal Reports.

The application has been around for 17+ years and each new version has offered improvements over the previous version. Timeslips Pro version 11 adds several new features: The ability to enter time in a form that looks like a spreadsheet in addition to the usual "slips" entry, a stopwatch that records the exact start and end time for a task, the Mini Slip view that allows tracking of time while the user is in another application, and

NOW what??

Dead Trees seemed to be a somewhat negative name for this publication. Starting with this issue, the new name is ***Random Thoughts***, suggesting – if not deep analytical articles – that at least minimal thought during development of the articles. Please note that I still bear no particular animosity toward trees.

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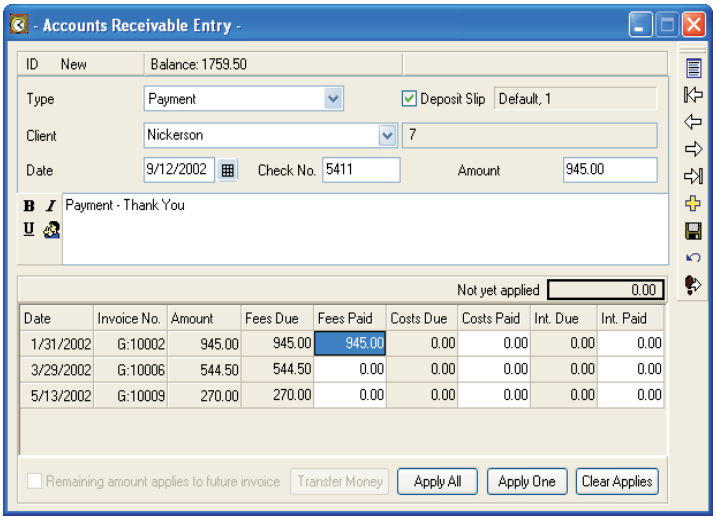


When you receive a payment, it might be for one invoice or several. Assigning payments to invoices requires no more than a quick click and the layout makes it easy for even those of us who aren't accountants to figure out what to do.

abbreviations that are automatically expanded to provide consistent and accurate descriptions.

Timeslips Pro tracks expenses, too. Those who must purchase products or services for clients can enter the appropriate information so that the correct amount (passed through or marked up) will appear on the client's bill.

Customize, customize

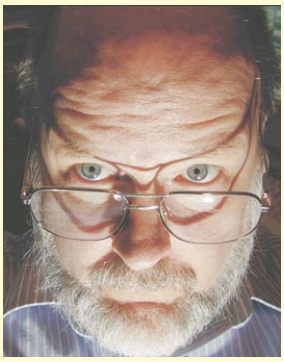
Even the bills are customizable. A firm may have a standard bill that shows the amount of time per project with the cost per task shown, subtotaled by task classification for most clients. But if one client wants to see the initials of the person whose time is being billed and the hourly rate, that's exactly what will be on that client's invoice. Should another client want nothing more than a statement for "Professional Services" and a grand total, that's what the client will see.

All of these features come at a price. There is a 300+ page manual that new users must read and those who are upgrading from previous versions of the program should read. For large firms, the price will be significantly more than $400, too. Each workstation that connects to the Timeslips database needs a network station license ($100 each or $450 for 5). You'll also pay $100 per device to put Timeslips applications on a Palm or Palm PC. If accurate time billing is your goal, the expense is easily justified.

Time billing is a specialized operation. Those who sell items from inventory cannot use time-billing software, but some people who bill for their time think that they can convert their billing practices and use an inexpensive "widget" billing system. If you're billing for your time, you need a time-billing system; if you need a time-billing system, you won't find a better one than Timeslips.

For more information, see the Timeslips website at www.timeslips.com.

Too many computers & not enough keyboards or mice



I have 2 (and sometimes 3 or 4) computers on the desk. Giving each a keyboard, a mouse, and a monitor would mean that I have no desk left. To avoid computer gridlock, I installed a pricey KVM (keyboard video mouse) switch several months ago. It had a nasty habit of locking up the keyboard about every 5th time I pressed the Ctrl key.

And because I use a lot of keyboard shortcuts (Ctrl-S at the end of every paragraph, frequent Ctrl-C or Ctrl-X followed by Ctrl-V, Ctrl-W, Ctrl-Q, and more, I experienced a lot of keyboard lockups. To clear the problem, I had to reach out to the KVM, press the button, wait a second, and press the button again.

Then IOGear sent me a small (they call it bagel-size) inexpensive (about $50) KVM that doesn't even have a switch to push. It sat around for several weeks until I had to move some wires around to install a hardware firewall. That seemed like a good opportunity to swap KVM devices.

Now to switch from one computer to the other, all I have to do is press the Scroll Lock key twice. No need to even take my hands off the keyboard. And since installing the IOGear KVM switch my keyboard has locked up how many times? None. Not once.

Because the "bagel" part doesn't have a switch, I can stow it behind one of the computers and that gives me back a small (but still useful) piece of my desk.

One rating that's applied to KVM switches is the screen resolution and refresh rate that the switch will handle. My monitor is a 17-inch LCD with a native resolution of 1184x1024, which is near the top end of the switch's rating (1920x1440). LCD monitors need to be run at their native resolution whenever possible to avoid image problems and I've noticed that the IOGear KVM introduces just a little fuzziness into the display. While this is troubling, I'm more than willing to accept slight image degradation if it means I can eliminate the frequent keyboard-lockup problems.

If the fuzziness becomes too annoying, I can use the KVM to switch the mouse and keyboard. Because the monitor has two inputs, I can plug both computers in to the monitor and use the monitor's switch. Or I could pop for one of IOGear's higher-end models. I suspect that a switch rated at 2048 x 1536 would reduce or eliminate the minor problems I see with the "bagel".

If your desk has multiple computers and you want to get rid of some of the clutter, take a look at what IOGear has to offer. See www.iogear.com.

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