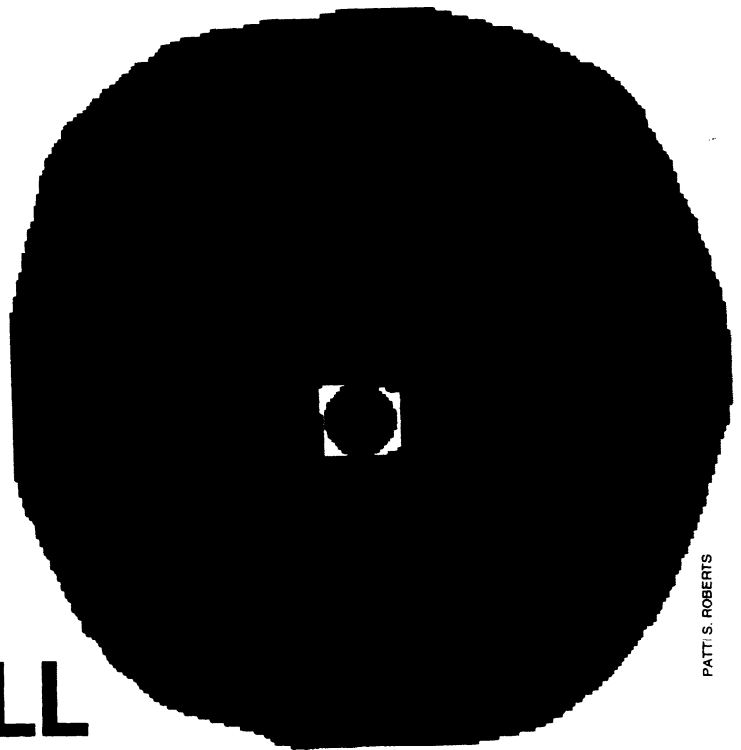


Timeslips Release 5 IS FINALLY A FULL LEGAL BILLING SYSTEM



PATTI S. ROBERTS

By James A. Eidelman

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imeslips has just released a new version, the first version I would call a “real” legal billing system. It is great for most firms that do not need a completely integrated general ledger.

Timeslips has always been a wonderful way to track time, and a very basic billing system for solos and small law firms. The difference between a real “legal” billing system and a “professional” time and billing system has been that a legal billing system has special features important to lawyers, such as:

- The easy ability to track, report and bill work on multiple matters for the same client separately;
- Aged work-in-progress reports;
- Proper handling of “write-ups” and write-downs”;
- Handling of retainers and client trust accounts;
- Multiple rates for clients and timekeepers.

Timeslips used to be just a “professional” system but is now suitable for use in most small law firms. At \$299.95 for the single-user version and \$599.95 and up for the network version, it is quite a bargain.

The First Timeslips Set New Standards

I remember when I first met Mitch Russo, president of Timeslips, at Legal Tech in New York several years ago. A big crowd had assembled on the exhibit floor around his booth, so I walked over to see what was going on. To my surprise and delight, the company was selling a complete time and billing system called Timeslips 1.0 for just \$99. (Up to this time, there wasn’t a package under \$1,000.) I saw the demonstration, which had a pop-up timekeeping module with a pretty screen that looked like a paper time slip. This made it easy to move among different projects, and automatically kept track

of time. You could even “see the meter running” in red when the timer was on. Like the man at the state fair selling pens guaranteed never to run out of ink, was this too good to be true?

Well, the timekeeping system was innovative, creative and a terrific utility for attorneys who have a computer going at their desks all day long. The billing system was wimpy. It was slow and limited, but was O.K. for a solo practitioner or very small firm. Considering that two-thirds of the lawyers in the U.S. practice in firms of three or smaller, that’s not bad.

My general advice to solos and very small firms was to get Timeslips if they intended to keep their own time, and to get something else if they didn’t.

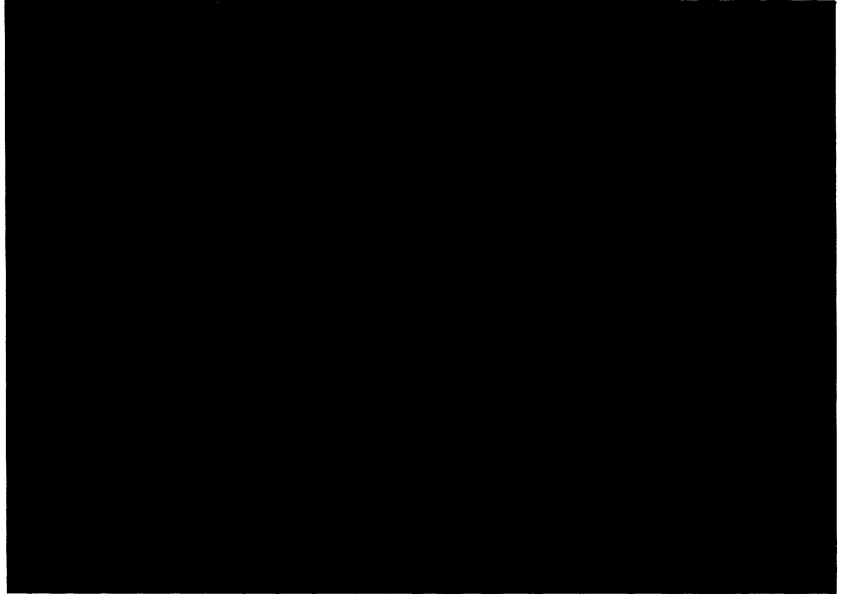
Benefits of a Pop-Up Timer

Keeping time is the bane of existence for most of the law firms I know. Everyone hates it. Timeslips can help in two ways:

1. Automatic timekeeping really works, if you get in the habit. Assuming you know how to type and have a computer keyboard on your desk, it works like this:

Phone rings	“Jim, it’s John Smith” “Hi, John,” etc.	Pop-up Timeslips Start new slip Select client Start the timer.
While listening		Type in “Spoke with John Smith regarding. ...”
When done talking	Dictate or type memo, update calendar, etc.	Type in rest of text. Go to previous slip. Switch timer to previous slip.
Continue working on original project		

At the end of the day you will have a full day of time records, entered and fairly complete. You can easily make some adjust-



TSTimer—the main screen used to capture time.

ments to them, with no further muss or fuss and no data entry required.

2. If you have trouble keeping time on paper or using a computer, you can dictate your time records. Your secretary, if Timeslips is running, can pop up the data entry screen between your letters, pleadings and other documents.

A screen used to enter time is shown in Figure 1.

Enhanced Timeslips

Through the years the product was so successful that the company changed its name from North Edge to time slips Corporation. It added features to combine the time slips of many attorneys and paralegals from remote computers, linked the program to several general ledger systems, added a network version, enhanced the report writer, supported options for importing data from other formats, wrote an Apple Macintosh version, and instituted programs for certified Timeslips trainers and consultants.

When all was said and done, the program became much better, but still did not deal with write-ups, write-downs, aged work-in-progress, multiple matters per client and

Timeslips Release 5 is a new program that takes into account the needs and requests of the many frustrated lawyers who have been using the package through the years.

other features I considered necessary for a “real” legal billing system. I have used it for a long time, and have recommended it many times, but not without reservations.

New Version a Completely New Program

Timeslips Release 5 is a new program that takes into account the needs and requests of the many frustrated lawyers who have been using the package through the years.

The package is too new to have been tested extensively, but the new features are important. They include:

- Multiple matters per client are handled better;
- Greater flexibility in designing billing formats;
- Aged Work in Progress and Aged Client Investment (WIP and Accounts Receivable) reports;
- Ability to manage client funds and apply to bills;
- Much more sophisticated productivity reports;
- Much more client and matter level coding for tracking by client type, area of law, originating and responsible attorney, etc.
- Ability to allocate write-ups and write-downs to specific timekeepers.

Carol Schlein, of Law Office Systems in Montclair, New Jersey, said, “They have finally added features that my clients and I have been requesting for years. Multiple rates for attorneys and the ability to bill multiple matters on the same bill while tracking payments at the matter level have been sore points for many Timeslips users.”

Ray Steiner and Scott Sherer of Seattle’s Steiner, Sherer and Associates commented that for timekeeping and billing, the program is great, and will give TABS a run for its money

Timeslips has most of the features that TABS III has, and makes the lower-end ProfitSource, from Software Technology, look weak. ProfitSource is a balance-ordward system and has no way to determine effective hourly rate.

Timeslips 5.0 works well on a network and has good security features. The new user manuals are great, including a thin and important one on how to manage Timeslips.

The system has a large (and sometimes confusing) number of new reports that provide most of the information firms will need, including a History Analysis report which compares billable hours to total hours and billable fees to billed fees.

Weaknesses

Timeslips 5 .O is still not perfect, and there are problems that will be “show-stoppers” for some firms.

Steiner points out that the weak spots are mostly in the area of accounting. First, there are still very weak audit trails, and the system is open to making undocumented changes to the data. This means that if you use Timeslips, you should be sure to print out reports as you go along that show all data. you have added or changed. (There is password security, however.)

Second, the system does not distinguish between “hard costs” and “soft costs,” or in TABS III lingo, “advances” and “expenses.” A filing fee is treated the same as photocopy charges. Depending on the state you practice in and your approach to accounting, this can also be a significant issue.

Third, Timeslips does not have an integrated general accounting system. This is not a major problem for small firms that use a manual checkbook or Safeguard or LPI one-write system. However, it is a shortcoming for larger firms and busy litigation practices that write large numbers of client-related checks. TAL, “Timeslips Accounting Link,” is available to export data to several popular accounting systems, but it is tricky to use and still requires double entry of client advances. TABS III, Juris, Libra and other systems that let you write a check as part of the Accounts Payable module, and pass the data through automatically to billing, Profit and Loss statement and Balance Sheet, are better for those who need the integrated accounting. Furthermore, if there are problems, you need to call two different software houses for help with three different software packages. Using Timeslips/At_ is more work and harder to manage. (On the positive side, there are more than 20 accounting packages you can use, and TAL gives you a wide variety of choices.)

Finally, although Timeslips has speeded up the processing of reports, it is still slow in a number of areas.

Conclusion

The process of implementing a billing system and the amount of effort required to go through a billing cycle is never easy. The cost of the software itself is the smallest cost, compared to the value of the dollars passing through the system and the value of the time attorneys and staff work with it. Whether the software is \$99, \$395, \$5,000 or \$30,000, the people side is the most important and the most expensive.

The reputation that Timeslips is just for a one- or two-lawyer firm has faded, as it could be used in an 8- to 10-attorney firm if the bookkeeper is knowledgeable or expenses are tracked another way.

Now, even for lawyers who do not keep their own time on the system, Timeslips is a robust system that compares favorably with other "low-end" billing systems, and in many respects with much more expensive systems. Timeslips Release 5 is a gem that I recommend highly to solo practitioners and small firms.

For further information or a demo, you can contact: Timeslips Corporation, 239 Western Avenue, Essex, MA 01929; (800) 2850999. ■

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James A. Eidelman is director of practice systems at Automation Partners, Inc., 227 East Monroe, Chicago, Illinois 60606. He serves on the LPMS Council and is chair of the Practice Systems Interest Groups in the Computer Division.

Other Timekeeping Programs

A number of other programs do have an automatic timekeeping module, including the popular PC-based TABS II and Libra. In addition, the following are excellent programs for lawyers in larger firms to use on a network to keep and enter time that can be "uploaded" into minicomputer billing systems:

Carpe Diem
ProSoft
(800) 477-6763

(Special version of Carpe Diem for Wang Informatics LTMS MiniSoft)
(602) 788-9070

DTE—Distributed Time Entry
Advanced Productivity Software, Inc.
(800) 878-9610

Date 03/27/92		Hamilton Services Corporation				Page 1
Time 5:34 pm		User Productivity by Rate Report				
* average billing rate = total billable fees / total billable hours						
User (####)	Rate	Unbillable Hours	Billable Hours	Unbillable Fees	Billable Fees	Percent Billable
D. Brickley (1)						
1:	110.00	0.00	21.38	0.00	2351.70	100.00%
Frozen (1)	110.00	0.00	2.35	0.00	258.50	100.00%
TOTALS		0.00	23.73	0.00	2610.20	100.00%
Average Billing Rate* = 109.98						
M. Renfro (3)						
1:	100.00	2.00	2.65	200.00	265.00	56.99%
2:	125.00	0.00	0.25	0.00	31.25	100.00%
3:	150.00	1.23	0.00	184.50	0.00	0.00%
Frozen (1)	100.00	0.00	2.35	0.00	235.00	100.00%
TOTALS		3.23	5.25	384.50	531.25	58.01%
Average Billing Rate* = 101.19						
N. Appleton (4)						
1:	125.00	0.00	6.08	0.00	760.21	100.00%
2:	150.00	0.00	5.70	0.00	855.00	100.00%
Frozen (1)	125.00	2.35	0.00	293.75	0.00	0.00%
TOTALS		2.35	11.78	293.75	1615.21	84.61%
Average Billing Rate* = 137.10						
T. Henderson (5)						
2:	115.00	0.00	0.75	0.00	86.25	100.00%
TOTALS		0.00	0.75	0.00	86.25	100.00%
Average Billing Rate* = 115.00						
GRAND TOTALS		5.58	41.52	678.25	4842.91	87.72%

Reports can be generated by user, client or activity to show the amounts billed by each billing rate.