

Critical Characteristics to Demand From Your Timesheet Vendor

BY CURT FINCH

Time and attendance, timesheets, time tracking—whatever you call it, time accounting software is not just for payroll anymore. Increasingly, project accounting and client billing are becoming critical to professional organizations of all sizes.

If you've outgrown your current system, are using Excel, or have multiple inconsistent systems—get a real solution. Without timesheet software, it is hard to understand project costs, get payroll or exception time accounting right, or accurately invoice your customers.

How can you be sure you'll get a system that works for your company and is immune to the most common problems people experience when buying a timesheet collection automation system? If you pay attention, you can avoid making serious mistakes and get the product you need.

The Most Common Mistake in Buying Timesheet Software

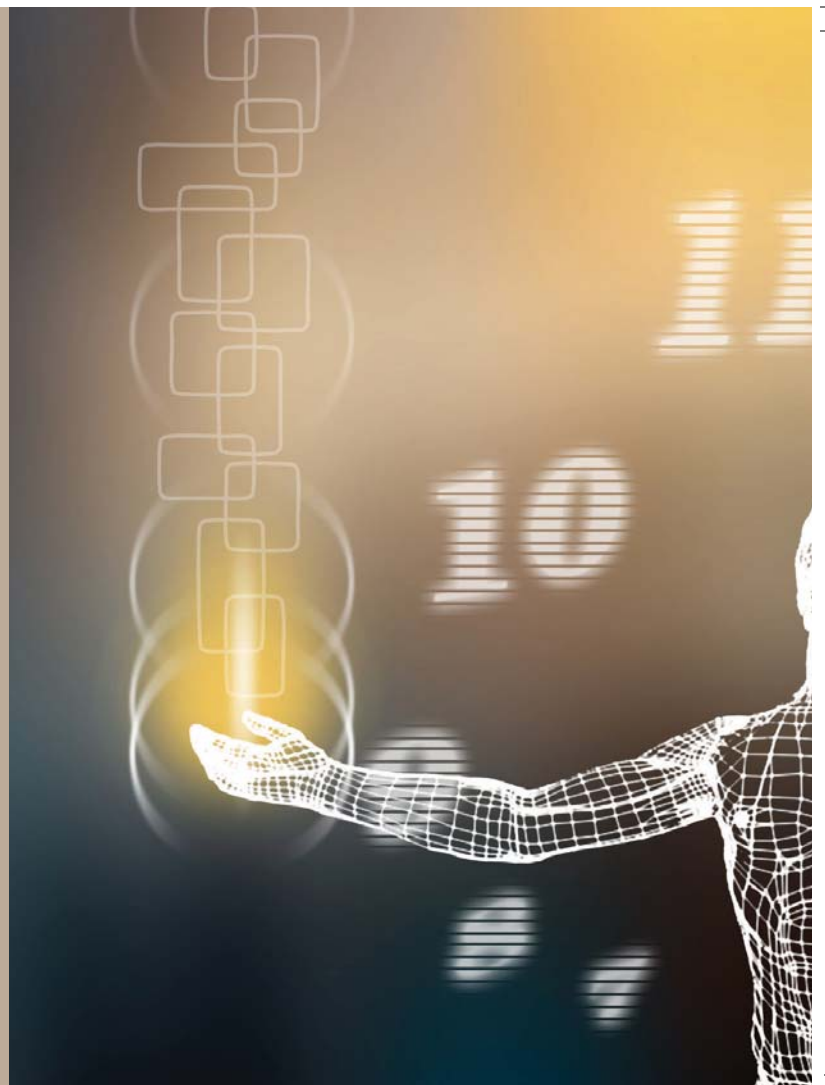
Don't fall for a deceptive demo. Demand that any vendor absolutely, completely prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that their solution will solve your company's specific business problem. You deserve a detailed demonstration that uses your employee list, your customer list, your project list, your company's logo, and your color scheme. The demo should also show you reports on your data that will prove your business problem is solved. If you aren't 100% certain that the solution will work for your specific business needs, then walk. Canned demos are designed to deceive, so don't believe them.

The key is to demand that vendors prove they can do what you need them to. You are the customer. Ask that vendors show you exactly how they will solve your business problem, using your employees, departments, projects, etc., and then show you the reports you need to see. Don't forget to ask for references from clients in your industry that have successfully integrated the product with your accounting system, project management system, and payroll service provider.

The Benefits of SaaS Flexibility

Some companies sell traditional software. Some sell software as a service (SaaS). Since most timesheet software is primarily Web-based these days, providers should do both.

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Avoid the Most Common Payroll Mistakes With Time & Attendance

BY MELISSA DIEMERT

Time and attendance serves as the checks and balances of processing payroll. Proper time and attendance tracking can help your organization avoid costly lawsuits, while at the same time inadequate tracking of this same information can put your organization right in the middle of a lawsuit. A couple of the most common time and attendance mistakes are inaccurate time keeping and not meeting labor compliance regulations.



Collecting Time and Attendance Info

The bottom line is that people make mistakes—even when it comes to time and attendance. Organizations that manually track this information or re-key the data into a payroll system run the risk of inaccuracies. Today, many payroll departments are moving toward automating the time and attendance processes to eliminate costly payroll errors.

In April 2006, the American Payroll Association released its 2005 Payroll Best Practices Benchmarking Study, which stated, “The trend in timekeeping solutions is heading away from an in-house solution to a solution provided by a time and attendance provider.” Organizations recognize that older systems may not have the functionality to meet current standards and in many cases are costly to update.

The ROI can be huge when licensing a system that automates compliance regulations, best practices, and business rules—automation is one way to greatly reduce or eliminate the mistakes that occur when time and attendance records are prepared manually. Recording time manually eliminates checks and balances or an audit trail to the hours truly worked by that employee. There are organizations that never had a tardy employee until an automated time and attendance solution was implemented. Imagine how many

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SaaS means that you rent access to Web-based software running on the vendor’s server instead of installing it on a server at your office. SaaS can give you:

1. *Easier IT.* SaaS avoids burdening your IT department with yet another package to maintain. Let them focus on the core competency technologies that drive your company’s sustainable competitive advantage.
2. *Lower cost/risk.* A monthly fee may be more advantageous than upfront costs. Put the risk of rollout success on the vendor. Why take all that risk?

Even if you choose to install at your own location, SaaS can still provide benefits:

1. *Early rollouts.* The vendor can let you pilot with the SaaS site until your IT department gets the machine ready for your local installation.
2. *Server protection.* E-mailing a backup to the vendor in case of machine failure at your local installation should let him get your system up on his site instantly in the event of a failure at your site. This avoids the cost of buying spare machines yourself.
3. *Easy upgrades.* The vendor should provide you with a test site during the upgrade process that requires no hardware purchase on your part.

Ask vendors about the specifics—how would you survive a power outage at your SaaS site and where is it hosted? How many connections to the Internet does your SaaS site have? How much does server protection cost? Can you rollout on the SaaS servers and later transfer the data to your own servers? Where are SaaS backup tapes stored? If a vendor promises to deliver certain tasks, make sure you get it all in writing.

Check References

Most people are too lazy to check references. Don’t make this mistake. Make sure the reference is a real company in your industry of your size. You will be putting a huge amount of time and money into this vendor, so make sure you are completely confident they are trustworthy before you begin this relationship. Ask the reference specific questions, prepared in advance. For example, are they using the software in a way that will be as complex as the way you are using it?

Avoid these common mistakes to ensure you get the product you need.

Curt Finch is the CEO of Journyx (pr.journyx.com), a provider of free, patented Web-based solutions that automate billing, payroll, and project accounting by tracking time, expenses, and mileage.