

Benefits

- Reduced data entry errors, even when operated by an unskilled user.
- Improved management control – know exactly how much revenue your staff have generated each month and how much time your team has spent on each client.
- Keep clients accurately informed of the hours spent, and work done, on their account.
- Alert when a client's monthly spend is approaching its limit.



Background

A specialist PR company has an increasing number of clients, for whom they provide a fixed number of days' work per month. It is important to monitor the hours booked against these clients to prevent overspend.

Staff members summarise their work daily on paper timesheets. Every few days an administrator transfers these entries into an Excel spreadsheet which is used to manually compile monthly timesheets.

Problems

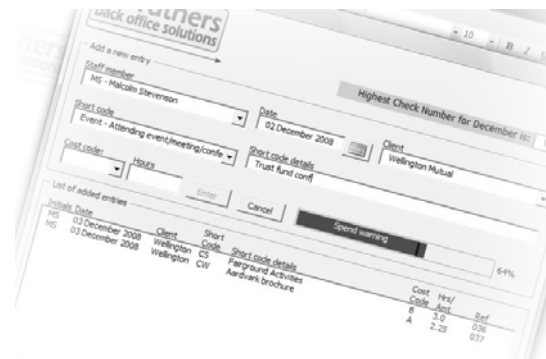
The spreadsheet relies on some values being calculated manually and, critically, is unable to monitor ongoing spend which would enable potential overspends to be detected early.

Recommendations

We recommended that the best solution would be a **spreadsheet-based application**. This is an advanced form of Excel spreadsheet that uses the cells on the worksheet(s) only to store raw data. Instead of using formulas, this data is manipulated by specially written Excel VBA code (macros) to generate the required outputs.

We proposed a solution that would:

- Provide form-based entry of hours booked which would validate values on input. It would also allocate a unique check number to each entry (that the administrator writes against the corresponding entry on the paper timesheet) to support reconciliation with the entries in the database.
- Use a form-based user interface to support configuration of the 'working data' (client names etc).
- Allow multiple related clients to be processed as a single 'Client Group' by enabling them to share a combined budget (so the overall spend of a company can be broken down and the spend of different divisions clearly relayed back to the client).



Recommendations (continued)

- Implement the following mechanism to allow monthly spend to be monitored. Each client and 'Client Group' can have three parameters configured against them: **budgeted monthly spend**, **threshold level** and **top-up amount**.

The **budgeted monthly spend** is the number of days regular work each month agreed with the client; **threshold level** is set to a proportion of the **budgeted monthly spend** to allow advanced warning of potential overspend and **top-up amount** is a (time-bound) contingency that can be used to accommodate controlled overspend when required.

- On entry of timesheet data, display a simple graphic indicating the **threshold level**, the proportion of the monthly spend used up and, if the **threshold** has been exceeded, a warning.
- Use a form-based user interface to support configuration of the 'working data' (client names etc).
- Allow the user to generate detailed monthly timesheets and also 'Summary' timesheets that can be automatically emailed to a manager at the click of a button.
- Provide a single point of entry to all the above features.

Detailed features

The proposed solution was not trivial and involved about four weeks' work. However, it had a very short payback time with savings quickly being realised in the following areas:

- Validation of data on entry, resulting in fewer user errors.
- The unique check number allocated to each entry allows reconciliation with the original paper-based timesheets.
- Entries can be reviewed and corrected prior to committing them to the database, thus removing the need to edit the database directly.
- Intuitive graphical user interface (GUI) means that the application can be used by administrators and temporary staff who may be unfamiliar with Excel.
- Monthly spend for each client is automatically monitored, and early warning is given of overspend, thereby allowing remedial action to be applied.
- Detailed, monthly, printer-ready timesheets can be generated at the click of a button representing a considerable improvement in time and accuracy compared to extracting the data manually.
- Specified timesheets can be emailed at the click of a button - no need for awkward copying and pasting to a new workbook.
- Scalability - it's just as easy to process eighty clients as it is to process eight.

"Carruthers Back Office Solutions has made a significant improvement to our business. The bespoke timesheet management application they built has reduced the chance of errors – in fact we've already saved half the cost of the project when the system identified a potentially significant data entry mistake within the first six months. Our clients are happier because we're able to tell them much more accurately and easily where their spend is up to during the month, and to warn them when they are reaching their budget capacity. Also it's helping us manage our work – ensuring we don't go over a client's budget and do work for which we may not get paid." MS, CEO.

If your spreadsheets are impeding your business processes, contact us now for a free consultation
07792 380 399 enquiries @cbosolutions.co.uk www.cbosolutions.co.uk