

SOFTWARE REVIEW

BY DAVID E. ESSEX

In response to the wealth of products entering the market and as a service to readers, *PM Network* is proud to publish a quarterly software review. Each column discusses the latest tools that affect the way managers approach projects. These reviews, while systematic and thorough, are one person's opinion and do not constitute an endorsement or necessarily reflect the views of PMI or *PM Network*.

Time Travelers

No longer just for clock-punchers, these timesheet tools can anchor your project governance strategy.

Though it may rely on the lowly timesheet for data collection, time and expense tracking isn't just a bland tool for supervisors and consultants. For them, the appeal is obvious: Every documented hour of billable time is a nugget of gold. But now project managers are employing time sheets to help organizations meet financial regulations and other mandates by providing a more reliable record of resource use. When tied closely to other software, timesheets become project portfolio management vehicles, helping align your costs with business goals. They bring structure and predictability to corporate governance, enforcing auditing and compliance rules. Project managers employ timesheets to gather truer measures of the value of project management offices to organizations and to gain control over internal and external project resources.

While there are dozens of timesheet products on the market, I looked for the programs most geared to the needs of project managers. To qualify, these tools had to provide links to Microsoft Project, Excel or other standard project management and accounting tools. Most importantly, they had to employ the project as their organizing principle.

The three programs I chose to review all perform the same key tasks: timesheet creation and administration, time entry, workflow (Web posting, routing, e-mail notification, etc.) and reporting. All can be accessed from Web browsers and run from an in-house server or are hosted on the vendor's Web servers.

Tenrox Timesheet

Tenrox is an entire project governance and compliance platform that also handles workforce management, accounting, invoicing, budgeting, executive dashboards and data analysis. However, you can turn on just the modules you need.

Tenrox's expense-entry forms are extremely detailed and backed up by tax tables from numerous countries and individual U.S. states. Like Journyx, the program lets you download expense data from online credit-card statements. A workflow diagram shows you exactly where timesheets and expense reports are in the approval process. Tenrox can read and write to Microsoft Excel (still a popular expense tool in the project management world), and has limited file-level integration with Primavera.

The latest upgrade, 8.6, adds improved Microsoft Project Server synchronization, more flexibility in integrating with accounting databases, quicker timesheet copying and the ability to associate a work type to a project multiple times to create unique tasks

Time's Up

Despite the system's apparent simplicity, I couldn't get comfortable finding my way around Journyx Timesheet. It seems to put the same data-entry screen in front of every application, making it feel like an obstacle rather than a welcome mat. Even at installation, this program seems designed for techno nerds. Tenrox was significantly better in this regard, with homely but ultimately easy and familiar screens centered on directory trees and drop-down menus. Replicon's Web TimeSheet had the most Web-like interface-sort of a large-print version, with big red Xs and green checkmarks to highlight timesheet status at a quick glance-and the clearest, best-organized help system. What Web TimeSheet gains in ease of use, it loses in featurerichness compared to its competitors, which have more "granular" controls.

The clear pick is Tenrox. It has a near-optimal balance of power and ease of use, with the deepest administrative tools and broadest range of project management support. I can only give it a tentative thumbs-up for value because it's unclear to me how many more Tenrox modules you need to buy to get the full benefit, and consulting fees likely will be higher than for the other two options. Its modular approach is both a help and a hindrance compared to the competitors, which function more like standalone products. But that's only because Tenrox seems to understand that the project timesheet deserves to become an integral, mainstream tool. **PM**

QUICK FACTS

Tenrox Timesheet 8.6

Requires: Server: Dual 2.4-GHz CPUs, 1GB RAM, 10GB hard disk space, Windows NT/2000/2003, MSDE or SQL Server 7.0/2000 or Oracle 8.05 and higher database, Apache 1.3.22 or IIS 4.0 or higher Web server; client: Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.5 and higher.

Price: \$60-\$140 per named user; volume discounts available. Hosted version \$10 per user monthly. Excludes consulting fee.

AT-A-GLANCE REVIEW (5 is best)

Ease of Use: ★★

Feature Richness: ★★★★★

Project Management Support: ★★★★★

Performance: ★★★★★

Overall Value: ★★★★★

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