

Critical Characteristics to Demand from your Timesheet Vendor

By Curt Finch

Timesheet software is not just for payroll anymore. Increasingly, project accounting and client billing are becoming important to professional organizations of all sizes. If you've outgrown your current paper-based or homegrown timesheet system; if you're trying to use Microsoft Excel for timesheets; or if you have multiple installed time collection systems that produce inconsistent data, you need timesheet software.

Without using timesheet software, it is difficult to understand project costs, figure out what people are working on, and send correct and timely bills out to your customers. It also can make payroll very frustrating.

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? Here are a few things to consider:

The Most Common Mistake In Buying Timesheet Software

Don't fall for a deceptive demo.

You have the power to 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, and that shows you reports on your data that will prove to you that your business problem is solved. If a vendor can't make you 100 percent certain that the solution will work for your specific business needs, then walk. Period. Canned demos are designed to deceive. Don't believe them.

What To Ask Vendors – "Can you absolutely prove to me that you will solve my business problem, using my employees, departments, projects, etc., and then show me the reports I need to see? Can you provide references of clients that have successfully integrated your product with my accounting system, my project management system and my payroll service provider?"

How To Know If You Will Get Responsive Support.

Many vendors provide a static outdated FAQ list, and a support staff that is part of the sales team. When support is part of the sales force, you only get help as a prospect. Once they've got your money, getting help is difficult.

What To Ask Vendors – "How many cases do you have published in your automated helpdesk tool? Is your support staff part of the sales team? What is your support staff response time? Can I talk to three recent customers that are happy with your support that are in my industry and are about my size? (And you need to

actually call those references and verify they're really a customer and all is well.) What did your most recent support poll reveal as the overall satisfaction level for your supported customers? Do you even do such polling? What percentage of your customers renew their maintenance contracts each year? What is the retention rate of your ASP customers?"

ASP Flexibility Allows Early Rollouts, Server Protection and Easier Upgrades.

Some timesheet software companies either sell software that you must install at your location or sell an ASP service. Since most software of this type is primarily web-based these days, there is no reason a provider can't do both.

ASP means 'application service provider'. It means you can rent access to web-based software that's running on one of the vendor's servers instead of installing it on a server at your office. This allows early rollouts, server protection and easier upgrades. An *early rollout* is when the vendor lets you temporarily use the ASP site until your IT shop gets the machine purchased for your local installation. *Server protection* is the process of sending a backup to the vendor in case of machine failure at your local installation, so that the vendor can get your system up on his ASP site instantly. ASP vendors allow easier upgrades because they can provide you with a test site during the upgrade process that requires no hardware purchases on your part.

What To Ask Vendors – "What sort of backup generator do you have in case of a power outage at your ASP site and where is it hosted? How many connections to the internet does your ASP site have? How much does server protection cost? Can I rollout on your ASP servers and later transfer the data to my own servers? Where are ASP backup tapes stored?"

In summary, you deserve to be 100 percent positive that the timesheet software you purchase for your company is the right choice for you, and is capable of early rollouts, server protection, and simple upgrades. You have the right to demand responsive support and a tailored demo with your company's information.



Curt Finch is the CEO of Journyx (<http://pr.journyx.com>), a provider of free Web-based software located in Austin, Texas, USA that automates billing, payroll & project management by tracking time, expenses and mileage. Finch is a software industry veteran. In 1997, Curt created the world's first Internet-based timesheet application and the foundation for the current Journyx product offering. Curt has managed development teams creating enterprise-level software solutions since 1985, with a focus on distributed workforce management. In 1992, Finch led the team porting Tivoli's product line to the AIX operating system, which led to the company's acquisition by IBM. As a member of the executive team, Curt helped launch The Kernel Group (TKG), a venture-backed firm that grew to 50 employees and \$7.5 million in sales during his tenure. Curt has a B.S. in Computer Science from Virginia Tech University in the USA. Curt Finch can be reached at curt@journyx.com.