

“ Unless you measure it you can't manage it. Straightforward Timesheets allows us to keep on top of our utilisation and ensures that our teams are focused on billable work. ”

## Consulting services provider keeps tight control with Straightforward™ Timesheets

ICS Solutions is an IT solutions and consulting services provider based in Hampshire. It maintains a database of more than 2000 consultants and has more than 50 people working on projects at any one time. Since installing Straightforward Timesheets it has seen significant improvements in both utilisation and cash flow.

### Finding the right system

Customer projects and consultants had traditionally been managed through a system of Excel spreadsheets, email and paper documents. This system, which had evolved over a number of years, was slow and error-prone, and it was next to impossible to extract any kind of useful reporting or management information.

Alan Ridge, Operations Manager, ICS Solutions says, "Part of the problem was an inconsistent approach. Sometimes we would fail to send timesheets out. Sometimes consultants would forget to send them to us. There had been instances when projects weren't invoiced until up to 3 months after completion. All of this was causing real cash flow problems for us."

ICS had tried a number of alternative timesheet systems over a period of six or seven years but had been unable to find anything that provided the levels of information, control and ease of use that it needed.

Ridge says, "We even tried the free timesheet system that comes with Microsoft Office SharePoint Server but found it incredibly difficult to use. It was hard to get any information out so it didn't really provide any benefits over our existing system."

### A useable solution

With increasingly aggressive timescales and targets for billable work, ICS needed a system that would allow it to keep a much tighter handle on utilisation and invoicing. Ridge says, "We wanted a consistent approach and we wanted to shorten the time lag between doing the work and billing the customer. We simply had to make these improvements if we were going to hit our targets."

PointBeyond installed Straightforward Timesheets, a custom-built timesheet management system designed specifically for services organisations.

One of the real benefits for ICS was its integration with SharePoint and the use of SQL Server Reporting Services for producing customisable and meaningful reports.

#### Customer:

ICS Solutions Ltd

#### Location:

Basingstoke, UK

#### Industry:

Information Technology

#### Company Challenge

- Error-prone system for managing consultants
- Inadequate reporting
- Time to invoice causing cash flow problems

#### Solution Summary

- Straightforward Timesheets custom built timesheet management system for services organisations
- Reports built in SQL Reporting Services

#### Key Technology

- Straightforward Timesheets
- Microsoft Office SharePoint Server

#### Benefits

- Efficiency benefits – massive reduction in the time spent managing timesheets
- Tighter control through allocation and approval process
- Visibility of utilisation
- Reduced time lag to invoicing
- Improved cash flow
- Better reporting
- Improved forward planning

Ridge says, "One of the selling points for us was the familiarity of the User Interface. Everyone who is using it says that it looks good and is easy to use. There wasn't even much need for training – we just held an awareness session and people were up and running." Another advantage is the ability to produce reports. "Straightforward Timesheets comes with a number of standard reports but if you can get a super-user to build their own reports you can match it to pretty much any of a business's requirements."

## Good discipline

Straightforward Timesheets forces good discipline within the ICS project management teams. When an order comes in, a project is created on the system and activities (such as building, designing, testing, deploying) assigned to that project. Roles are then assigned to activities and people to those roles. This is all set up in advance of a project so that when consultants come to book their time they just need to select activities available to them from a set of menus.

Timesheets are controlled through an allocation and approval process and unsubmitted timesheets can now be identified and chased. Ridge says, "Now we can be certain that all the work that has been done has been entered on a timesheet and invoiced."

Because the timesheet system integrates with SharePoint, ICS can also use it to share information between project managers and consultants. Individual project managers can create their own projects in the system, thereby distributing the administrative load.

## Control utilisation

Another benefit of using the Straightforward Timesheets system is that ICS can react better to project changes. Ridge says: "What could sometimes happen was that over the course of a month income was getting eroded. For example, we would plan for someone to work for four days a week for a client and then find that they were only doing two days. The problem was that we were only finding this out a few weeks after it had happened, whereas we can now see what is happening and have the chance to react."

"We can also see if a project is overrunning and allocate time to it. We can react quickly and ensure that we stand a better chance of meeting our utilisation targets – instead of not knowing anything about it until the end of the month, by which time it's too late. Once you've lost the time you can never get it back. When it's gone, it's gone, so we have to be able to react in real time and the system is forcing us to do that."

Not only does the timesheet system speed up timesheet issue, collection and invoicing, it also gives ICS project managers control over the number of days booked and prevents consultants from going over budget. Project managers can also use the reporting features to analyse forward load. They can look forward at the pipeline of work and schedule resources in the most efficient way.

## Improve cash flow

With greater control over timesheets, invoices are more accurate and can be issued more quickly. The system can be used to drive invoices and for reconciliation against budgets.

Ridge says, "The system allows us to develop a more consistent approach to billing clients. We are creating a cycle in which everything is done by a certain date and timesheets are just a part of that. We can get the work done and get it invoiced. We could even go to weekly invoicing to really improve our cash flow."

"One of the reasons why the system was so attractive for us was that it didn't represent a massive capital outlay. It was built on familiar technology so was something we could work with from a technology and services viewpoint.

"We were able to work with PointBeyond to do some minor customisation and envisage further integration opportunities across the business."

## For more information

PointBeyond Ltd  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 145-157 St John Street  
London EC1V 4PY

Tel: 020 7558 8340  
Web: [www.pointbeyond.com](http://www.pointbeyond.com)  
Email: [contact@pointbeyond.com](mailto:contact@pointbeyond.com)

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