CASE STUDY:

How Hawkins Parnell Thackston & Young Leveraged a Successful iTimekeep Pilot for a Rockstar Firm-Wide Rollout

The Challenge

Like many firms, HPTY was looking to streamline the billing process in order to reduce the rejection rate of client bills. At the time that iTimekeep was first introduced to the firm, attorneys at HPTY would often word time entry narratives in ways that were inconsistent with client billing guidelines, thus leading to frequent rejections. Interested in implementing timekeeping real-time compliance at HPTY, the firm's Director of Accounting & Billing, Tim Arvidson, launched a pilot of iTimekeep.

At HPTY, 65% of the bills are sent electronically. Therefore, any inconsistency between the firm's electronic bills and client billing guidelines are likely to lead to rejections, thus taxing firm resources, delaying payment, and compromising client trust. Behind every compliance or billing issue at any law firm is one thing: accuracy. Timekeeping accuracy is the foundation of law firm data. Therefore, in order to realize the ultimate goal of decreasing the firm's rejection rates, we first needed to understand the level of accuracy in the firm's timekeeping records. Billing accuracy is directly correlated with time entry practices. So, what was the time entry situation at HPTY?

All law firms have a written timekeeping policy of some sort and HPTY is no exception. Arvidson described timekeeping expectations as an evolution, stating that "No one has found the silver bullet in regard to creating timekeeping policies that work or enforcing that policy. The firm expects timekeepers to enter their time every day and release that time no later than the end of the business day on Monday for the preceding week. We create timekeeping reports on Tuesday morning for time entered during the previous week."

If the timekeeping policy doesn't motivate attorneys to enter their time, what will?

Enlisting the help of the iTimekeep team, HPTY set out to change timekeeping behavior at the firm. While most of the firm's attorneys are responsible for entering their own time, equity partners were permitted to have an administrative assistant assist in timekeeping. Therefore, a behavioral shift would be required for attorneys of varied seniority levels in order to drive mobile time entry adoption for attorneys who were accustomed to using spreadsheets, documents or even legal pads to keep track of their time.

At the start of the pilot, Arvidson quickly realized that mobile time entry had increased in importance from a "nice to have" to a "must have." A successful pilot was of crucial importance to the firm, as it would set the stage for future timekeeping success.

The Secret Sauce for a Successful Pilot

The pilot commenced with a kick-off meeting to identify the firm's goals and review the implementation plan for the two-month trial period. The iTimekeep installation was completed within one hour, enabling the 10 pilot participants, hand selected from the firm's attorneys by Arvidson, to immediately begin entering their time contemporaneously. No training was required for the pilot participants, as the intuitive nature of iTimekeep allows users to get started with the App after viewing a brief 3-minute welcome video.

Arvidson carefully selected the pilot group to include attorneys who were likely to be vocal about their iTimekeep experience – good or bad. He also chose participants that would be likely to influence others within the firm to adopt iTimekeep, if the pilot went well. "The pilot group just latched on to it and couldn't say enough good things." Arvidson included participants ranging in age, personality type and technology skills to participate. Arvidson's approach was towards thinking about the internal sales pitch to adopting the technology far in advance of the firm-wide roll out.

While attorneys were testing iTimekeep, they were bouncing ideas off of each other. As the pilot group discussed iTimekeep, the buzz within the firm increased. Suddenly, non-pilot participants were requesting access to iTimekeep at all levels of seniority, including equity partners!

Meanwhile, Arvidson and iTimekeep collected and analyzed the data. Several significant findings emerged:

1. 99% of time entered within the duration of the pilot was entered on a mobile device, rather than through the firm's Time & Billing System (Aderant Expert).

2. 100% of the attorneys included in the pilot group were active participants.

3. The firm reduced time leakage by 26% by accounting for time that would have otherwise been lost (work completed outside of business hours and on holidays).

4. Time velocity increased, as 64% of the entries happened within one day of the work performed. 2/3 of timekeepers were contemporaneous.

5. Throughout the pilot, time accuracy got better for most of the attorneys. 82% of the timecards were submitted with time recorded in small increments (from 0.1 to 0.9 of an hour), with 73% of time entries being less than 0.6 of an hour.

6. For some attorneys, iTimekeep represented an important milestone: the first time in their legal career that they entered their own time, rather than relying on an assistant. It paid off, as 60% of the attorneys reported to have recovered time that otherwise would have been missed.

7. Attorneys used iTimekeep on every device: iOs and Android smart phones and tablets, as well as desktop computers.

Finally, and perhaps most notably, was this: 100% of pilot users planned to continue using iTimekeep to enter their time after the pilot.

From Successful Pilot to Firm-Wide Roll-Out

After a successful pilot, which confirmed that iTimekeep was a good fit for HPTY while generating buzz and demand for access to the application, it was time to make mobile timekeeping available to all attorneys and paralegals.

As pilot participants were using the product, several non-participants began to request access to the mobile app. While the app was not yet available to all attorneys, Arvidson began a "wait list" to provide those attorneys with the first opportunity to use iTimekeep after the roll out.

Arvidson took a unique approach to the rollout "When we went to an unlimited complete site license where we could sign up everyone in the firm that wanted access, there were two things that I had to keep in mind. One, I was the only person that was administering the application, because IT wasn't involved. Secondly, carrying out the rollout in small groups would be more manageable, should there be any issues in starting up," he said.

So, Arvidson decided to offer the roll-out to groups of 20 attorneys at a time. An additional benefit of this approach was that it created a sense of demand and urgency for mobile timekeeping within the firm. Arvidson sent an email to all attorneys reporting on the success of iTimekeep in the pilot group and announcing that he was looking for 20 people to become the first users of iTimekeep at the firm (excluding pilot users.) "Within five minutes, I already had my 20 people."

By the time Arvidson was ready to offer iTimekeep to the next 20 people, there was a strong sense of FOMO (fear of missing out) at the firm. He continued to keep a waiting list for those that had missed out on each offering in order to maintain the high level of demand within the firm.

As he continued his rollout strategy, Arvidson was surprised by how easy it was for new iTimekeep users to get up to speed. Knowing that each rollout included several different personalities and levels of sophistication with technology, he put together a two-page quick-start guide, which included FAQs (frequently asked questions) and step-by-step instructions. He found that iTimekeep was so intuitive and easy-to-use that he received very few questions. Ultimately, he was able to offer to the group at large, "I was able to take the approach 'If you want it, you can have it,' because it was so easy to manage and set up."

Now that Arvidson has completed his roll-out to the firm based 100% on volunteer usage and has demonstrated success in adoption, he will transition to a policy to make iTimekeep a requirement.

What Other Firms Can Learn About Implementing a Mobile Time Entry Solution

The success of iTimekeep at HPTY presents several key takeaways for firms considering a mobile time entry solution.

Diverse group of attorney selection is important

It is important for administrators to select a group that is diverse in technological fluency, age, rank and personality. Furthermore, it is important to include individuals in the group that are likely to influence other attorneys at the firm, assuming that the pilot is a success. Finally, it is crucial to include participants who will be vocal, whether the solution is a success or failure during the pilot period.

Create demand among attorneys

Arvidson's approach was to "begin selling before it was time to sell." This created a buzz within the firm as to the benefits of mobile time entry, leading to demand for access to the solution. While some firms are forced to convince their attorneys to try something new, the attorneys at HPTY were requesting access before it was available.

Contemporaneous time entry increases accuracy, every time

Accuracy was one of the initial objectives in implementing iTimekeep at HPTY, so this was an important indicator in the success of mobile timekeeping. Time velocity and accuracy improved as a result of the attorneys' ability to enter time contemporaneously.

Attorneys are able to embrace new technology, when it is easy for them. HPTY had a distinct advantage in initiating a behavioral shift due to the intuitive and easy-to-use nature of iTimekeep. Since iTimekeep is a plug and play app, attorneys were able to enter their time immediately after downloading the app. When technology gets in the way, attorneys won't use it.

Implementation is easy, if you choose the right solution

HPTY did not have vast IT resources to lean on, therefore it was critically important that implementation be as seamless as possible. In less than an hour, iTimekeep was fully installed and integrated with the firm's time and billing system.

Time Entry as a Service (TEaaS), the only way to drive real success.

HPTY implemented iTimekeep using the minimum amount of resources. This was necessary because the firm's resources, such as IT, were already devoted to other projects. Thanks to the Time Entry as a Service (TEaas) model, the firm was able to rely on the iTimekeep team to assist them in achieving immediate success. There was no additional hardware or software to be installed, which was key in minimizing the firm's resource dependency.

Conclusion

Timekeeping accuracy is one of the most important factors in the financial health of a firm. When there are issues with inaccuracies, several consequences arise, such as time leakage and incorrect bill submissions. The best way to increase accuracy at the firm is to put the power in the hands of attorneys through mobile time entry.