



White paper

Standard Time

Why detailed time tracking is valuable

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Scoutwest, Inc.

Standard Time

This chapter is about the features and benefits of the Standard Time® product. Hopefully it amounts to more than a ploy to sell more products. Trust me; that is not the intention. Although the same company that publishes this book also produces Standard Time, it has value for product development and consulting companies and therefore merits a short chapter in this book. Hopefully the discussion will benefit you in your quest for better product development and project management practices.

It's probably wise to begin by understanding why people track time and project status. There are a lot of reasons. People recognize that time is a limited resource, that once used it cannot be recovered. Making good use of time leads to financial benefits. That's common knowledge, but what's more elusive is how to analyze your time, and make simple and applicable use of what you discover. Few people are good at that. For many people it's just too hard to even try. However, for those who do, they are usually trying to gather more information about their own use of time, and on a broader scale, the use of entire teams of people. Peering into this murky well of knowledge is a tiresome task. The impetus that invokes such an undertaking in the first place is usually based on financial or competitive pressures. These are outside pressures forcing you to improve your process in an effort to survive. Only those willing to improve survive. Goals need to be met, market pressures bear down, poor project track records haunt, and customers demand proper accounting. These are the reasons people are forced into the uninvited charge of tracking time. Failing to do so defaults the benefits to those who do.

The current state of technology for tracking project status is still in its infancy. Unfortunately, it is still a somewhat manual process, and one that many people decline to engage in. People attempt to use project-scheduling products like Microsoft Project to schedule tasks. Ninety percent of the time, these schedules

are created once, and never updated because tasks change far too frequently and it's hard to keep up. Tracking project status is nearly impossible because the tasks for a given project will almost all change by the time the project is finished. Keeping up with all those tasks is a manual labor nightmare. It's also pretty hard to track time to tasks or projects because you must baby-sit a time tracking product all the while. As I stated earlier, this is the current state of technology, not the final result. Just as word processing became a no-brainer, time tracking will evolve to the point where it meets the required needs without all the hard work. We're getting there.

Time tracking benefits product development in several ways. It goes beyond knowing how long things take. Projects usually must meet certain budget and time targets to ensure profitability. Tracking time for all resources involved in the project gives you a fair idea of the ongoing status. If a project is broken down into phases, you can practice phase containment to reduce thrash and measure the effect your choices make in subsequent phases. Measuring this time also lets you make a postmortem analysis of project anatomy – where all that time goes. Understanding this gives you a leg up on the competition.

Standard Time offers several interconnected “views” of your time data. The Project Task view offers a hierarchical view of all project tasks in the project. Each task rolls up certain fields like duration, actual work, remaining work, and percent complete to the subsystem and project level so that you see project status at a glance. Projects and subsystems are listed in order with project tasks below them. They may be collapsed and expanded to show detail as needed. A timesheet view is convenient for people who would rather estimate each day's work in a spreadsheet style layout rather than use a precise timer. Using this view may reduce the fidelity of the data you collect, but some data is better than no data. A Time Log view shows the historical record of all time that has been logged. Most of the reports are based on this data since it contains the honest historical truth about what has happened in the project. This is the data you'll

likely use to analyze your projects. Mileage and expense tracking is also available to help round out the tracking of project status. The complete picture of project time and expenses is sometimes necessary. Client invoicing is based upon time that has been logged and expenses incurred. These basic features can be used by one-man companies or large teams to collect time that is useful for analysis.

Standard Time can be used to learn about time usage. Track your time on every thing you do. This gives you the raw materials to look for the connections between strategy and tactics. Try to find the optimal mix of time spent on strategy, tactics, and administrative overhead that result in actual work performed. Once you obtain a “baseline” analysis for yours, and your team’s performance, try to squeeze out additional performance by shifting time to different priorities. This is an experiment that takes time to perfect. After looking into the microscope of time tracking for a while, you may be a little bug-eyed, but you’ll start to see patterns of performance that are directly related to your mix of priorities. You’ll discover the optimal mix of process overhead necessary to reduce thrash. You’ll find the amount of time you can spend on each release cycle to optimize quality, customer satisfaction, and employee morale. You’ll discover how much time is actually spent on administrative overhead and downtime. You’ll find relationships between QA polish time and product quality. You’ll learn about task context switching time and the need for focused REM development. You’ll be able to meet market windows by reducing functionality that doesn’t matter, and spend more time focusing on customer priorities. These are the benefits of tracking time!

About Us

Scoutwest, Inc. develops and publishes project management and time tracking products for consulting, manufacturing, government, and general business applications.

Thousands of small to large businesses, in dozens of countries worldwide, trust their mission critical business processes to Scoutwest products. Standard Time® and Standard Issue® work together to offer well-rounded project management solutions.

We specialize in packaged software for timesheets, project management, time tracking, defect tracking, and issue tracking. Standard Time is a web-based timesheet that also runs on Windows, Palm OS, and Pocket PC. It can be used for client billing and task management. Standard Issue is used for bug tracking and general issue tracking.

Please visit these web sites for more information.

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www.sdtissue.com