your employees are your biggest asset—and your biggest expense. Their time is your money.

Think back to yesterday, or last week: Where did you assign people? Was each person needed for the entire time? Did each one start on time and work the hours you expected? Or was a straggler punched in by a buddy? Was that OT really necessary? Who was absent ... again? Finally, were all those timesheets and cards in on time, legible and accurate?

The fact is, tracking employee time and attendance is more than a clerical issue. It is a critical measure of your company’s productivity. Time records help you monitor and manage absenteeism, staffing levels, performance, overtime and workloads. Lost hours are lost dollars.

And yet, employee timekeeping can be an administrative hassle. When done manually, it is a chore that often gets put off until the last minute—and, not surprisingly, ends up rife with errors. Creating detailed job time reports can take

It’s About Time
Sloppy attendance records can kill your bottom line.
The good news? The right software can revive it. By Anne Wolfe

Exaktime
An employee on a jobsite clocks in to The JobClock System with his individual green Keytab.
days, weeks or even months.

What you want is a more automated time and attendance system that helps inform your labor decisions. What can an automated system do for you? More than you probably realize. It can help:

- Ensure the right head count to handle your business volume
- Monitor excessive overtime or absenteeism
- Analyze labor costs
- Align labor allocation with your strategic goals
- Ensure accurate billable hours for clients
- Reduce wasted time by employees

From cards to clocks
Scharff Construction, a residential framing subcontractor in California, faced problems with employees failing to complete their time cards in time for payroll processing.

“Our biggest problem was just gathering the information,” said office manager Kim St. Dennis. “I would have to go back out to the job site to gather them from the guys that forgot. I spend upwards of a day and a half each and every week just acquiring the time slips and getting time in.”

Moreover, she added: “Our sense was that the time information we were getting was extremely unreliable.”

That meant spending 40 hours each month just to collect and correct errant time cards, before processing the payroll.

“We knew we needed to get a handle on our payroll,” St. Dennis said. “We had a rough idea of what our overhead was, but we needed an accurate way of knowing our actual costs and seeing where we were making our money.”

The company looked for a solution that would improve time-card collection, reduce time-slip errors, and provide more accurate payroll tracking and processing.

“Initially, there was some grouse—mostly complaints about having another thing to do at the job site,” said St. Dennis. But once employees realized their paychecks depended on the system, “if they wanted their check by Friday, they had to make sure to clock in and out.”

The system has enabled St. Dennis to recover many of the hours she once lost to chasing time cards. Not only that, but “we are now able to easily look at the payroll on a week-by-week basis and discover things like, ‘Hey, this job is taking too long.’”

Having the hours in digital form also made it easy to export time to the company’s Job Report sheets, kept in Excel format. Today, using 15 JobClocks to gather and report time for 60 employees, the company creates Excel spreadsheets for each job to track exact lumber costs, hardware costs and weekly labor costs.

Said St. Dennis: “As a forecasting tool, this system is incredibly valuable.”

iPhones and PCs
Other attendance systems are designed to work with iPhones and computers. TSheets software turns any computer or Web-enabled mobile device into a time clock. The system also offers reporting, paid-time-off and overtime tracking, job/project tracking, and integration with QuickBooks and Twitter.

Color Craft Inc. in Boise, Idaho, scrapped its paper timesheets a year ago, turning to TSheets to track 24 employees working in painting crews across the area. Managers now easily review and adjust crew timesheets to facilitate weekly payroll processing.

“TSheets allows our project man-
ager to track the manpower,” says Color Craft president Steve Blackhurst. “Having accurate week-to-week labor reports helps me in the estimating and job costing, to track each job as it progresses.”

Adds Brandon Zehm, CTO of TSheets: “We help streamline your business so you can collect time from employees, get it approved by managers, and exported for payroll or invoicing with just a few clicks.”

No more ‘buddy punching’

For large businesses like Crossland Construction, Kronos Inc.’s Kronos Essentials automates time and attendance data collection, increases payroll accuracy, and simplifies time reporting compliance across the organization.

With offices in four states, Crossland uses Kronos biometric data collection terminals at each construction site to verify time entries. (Biometrics are automated methods of recognizing a person by a physiological or behavioral characteristic: for example, by voice or fingerprints.)

Many of today’s time and attendance systems employ biometric technology to eliminate “buddy punching,” the costly act in which employees punch in and out for one another. Kronos Essentials, for example, can scan employee badges or fingerprints.

“Before installing the biometric ter-
minals, we had people who didn’t even work for us clocking in for actual employees,” says Joyce Maroney, a senior director with Crossland. “This resulted in an inflated payroll that negatively impacted our company and distorted our budget.”

Scanners and reporting

Some systems offer an assortment of time entry mechanisms. CheckMate Time and Attendance system, by Dynamic Systems Inc., works with barcode scanner input, computer input and time clocks. Its many reports include payroll by task, shift and overtime; exceptions; current employee status, and export of labor hours by employee and job.

Every system varies somewhat, so you must analyze your company’s needs before you shop the features. For example, when expanded territory and business volume overloaded the pencil-and-paper payroll process at Tarlton Corp. in St. Louis, Mo., management looked for software that would facilitate time entry, job costing, management review and approval, and integration with the accounting system.

Beyond those functions, the company also wanted to improve its allocation of labor, from crews to project managers. Assigning people to the right jobs at the right times “was a challenge for us to resolve efficiently,” said David Moore, Tarlton’s VP of finance. Finally, the company needed “a product that would permit field superintendents and foremen to produce daily timesheets electronically.”

Eventually, the general contractor chose Resource Commander, by ACS Connect. The result: Tarlton slashed its reporting and payroll processing time each week, recouping the system’s initial cost within five months. The system also ensured “efficient and accurate allocation of labor resources to our general ledger,” said Moore.

Homegrown to high tech

Using three homegrown systems to track 1,300 employees in more than 300 locations each week had become a nightmare for the timekeepers at Florida-based W.S. Badcock Corp.

“Every pay period was stressful,” said Lisa Tobias, business solutions group manager. “They were responsible for pulling employee time from the various systems, and then re-keying hours worked into the payroll system, and entering time-off or leave into the HR system.”

The home furnishings retailer turned to EmpCenter from WorkForce Software to centralize employee data and streamline its workforce management. The software automated the collection and tracking of employee work hours and the accrual of vacation, sickness and other time banks. Online timesheets and time clocks collected work hours and helped manage employee leave. Data are now automatically transferred to payroll and HR systems, to ensure accuracy and consistency in business policies. Employees can log into the system to see their vacation and other balances, freeing managers to spend more time on other tasks.

Automatic data transfer among sys-

See TIME on next page

Tips for Time Trackers

Time tracking software should do more than just record working hours. Unsure what to look for? Online electronics reviewer TopTenReviews (www.toptenreviews.com) suggests criteria to consider. Look for products that:

• Track vacation accrual, sick leave and overtime
• Track both hourly and salaried employees
• Create payroll reports of hours worked and wages earned, with easy export into your payroll program

As with all software decisions, do not base your purchase on price. The right product should return your investment in short order.

Finally, enact changes carefully. Do your homework, proceed with caution, and allow time for implementation. Nothing destroys employee productivity faster than reckless labor management.

“Plan for 30 days of transition,” advises Kim St. Dennis, of Scharff construction, which uses Exaktime’s JobClock System. “It took us about four weeks to get off time sheets.”
Time & Attendance Solutions

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Source: Suppliers

**TIME from last page**

tems is an important issue for many companies that, like Badcock, want their time and attendance data to flow into accounting, payroll and human resources systems. If one software program can’t talk to another, efficiency suffers. Human intervention is required, along with duplicate data entry, and there is greater margin for error.

A system such as mJobTime is able to interface with a wide variety of construction systems, including QuickBooks, Master Builder and Construction Partner.

Patricia Ross, controller of RB Interior Trim in Colorado, settled on mJobTime partly because of its interface with the company’s ComputerEase accounting system.

“We have about 15 to 20 projects underway all the time, so we received a mountain of paper time records every week. I had to find a way to streamline the payroll process and also extract useful data for job cost reports,” said Ross.

“With mJobTime, time records and other important information are sent directly to our accounting system. So now, instead of spending hours on manual input, I can access that data and use it to improve how we operate, [such as] creating up-to-the-minute reports for management meetings.”

**Time for a change?**

Whether it’s a job clock widget, biometric terminal, mobile phone or Web-based set-up, a time and attendance system can be an essential tool in managing your work force efficiently. Get a handle on this piece of your operation, and you’ll be amazed at the impact on your bottom line.

Employee time can be collected at many far-flung locations and processed centrally, without chasing down missing information and tallying hand-written records. You can also track real labor costs, prevent overpayments and buddy punching, avoid staffing problems, and control internal inefficiencies.

As Blackhurst of Color Craft says: “Knowing where each employee is working at any given moment facilitates efficiency, thereby saving money.”

Contact technology writer Anne Wolfe, M.S., at anne@annewolfe.com.
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