

Keeping track of time usage is a demanding task for both individuals and companies.



Cameron Johnstone reviews a 'time tamer' suited to CAD offices of all sizes.

Description	Work (hh:mm:ss)	Ratio (%)	Status	Progress	Comment
Period Mon 2001-10-08 to Fri 2001-10-12	403:47:46				
1 - Our Company	403:47:46	100%	In progress	8.3%	My company
1.1 - Clients	170:25:36	42%	In progress	33%	All my compar
1.1.1 - Swift Consulting	162:23:58	95%	In progress	44%	A favourite Cl
1.1.1.1 - XLM System	162:23:58	100%	In progress	44%	Contract to dk
1.1.1.1.1 - Specification	06:54:06	4.2%	Completed	100%	Discuss and cr
1.1.1.1.2 - System design	23:44:40	15%	Completed	100%	
1.1.1.1.2.1 - High level design	00:44:54	3.2%	Completed	100%	
1.1.1.1.2.2 - Database design	06:19:47	27%	In progress	0%	
1.1.1.1.2.3 - Client software design	16:39:59	70%	In progress	0%	
1.1.1.1.3 - Implementation	87:11:13	54%	In progress	100%	
1.1.1.1.3.1 - Database Construction	76:19:02	88%	Completed	100%	Setup databa:
Jennifer Jenkins	34:39:24	45%			
Microsoft Visual C++	34:39:24	100%			
wndHndl.cpp	24:53:58	72%			
restWord.cpp	09:45:26	28%			
Phil Adamson	17:49:33	23%			
Jeremy Giltrap	13:09:51	17%			
Microsoft Visual C++	13:09:51	100%			
bkgPrc.cpp	13:09:51	100%			
Laura Hayes	10:40:14	14%			
1.1.1.1.3.2 - Client software	10:52:11	12%	Completed	100%	programming
1.1.1.1.4 - Code review	09:03:10	5.6%	In progress	0%	



TIME TAMER

Clockwise Timesheet is a project monitoring, personal time management and computer resource management system produced by an Australian company, Spherical Technology Pty Ltd.

It accurately tracks the time spent working on files and programs, and/or inactivity on your computer. Clockwise Timesheet also has the ability to monitor other billable manual tasks such as making or receiving phone calls or attending meetings, etc.

The data collected can be quickly and easily edited, modified or deleted. Using this data, the program automatically generates a timesheet, or (with the Professional Edition tested) the data can be submitted to a central company database, to reduce the amount of office paper shuffling and administration.

Features of the package include the ability to generate billing and costing reports, accurately monitor hardware, software and resource usage, accurately monitor internal projects and work for clients to aid in project management.

Requirements

The software will run under Windows 95, 98, 98SE, ME, NT4 (SP6), 2000 or XP. Its minimum requirements include Internet Explorer (at least v4 recommended); a 486 processor (Pentium II or equivalent recommended); 32Mb of RAM (128Mb recommended) and free hard disk space of 50Mb (200Mb recommended). A copy of Microsoft Access 2000 is required if you want to perform advanced user privilege editing.

This review was performed on a Pentium machine running at 266MHz, with 96Mb of system memory and Windows 98. Although this machine could be considered a dinosaur in today's CAD or office environment, there were absolutely no problems running the software.

Installation

Set-up and installation were very easy, with automatic loading. The software first searches for components it needs to run on your system and installs necessary files if not found. A system reboot is required for Windows 98 and Windows NT4. On restarting the computer and running the program for the first time, once the licence and product key details are entered, the software prompts for a password to access the main program.

The password is used to protect each individual user's personal data, and is only accessible by the individual user. This is designed to maintain privacy so that company staff can be confident that they are not being monitored while they work. The software then takes you through a quick setup wizard to help you get started.

Documentation

The online documentation includes a demonstration software package, which is a good way of getting to know the product before finally setting up any individual requirements. The help system window – docked on the right side of the screen when the program is first used – is very useful for getting acquainted with the terminology and layout.

The help files seemed to lack a little in the advanced user area, but a company spokesman indicated that the product was only in its early stages of development and the help system will become more comprehensive with each new release. Most users will have no trouble with the general use of the product, and prompt comprehensive advice is always just an email or phone call away.

Training and customisation

At this stage, Sydney-based Spherical Technology offers face-to-face training. However, the product seems very simple to operate at a user level and training might only be required for those with little computer literacy or system administrators setting up on a network. If any setup or operational difficulties were experienced (not that any were encountered during this review), they could be remedied by telephone or email.

The advanced user customisation features of the software allow for most scenarios likely to be encountered when using the package, however Spherical Technology also offers software customisation on an hourly fee basis for those with specific needs not catered for by the 'out-of-the-box' software.

This product is aimed at anyone using a computer in a small to large organisation to accomplish work-related tasks, and is an excellent way of scrutinising your personal time management, as well as accurately tracking the multitude of tasks accomplished each day with a minimum of fuss or effort.

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Operation

Clockwise Timesheet stores all of its data in Microsoft Access databases. In fact, the program is basically an automated database, which logs the use of files and programs, unobtrusively in the background as you work.

The automatic logging feature is complemented with a quick and easy-to-use manual-logging interface (pictured, previous page) to cater for the tasks carried out away from your computer.

At the end of the work period, with the use of the Clockwise Timesheet user interface (right), each day's activity (or inactivity) is displayed for editing.

Data can be added, deleted or edited at any time. For this review, the time taken to edit the weekly data ready for submission was less than two minutes.

A very useful drag-and-drop facility can be used for correcting discrepancies created when flitting between files, as most CAD users often do.

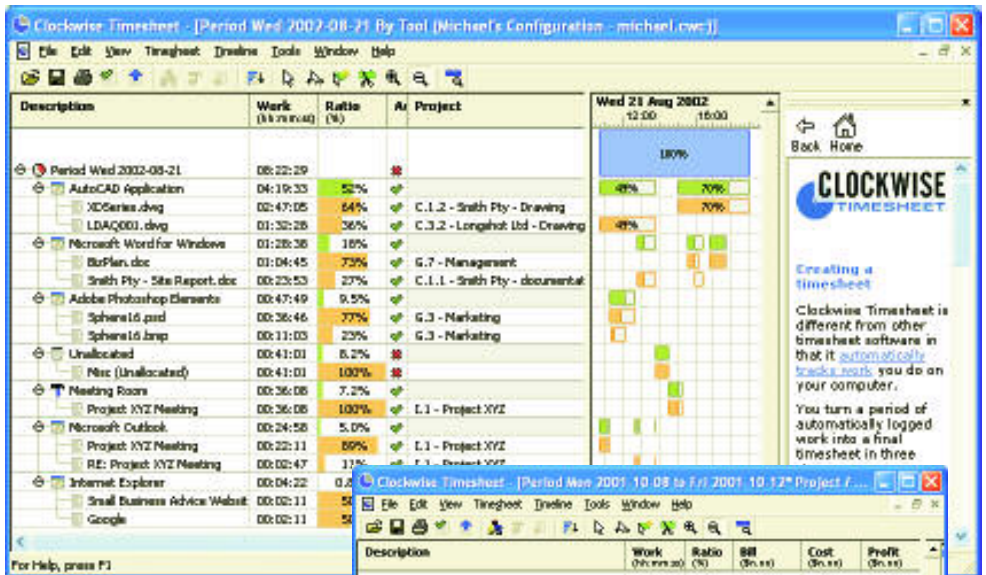
Tasks carried out can be associated with a particular work project, and projects associated with clients and so on, in a hierarchical fashion, so that time logged as you work is automatically booked to a particular project/ client.

Hardware and personnel resources can also be assigned to a particular department in the same hierarchical manner. Once the program has established the link between the file and the project, any future time spent working on the particular file/s is automatically booked against the appropriate project. This link can be altered if needed future by assigning the file to a different project.

In the Professional Edition, the data collected can be used to generate billing and costing reports (as shown at right), and for those on a network, the use of hardware and software resources can be monitored.

One advantage for system administrators and managers is the ability to identify software and hardware which is not being utilised. Money can then be saved by moving hardware to where it will be better utilised and reducing the amount of redundant software licences.

Access privileges can be set up on a network to limit access to authorised per-



sonnel for information submitted by individuals to the central database.

Clockwise Timesheet allows the set-up of a hierarchy of submission databases. For example, engineering staff can submit their timesheet data to a database, the engineering manager can then edit and submit it to the company database.

A hierarchy such as this allows managers to approve their department's use of time first before submitting the data for billing.

Clockwise Timesheet Professional Edition features a fully configurable viewing system so that users can define the exact way they want to view and print their data. The example shown (main picture, previous page) can be created with the inbuilt customisable viewing system (this view is included as standard). The view shows the company's projects, and the item that each user worked on by the tool they used to do the work.

The software has the ability to export data to other applications in formats that include CSV (Comma Separated Values) text files, tab delimited text files, and XML (eXtensible Markup Language) files. CSV and tab delimited text files are commonly used to import data into spreadsheet software such as Microsoft Excel. XML format is commonly used in Internet and Intranet applications.

The Standard Edition of Clockwise Timesheet is priced at \$139 (1-4 copies), while the Professional Edition costs \$299

(1-9 copies), with price discounts on larger quantities of either edition.

Conclusion

As with any new software implemented, to gain the maximum benefit users need to familiarise themselves with new terminology, and this program is no different in this regard. An hour spent reading over the help files should be sufficient to get started.

Once set up, significant timesaving in timesheet administration and/or individual time management could be achieved in any size business. The software works very well, is easily set up to use and highly recommended for any manager or computer user who would like to see better utilisation of computer and human resources in their business, or anyone who just wants to improve their own time management. ♦

For more information, visit www.spherical.com.au