

# Capture Time on the Road

*Automatically recovering billable hours spent on remote devices*

by Ray Deck, Element55

More attorneys are spending more hours outside the office, before or after usual business hours and without the support structures of an office environment. But for all the variety in the time, manner and place of the activity, the work is still billable, and needs to be captured to the timesheet.

## Easily Lost Time

Excluding scheduled meetings and court time, time away from the office is often the most difficult to record for most attorneys. First, just being away from the office means that there are no support structures that many attorneys otherwise rely on to remember to catch the time as it happens.

Second, because the work often involves various small activities scattered over time, stopping after each activity to record the hours is burdensome. Even when the attorneys have immediate time entry opportunities outside the office, they often go unused in favor of maintaining a flow of work or returning to the non-work activities that are (or should be!) the norm outside business hours.

## Zero-Click Time Capture

The solution is to shift the focus from time entry to time capture. Time capture remembers time the attorney is working on a given document, communication, or other activity and saves it for reference and submission at a later date.

Zero-click time capture technology complements the attorney's memory with a timesheet pre-populated with activities over the course of the day. Rather than having to remember to start or stop a clock as she works, or filling out a time slip immediately after the fact, the information is recorded to the timesheet in real time for the attorney's reference at his or her convenience. When the attorney opens it, he sees:

- .20 hours on an email message composed on the wireless device
- .10 hours on a call received via smartphone
- 1.2 hours revising a pleading on the laptop while on an airplane

## Capturing Billable Hours

Billable time away from the office often involves technologies in three categories:

1. Remote Access: Citrix and other virtual office environments allow attorneys to work on systems as if they were in the office even when they themselves are remote.
2. Laptops: Increasingly attorneys can take their computers with them, so ability to track hours when disconnected from the network is important
3. Handheld Devices: Advanced "smartphones" and PDAs are making the ability to work ubiquitous and increasingly scattered, as one can compose an email at the beach before diving into the water.

Each requires a different approach to the time capture equation:

1. Remote access: work conducted in the virtual environment should be captured just as seamlessly as if the attorney were using his/her own computer in the office. (see "Zero-Click Time Capture", *Finance in the Electronic Age*, ILTA White Paper Series March 2005)
2. Laptops: time capture systems should capture time attorneys spend working even when they do not have a live network connection

3. Time capture systems should be embedded into mobile devices to capture time and save it centrally without requiring a single click. The systems should capture the full spectrum of activities one might engage in on the device, rather than, say, just phone calls.

## Integrating with Existing Systems

The information from these remote locations is most effective when cross-referenced with the firm's knowledge systems, including:

**CRM:** A majority of activity conducted outside of the office involves communications, so cross-referencing with contacts and relationships to better-populate the timesheet will put a significant multiplier on the value. Ex. "Call to 6174230692" from a smartphone becomes "Call to Ray Deck (Element55)". This should happen even when CRM is not immediately accessible from the remote device itself – central systems enhancing data captured at the edge.

**Document Management:** Many new PDAs and almost all laptops enable the review and manipulation of important documents while away from the office. Many of these documents have a profile in the document management system of the firm, and associated contextual information that can better help populate the timesheet. Ex. "Revising 1239854.DOC" becomes "Revising Pleading for ABC Inc." and is assigned to the appropriate client-matter based on the profile in the DMS. Again, this integration should occur regardless of whether the attorney has access to the document management system interface from the particular device.

**Desktop-based Time Capture:** Time from the remote locations is most effective when combined with time captured in the office. The combination allows a complete picture of the attorney's work to emerge – wherever they might have worked over the course of the day, week or month.

When combined with the above, zero click time capture on the remote devices allows the attorney to better understand his/her day, get more hours onto the timesheet, and support those hours with greater detail, all with far less work than trying to remember "what did I do last week?"

## Time Everywhere


Since the time capture system creates an information resource for the attorney, access to that information in the form of a pre-populated timesheet that combines all of the above should be available wherever the attorney would think about or submit his or her time.

Time captured on the road should be available for review when at the desk, and time captured on the desk should be reviewable on the road – access to the information should be as ubiquitous as the opportunities to do the billable work.

## What's Next – Attorney-Centric Time

Capturing billable hours from remote platforms is a significant opportunity, and is even more powerful when extended to a time capture system that works with attorneys both inside and outside of the office environment. Further, once attorneys have a taste of automatic time capture from one system, they ask "why not for everything?"

Thus time capture is not an issue for one platform, but rather should be focused on the attorney, capturing and adding value no matter where he or she is, such that the firm can reap the benefits of more complete timesheets and the hassle of reconstructing the day is minimized.

Automatic time capture is an opportunity to increase the completeness of timesheets and leverage your existing investments in technologies both inside and out of the office. For a relatively small marginal cost – and without requiring additional work from attorneys – the firm can reap the benefits of capturing more billable hours. 

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### About the Author:

Ray Deck is the President of Element55, which offers automatic time capture software Legal55. Element55 is a silver sponsor of the International Legal Technology Association ([www.iltanet.org](http://www.iltanet.org)) and a founding sponsor of the Institute for Time Capture ([www.timecaptureinstitute.org](http://www.timecaptureinstitute.org)). Ray can be reached at (617) 423-0692 or [ray@element55.com](mailto:ray@element55.com).

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