CHAPTER 19

Time Management Software

Many software programs currently are available to improve the individual's and organization's efficiency over a broad range of tasks. These programs can, for example, maintain a calendar of meetings and appointments as well as a to-do list, keep group contact lists, manage e-mail, make and file notes, and help manage projects. The "smarter" applications link functions so that data needs to be updated in one place only, and the update will flow to all connected sites.

Some programs are designed specifically to help work groups collaborate and communicate more effectively. By making schedules of each individual available to all via a web-based program, for example, the task of scheduling meetings is greatly simplified, particularly when members are scattered in different locations. Address book contacts can also be shared by a group. Still other software applications address enterprise-wide productivity issues by attempting to help users organize the creative and innovation process, promote brainstorming, capture ideas, encourage strategic thinking and planning, and automate business processes. The postmortem process can also be greatly simplified due to the built-in reporting and analysis capabilities of many project management programs. Organization intranets are now incorporating collaboration functionality to facilitate teamwork, as are client-based applications (Microsoft Office updates, for example, will include more collaboration functionality allowing users to write, edit, and share documents remotely).

Capitalizing on the proliferation of personal digital assistants, new software packages ensure that all the devices an individual may use whether in the office, at home, or on the road, are

synchronized. Many programs allow export and import of data so that other users can share and use information in other programs. Many programs are designed to work in conjunction with common information management and/or e-mail applications.

THE FUTURE IS HERE

There are software applications available to facilitate almost any time management need and shorten almost any process. All promise to save time through the use of computers' technological advantages: storage, sorting, linking, and conversion. Enter contact information once, for example, and it becomes available indefinitely, is readily updated, and can be accessed and transferred easily to other applications, devices, and users.

Yet, time management software, while providing distinct advantages over paper-based systems, is just an improved tool in the hands of the user. Much as an electric saw cuts faster than a hand saw, time management software will improve work flow compared with a system based on note cards or notebooks, and written lists. And because so many projects involve team members working in different locations, a shared project management program is essential to coordinate their efforts.

Time management software can provide definite productivity gains if:

- The installation and configuration stages are properly managed
- Initial data entry is not excessively time consuming
- Updating and maintenance of data is convenient
- The learning curve for new users is not overly steep
- The software is stable and available; crashes are infrequent
- Users consider the output valuable

A complete description of all time management software packages available is beyond the scope of this book. And, because

programs come and go with significant frequency, any list will become quickly outdated. We won't consider browser, e-mail packages, or search engines here.

Here are some examples of categories and typical applications. Note that many fine and appropriate software packages are not included, and those that do make the list are not meant as recommendations.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

For any project that involves multiple participants, multiple steps, or the necessity to capture time for billing purposes, project management software offers distinct time-saving advantages. These programs permit individual users to establish to-do tasks for themselves, others, and groups, and track completion against schedule or forecast. They offer the capacity to track multiple projects. Some examples include:

Microsoft Project (Microsoft) integrates with Microsoft Office XP and Vista, so it lets Office regulars get up and running with relative ease in an application that would otherwise require training. Managers who don't use Office may prefer a package specific to their businesses, such as construction, sales, or manufacturing.

FastTrack Schedule (AEC Software, Inc.) is a project management tool that breaks down projects in terms of human, financial, and time resources needed to complete different stages. FastTrack will alert users to planning conflicts and has templates to help load data for new projects. Its dynamic nature accommodates changes in resource availability.

OrgPlus Professional (HumanConcepts) is basically an application for organizational charting; it also permits the building of what-if business scenarios for use in HR decision making.

SureTrak Project Manager 3.0 and Primavera (Primavera Systems, Inc.) are project management software programs.

Merlin (Project Wizard) is project management software that also functions as a content-management system to keep versions of documents, list authors, and share them with team members.

OmniPlan (The Omni Group) is a simple, Mac-only project management application.

Daylite (Marketcircle) is a project planning and tracking program that allows members of a workgroup to share information such as sales-call reports or project schedules. By defining recurring projects with standard steps, Daylite will generate due dates for each step automatically.

INFORMATION CAPTURE, SHARING, AND DEVELOPMENT SOFTWARE

The following programs help with idea management:

MindManager (Mindjet) has more than 70 percent of the PC-based market (and more of the enterprise market) for mind mapping software, which allows the user to capture, organize, and share information. A means to organize ideas (you start with a topic and add branches as you mine your idea)—its integration with FastTrack project management software allows those ideas to be incorporated into a project management framework. MindManager can assign ideas to a specific individual and show completion.

Visual Mind (Mind Technologies) is a graphical planning and organizing application.

EMC Documentum (EMC Corporation) permits the capture, management, delivery, and archiving of documents used in invoice processing, claims handling, loan processing, and applications processing.

OneNote 2007 (Microsoft) is a note-taking and information-management program.

COLLABORATION SOFTWARE

These programs allow you and your colleagues to stay on the same page:

Lotus Notes (IBM) offers e-mail, instant messaging, notebook, calendar/resources reservation, and means to interact with collaborative applications.

Basecamp (37 Signals) is a Web-based application that facilitates real-time group decision making.

FacilitatePro (Facilitate.com) is a Web-based brainstorming and decision-making tool.

PERSONAL ORGANIZATION SOFTWARE AND TO-DO LIST MANAGERS

The following programs will help you stay organized:

Calendar Creator (Encore Software Inc.) uses templates of daily planners, weekly organizers, monthly and yearly calendars (including Franklin Covey® layouts) to create a personal calendar.

TreePad (Freebyte) is a personal information manager, organizer, database, and word processor. It stores notes, documents, hyperlinks, and images and makes them easily accessible.