Polaris

BurnsGroup
Real-time Project Time Tracking Increases Profitability

Burns

Industry: Marketing/Professional Services

Company Size: Large

Products Used: Project Costing, Client Billing, Absence Management

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Challenges

- Manual time tracking processes that were not scalable or transparent

- Complex, time-consuming process for staff to record their project time per task, as well as track attendance information such as time off

- No unified means of analyzing the number of hours staff worked on projects, the work they did, or the clients they served

- Difficult to manage different rates staff were charged out at, depending on role and task type

BurnsGroup burst onto the New York advertising agency scene in 2006 with a mission to "transform brands into a category of one." The company has seen a surge in demand for its marketing services since then, building new brands from scratch and pointing established ones such as YellowTail Wines, Columbia Business School, and Pfizer in a new direction. Like any marketing services agency, BurnsGroup is crammed with experienced, highly strategic, creative thinkers. These are the kind of people who have relentless pride in their craft and want to deliver the best possible creative output — even if it means working longer than anticipated to complete it. But in the midst of this craziness, they enjoy filling in their timesheets about as much as riding the New York subway at rush hour.

Monitoring time and resources became a growing challenge for the company's HR managers, executive team, and project managers, who needed their on-the-go employees to maintain a complete, accurate, and timely record of how many hours they work, plus the increased number of projects and clients they work on. "We can't waste valuable hours or overcharge our clients relative to the project," explains Ann Morton, Executive Account Director, BurnsGroup. "Prior to introducing Polaris, time tracking used to be a shot in the dark. Our CFO had to chase people down and make a leap of faith that what she was getting was accurate. The agency's reliance on manual time tracking processes made it very difficult for management to keep a pulse on the run rate of a given project at all times."

Another time tracking challenge is that each member of the team records their project time differently, depending on their role or the task at hand. An art director, for example, has one charge-out rate for conceptualizing a new campaign, while a freelance resource — often brought in to supplement BurnsGroup's own staff — is carried at a different net rate. To help cope with their exponential growth, the agency needed a simple and straightforward mechanism to record, allocate, and bill their time.

Track project time quickly, easily, and accurately

BurnsGroup needed a scalable solution to efficiently track project time anytime, anywhere: one that was as easy-to-use as it was to deploy. The solution also had to manage the different billable staff rates, depending on the role and the type of work. Morton implemented a Polaris solution at her past two employers with great success, which made her a staunch advocate of the technology. "I ran a consultancy that helped smaller shops implement operational best practices, with resource optimization front and center of my offering," she says. "Polaris was part of my recommended 'tool kit,' and every client I introduced to the platform was amazed at the value for money and ease of use."

BurnsGroup now uses Polaris to gain rich, real-time insight into the time staff spends on projects and other tasks, and to automate time off tracking and enforcement so that it's simple for staff to appropriately comply with internal policies. The best-in-class solution for project time capture provides employees with easy-to-use timesheets so they can detail how many hours they work, which clients they serve, and the type of work they are doing based on pre-configured increments of time. That busy art director, for example, now simply logs onto Polaris — through a browser or on his or her mobile device — and records the number of hours devoted to approving client artwork or briefing a studio photographer, while Polaris does the rest.

The Results

Real-time project/client profitability analysis

By tracking individual employee hours, different charge-out rates, and real-time progress against projects, BurnsGroup has significantly greater visibility into how projects are run and budgeted. The company uses this information to evaluate the profitability of individual clients, plan and allocate resources, and forecast future business growth. It also has enabled the company to flexibly re-allocate resources on the fly in real time in response to client needs.

Improved time management

BurnsGroup is able to identify how much time is spent performing client-facing tasks, such as creative brainstorming and production, and how much time is spent on non-billable work, like new business pitches or internal staff meetings. When a new project arrives, the firm can better estimate the resources and time required, and charge clients appropriately. Moreover, Polaris can help identify seasonal fluctuations in workload and determine when freelance staff should be hired.

Reduced revenue leakage

Polaris enables BurnsGroup to capture all staff time accurately and in a timely manner. This ensures that clients are charged according to the work completed, and that any under- or overservicing of clients can be immediately addressed.

> 66 *Polaris redefines and revolutionizes the way BurnsGroup tracks project time, which is increasing our profitability. Managing resources so we can scale profitably is paramount and Polaris helps us closely manage project time, account servicing, and agency profitability. We couldn't be happier with the product. It has changed everything for us.* 99
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> Ann Morton, Executive Account Director, BurnsGroup

Look, no IT

Being cloud-based, Polaris software requires minimal up-front investment, and no expensive hardware or technical configuration. BurnsGroup benefits from rapid, low risk implementation, low total cost of ownership, and minimal intervention from the IT department. With this software-as-a-service (SaaS) deployment, everyone in the company is working on a single, current version of the application — thanks to seamless integrations and upgrades.

Increased staff productivity and satisfaction

The intuitive, easy-to-use time tracking solution provides staff with a fast, straightforward means of completing the formerly laborious timesheet process. They now have more time to devote to client-facing activities and, because they are free of the burden of manual time tracking, feel more rewarded and satisfied in their role. The cloud-based model also means they can access Polaris anytime, anywhere. Marketing services staff and freelancers are often working unusual hours on client projects, and Polaris gives them the flexibility to record their time through their mobile device when they are at home, on the weekend, or while traveling.

"If you're not capturing time, then you're not collecting revenue for it," Morton concludes. "Polaris redefines and revolutionizes the way BurnsGroup tracks project time, which is increasing our profitability. I continue to be pleased with how easy Polaris is to use across our organization. Being cloud-based, everyone is working from one common platform and they have the added advantage of mobile integration to make time capture even easier. Managing resources so we can scale profitably is paramount, and Polaris helps us closely manage project time, account servicing, and agency profitability."

Results

- Cloud-based solution ensures automated capture of staff/ freelancers' work on client projects, which clients they serve, and the type of work they do

- Provides greater visibility into employee time off and how projects are run and budgeted

- Improved visibility into project costs increased client confidence in billing accuracy and reduced revenue leakage

- Ensured rapid, low risk implementation, and low total cost of ownership

- Easy- to-use interface and mobile access ensured rapid employee adoption, and freed staff to devote more time to client-facing work

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About Polaris

Polaris, the world's first Self-driving PSA, has created a new category for Professional Services Automation. For the first time, leaders get intelligent help with decision making as Polaris does the heavy lifting, analyzes real-time data, and delivers live recommendations on the best possible choices for them to decide from. Polaris is created by the team at Replicon, the Time Intelligence company, with over 25 years of industry leadership in enterprise time tracking. Replicon supports thousands of customers across 70 countries, including PwC, SAS, NTT, NSC Global, Omnicom, and Aon.

To learn more, visit www.polarispsa.com

Want to try it for your business?

Watch a live demo now. Free one-on-one support is available throughout the trial:

www.polarispsa/live-demo

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