

Low cost electronic Time and Attendance monitoring?

Thinking about electronic Time and Attendance but worried about 'taking the plunge'? A package at under \$3,000 might prove irresistible.

It's one thing to know your old punch card time clock is overdue for replacement, or to suspect a modern electronic system would save a lot of time, but another altogether to know which product to use. Then there's the substantial cost.

But now a product called TimeSheet Express, from Melbourne company ASP Microcomputers, has brought full electronic Time and Attendance solutions down to under \$3,000.

ASP is a great success story in the local IT industry, having flourished since 1977. It specialises in clever "data technology" solutions. We spoke to ASP's Director, Robert Kogoi.

BACKGROUND

ASP started by designing its own low cost, compact ZipNet Terminal. The size of a power point, the Terminal displays the time, scans barcoded cards, or higher security ID Tags and stores the time and data. The units can be networked for multiple terminal installations, and even installed without network cabling using an innovative 'no wires' 'Direct Download' system.

"The ZipNet Terminal is in its second generation and we're very proud of it. It's simple and reliable and has gone all over the world".

The other challenge was the Windows PC software to work with the ZipNet Terminal.

ASP's first Time and Attendance program was called ZipNet TimeSheet, and it followed a conventional approach, requiring the definition of 'Shift Profiles' to be applied to each staff member. "This allowed the computer to check actual working times against what was expected" Robert

told us. "While this approach worked fine for companies with static work arrangements, we soon found that little was 'static' in the workplace".

ASP discovered that for many companies the process of defining and maintaining Shifts was too demanding. Perhaps they were short staffed in the payroll area, or their staff worked very flexible hours, making Shifts hard to define anyway. Whatever the cause, some innovation was needed and TimeSheet Express was the re-



The ZipNet Terminal is available in barcode card and IDTag versions.

sult, immediately proving popular for its simplicity of operation.

"Our testing showed that summarised time displayed in a 'grid' or spread sheet form could be rapidly scanned to check for anomalies. While this meant more use of the human brain, and less of the PC, it actually worked better for most people and allowed us to leave out the Shift definition stage."

"SILVER BULLETS"

There was another issue that was concerning ASP. "There was sometimes a long time between client enquiries and eventual purchase. We sensed that clients often contacted us at a time of stress. Perhaps there had been a major issue in the payroll, and they wanted a better way. The trouble was they seemed to want a 'silver bullet', an instant solution to their problems. But no new system comes without some disciplined work at implementation."

In fact TimeSheet Express, with its extreme simplicity, was proving itself pretty close to a 'silver bullet'. The price was low, and training and support services were readily available. "Clients would confide after purchase that the nearest alternative they had found was two to four times our price! They seemed to think we didn't realise this, but our aim at all stages has been to get to the broad volume market. This required a combination of pricing and of course getting the product and services right."

TIMESHEET EXPRESS V3

ASP developed their first Time and Attendance solution in the late 1990's. Since then ASP have taken the philosophy of developing the solutions in close consultation with Australian Businesses to a point where the current flagship product, TimeSheet Express V3 has been introduced. This builds on the previous version of TimeSheet Express.

Now Microsoft Vista® compatible, TimeSheet Express V3 offers users an expander range of functionality and flexibility in an extremely cost effective package.

IN USE

TimeSheet Express V3 is supplied on a self installing CD, with a well written Users Manual conveniently packaged in a DVD case. The Manual is designed to work as a self instruction course, but if you prefer optional telephone delivered training, ASP can assist with that as well.

Once you install the program it will work for 30 days, before a security Activation Code is required for further use. ASP's money back period is 30 days, or until you get the Activation Code, whichever is sooner.

With the program installed, enter your company name, staff names, and allocate an employee ID number. ASP also offers a time saving initial database setup as an optional service. Just give them a computer file of staff names, and they give you back your initial database on CD, plus IDTags or barcoded cards labelled for distribution to your staff.

Other settings to be considered include clock in and clock out rounding. For instance you probably don't want to see '8:57' as a clock in time, because '9:00' is more appropriate and faster to take in when checking. Provision are made for simple rounding rules, as well as more complex ones when required. The Meal Breaks option allows you to specify whether staff are to clock in and out for meals. If they aren't required to clock in and out, you can set a period of time to be deducted automatically. Also up to three categories of Overtime can be specified to start after a set number of hours worked.

If your staff work across midnight, you can automate the transition into the next day with a simple setting. 'Auto Highlight' is one of TimeSheet Expresses' handiest functions. It uses colour to automatically highlight an employee's hours if they are more or less than expected.

ASP has put a lot of effort into keeping the program easy to use, and easy to understand.

ZIPNET TERMINAL

Clocking in and out with the ZipNet Terminal is easy. If you purchase the barcode version, staff slide their



plastic card along a slot. With the more popular IDTag version they touch a small tag attached to their keyring to the front of the Terminal. The Terminal displays the time and holds the data until automatically collected by the program (up to 31 units can be daisy-chained over up to 1.2km of cable on an industrial standard RS485 Network). Alternatively, save the wiring and use ASP's unique Direct Download technology - data transferred from the Terminal to your PC by a memory chip 'DataTag'. Other communication options such as GSM are available for remote sites.

There is also available a 'Sound Activation' option, allowing signals such as lunch start and end to be sounded under the control of TimeSheet Express.

DAY TO DAY USE

First, it's important to appreciate that TimeSheet Express V3 deals in TIME not MONEY. Time is turned into a money value by your payroll program or service.

TimeSheet Express V3 will automatically collect and add up the clock in and clock out information collected from the ZipNet Terminal, and adjust the times as specified by the rounding and meal break options that have been set. Ideally the paymaster uses the program daily to quickly check the previous days times (because these are complete and fresh in everyone's memory). Checking can be on screen or via a printed Report. The paymaster then makes adjustments if required. For instance someone may have forgotten to clock out. A quick call to the foreman might be made to check what really happened. Then at the end of a pay period just print out or export the final staff time figures. The whole procedure is simple and convenient.



REPORTS

The Report Menu allows selection of Reports including employee details, both unadjusted and adjusted times, and an 'Evacuation' Report (this can also be used to find out 'who's in').

EXPORTING TO PAYROLL

The entire process from an employee clocking in to paying your employees can be automated using an optional payroll export module. There are many of these payroll products or services on the market and ASP can export to most. Robert told us that the modules can be developed quickly. Currently there are over 20 export modules available including: Quicken, MYOB, MicroPay, Attache, Arrow and Pronto.

Export modules automate the entire process and reduce the risk of costly mistakes in the payroll process.

SUMMARY

ASP's Time and Attendance solution is complete, simple to understand, simple to install and simple to use.

TimeSheet Express V3 is the latest release and will continue to be enhanced according to the requirements of Australian businesses.

CONTACTS

ASP is at 456 North Road, Ormond VIC 3204. Telephone 03 9578 7600, Fax 03 9578 7727. Email to solutions@asp.com.au. Their Web Site is www.asp.com.au.

A full 30 day trial of TimeSheet Express V3 is available at <http://www.asp.com.au/reqte.html>

ABOUT ASP

ASP Microcomputers (est. 1977) is the trading name of Grayline Holdings Pty. Ltd., a privately held Company based in the Melbourne suburb of Ormond. The company uses its supply, design, programming and fabrication skills to realise the potential of technologies including Barcode, RFID, Smartcard, Magnetic Stripe, MICR, OCR, iButton, Web, Ethernet, RF Wireless, Bluetooth, GPRS and GSM Data Transfer. Hardware products, designed and built in Australia include Portable Barcode Readers, Ethernet Terminals, and Time and Attendance Terminals.