

PRODUCT REVIEW - iOrion®: fast, intuitive and straightforward mobile time management

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Among lawyers, I was an early adopter, having used iPhones® and iPads® in my practice since the second generation. Even though I used these devices for years, I had not found the right app to enter time at the office. The iOS compatible time entry systems I tried were not intuitive; they did not work well for me and so after trying a few of them for a while, I stopped using them.

For quite a while, my remote access solution was Logmein.com. I used it to control my desktop with my iPad and that allowed me to enter in time and access data remotely. This was acceptable at a basic level, but it certainly wasn't ideal. My goal was to open my iPad, have an app pop up prompting me to enter my time - quick in, quick out. Seems simple, doesn't it? Well believe it or not, it took quite a while before I found what worked for me.

Keeping track of billable time is the bread and butter of a legal practice and it doesn't have to be the guessing game it used to be. Today, mobile applications created by legal software suppliers are helping legal professionals on the go, like me, enter and keep track of their billable hours with ease.

My firm has used financial and practice management software from Orion Law Management Systems, Inc. for many years, so when they recently released iOrion®, an iOS-compatible (6.x and higher) mobile application, I was intrigued. iOrion allows me to access key Client and Matter information as well as to track, enter and edit my time on my iPhone or iPad. From my standpoint, iOrion's two most valuable functions are "Time Manager" and "Matters View." Time Manager allows me to keep track of time and enter billable hours no matter my location and allows me to quickly review my billable hours by day or week. Since I use my time entries as a narrative of my case preparations, it is easy to track the status of cases by simply reviewing my time entries. The Matters View not only provides me access to information about my cases, but also allows me to initiate both emails and phone calls to matter related contacts with a simple touch. Best of all, iOrion then prompts me to bill for the email or call by generating a fee entry. Capturing emails and phone calls automatically is the surest way to guarantee that a busy lawyer is both capturing his/her time AND better serving his/her client.

Lawyers searching for a simple and intuitive way of tracking their time should consider the benefits of iOrion. With its iOS compatibility, I can use features built into my iPhone or iPad's software in conjunction with iOrion. One of the most notable advantages is the ability to use Siri® within the application. Siri enables voice dictation and electronic transcription of notes regarding the content of my phone calls, rather than my having to type the description of services by hand. Given the ability to dictate rather than type, I have more descriptive time entries which lead to better case management and increased client satisfaction. Having my notes read like spoken journal entries constructs a narrative of my time and not only helps me, but keeps my clients informed as well. The billable time and annotations in iOrion appear on my clients' bills and indicates exactly what I have done for them.

Another bonus feature of the iOS within iOrion is the presence of a scroll wheel to select time entries based on common time denominations (i.e. .10, .20, 1.50, etc.) As a long-time Apple user, I appreciate the intuitive feel of this app and its stylistic union with the rest of my iPad's programs.

The mobile application itself is incredibly easy to use and there is hardly any implementation or training needed to get started. Upon opening iOrion, I enter my login information where I am then directed to a home screen showing two days' worth of time entries. I greatly appreciate the secure login requirement since security is always a concern of mine regarding my client work-related data. The login itself is as easy as the passcode on an iPhone or iPad. I don't get bogged down with complicated security measures, but I still know my information is safe.

Once I am in iOrion, I can start tracking time immediately with the "Smart Timer" function or enter my billable hours with "Time Entry". The application also limits the presentation of data to Contacts, Matters and time to reduce confusion that often comes with too much information. There is no weeding through numerous entries in order to find my billable time. This optimizes my time spent in the app and saves me time to focus on practicing law instead of tracking time. As all billing attorneys know, time entry is meaningless unless it is tied to a Matter. iOrion seamlessly integrates with my Matters and Contacts so I always have the latest information I need right at my fingertips. For example, I can access my "Client-Matter Status", to review up-to-the-minute information on a client's aged accounts receivable, aged work in process, and billing and payment history while away from the firm. Using this feature regardless of my location helps tremendously when I am ready to put together my Client-Matter Status Report, or simply put, my billing summary. Having a mobile timekeeping application at my side 24/7 rather than recreating time entries back at the office is a luxury, and also often a necessity for today's attorneys. Not only does iOrion allow me to track my time on the spot regardless of my location, it also instantly updates to my Orion server back at the office.

Being able to sit on my back porch on a Sunday afternoon and review time entries on my iPad instead of having to go to the office is a big bonus for me. I even find that although I am able to use the same timekeeping functions on my desktop at work through Orion, iOrion on my iPad is so easy and practical that I end up using it at my desk sometimes. I often work at my office computer and have my iPad next to me to quickly track my time.

iOrion is a straightforward mobile app built to make an attorney's life easier. I can definitely say that within just a few weeks of using it, I cannot imagine a more efficient timekeeping device for lawyers to use on the go. After trying other popular time management apps and not liking them, iOrion fit comfortably into my mobile- and Apple-friendly approach and has enhanced - never interrupted - my workflow. iOrion doesn't try to be Orion in your pocket- it is strictly a time manager built for quick in, quick out timekeeping and billing organization, and that's the way I like it.

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