

Nearly Mastered

PracticeMaster/TABS III

Software Technology Inc.

(402) 423-1440
www.stilegal.com/practicemaster.html
www.stilegal.com/tabs3.html
 Price (PracticeMaster): \$295 for single-user license; \$595 for three-user license; \$425 for each additional three-user license.
 Price (TABS III): \$295 for two timekeepers; \$495 for five timekeepers; Check Web site for multi-user version and other pricing options.
 Windows 95/98/Me/NT/2000/XP

Reviewed by Jay Hollander, attorney and principal of Hollander and Company in New York.

Over the past several years, practitioners have struggled with integrating case management programs with the software they have purchased to handle other needs.

Software Technology Inc. (STI) has created a tightly knit package including its PracticeMaster case management program and its Time Accounting Billing System III (TABS III) time and billing program.

While this combination also offers links to popular third-party programs, the integration of the basic functions of case management and time and billing is a real winner. In contrast to many third-party links found in competing case management programs, the link between PracticeMaster and TABS III is almost completely bi-directional and dynamic.

PracticeMaster and TABS III stack well on their own.

The real key to the effective use of TABS III lies in the setup, which is done at the outset. One of the strengths of TABS III is in its customization ability and its ability to screen sensitive information from unauthorized users on a particular network.

One of the best features is the flexibility of its "undo" feature, allowing the

modification and even cancellation of invoices long after they have been finalized and sent out to the client.

Another impressive feature of TABS III is the pre-bill tracking feature. With the pre-bill tracking feature, the administrator can note at a glance all pre-bills that are still outstanding, track them down, get them out to the client faster and get paid faster. Through the "Rapid Fee Entry" screen, tasks can be billed by timekeepers with the minimum number of fields, which comes in handy when playing catch up.

Of course, not everything was perfect. The most glaring problem is the format of the bill isn't very customizable. One can tailor the types of information that appear on the bill, but the customization of the physical layout is limited. In Timeslips, by contrast, the physical layout of the bill can be modified by the user. While this isn't a huge point, having had experience with the benefits of customizing the layout of a bill, this is a feature I would like to see in the next iteration of TABS III.

PracticeMaster (formerly called Case Master) is also impressive. While the integration of TABS III is clearly an advantage, PracticeMaster also can link to other common, third-party programs.

PracticeMaster's benefits are enhanced by extensive work in the setup area. One of the great features of PracticeMaster is nearly every field and layout is almost entirely customizable. The only exceptions are certain protected fields, necessary to ensure the valued integration with TABS III. This, of course, is on top of several preconfigured setups for common areas of law, or "areas of practice" as the program calls them.

While PracticeMaster has the individual and group calendaring functions you might expect, there are other fea-

tures that make it useful for handling everyday information, including an internal Web browser.

PracticeMaster allows you to download Microsoft Outlook e-mail to a window, isolate messages you wish to associate with a particular client or file, and save them into the client's folder. The program is equally adept when it comes to sending e-mail. Having its own internal e-mail software, outgoing e-mail can be composed from within a client file and sent via the Internet or Outlook.

Another useful feature found in PracticeMaster is document assembly. Although the program works with HotDocs, it doesn't require it to assemble document templates using Microsoft Word. Instead, the program comes with its own document assembly features specifically compatible with Word. For Corel WordPerfect users, the program requires the presence of HotDocs to complete document assembly.

There are some features I found lacking and would like to see in an improved later version. First, while it's true the program allows outside users to dial into the network, I would like to see a Web interface to accommodate the increasing number of mobile attorneys in the workforce. Also, performing document assembly tasks without third-party assistance for WordPerfect would be a useful feature.

However, these are relatively minor criticisms of what overall is a powerful program that more than holds its own with the likes of Amicus Attorney and Time Matters. **LOC**

Closing Argument

Pros: Superior integration between case management and time and billing programs. Extensive ability to customize fields.

Cons: Lack of a Web interface, direct document assembly features with WordPerfect and ability to modify look and feel of invoices.

Verdict: A worthy competitor to other popular case management systems.