National PR Leader Streamlines Client Management, Billing with GoldMine®

Company Name
Sam Waltz & Associates Business and Communications Counsel

Industry
Public Relations/Advertising

Web site
www.SamWaltz.com

Solution
GoldMine® Business Contact Manager and Relatia Time and Billing

Business Benefits
- 5000+ contacts transferred to GoldMine®
- Streamlined data storage
- Increase in billable time
- Access to a single set of client records
- Contacts now linked to projects and opportunities for increased client relationship management

Quick Stats
# of Users: 10+
Operating Environment: Microsoft® Windows®
Add-ons: Relatia Time and Billing

COMPANY PROFILE

Sam Waltz & Associates Counsel is a ten-year-old public relations and business counseling firm with ten employees. The company provides its clients with communications solutions including research and strategic planning, integrated marketing communications, reputation and relationship management, leadership training and corporate coaching.

BUSINESS NEED

Given the unprecedented growth of the firm in the last two years, to better manage client relationships, the firm decided in mid-2002 that it had outgrown Microsoft® Outlook®, which was being used both for email and as an ersatz database. In search of a software application that would serve as a combined contact management and project management tool, Sam Waltz & Associates evaluated several options before ultimately deciding on GoldMine®. Its three-dimensional database gave the firm the ability to link contacts to projects and opportunities; to better manage their client relationships; to be productive in their work with clients and to be more collaborative and efficient, internally.

After the firm transferred its 5000-plus contacts to GoldMine, data storage was streamlined and everyone in the company had access to the same set of client records.

RELATIA TIME AND BILLING SOLUTION

With account managers now keeping consistent client data that could be accessed by their coworkers, the firm still faced the issue of needing to track the hours spent on client projects. "Public relations firms bill out just like law firms do," says Sam Waltz, president of the firm. "Our account managers work about 2,000 hours per year, and we strive to bill about 75% to clients. To facilitate our billing process, we needed software that would allow our associates to track their hours and assign them to client projects."

"This year, our firm literally doubled," notes Waltz, " and we were all keeping track of our client hours on paper or in individual spread sheets. Our operations manager would then collect our time sheets, decipher them and bill our clients accordingly. However, with so many account managers, that solution soon became impractical and time-consuming."

Also, associates thought they might be inadvertently under-billing their clients under the old paper time-tracking system, and therefore the firm was losing revenue. "After finishing some client projects, we would estimate the amount of time we had spent," says Christine Waisanen, Esq., managing director of the firm. "Of course, we would estimate conservatively because we didn't want to unfairly bill clients for time we hadn't spent working for them. Over the course of a year, however, I'm sure we under-billed thousands of dollars!"

Sam Waltz & Associates quickly learned that GoldMine was not the complete solution, even as the firm began to better understand how

GoldMine was positively impacting the way employees worked. They realized that the true measure of their increased productivity and profitability would come only when they incorporated a time management piece that would factor in the expense of time and resources invested in a client relationship.

As they began the evaluation of tools that would maximize the benefits of GoldMine, their research brought them to conclude that Relatia would best suit their needs. Almost immediately after acquiring the software, their accuracy in billing their clients improved.

"Now, when a client calls me," says Waltz, "I can start the clock in Relatia and keep track of the length of the call. We used to lose so much precious billable time to phone calls, but now the 'Add Labor' function on Relatia allows us to add smaller increments of billable work that otherwise would not appear on our calendars. I do a lot of counseling over the phone and calls from my clients often come at unexpected times, so this is a feature that I think is invaluable to the public relations and consulting industries."

"Relatia allows us to see where our account managers' time is being spent," adds Waisanen. Most track their time by using the appointment, call and action scheduler on GoldMine. When they complete an activity, they make sure that Relatia will track this completion and record the time spent on each client project. I can then run a report to see how much of their work time is billable and how much is not. If the account managers are not devoting enough time to client work, then I can encourage them to develop new client business that can increase the percentage of time spent on profitable projects."

"I'm really pleased with the value that Relatia has added to our way of doing things," says Waltz. "Relatia has definitely filled in the gaps that GoldMine left. GoldMine is a very powerful client relations tool and has brilliantly allowed us to organize our client work by projects and opportunities so that we can efficiently share developing documents and incoming emails with each other in the office. However, Relatia has made it so that we all have an added incentive of keeping our calendars on GoldMine: not only do our GoldMine calendars allow us to have immediate access to the schedules of others, but we can also report our billable time to our operations manager just by keeping an accurate calendar and completing our activities. In addition, because Relatia works within GoldMine and time can be recorded with just a few clicks of the mouse, it has effectively reduced the time we were spending on recording our billable hours while increasing the billable hours captured."

Waltz estimates that there are about 1500 mid-sized public relations and advertising firms in the U.S. that would benefit from the cost-effective Relatia/GoldMine software combination. These are firms that are large enough to have a need for client management and billing software, but not so large that they have technical employees who write their own software tailored to their company. "Relatia enhances GoldMine in ways that make it even more powerful. We can now be more reflective about how we are spending our time and our client billing is as close to 100 percent accurate as it can get," states Waltz. "These are two key things that impact the success of firms in our industry. Improvement in these two areas should be the goal of every smart public relations firm."