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Chrome River Technologies Bring Automation to Attorney Expense Management

A look at how Chrome River's software uses automation to handle increasing billing complexity.

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Billing technology has taken on a more prominent role in legal technology as legal organizations attempt to meet increasing client demands for efficiency and cost reduction. But despite industrywide efforts to streamline billing, large legal organizations are often charged with handling billing through a number of different systems, which can cause significant operational headaches.

These headaches only amplify when you add in the need to reimburse attorney expenses, which often need to be tied to different client matters in a number of different systems. Karen DeLucia, managing director at Chrome River, explained that the company designed its expense management system with the idea that automation could better help plug attorney spending into the appropriate billing system.

Here's a look at Chrome River's approach to expense management:

Who it serves: Although the technology was designed to scale to legal organizations of any size, Chrome River's approach is likely of most use to organizations with over 50 employees, where expense tracking can get a little harried. "That's the threshold where manual expense processing becomes a considerable burden for a finance team," DeLucia said.

What it does: Chrome River's software introduces automation into the expense management equation on both the attorney and operational handling ends. Attorneys or other legal employees can submit expenses by taking a photo of a receipt and uploading it to Chrome River's platform, which can then be processed through optical character recognition (OCR) technology to provide finance teams the spending and timing data they may need. While OCR has gotten really good in the last five years, it's still not perfectly accurate, meaning this isn't ready to be a "set it and forget it"-type software, but it certainly has the potential to ease the tedious data entry problems many billing departments deal with.

Incorporating policy: Managing law firm policies about employee expenses can be a hassle, but clients often have their own billing cap policies that come into play around employee expenses. Automation and algorithmic logic allow for Chrome River's system to take into account multiple client- and firm- specific rules and policies before reports can be submitted with the idea that complete and accurate reports will help firms get paid more quickly. As corporate policy grows to adapt to a heavily regulated landscape, this is a feature likely to come into play increasingly often.

Integrating into the billing workflow: DeLucia noted that Chrome River can plug into over 40 different billing and ERP systems, and expressed confidence in the software's ability to import and

export even minute data elements across platforms. "Regardless of which system that a firm uses, we've been there and done that," she said.

Dealing with Big Data: As demands on billing have ramped up, so too has the role of Big Data in the billing process. "We're certainly seeing a greater requirement from our customers to get more granular data from their teams' expenses, both in response to their clients' requests, as well as to help them to control billable and nonbillable expenses more effectively," DeLucia said of the company.

The company has responded to this need by incorporating an internal analytics platform to give finance teams some metrics to track patterns. As with any analytics platform, the key to success here is striking a balance between ease of interpretation and display of meaningful data. Chrome River attempted to hit this balance through simplicity. "We wanted to make it easy to use and very visual," DeLucia noted.

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