



Shepherd Epstein Hunter

Who is Shepherd Epstein Hunter

Shepherd Epstein Hunter (SEH) offers architecture, planning and landscape design and support services. SEH specialises low-energy design, project management, master planning, urban design and space planning. It also carries out residents and user consultations. An established practice, SEH has a reputation for creativity. Recent awards recognise the practice's work in social housing and higher education.

The mission

- Tighten up business procedures in order to bring the quality of administrative processes in line with the high standard of architecture.
- Increase profit margins.
- Find a powerful, yet easy to use Software Solution.

The solution

- Implement the **time®** Time Recording and Billing Solution from Timewatch plc for over 50 users.
- Utilise Timewatch's consultancy support & report writing services.

The results

- 95% recording of time compared with 75% previously.
- Through improved accuracy in bookings, SEH is now invoicing time previously lost.
- Total billing has risen by 10%.
- The new system has freed up 50% of the time of one office administrator.
- SEH now have the potential to increase their bottom line by 30 to 40%.
- Instant Return on Investment through increased billing.

TIMEWATCH CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

Customer Summary

"We have gained much more commercial awareness at all levels. Some people simply did not do timesheets and our monitoring system was not that thorough. Without really trying we have achieved a change in culture and have elevated the status of timesheets. They are no longer associated with form filling and bureaucracy; now everyone is taking more interest in the financial health of the projects they work on. We have the potential to increase our bottom line by 30 to 40%."

Brian Pinder-Ayres, Finance Director, Shephard Epstein Hunter

Founded in the 1960s SEH has a long standing reputation and employs more than 50 staff. Its directors have a strong interest in good design yet they recognise that in running a successful business, commercial acumen is equally important. Architectural projects frequently take two or three years, with payment to architects broken down into stages. It is important to monitor profit throughout the life of a project, which may cross several financial years.

For an architectural practice, the most profitable period of a project is at the design stage. Profit can dwindle once the building process begins and clients perhaps ask for amendments. Some projects end up as break-even or even make a loss. Whilst architects are understandably enthusiastic about the design process, business success very much depends on vigilant monitoring during the later stages of a project.

When SEH appointed Brian Pinder-Ayres as Finance Director early in 2001 his remit was to ensure that the company tightened up its business procedures. Having previously worked with an architectural practice, he was aware of the particular difficulties facing the profession. "If a practice is not making a profit at any one stage then it needs to be able to see the big picture and the possibility of making up later. As with any business, it is important to be able to see expenditure against budget; and most of that expenditure is time. Clients often change their minds and, in trying to be helpful, a designer might spend two days on something that is not in the budget. Only close monitoring will pick this up."

At the time that Brian joined SEH the company had a combination of systems that tracked progress. Timesheets were completed by hand and had to be collected and entered into a project management software package. This was complicated to maintain and had no reporting capability so the data it produced had to be manually transferred into a spreadsheet. This whole procedure was very labour intensive and accounted for 50% of one administrator's time.

In Brian's previous position he had gone through the process of introducing a software-based timesheet package. "We had seen huge benefits; but because that particular practice had chosen to develop its own in-house package it had incurred a lot of expense. I felt sure that there was a system already available. I did an internet search on timesheet systems and came across Timewatch. I discovered enough from the web site to know that it was worth making contact. When I had the free download I could see the software was user friendly".

SEH invited Timewatch to demonstrate the product to the directors. "We liked it" said Brian. "It was very intuitive. It does all the things you'd expect. We can't think of anything else we would want it to do. In particular it is easy to use and maintain. I know from experience to avoid any software that is complex and requires a lot of training - people will not take to it."

SEH purchased a 50 user **time®** Time Recording & Billing Solution in August and utilized Timewatch's implementation services to training key staff, who trained end users. The system went live in September.

"People picked it up very quickly" reported Brian. "There was great enthusiasm because completing timesheets is much simpler and it is useful for individuals to have an electronic record to look back on. We now record more time, partly because the task is now much easier. I estimate our paper system only caught 75% of time anyway. Now it is more than 95%."

With **time®** on their desktops, the directors can see the status of a project at any time. SEH finds reports extremely useful; particularly the standard reports which show hours spent, cost of those hours, fees billed and contribution to a project. "These reports permit us to see what we need to do next" observes Brian. "They make people think about fees and costs. If we are not on target they are prompted to ask why and to consider taking action or getting an invoice out. Everyone is becoming much more business minded."

The speed of billing has increased because invoicing trigger points can clearly be seen. It has also become much easier to identify when time is building up and so charge for small extra projects at an hourly rate. "We cannot bill for 80% of extras" explained Brian, "but we can now invoice for the remaining 20% - without **time®** we could not do this. We work on tight profit margins and improvement is all about what we can achieve at the edges."

The result is that SEH is billing 10% more; 10% that Brian feels would have previously have missed. Before, SEH had to take a whole project view; with **time®** we can work on a stage by stage basis. "Our major project billing has not changed but **time®** allows us to pick up loose ends."

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Product Summary

Shephard Epstein Hunter implemented a **time®** Time Recording and Billing Solution using the **centraltime®** Server, the **personaltime®** end user Time and Expense entry system and **reporttime®** report writer.

SEH required minimal training, as they utilized the Train-the-Trainer approach to implementation. Instead, SEH focused on using assistance from Timewatch to write reports to perfectly meet SEH's requirements.

