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A TimeControl Case Study

Processor Powerhouse AMD Uncovers the Meaning of Time

AMD

Move to the Cloud Gives Global Engineering Team a 'High Performance' View of Timekeeping Data

Every day, thousands of AMD engineers across the globe imagine how their partners and customers might work better in a digital age. Now, they're transforming a simple, yet critical, everyday task of their own: timekeeping.

From supercomputers and game console companies, to always-on cloud infrastructures and laptop companies, the company's expert engineering team works with industry-leading entities around the world to deliver state-of-the-art products that shape the future of computing. No two projects are the same, yet they all require the accurate and efficient collection of time data.

"The importance of capturing time spent by our engineers is twofold," explained AMD IT Business Systems Manager Brian Poole. "We need to know how much time is spent on each project for our financial reporting and billing purposes, but we also need to understand where time is spent in order to more accurately and competitively forecast future work."

That's where the company's decision to move timekeeping to the cloud using HMS Software's TimeControl® Online software-as-a-service is opening up new possibilities, including some they haven't even thought of yet, said Poole. "We're using our time data in more meaningful ways and, moving forward, I think we'll identify even better benefits," he said.

The appeal of the cloud

AMD's previous timekeeping system was a standalone application that had reached its end of life. AMD decided it was time to search for a replacement and an in-the-cloud solution seemed most attractive due to AMD's worldwide workforce.

"The biggest appeal of moving to a cloud-based offering was that we would no longer be responsible for maintaining servers in-house," said Poole. "But we were drawn to TimeControl Online in particular, because it gave us the programming tools we needed to connect timekeeping activities to our other enterprise applications, creating a more automated approach that supports the push and pull of information between our important software systems."

AMD IT staff worked with the HMS Software technical team and select AMD user groups to configure the cloud environment to suit AMD's workflow. What initially started as a purely IT initiative, quickly became a co-sponsored venture between IT and Engineering that pushed the boundaries of the TimeControl application programming interface (API).

"We essentially created a new profile for group administrators within Engineering, making it easier for them to onboard new employees at the front end and extract data at the backend," explained Diwakar Krishnappa, AMD Business Analyst. "The standard TimeControl APIs are already robust, but we were looking to take integration to another level."

The detailed work – which spanned three pilot projects in total – enabled AMD to pull data from its enterprise project inventory systems to automatically populate timesheets with employee and project information according to each employee's profile. At the same time, timekeeping data is seamlessly extracted from TimeControl and combined with other corporate data for both financial reporting and forecasting purposes.

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James Dardig
AMD Program Manager

"The way in which AMD worked with our team to apply our APIs was extensive," commented HMS Software President and Founder Chris Vandersluis. "They took the time to ensure their business processes were getting the most out of TimeControl in an automated fashion."

Simplicity and training fuel smooth go-live

After hammering out the custom integration details, the AMD IT team shifted its focus to the timekeeping system's user interface. With such a large, diverse group of users located around the world, the motto was "keep it simple," said Poole, noting that it was important to make the user interface easy to help engineers with the transition.
AMD timesheets are standard for every AMD engineering business unit. Users are presented with a weekly grid and enter their time per project. Everyone follows the same guidelines, and the only information that changes between business units is the number of projects users have access to in order to record their time.

"The user interface is consistent across all groups," explained Poole. "The main difference is the number of projects they can or cannot see depending on their profile access."

To ease the transition to a new timekeeping platform, AMD ran multiple training and communication sessions. Administrators, managers, and engineers were also able to test the application during the pilot phases, leading to a very "smooth" go-live process.

Cloud delivers game-changing benefits

Now that AMD timekeeping activities take place in the cloud, the most noticeable change for IT is the resulting decreased maintenance. The burden of keeping the application running lies with the HMS Software team and that means the amount of IT resources required to maintain a timekeeping system "has decreased significantly," said Poole.

"By choosing TimeControl's software-as-a-service model, we've reduced the level of IT support required and ultimately, that helps drive cost savings."

Engineering users are now using the new system, and the feedback globally is that TimeControl is a more workable application. "The more they work in the cloud, the more they see the advantage of having data in a single place with seamless integration between systems", said Krishnappa.

If issues do arise, the HMS technical team works with AMD's IT group to determine the root cause. For example, during one of the pilot tests, some users in the company questioned the application performance. AMD IT tracked the problem down to an internal issue related to virtual private networks, and at the same time worked with the HMS technical team to investigate any possible causes at their

end.

“The issue was resolved together,” Vandersluis said. “We worked with each other to try to identify why users were not experiencing the kind of response they should expect. The issue was solved internally by the client but both teams were ready to make adjustments to improve the users’ experience.”

For group administrators, the manual work of adding users or updating project information in the timekeeping system has disappeared. When a new engineer joins AMD, their information is integrated directly from the Human Resources system into TimeControl, so they can start entering time immediately.

User profiles are also updated behind the scenes, explained Poole. “Previously, you had to go in our timekeeping application and assign projects one by one. Now the process is automatic, cutting down on the administrative burden required.”

Time data has new meaning

AMD Program Manager James Dardig is the program manager for the company's Client group Engineering. His team uses TimeControl to determine the percentage of time spent on projects, so they can better understand the total effort required and ensure projects stay aligned to existing plans. One of the most noticeable differences, he said, is that he now has automatically refreshed dashboards at his fingertips.

“Our project progress data is never stale,” said Dardig. “With our old system we could only access weekly or monthly reports. The new dashboards have energized management interest in reporting.”

It’s a game-changing benefit made possible by the upfront work to customize AMD’s implementation of TimeControl. Whereas timekeeping information used to remain static for the quarter, it is now updated in near real time and supplemented with information from the company’s data warehouse to generate dynamic, meaningful reports.

“What TimeControl APIs have allowed us to do is pull out the time information we need and push it to our own reporting systems,” Poole said. “Every day we get more and more data we can use in a more proactive, predictive manner. We are mining our time data and I see even bigger benefits ahead.”