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Pontem Payroll/Advanced Time Management Case Study

## Michigan County Clerk's Office Streamlines Manual System from Punch to Payroll

**40 departments, multiple unions and 150 employees benefit from increased efficiency, accuracy and ease of use**

“Automating our manually-kept employee time and attendance records with Advanced Time and teaming that with our Pontem Payroll software has cut the time spent on those tasks in half and increased accuracy dramatically. It’s been a win-win-win for all concerned.”

### Summary

The Alpena County Clerk’s Office significantly reduced the amount of administrative time it once needed to track employee data and prepare its payroll while increasing accountability and the accuracy of its record-keeping. Since adding the flexible, easy-to-use Attendance Enterprise System from InfoTronics to the powerful Pontem Fund Accounting and Payroll software it already had in place, the county spends half the time completing payroll processing, has standardized employee time and attendance policies and procedures which has resulted in increased job satisfaction and enabled supervisors and county commissioners to make more informed decisions about the allocation of limited resources.

### About Alpena County

Alpena County is located in the northeastern part of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula. As of the 2010 census, the county’s population was 29,598. Alpena County government operates the jail, maintains rural roads, operates the major local courts, keeps files of deeds and mortgages, maintains vital records, administers public health regulations, participates with the state in the provision of welfare and other social services and operates three parks. The County Clerk’s Office functions as the official keeper of county records for Alpena County residents. In addition, the office also is responsible for preparing, processing, and disbursing a bi-weekly payroll for more than 150 employees who work for the county in various capacities.

### Past Methods

Employee time and attendance data was tracked using paper time sheets. Department heads would review each time sheet, make corrections and forward the approved time sheets on to the clerk’s office for further processing every two weeks.

Several Alpena County departments, including maintenance, the sheriff’s office, and airport are located off-site. At the end of every pay period remote office representatives were required to drive to the county courthouse in Alpena to deliver their department’s approved time sheets to the clerk’s office. While the trip itself was less than 10 miles, several staff hours per month were lost as a result – hours that could have been spent on more critical tasks – especially in today’s economy, when every day and dollar count.

A payroll clerk then hand-entered the data contained in each employee’s time sheet into an Excel spreadsheet in an attempt to keep track of such entitlements as Paid Time Off (PTO), Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) hours, and compensatory time.

Nearly the same information was also entered into Pontem Payroll (www.pontem.com), Alpena County’s fund accounting and payroll processing software so the county could prepare its payroll, calculate payroll taxes, print payroll checks, and other associated tasks.

The process often took nearly three days to complete and required clerk’s office staff to consult with county department heads and staff members frequently to clarify or rectify discrepancies.



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## Many Workers, Little Consistency

Variety may be the spice of life but when it comes to worker satisfaction and morale, employee policy consistently applied is critical.

Like many similar governmental entities, Alpena County has a mix of employee groups and classifications. Four different unions represent Alpena County workers. Each union's work week began on a different day and each also had its own policies when it came to shift differential, holiday, overtime pay and other leave entitlements. Three different personnel handbooks were in use within the county and six different time sheets were utilized county-wide.

Not surprisingly, manually keeping track of and correctly applying the proper employee entitlements for so many groups and classifications was a challenging task. But equally time-consuming was the need to correct errors caused by department heads, union representatives and staff members whom for the most part due to lack of knowledge, training or understanding, often interpreted various employee work group policies or procedures incorrectly and/or in differing ways.

Calculating retirement or disability benefits for employees also was time-intensive. Clerk's office staff often had to go back through five or six years of hand-written time sheets and other documentation to determine what entitlements should be awarded. Similar efforts were often required in order to resolve or clarify issues related to employee disciplinary actions which many times developed originally due to misunderstandings or misapplication of union contracts or employee policies/procedures that were currently in place.

## Scheduling Challenges Abound

Creating staff schedules and approving employee requests for time off was also handled manually with each department creating its own system to accommodate its needs. For example, the county's 911 office used an Excel spreadsheet to schedule its workers. The union contract covering sheriff's office employees specified the worker with the least amount of overtime be scheduled first when overtime was required. To determine who was eligible, sergeants would have to wade through voluminous paper records and then manually generate and disseminate a roster to staff. Any changes meant the process would have to be undertaken all over again.

County employees requesting time off not only had to gain access to their supervisor to lodge a request and obtain approval, there often was a delay until the department head could consult and analyze paper records to determine if the employee had adequate leave time available and/or if granting the request would be detrimental to departmental operations.

## An Integrated, Automated Solution

It was clear to County Clerk Bonnie Friedrichs and Payroll Clerk Sue Latuszek that significant efficiencies could be gained by replacing Alpena County's manual labor management system with an automated solution – especially one that would work seamlessly with the Pontem Payroll processing software the county already had in place.

"We saw a demonstration of how Pontem and Advanced Time Management could provide a full-circle solution to address our needs" says Friedrichs. "We recognized what an asset the software would be and organized a follow-up webinar for our department heads so they also could evaluate the benefits."

Suitably impressed, Alpena County decided to purchase Attendance Enterprise, Advance Time's web-enabled, integrated time and attendance solution from InfoTronics, Inc. Advanced Time and Pontem Software representatives worked closely with the Alpena County Clerk's Office, department heads and other designated representatives to configure the system to meet the county's unique and multi-faceted needs.

## **A Streamlined Process**

Instead of logging hours on paper time sheets and leave request forms, workers county-wide now “punch in” and “punch out,” can request time off, review their work schedules, personal information and more via a simple, user-friendly “Employee Self-Service” portal that’s accessible via the Internet, 24/7.

The same web-based interface provides department heads and other administrators with real-time access to essential employee time and attendance information. “At the touch of a button supervisors can now view employee hours worked, current pay period or previous period time card information, and other details about their workers any time they choose,” explains Friedrichs. “It’s streamlined the whole process enormously.”

Pay period totals from the county’s remote office locations are now collected, approved, and available electronically eliminating the need for staff to “courier” the information over to the county courthouse every two weeks.

Since Attendance Enterprise automatically tracks such details as shift premiums, leave and overtime, and union-mandated wage or scheduling policies, it’s no longer necessary for Alpena County to calculate and document this information in parallel systems.

“I used to spend hours double-checking that various work and union group entitlements were calculated and logged correctly,” says Sue Latuszek, Alpena County payroll clerk. “Now I just look for abnormalities because I know our records are accurate and the rules for all employees are being consistently applied.”

Because the Attendance Enterprise works seamlessly with the county’s Pontem Payroll processing software, employee data is entered only once without the need for cumbersome imports or exports. An employee’s time card information is automatically carried over when creating pay vouchers and flows all the way to the general ledger, distributing hour and wage information to the appropriate budget center in the process. According to Latuszek, the time spent processing the county’s bi-weekly payroll has been cut in half.

## **More Accountability**

Not only has Alpena County’s usage of Attendance Enterprise reduced errors and the time spent on payroll management issues, it has proven to be a valuable tool in helping staff and department heads be more accountable for their time.

“In the past, disputes would sometimes arise over the accuracy of an employee’s time card,” says Friedrich. “Now, there’s no question as to the hours worked. We’ve found employees and supervisors alike have been supportive of the system -- as in a way, it takes the pressure off both parties in terms of accountability.”

The increased accountability department heads now have at their disposal also has allowed them to better monitor employee performance and productivity. The system flags irregularities including schedule exceptions, helping managers document and identify habitual problems and work with employees to correct deficiencies at a much earlier stage.

Administrators have also welcomed the software’s ability to track hours and attribute costs by budget center. Often the county will receive state or federal grants to undertake special projects and the hours spent by county employees on such activities must be documented separately. Attendance Enterprise can track such information, saving administrators and budget officers countless hours by automatically generating the necessary reports.

## Scheduling Efficiencies

Since the introduction of Advanced Time's labor management software the need for hand-written or Excel-generated work rosters is no longer necessary. Staff schedules are accurately and automatically generated within the program and are accessible on the web to all in real time.

No longer are employee PTO requests delayed until it can be determined they are entitled; supervisors can tell instantly whether the employee has earned the paid time off and also determine what impact granting the request will have on department-wide scheduling.

Since the system has the ability to examine employee costs it also can be a valuable tool in helping determine the most cost-effective solution for staffing deficiencies. "Department heads can see in real time what impact paying overtime to cover staffing shortfalls is having on their budget," says Friedrichs. "In some cases, hiring a part-time worker may be the more cost-effective solution. The new software gives them the ability to analyze that sort of data."

The ability to track and analyze staff schedules and attendance has also helped foster a better understanding among county commissioners in terms of how department heads and other administrators are deploying scarce resources. "In the past, a commissioner might have gotten a complaint from a citizen about how a department responded. Now, supervisors can accurately assess the situation and show commissioners what impact reduced staffing levels are having on county services including how staff are being utilized in order to stretch limited resources as far as they can," Friedrichs explains.

## A "One-Stop Shop"

While automating Alpena County's manual labor management system has had many advantages, according to Friedrichs one of the most valuable is the fact that by teaming Attendance Enterprise with Pontem's Fund Accounting and Payroll processing software, the county has created "a one-stop shop" that is appreciated by all.

"Department heads and administrators value the new system because they can monitor employee time and attendance, approve leave requests, schedule staff, and even be reminded when it's time to conduct an employee's performance evaluation or grant a raise all in one place. There's no need for them to maintain their own records, tickler files or home-grown schedules," she explains.

"Employees have been enthusiastic because it's brought consistency to the way in which employee record-keeping was handled. Everyone now has a better understanding of what they are entitled to and know that benefits will be fairly applied.

"Finally, I couldn't be more pleased in the efficiencies the new system has brought to the county clerk's office," says Friedrichs. "Not only are we using less paper, require less storage, but thanks to the solution Pontem Software brought to the table, we're spending less time on the whole labor management and payroll process yet our level of accuracy, accountability, and consistency has never been greater. Bottom line, it's been a win-win-win for all involved."



Pontem Software  
sales@pontem.com

www.pontem.com  
888.742.2378