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Satago – automate your credit control and spend less time chasing debtors.

The review

This nifty little add on product is all about credit control. The product links directly with your accounting software solution to track the overdue status of invoices from customers, issues reminders and calculates interest you can charge errant customers. It works with a wide range of desktop and cloud based systems – although this review concentrates on the cloud version, which links and imports directly from the software.

The product has been developed within the last 12 months, and the (very friendly and helpful) people behind it were at pains to say that it is being improved and developed all the time – (it changed loads in the time I worked with it!) : they reckon the product is about 10% towards the best it can be. And it's pretty good already…

Setup

Sign-up is immediate – enter your email address and you're away! You get a 30 day free trial to play with it and then can sign up to a plan – one of which is free.

The home screen – also the **My Account** screen is - where you enter your company details, and then you are straight into linking with your Cloud accounting system. For the purposes of this review I was working with Xero. Having clicked the Xero icon on Satago I was invited to log in to give access to my data (I could choose which client in Xero to use for the trial) and immediately the system started to upload the invoices I had in Xero. There didn't seem to be an option to upload only a selection (say from the last 30 days) so the whole 122 invoices created in Xero were imported. Later I realised that this is because it calculates the time taken to pay each invoice, plus other bits of data analysis, so it's important to make sure your credit terms are correctly entered to your accounting software before you do the import or the data will be meaningless.

The process

So – to the main point of the software…. chasing the clients.

There are 2 main sections to the software – **My Account** & **My Reminders**.

The **My Account** screen (also the home page, as mentioned) has three main sections, navigated via dropdown menu –

- **My Invoices** – (also the default landing page). Once you've imported your data from Xero etc this screen shows you a summary of the value of your invoices that are overdue by 7 days, 14 days etc – you can chose whether to view all invoices or those overdue by each time limit. You can easily sort the list generated by 6 different fields – company, invoice number, due date, status, amount due and the late fees the system suggests may be recoverable if you choose to do so. You can also click through to individual invoices and search your debtors for a specific customer if you wish.

- **Account details** – your own company details can be edited here. This tab also shows import info - records of the date and time of each automatic import of up to date data from your accounting software. It does it once a day automatically, or you can do an 'import now' to immediately update the file, so your data is correct prior to debt chasing. You can also see what plan you are on here.

- **Customers** – this page is where you can view the details imported from Xero (in my case) of all my clients I have invoiced. It also imports all the company address info and contacts fields. You can control the data sharing rules for each customer – you can either just import the data from your software but not share your own data, import and share data, or not import data – presumably so you don't have to import customers that are long gone etc.

  The sharing option means you are able to anonymously share the time taken for the company to pay. This allows you to see if customers are paying you before or after they pay other suppliers (if there is enough data). In order to do this, once all your data is imported, the software does a nifty thing in matching up your Ltd Company clients with the Companies House records to find the registered address etc. It can't match up sole traders or partnerships because of the lack of a central register, but you can tell the system that the customer is an individual etc and it will mark it as such. Data sharing is not possible for these customers.

  Also in this window, you can customise the settings for each customer – their email templates, whether they get reminders statements etc. It takes a little while to set all these up if you have a lot of clients, but it's a once only set up for each customer – although you can of course amend settings later.

The **My Reminders** section is where you can manage & configure the invoice reminders. It has 6 sections which are again selected from a drop down menu. It's important to realise that you need to enable reminders to use the system to its full advantage. If it's turned off you can't view or preview any reminders except the final one. (There is a big massive green button that says enable (or disable) reminders on this screen – this is what I failed to do at the outset which was why I found it confusing. Doh…..)

- **Scheduled reminders** – if you have enabled reminders, this screen will show you all the reminders due to be sent – and those that could have been sent but have missed the deadline (marked with a yellow warning triangle). From here you can, preview email's due to be sent, configure the emails to suit, or send the emails manually. The idea is that the reminders are generally automated however, so it will automatically generate an unpaid invoice reminder letter after 7 days or 14 days etc. The system alerts you by email the day before it sends anything, however, so you can still opt out of the automatic send. You can also enable and disable the reminders here for each individual customer if you wish. If you want to use the system to send reminders when you choose you can do that too – it's very simple to turn the feature off and on.

- **Scheduled statements**: this feature enables you send an automated email statement – which is basically a list of open invoices within the body of the email with a covering note that requests payment or a response. Useful, but I like the format of the Xero statements and would ideally like to be able to link the actual Xero document to this feature.

- **Sent reminders:** view logs of reminders actually issued, which can be filtered by customer name.

- **Email templates:** this is where you can customise your email templates. The email reminders are very comprehensive .There is a series of 5 email reminders which get increasingly more severe. You can configure and adapt for your own purposes, adding fields imported from Xero and altering the text etc. Definitely worth doing this as even the initial reminders are very formal and personally not written in my style of approach. You can customise for each customer too to tailor to an individual. At present you can't add your own logos or change fonts etc but they are working on it….

- **Letter templates :** there is one template available for an initial letter, but you do need to upgrade to use this feature further so this has not been tested within this review

- **Statement templates**: adapt the statement email to suit your needs.

You can also navigate to all of the important bits (customer info, invoice details, due dates etc) from pretty much every screen, as well as the fixed header dropdown menus, so it's very easy to find your way around and look at the global picture or a specific customer invoice in a couple of clicks wherever you are in the system.

Interest / late fees: Satago's Late Payment Calculator shows you how much money you are entitled to charge your business customers for late-payment of invoices under the Late Payment Commercial Debts Regulations 2013. It calculates the interest at a daily rate and you can choose to add these costs to your client's invoices or not. However, the feature only really works on fully unpaid invoices and the developers are quick to add that "Since we are not lawyers, we recommend that you consult your own solicitor before charging late-payment fees."

Support: When working with the software I did have quite a few queries and questions, and used the instant chat feature quite a few times. You can also email or call them on a standard phone line. Everyone I dealt with was concise, helpful and effective, even when I just hadn't read the instructions….. The developers are clearly open to ideas and feedback – they even very politely made it their fault that I couldn't work out how to turn on the reminders – despite the presence of the big green 'enable' button…..

As mentioned, the software is continually being improved and updated. In the two weeks I was reviewing the product the format and layout changed several times, so it's a very fluid product and you will always have the latest version, one thing I love about cloud based systems. That said, I hope the content of this review is still relevant by the time you get to read it!

Features yet to be added: In the next couple of weeks the ability to attach open invoices to reminders is being added – this is a major plus point for me as that is what I would normally do when reminding late paying customers. As mentioned previously the ability to upload company logos etc to email templates is also coming online soon.

Also coming is a **multi-user option** where, as a bookkeeper/ agent you can subscribe and log in to all your clients debtors lists through one control panel (much like Xero I imagine) (if they using the supported software) so you can keep on top of their credit control. It's a shame that I couldn't test this but if the same principles apply to the multi-user interface it's definitely something I will be looking at adding to my repertoire. There are also plans for a Partner Programme that will reward partners with a % of revenue earned by sign ups. There is a link to read all about it here http://try.satago.com/partners/

Costs: If you are an accountant/ bookkeeper, you get a free sign up for 30 days, and then if you get 3 or more of your clients onto Satago you get a free account through the partner programme, plus commission on an increasing sliding scale depending on how many clients you can get to sign up. There are three plans available to your clients:

1. Basic - free (for up to 10 invoices chased per month),
2. Professional £15+ VAT per month (for max 100 chased invoices per month)
3. Premium for up to 500 invoices for £30 +VAT per month

Pretty reasonable charges – although I would like to see an intermediate rate for companies with up to 50 invoices for around £7.50 – this is where most of my clients would sit. The above prices were correct at the time of writing, but as the product develops things may well change!

As with all debt collection tools, your clients (and yourself) do need to be super vigilant and remember to record payments against invoices regularly. Satago can only know what it's being fed from the software – so the need to keep on top of your debtors list is as important as ever in terms of recording money coming in. Satago does, however, help to prevent you from automatically sending embarrassing demands for money already paid. You can set reminders to be sent in accordance with your dedicated debt chasing times through the 'Schedule' feature. So for example, you could select that Reminders will only be sent on a Wednesday. This means you only have to do your reconciliation's once a week – say, on the Tuesday - and you know that whatever Reminders are sent on the Wednesday will be correct. Any Reminders that would otherwise have been sent on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Friday, will be queued until the Wednesday, and the data in each Reminder will be correct for the Wednesday (i.e. it might say 9 days late instead of 7 days late), as long as you did do the payments reconciliation on the Tuesday! Clever stuff.

I really liked this product. I only trialled it in the cloud and with Xero but it had great functionality, was easy to navigate and gave a very structured and easy to follow plan to chase debts – something which I normally hate doing and currently don't offer to clients as I never quite knew how to approach it. Armed with this tool I feel much more confident systematically dealing with late payers, and knowing that the system will stay up to date and record all my efforts in an easy to access format. I know that some desktop products have their own credit management facilities. Some of these I have dabbled with previously, but none have been so easy to set up and apply as this.

Well done Satago – a really good, clear and concise product and a great addition to the bookkeepers toolkit.

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