Bright Pay – the future's bright, the future's BrightPay?

Company Overview

BrightPay, created by Thesaurus Software, is a company with over twenty years of experience in the payroll market. Based in Dublin, they initially operated in the Irish market but successfully expanded into the UK over twelve years ago. Their website www.brightpay.co.uk announces, "Finally, someone has made great payroll software"; quite a statement to live up to!

BrightPay utilises the full social media experience to gain your attention. Website, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn all feature and also You Tube videos, a first for me. All the material is bright and glossy but also informative and inviting. The website is, as you would expect, well designed and easy to read, although there was a lot to scroll down through on the home page. Alongside the option to download the product is the view pricing button providing a clear transparency on how much BrightPay will cost you. It is also easy to view the tutorials and access support. All these elements are fundamental to the service that BrightPay claim they offer their customers and will be covered later in this review. The blog has current articles, and, at the time of writing this review the last blog post was just a day old and very informative. The last status update on Facebook was a mere 22 hours ago and I was pleased to see that posts to the page had been answered promptly.

The product is mainly aimed at start up and small to medium businesses and accountants/payroll bureaus. In both cases the need to streamline and simplify the payroll function is imperative. The claims made in the social media world were quite impressive so, as a member of the ICB that operates a payroll bureau, I was keen to find out how good this product actually is.
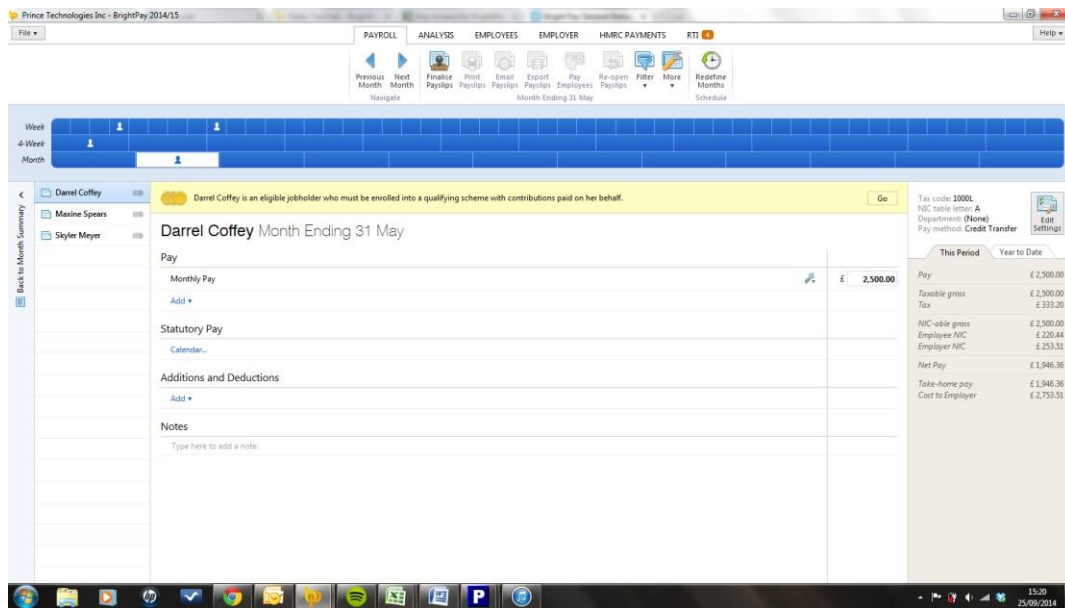
Scope of Review

On speaking with BrightPay and downloading their product I was offered a demo company to play with. This was really useful in getting to know how the features of the software worked. I also set up a new company to understand how easy it was to do this. I was able to perform standard payroll functions on both the companies but didn't make any actual RTI submissions. BrightPay are fully RTI compliant so we can assume that the uploads work perfectly.

This review is about the how the software performs and not about how payroll works. I won't be explaining how to run a payroll but instead focus on the functionality that the BrightPay software offers.

I have used a number of payroll products over the years so have a great deal of understanding on how both payroll works and the products that other software providers offer. I will not directly compare the BrightPay product to other software on the market but

I believe that my experience gives me a good position to critique its strengths and weaknesses.

The Product

In simple terms, and using BrightPay's words, "it just works"!

The download and installation was seamless and a click on the new icon on my desktop opened the software ready for a new employer to be added. I duly did what I was told by the prompts on the screen, added a new company and the employees without any hassle or difficulty. Employees could easily be organised into departments and an unlimited amount of departments can be set up. Default settings for employees could also be set up though these of course can be changed later for individual employees if required.

Once this was all done I arrived at the main screen. This was well presented, easy to view with six tabs across the top of the screen; payroll, analysis, employees, employer, HMRC payments and RTI.

Rather than going through the functions in each individual tab, which would probably make for a 50 page report, I will highlight a couple of the features that each offer. I will also include screenshots of the main screens to illustrate the ease of the user interface with this software.

- **Payroll**

Employees are listed in a summary screen depending on their pay cycle which is shown on the blue table towards the top of the screen. By clicking on the employee button you bring up the details screen as above, where it is easy to amend payment details for the month in question. Their default pay is shown but can be overwritten and other pay elements can be added easily without having to move to a different screen.

The calendar click through under the statutory pay option is an incredibly useful and powerful tool. Here you can drag and click to select dates where an employee was on sick leave, annual leave, parenting leave etc. The package will then automatically calculate any statutory pay due.

Further additions and deductions, for example, dividends and attachment orders can be added from this screen to complete the payroll information for the individual. The process is clear and easy to use and with auto-enrolment upon us it is good to see a message at the top of the screen regarding the individual's pension position.

The production of payslips is easy and versatile. Payslips can be printed, emailed and exported. Printing options can be customised easily to suit your needs and a company logo can be included.

In conclusion, the ability to build the payroll run and produce payslips is comprehensive but also simple to use. The screens are well designed and easy to view and I particularly liked the fact that most of the work could be done from an individual employee's main screen without having to switch to different screens to set up defaults or add extra data fields.

- Analysis

Once payroll has been run it can be fully reviewed and reported upon in the Analysis tab. Here are a number of standard reports that you would expect to see and use. There is also the ability to create new reports, edit reports and create favourites. Reports can be printed and exported into a number of different file formats. It was also good to see a pensions report as standard which will be essential as auto enrolment requirements begin to impact more businesses. I appreciated a separate reporting function and the ability to produce bespoke reports easily. Having the functionality to easily review and analyse payroll data as an integral part of the product is a great strength.

- Employee

From the employee screen it is easy to add new employees and amend existing ones. Everything is there that you would expect and the inclusion of an auto enrolment tab is important and helpful. Employee details were easy to enter and review and covered all the necessary information for RTI submissions. The information that needs to be entered for an employee is reasonably standard whatever package you are using but the BrightPay user interface is superb and makes data capture painless.

- Employer
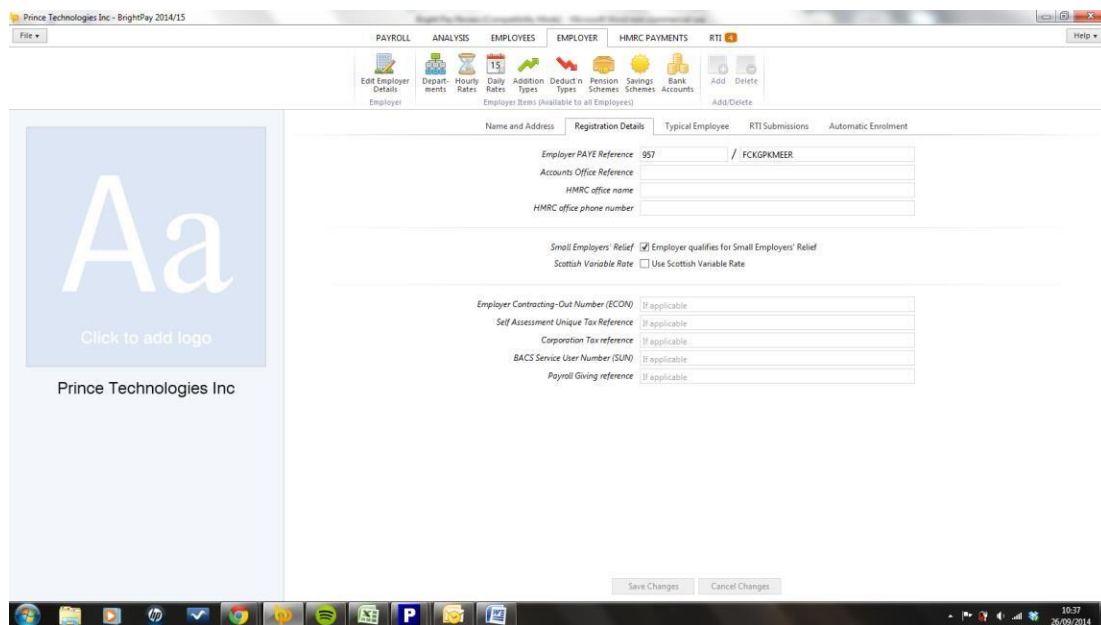
This is the last screen we will look at in detail. As you will have noticed each of the screens are very similar in their look and operation. Everything can be done from the one page which is clear, clean, crisp and tidy. Again, the ability to manage pensions is easy and will become more important in the payroll world going forward. I also particularly liked the way that departments were easily manageable.

There are dedicated RTI Submissions and Auto Enrolment tabs to manage these areas. BrightPay also supports a wide range of pension scheme types and default contributions can be set up for all your employees in the Employer tab.

The language used is easy to understand and minimises the use of payroll jargon. As a payroll professional the product gives me everything I need to ensure that a company's payroll is run compliantly. I can also see that the small business owner would be able to manage a simple payroll themselves as the software is user friendly and easy to operate.

- **Other tabs – RTI and Auto Enrolment**

These are the last of the tabs available.

The HMRC tab is already populated with the liabilities due but you can enter items such as CIS suffered and the total amount paid to HMRC for any given liability period. Here you can produce your P32 for the end of the year which will be fully complete if the HMRC information has been entered during the months.

Finally, the RTI tab manages these submissions. The RTI full payment submission can be made when payslips are finalised or they can be managed and submitted when required from the dedicated RTI screen.

- **Other information**

Importing capabilities

If migrating from another payroll system employee details can be easily imported into BrightPay. Payment and deduction information can also be imported in. This is done using the .csv format. I did not test this but the ability to import and export files is a very useful tool in any product.

Free unlimited support

Support is available both by phone and by email. I did call BrightPay with a question regarding departmental reports in the Analysis tab. The call was answered promptly, just a few minutes on hold, and my question was resolved quickly and in a very friendly and polite manner. I like to be able to speak to someone when I have a query or problem and free phone support is definitely a plus point for me. The four tutorial videos were also helpful and informative although slightly out of date as the material related to the payroll year 13-14.

Pricing Structure

The "Try/Buy" option on the website takes you to a page which clearly explains the three pricing categories. You can also install and use BrightPay licence-free for a period of sixty days at no cost – one of the better trial offers I've seen. And then it just gets better as the first license option is . . . .

- **Free – no cost**

  Yes, it's free! For a single company with a maximum of three employees you can obtain a BrightPay license for . . .free! It includes all the features of the product, none of this buy in at a lower price point but only get half the functionality. And here is the real deal clincher, the free phone and email support as well. This is not restricted to the more expensive price plans. When you take up the free licence you get the full BrightPay experience for up to three employees. The restriction is in the number of employees and a free entry point is sound business judgement as thriving companies will not stay at just three employees.

- **Standard - £99 + VAT per year**

  Single user, unlimited employees. Aimed at the small to medium business, this price plan enables the business owner to continue to run their own payroll at a reasonable price. Free phone and email support is, of course, included.

- **Bureau - £299 + VAT per year**

  Unlimited employers, unlimited employees. And did I mention . . . free phone and email support. This price point is comparable with some existing payroll products on the market and is a good offer for those bookkeepers who run a payroll bureau.

The simplicity in the three tiered pricing structure is refreshing and there really are no hidden costs. Realistically, the free license is a simple loss leader which will undoubtedly generate business for BrightPay but also offers a great benefit the new business owner.

Key Benefits & Strengths

- HMRC approved for RTI submissions.

- Auto enrolment built in and easy to access.

- Import/Export capability.

- User interface – screens are clean and crisp and easy to navigate around.

- Competitive pricing structure and free entry point.

- Free Phone and email support as part of every price plan.

- Client focussed– quick response and friendly approach.

- Comprehensive payroll software that is easy to use and understand.

Considerations

- **Knowing about payroll**. This package is very intuitive and user friendly. Aimed at small to medium sized businesses, and free for up to three employees, the owner is empowered to manage the company payroll. My experience has shown this can sometimes end badly as actually understanding how PAYE scheme operates is essential in running a company's payroll irrespective of what package you use.

- **MAC version essential**. The lack of a MAC version is a weakness but this is being developed and could be available from next year.

- **Transfer to BrightPay**. For payroll professionals operating a number of payrolls the investment in time to transfer to BrightPay from an existing system may seem a barrier to change. However, I am sure that BrightPay would offer great assistance and support to anyone looking to move to their software.

Summary of Review

The future's Bright – the future's BrightPay? Certainly they give themselves a lot to live up to with the social media claims. On the face of it BrightPay is glossy, slick and well presented but does the product live up to the image?

Any payroll software has to specifically adhere to HMRC compliance rules so what differentiates any product is the experience of using it. And it is here that BrightPay have ultimately hit the target bull's-eye. The product has a superb user interface that is easy to handle; with clear and uncluttered screens, good use of everyday language and a simple payroll process the user, whether a qualified professional or business owner, can quickly and effectively manage payroll. But more than that BrightPay do give an excellent customer experience, with fairly priced plans, no hidden costs or extras. The support is free by phone and email whatever price plan you take up and was indeed as friendly and professional as claimed.

I have been very impressed with this product and can see that BrightPay's presence in the UK market has every potential to grow. Not wanting to get carried away in my own enthusiasm for this product I did check other reviews online, all were extremely positive and complimentary and can be summed up in this one line, "BrightPay sets the new standard in Payroll Software."

So, the future does look very bright for BrightPay and their clients. Great software, well priced and a customer centred focus that provides an all round attractive product; BrightPay pride themselves on remaining friendly and approachable. As they continue to grow I certainly hope that they remain true to the ethos that has brought them this far while still striving to set new standards across the board in payroll software.

Disclaimer

The Institute of Certified Bookkeepers having reviewed the Brightpay software package, September 2014, cannot be held responsible in anyway for the actions of the company Thesaurus Software or their software, Brightpay. This review is merely an unbiased overview of the software package.