

# 8 TOOLS

## TO IMPROVE COLLABORATION WITH OFFSHORE DEVELOPERS





## INTRODUCTION

**Using the right tools for a particular job yields the best results.** The same holds true when you are working with an **offshore software development** team. While your offshore team may have the skills and equipment needed to accomplish the job, what good will it do if both of you lack the right tools for collaboration?

Indeed, many business owners are wary of tapping into offshore operations because they fear that distance will make project management difficult. They worry that they will be unable to monitor the project's progress, given that the team working on it is not within the same building or country. Is that any reason to miss out on the advantages of hiring an offshore development team? Surely not.

Fortunately, a **wide number of collaboration tools is now available** for you and your team to use. Whether you are managing a **custom web development** project or online marketing strategy, these tools will increase the efficiency of your staff and enable a more seamless workflow.



For time tracking, use [Harvest](#).



Time management is critical in ensuring that deadlines are met and working hours spent on a project are properly allocated.

If you work with an offshore team, monitoring their time spent on the tasks you assigned is vital. While you can use spreadsheets for that, getting a proper time tracking tool will help you get more accurate results, along with some statistics to help you gauge the team productivity.

Harvest streamlines time-tracking for you and your offshore team, making sure that projects are finished on time on top of your other tasks.

With Harvest's fast and user-friendly interface, getting the hang of this platform should come easy for everyone.

**Harvest allows you to easily monitor and update time data on the weekly worksheet.** Automated notifications for time reports is an available feature so everyone could easily get on board with your projects' progress. Additionally, it also allows you to generate and send invoices to boost up your sales process.

If you're using another multifunctional tool, you can easily integrate Harvest into your system. Some integrated / multifunctional tools allow the purchase and use of time-tracking plugins.

Harvest supports integrations for tools like Jira, Evernote, Slack, Github, and Google Drive among several others.

Harvest' business package allows 10 users into the platform where you can have unlimited clients, projects, invoicing, and timesheet approval.

**If you're looking for a simple timetracking tool with straightforward and elementary features, Harvest might be the solution.**

*Recommended alternatives:*  
**Timely and Toggl**

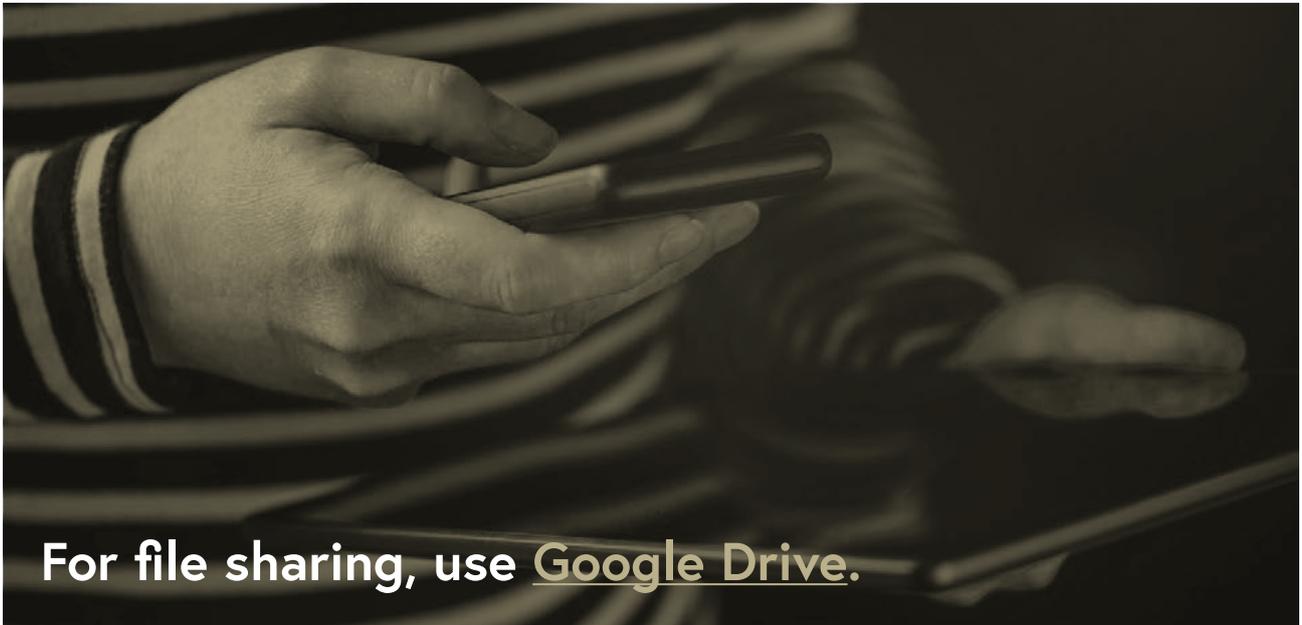
The screenshot shows the Harvest Timesheets interface for Thursday 14 Feb. The top navigation bar includes Reports, Timesheets, Invoices, Estimates, and Manage. Below the navigation bar, there are tabs for Time, Expenses, Pending Approval, Unsubmitted, and Archive. The main content area displays a calendar grid for the day, with a total time of 5:20. A list of time entries follows, each with a description, duration, and a 'Start' button. The entries are:

| M    | T    | W    | Th   | F    | S    | S    | Total |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 0:00 | 0:00 | 0:00 | 5:20 | 0:00 | 0:00 | 0:00 | 5:20  |

| Description  | Duration    | Start Button |
|--|-------------|--------------|
| Internal (Sterling Cooper)<br>Admin  | 1:00        | Start        |
| Business Analysis (Lucky Strike Cigarettes)<br>Admin                             | 1:05        | Start        |
| Summer Ad Campaign (Lucky Strike Cigarettes)<br>Project Management               | 2:00        | Start        |
| Summer Ad Campaign (Lucky Strike Cigarettes)<br>Meetings & Phone Calls - Casting | 0:30        | Start        |
| Magazine Campaign (Lucky Strike Cigarettes)<br>Art Direction                     | 0:45        | Start        |
| <b>Total:</b>  | <b>5:20</b> |              |

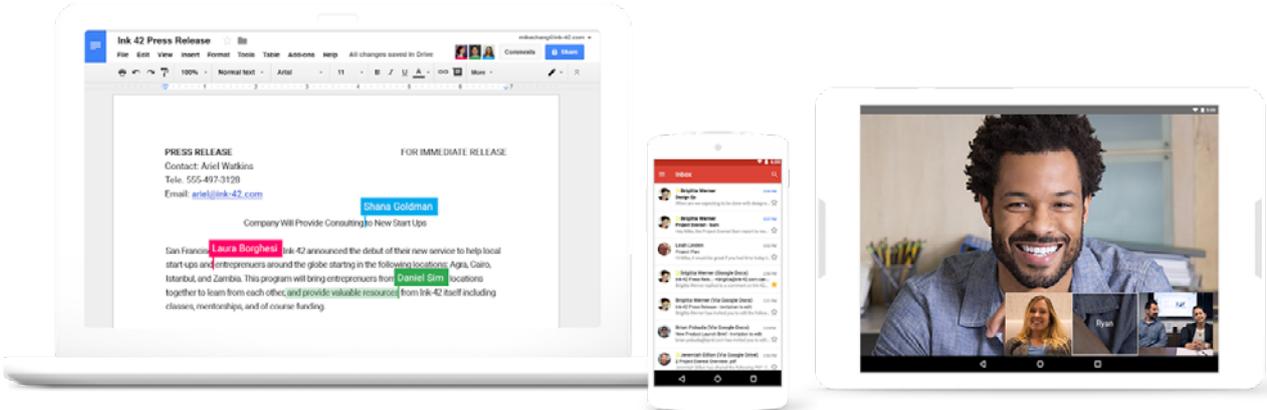
A 'Submit for Approval' button is located at the bottom right of the interface.



For file sharing, use Google Drive.



Since you will be the source of all information needed for the project, expect a lot of file sharing when you partner with an offshore development team. Instead of tossing files back and forth, streamline your operations by hosting those files online.



While there are numerous fancy cloud-based storage sites today, you can always go back to basics. Google Drive offers the most basic office tools, all online, so you and your team can collaborate anytime.

Many people are already aware of how much Google can do, but not all use Google Drive to make their workflow more efficient. **Google Drive is a low-cost tool that you can quickly implement among your team, seeing how everyone probably has a Gmail account already.**

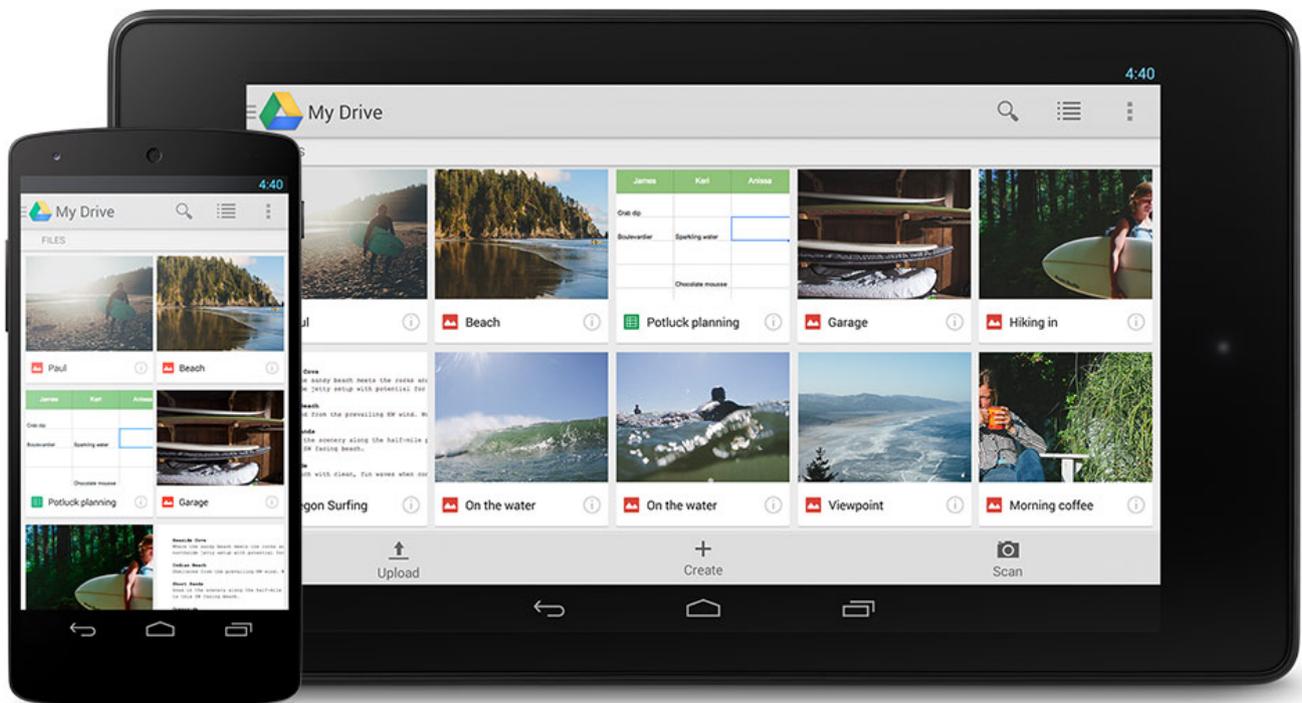
It can also host different file types such as documents, slides, spreadsheets, forms, and photos, among others.

Given that all the files are online, you can even check them on your smartphone while on the go.

Whereas Google does offer free service up to a certain amount of storage, expect to shell out money to tap into more features such as unlimited storage. Google's office tools may not compare to the more comprehensive features offered by other office programs, but it is still serviceable for businesses.

*Recommended alternatives:*

**Dropbox, Box, Microsoft OneDrive**





For meetings, communication, and collaboration use Skype, HipChat, or Slack.

**Open communication is the key to a successful collaboration.** This is especially true for those working with offshore development teams. It is easier to get your plans and goals across if you are having a face-to-face conversation instead of explaining everything through writing.

This setup also encourages feedback and allows your offshore team to get to know you, not just as an employer but as a partner in the project.

Luckily, there are a lot of collaboration tools that extend from the usual video chat and instant messaging capabilities.

**Skype, Hipchat, and Slack are our most recommended collaboration solutions.**

Each product has its own advantages and disadvantages, so you must carefully weigh everything based on your needs, business model, and budget.



## Skype

Skype is one of the most commonly used communication tools today. It has a package solely for businesses looking to expand their communication reach.

The **Skype for Business plan** lets you connect up to 250 people in a meeting and enables you to record it for future reference. Its biggest advantage over Hipchat and Slack? It's the only solution that allows you to make real phone calls.

Following the tie-up between Skype and Microsoft, Skype for Business also lets you access MS Office essentials. Thus, collaborating on a file and talking about it can be done on the same platform.

While the features of Skype for Business are definitely a step up from the free Skype service, it may not be advisable for small to medium-sized businesses. After all, free Skype lets you join up to 10 people on a video conference already.

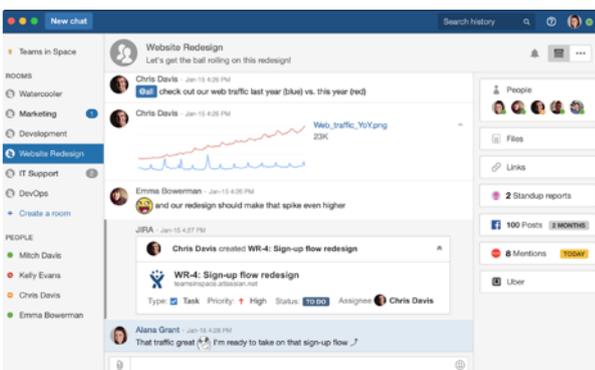


## Hipchat

Hipchat is a group chat solution specifically made for teams and businesses. Its premium version boasts of features like **unlimited cloud-based file storage, searchable message history, and screen sharing.**

Hipchat can be deployed on your own server and has an administration tool that lets you control who has access to the secure network. You can also give limited access to guests.

The biggest downside of Hipchat is it doesn't allow conference calls. You can, however, integrate hipchat with UberConference. It is also compatible with JIRA, Bitbucket, GitHub, Heroku, Zendesk, and Mailchimp.



# Slack



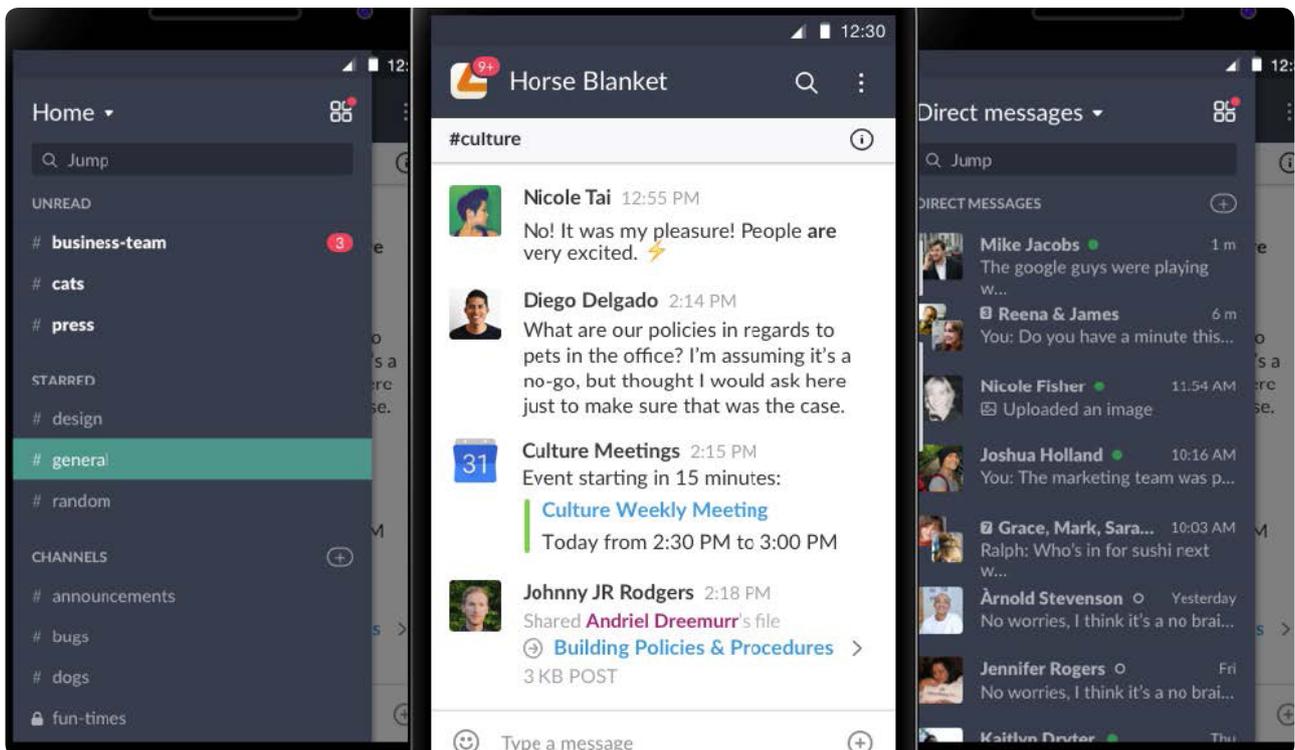
Unlike Hipchat and Skype, Slack's main focus is on **collaboration and file sharing**. It offers a built-in external and internal file sharing option, allowing you to upload and retrieve files with anyone from your team.

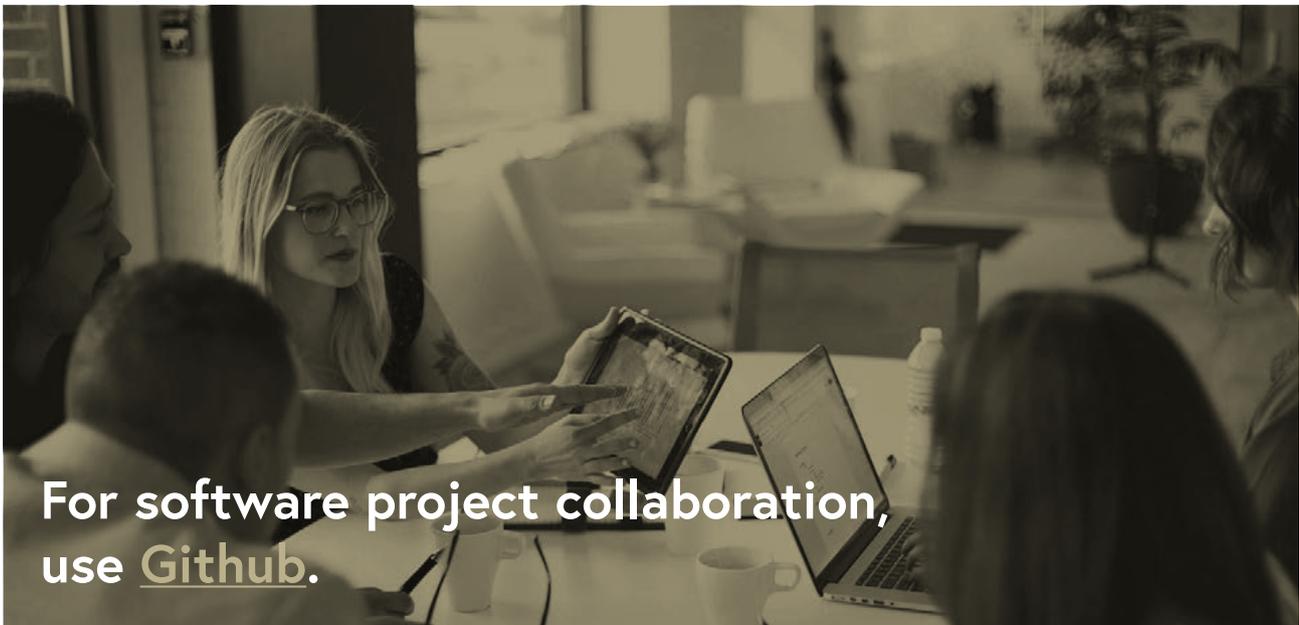
It saves you time with its file sorting and archiving features. You can also create open channels depending on

or project that you need, which allows an improved cross-team transparency. Likewise, you can also do private channels and direct messages.

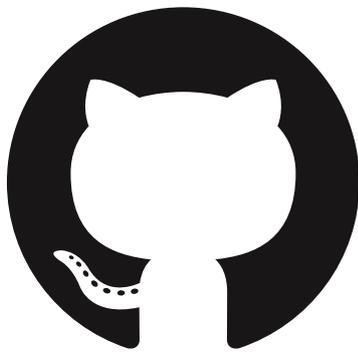
**It has a powerful search option, which lets you search not only your entire team message history, but also your files including pdfs, Google Docs, and more.**

As Slack automatically indexes and archives your files and messages from your integrated external systems like Twitter, Google Docs, and Dropbox, searching for one particular file or string of conversation has never been easier.





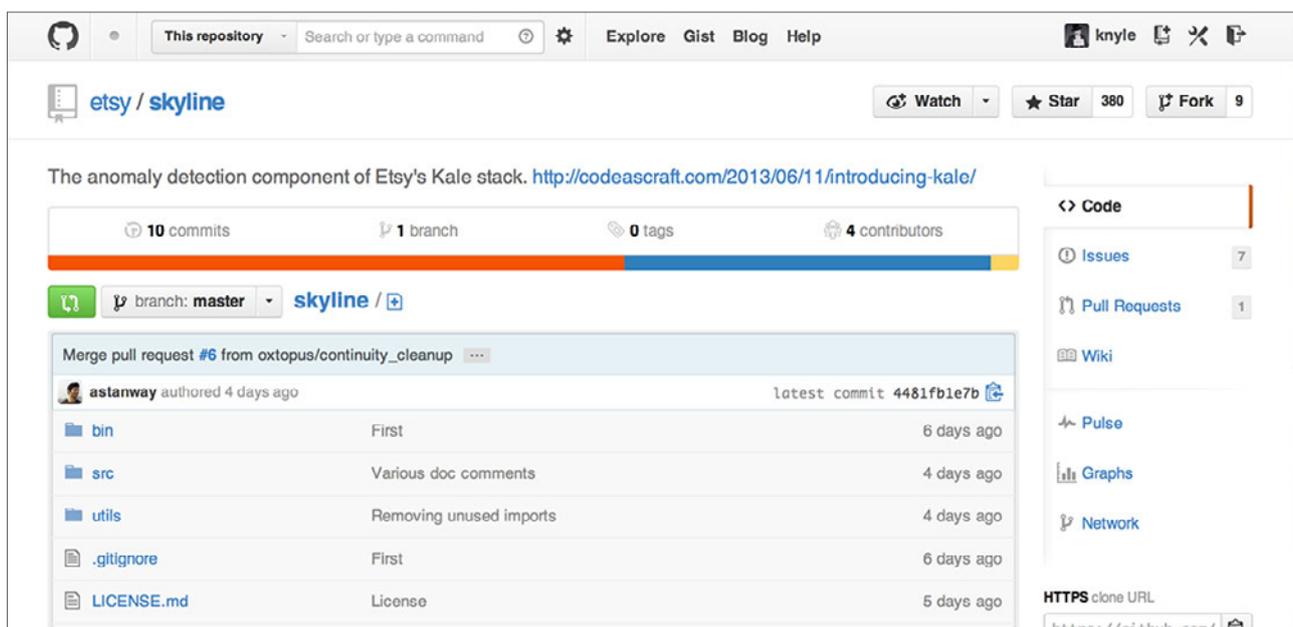
For software project collaboration, use GitHub.



One of the most common tasks being assigned to offshore teams is software creation. After all, not every business has a full-fledged IT department to handle all digital tasks.

Some prefer to outsource technical projects such as software development and website management, and instead just focus on their business's core operations. The task of collaborating with the offshore team falls into the hands of a lead developer based in the company itself.

**GitHub is a platform where your lead developer and the offshore team can host their codes for checking and collaboration.**



You can add feedback, notes, or revisions to the code itself. Likewise, it will be easier for you to monitor your offshore team's progress, making the workflow transparent. Changes are also tracked, so backtracking is easy when the output is not yet up to your standards.

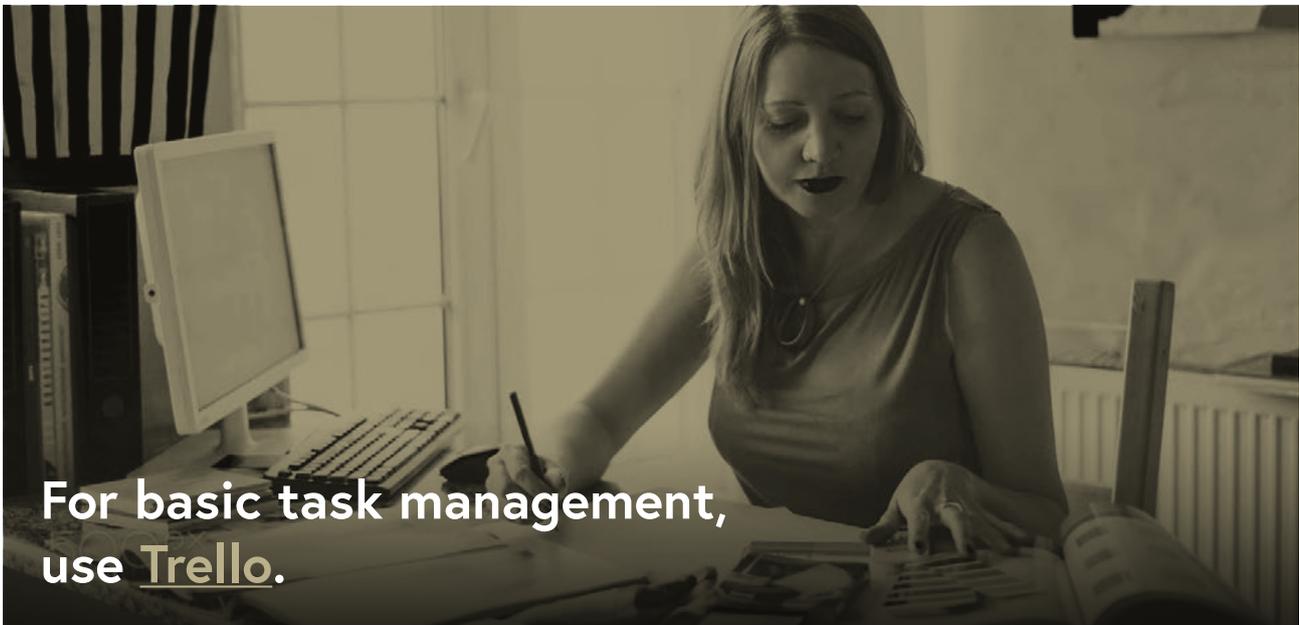
GitHub boasts of its portfolio of customers which includes e-mail marketing service provider MailChimp and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

While it is mostly praised for its suitability for collaboration, customer reviews, however, mentioned that it may take time to get used to at first. Users will do well to study GitHub's system first before they can truly make it their own.

Still, if your company is looking for a low-cost hosting platform for software project collaboration, then GitHub may just be the answer.

*Recommended alternative:* **Bitbucket**





For basic task management,  
use Trello.



Delegating tasks when your employees are just a few steps away from your desk is easy. When they are miles away, however, it becomes quite a challenge.

While you can use e-mails to send out tasks or spreadsheets to assign them to various individuals in your offshore team, task management will be easier if it is centralized on a single platform. A virtual bulletin board and consolidated to-do list rolled into one if you may.

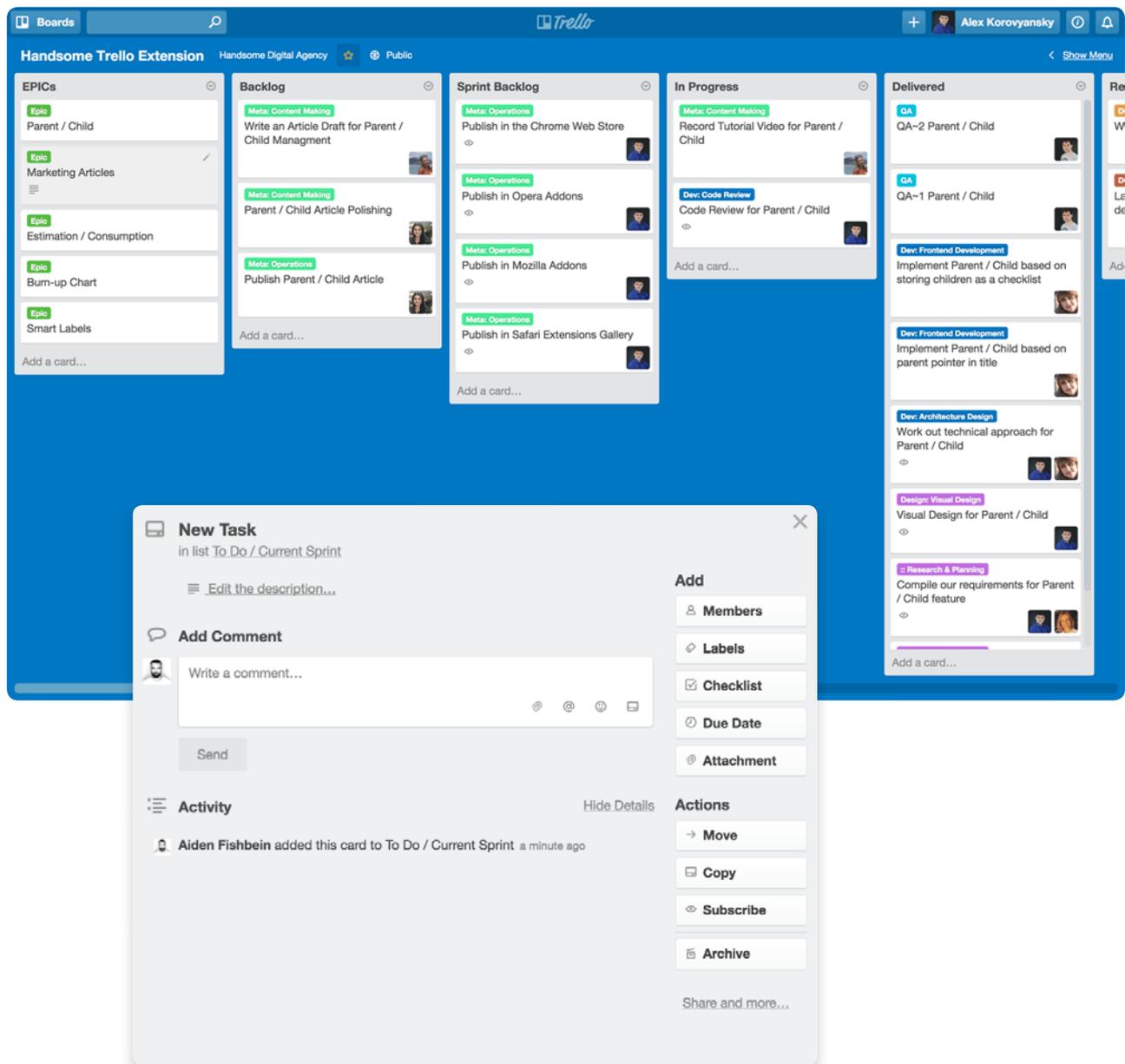
**Trello allows you to map out your entire project in cards, letting you see which tasks are yet to be assigned and which ones are done and ready.**

It is a project management tool that is easy to use and personalize, which means that you can tweak it to fit your workflow.

This tool, however, is suitable for simple distributed projects but is not for serious and complex software development projects or those involving hard to maintain clear requirements, reporting, and codebase.

Simply create a board for your project, add cards and checklists for every task needed to be accomplished, then add the persons who will work on the project. In one glance, the setup lets you see which tasks are lagging behind, near completion, or already up for your review.

Recommended alternatives for power users (includes advanced workflows and other functionalities): **Asana** and **Jira**





Running into bugs, defects, and problems is an inevitable part of the software development process.

While some project management tools let you track these issues, these solutions don't normally allow you to make issues visible with the rest of your team. This problem can be magnified if your development team is situated abroad.

Luckily, there's **JIRA, a solution designed to help teams work together to solve software issues, manage complicated projects, and ultimately, deliver a smooth product.**

JIRA allows integration with Github and Bitbucket as well, so you can export issues and display them in one or multiple dashboards.

It also lets you choose out-of-the-box workflows or customize one that will fit with how your team works or how the issues should be solved.

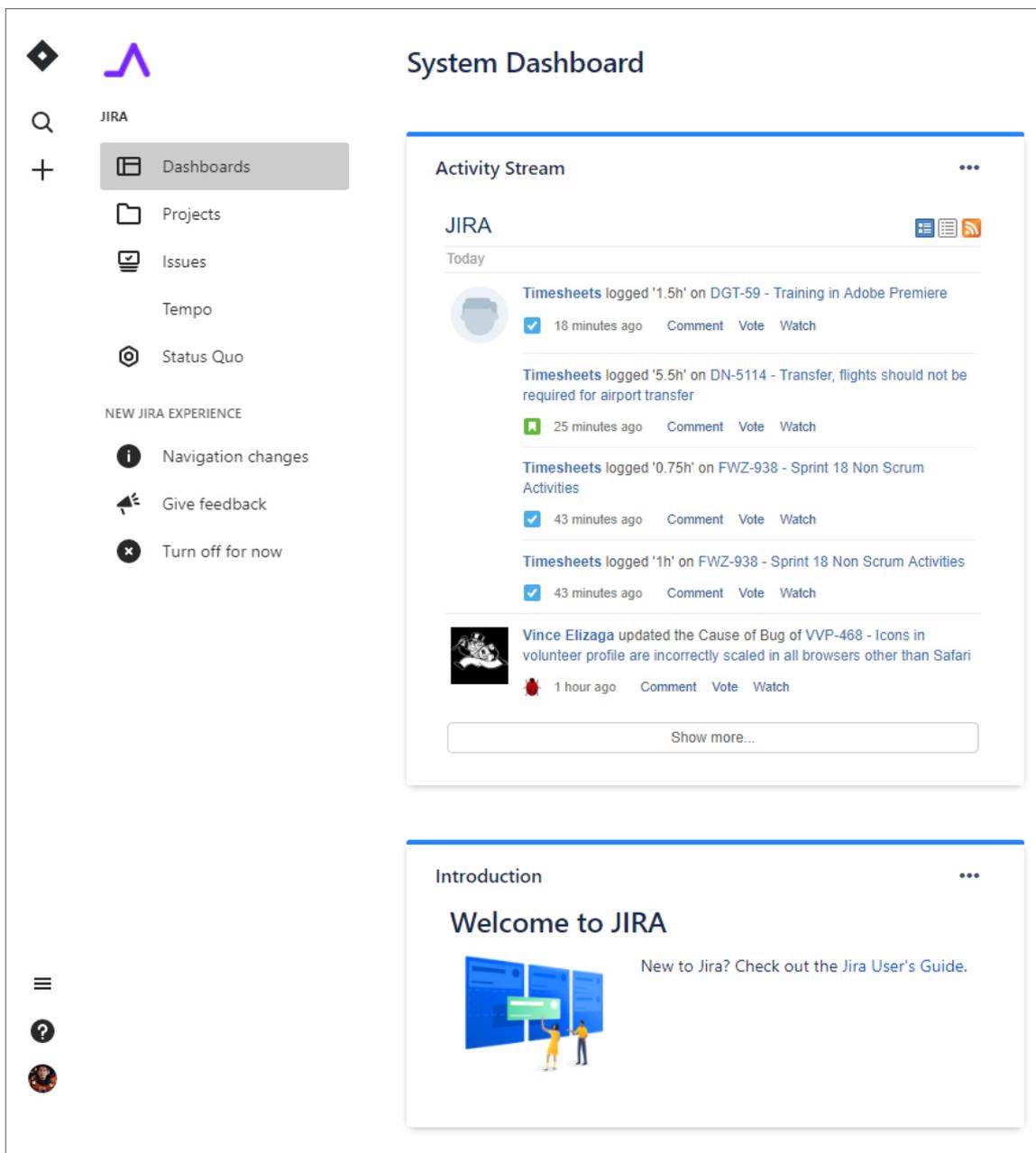
JIRA is our tool of choice to run our software development projects and have our clients assign tasks with their teams because it fills in the role of many of the tools mentioned above.

It allows time tracking with a plugin called Tempo used to log in the time for detailed project reporting, as well as eases invoicing. If you want an even more advanced invoicing tool, you can integrate JIRA with Harvest.

On top of that, we have developed a proprietary tool that automates reporting for our clients on a daily basis, so they are never left wondering what is happening, for our clients on a daily basis, so they are never left wondering what is happening, and doesn't require additional time from the development team to create a custom report.

With its wide array of functionalities, using the tool for the first time can be confusing or overwhelming. But, once you get the hang of it, the software can be very useful especially for agile environments like scrum and kanban.

Recommended alternatives: *Asana* and *Pivotal Tracker*





## ABOUT ARCANYS

Arcanys is a Swiss software development company with a delivery center in Cebu City, Philippines. Our focus is in the development and implementation of great and innovative ideas into smart software solutions for enterprises and startups.

Our core business is to help our clients from the design of the specifications to the release of a software project. We provide and manage teams of full-time software developers collaborating with offshore IT teams who are primarily based in North America, Europe, and Australia. We are dedicated to helping clients spot areas for improvements in their innovation process, from solid specifications to limiting errors and bugs, with a keen interest in delivering projects on time; just as you expect it.

With our extensive experience in dealing with onshore and offshore clients, you can be assured not only with the quality of the output, but also with the quality of your outsourcing relationship with us. Talk to us today to find out how we can help you achieve your software development goals.

## CONTACT ARCANYS

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