
CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER...

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO WHAT'S HOT (AND WHAT'S NOT) IN LAW OFFICE SYSTEMS

SCOTS SAY NO TO WINDOWS NT

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HOT PRESS

Fast growing business lawyers Garrett & Co have placed an order with Axxia Systems (☎ 01734-602602) for its Arista practice management system running on a Unix + Windows client/server environment. Axxia beat seven other suppliers to win the contract.

The largest legal practice in Scotland, Dundas & Wilson, has chosen Novell's NetWare 4.1 networking platform as the foundation for its new office automation infrastructure. Described as "part of a significant IT investment geared to provide the business with a scalable information systems platform for the future", the new NetWare installation will replace a 130 user peer-to-peer Windows for Work-groups network and deliver centrally managed business services to 300 staff at the firm's offices in Edinburgh, Glasgow and London.

PERFORMANCE DOUBTS

Commenting on the decision to follow the Novell route, Dundas & Wilson information systems director David Lanc said: "We must become better, faster information managers if we are to meet and service our clients' evolving requirements. To achieve these efficiencies for our business, we needed to move to a more sophisticated, centrally controlled and managed platform far beyond the scope of our old peer-to-peer network.

"We needed a solution that would provide a secure and reliable networking environment and we chose NetWare 4.1 because we considered it the best operating platform for intensive network services. We initially evaluated Windows NT but its performance did not, in its current form, stand up to the task in hand."

☞ **Comment...** The firm's decision to abandon Windows for Workgroups comes as no surprise but the rejection of a Microsoft Windows NT platform is likely to be seen as nothing short of heresy by many practices. Indeed the Scottish giant's decision is in sharp contrast with that taken by the largest firm in Wales - Morgan Bruce - who earlier this year waved goodbye to a Unix + Novell + Windows offering from Avenue Legal Systems, precisely so they could move over to a Windows NT client/server option - in their case the Admiral Legal Systems' Amicus package.

WELCOME TO THE LAUNCH EDITION

Legal technology has become a fast moving market. The last 12 months have seen one major MBO, ten suppliers enter the market, seven either taken over or pull out - and at least two are currently for sale.

As office automation projects frequently constitute one of the largest items of capital expenditure in a law firm's budget - and with so many suppliers specialising in legal IT - it is also a market where the risk of becoming yesterday's men saddled with yesterday's technology could be ruinous.

To keep track of the latest developments - to find out who is doing what to whom and why - you need **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER**, the only publication dedicated to the needs of today's legal IT professionals. In fact with each fortnightly edition containing news, analysis and comment backed up by statistical data, product listings and original research findings unavailable elsewhere - can you really afford not to subscribe?

- The Editor

HOT PRICE

MSS Management Support Systems (☎ 01252-371121) has launched a low cost Letter Before Action and County Court Default Summons production system. Retailing at £98 + VAT, its keen price undercuts the Law Society's own Summons Made Simple software by around 20 percent.

HOT ROM

Dick Greener, head of digital publishing at Sweet & Maxwell (☎ 0171-538 8686) says the Windows 95 version of the Supreme Court Practice on CD-ROM is in final stages of beta testing and will be available with the 3rd supplement of the White Book during the first week of November. To date over 200 firms have bought copies and a further 400 have trial disks.

LEGAL AID

Eileen Pembridge may not have won the recent Law Society presidential campaign but the profile of her firm, crime and family law specialists Fisher Meredith, goes from strength to strength and is currently being reinforced by an advertising campaign on London buses.

On the technology front the firm has ordered the ALS practice management system from **Dart Legal Systems** (☎ 01480-470307). Commenting on the order practice manager Steve Ray said: "For years now we have been trying to overcome the mass of bureaucracy which surrounds a firm like ours, heavily involved in criminal and civil legal aid matters. Because of the nature of our business, we rely heavily on the Legal Aid Board for payment but because the Board can and does quite frequently claw-back monies paid perhaps many years ago, the day-to-day effect on our practice accounts can be draconian.

"We have tried many solutions to our problems but did not see any benefit in acquiring a system that contains disparate little solutions that needed a lot of re-keying and did not provide us with a totally integrated solution."

With Dart areas where the firm "anticipate saving a lot of hard-earned cash" include reducing staff time on such things as handling negative credits, producing magistrates bills and bills of cost in taxable form.

☞ **Comment...** This is Dart's third major order - the others were Evans Butler Wade and Nantes & Wylde. Dart founder Geoff Morris is also hoping it will be third time lucky on the corporate front as at the time of going to press the company was negotiating a deal with Reflex Business Systems to replace earlier alliances with Australians ALS and Wang.

TRUST & PROBATE

The Custodiens trust and probate accounts software package developed by Cognito Software (☎ 0500-234513) is now also being distributed ➡

➡ through a national dealer network. **Southern region distributors Professional Computer Group** recently supplied the system to **Paris Smith & Randall in Southampton, Letcher & Sons in Ringwood and Lemon & Co in Swindon.**

ALL SUMMER LONG

Business has been buoyant throughout the summer with a steady flow of orders from both new and existing customers reports Tony Landes of **Quill Computer Systems** (☎ 0161-236 2910). New sites include Armstrongs in Skipton, Halliwells and Howarth Maitland in Bury and Brown Barron & Co in Barrow.

"Historically the summer has always been our quietest period but this year we are extremely pleased with our sales performance which shows a marked increase over previous years... This is a welcome trend and we are entering the second half of our financial year on a very upbeat note," said Landes.

☞ **Comment...** Tony Landes' remarks echo those of other suppliers, suggesting the lazy, hazy days of the Long Vacation shut down for lawyers has been replaced by more pressing commercial realities.

SPEECH RECOGNITION

Following hard on the heels of the Kolvox/Voicewriter acquisition there have been further developments in the speech recognition field with the announcement that Kolvox Voicewriter (☎ 0171-245 9312) will now distribute **IBM VoiceType products in the UK. Kolvox will be making its LawTALK product available to run under IBM's OS/2 Warp operating system.**

☞ **Comment...** Twelve months ago suppliers were queuing to climb aboard the voice technology bandwagon but now we are starting to see some welcome rationalisation. If Kolvox could only cut some of the confusion surrounding the various speech recognition engines - Kurtzweil versus IBM versus DragonDictate - it just might help relight interest among buyers.

NORWEL BACK IN THE BIG TIME

In the course of three weeks this summer **Norwel Computer Services** (☎ 0161-945 3511) has announced a trio of substantial blue chip orders, with Cranswick Watson in Leeds and both Berwin Leighton and Withers in the City - the latter being a £1million mega-deal - all signing up for a combination of front and back office solutions.

The firms have chosen Norwel as the foundation for new practice-wide networks for fee earners - Berwin Leighton will eventually have 250 users while there will be more than 400 at Withers. All three said the combination of client marketing, computer aided billing, on-screen time recording and EIS (executive information system) modules, which can be accessed through the Windows Fee Earner Desktop product, were the features that helped Norwel's offering stand out from the competition, both home grown and US-based,

☞ **Comment...** Not long ago Norwel's critics were composing its epitaph, now they are singing its praises. And with good reason as the company looks to be well on the road to recovering the form it enjoyed in the mid-1980s when it dominated the top end of the legal IT market. However, bearing in mind one of these orders took 32 months to win - from first presentation to signing the contract - it also demonstrates why legal IT is not like other specialist software markets and can be such a dangerous place for novices.

SCL AWARDS DEADLINE IS NIGH

The closing date for nominations to the **Society for Computers & Law's** annual award for "the most outstanding application of IT to the law" is fast approaching but there is still time for last minute entries if you contact the chairman of the judging panel **John Irving** (☎ 0171-486 5888) now.

This year's judges (who include **LTi** publisher **Charles Christian**) will be looking particularly hard at desktop systems designed to help fee ➡

➡ earners with day-to-day "lawyering" applications rather than back office administrative tasks. Or as **John Irving** puts it: "We want to make this a people's award, giving recognition to products that help practitioners with their legal work. As technology permeates even further into the daily routine of a modern legal office, so the opportunities for innovative use of IT - from humble wordprocessing macros through to law firm marketing pages on the Internet - are expanding."

The winner of the 1995 award will be announced in December.

INTERNET TO GO

Hamlin Slowe consultant **Graham Morris** has teamed-up with electronic publishing specialists **Velvet Palms** (☎ 973-341639 & 0181-365 1740) to provide a new service aimed at law firms wanting to establish a presence on the Internet. The service was launched last week with Velvet Palms providing technical input and HTML authoring skills, while **Graham Morris** will advise on the commercial and professional aspects of running a WWW site.

☞ **See...** back page for details of Velvet Palms special offer for **LTi** readers.

NO BLIND EYE TO DEBT

As part of a general upgrading of services to clients, which include a number of insurance companies, the commercial litigation department of **Nelson & Co** in Leeds has installed **Debttime** debt recovery software supplied by **Linetime Ltd** (☎ 0113-250 0020). The system will be used to process County and High Court work.

MANCHESTER IS MILES BETTER

Manchester practice **Jones Maidment Wilson** has joined a growing number of **Miles 33** (☎ 01344-861133) users upgrading from the old **SOMS** package to the new **Precedent** practice management system. Managing partner **Bill Jones** says **JMW** were swayed by "the security of investment" provided by the **Oracle** database.

HOT NEWS

Sun Life's legal department say the implementation of a **DPS** case and document management system supplied by **MCS** (☎ 0181-882 8811) has resulted in a dramatic reduction in the time it takes to assemble legal documents, cutting the time in some instances "from 35 minutes to 35 seconds".

SEARCH & REPLACE

• **Elite Information Systems** has moved its London office to **80 Watling Street, London EC4M 9BX** (☎ 0171-330 3500).

• Also on the move is **Select Legal Systems** now at **Haisell House, 4 Hull Road, Hessle HU13 0AH** (☎ 01482-644334).

• Former **Linetimer** **Stephen Taylor Parker** has been appointed a director of **AIM Law Data** (☎ 0113-237 8500).

CLINIC

A three partner firm in Lancashire writes... "We have a 5 year old Unix accounts system plus Uniplex for wordprocessing and would like to make our office automation operations more mainstream (our last temp only lasted an hour because she had never used Uniplex) and introduce case management with a view to applying for a legal aid franchise.

"We believe our accounts system still has several years life left and are considering going the Unix route with Windows PCs running WordPerfect attached. However we are concerned we may become Betamax men a VHS world."

LTi replies... We think your estimate of your current system's life expectancy is over optimistic. Furthermore while Unix may have once made sense, for a small firm the more cost effective route today is a PC network, which incidentally will give you access to a wider choice of case management and wordprocessing software.

Rather than have your future direction dictated by an ageing accounts system, your first step should be to concentrate on case management and then take the same route when you eventually have to replace your accounts system.

☞ If you have a computing query send it direct to **LTi** via post, fax or email.

☞ INTERNET OFFER

Interested in having your own World Wide Web (WWW) site on the Internet? The first 50 solicitors' practices to contact Internet developer Velvet Palms (see page 3 story) and quote their LTi subscription details will receive a free Internet report and the first 5 pages of their WWW will be developed for free.

For details contact Euan Ramsay or Najam Kidwai of Velvet Palms (☎ 973-341639 & 0181-365 1740).

INTRODUCING THE INSIDER INDEX

How much does it cost to equip a lawyer for personal computing? Are chip shortages forcing prices up or does the imminent launch of the P6 successor to the Pentium mean hardware prices will fall?

This month we launch the **LTi INDEX** to monitor price movements over a basket of products essential for legal desktop self sufficiency, comprising: a PC capable of running the latest Windows 95 software (16Mb RAM Pentium) + quad speed CD-ROM drive + laser printer + modem for fax, LINK and Internet traffic (14.4bps) + spreadsheet, wordprocessing, & PIM/scheduler programs.

October's best price (Dell Dimension P75 with integral modem and CD, bundled with Microsoft Office 95 plus HP LaserJet) is **£1650** + VAT and serves as our index base of 100.

IN THE NEXT EDITION...

- Microsoft reveals plans for lawyers
- Manchester software show preview

COMING SOON...

- Annual survey of low cost legal accounts software

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