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CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

# LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

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

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## QUALITY OF SERVICE ROW HEATS UP

**For the most part uncontroversial in content, the 1995 Robson Rhodes Legal IT Survey Report did contain one bombshell when it stated that: "Satisfaction with the products and services has deteriorated since last year... with regard to the quality of service provided by software suppliers, less than 25% of firms rated it as good or excellent - a significant drop from the 67% reported last year."**

Although cynics might argue that management consultancies always try to spread the FUD (fear, uncertainty and doubt) factor - as that is how they generate more business - the 1995 report nevertheless rang warning bells with some suppliers.

The managements of two in particular - AIM Professional and Axxia, who were identified as the clear market leaders - felt the quality of service had to be explored in more detail, for as they had the more users than anyone else, statistics might suggest they also had more dissatisfied users.

Both companies therefore commissioned independent agencies to conduct their own market research into the quality issue. The findings of these studies are, they believe, just as statistically significant as the Robson Rhodes research - yet they seem to produce diametrically opposed conclusions.

The AIM 'customer satisfaction' survey was carried out in June 1995 and achieved a nearly 40% response, with respondents asked to rate various

➔ aspects of AIM service on a five point sliding scale: Very Poor - Poor - Acceptable - Good - Excellent.

On the question of "overall performance" a total of 68% said AIM were either Excellent or Good, a further 28% opted for Acceptable and the remaining 4% described the performance as Poor. Even on such notoriously thorny matters as the quality of service provided by the help desk, the company still scored similar ratings - 69% said these were Excellent or Good.

The Axxia survey was conducted a couple of months later and represents a response ...*continued on page 3* ➔

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## SCOTS INVESTIGATE DEAL FOR FIRST TIME IT USERS

The Law Society of Scotland is currently holding discussions with a number of major systems suppliers, including Usher and Pilgrim, about the possibility of being able to produce an all-in package - comprising Windows PC, modem, printer, an office automation suite (such as Microsoft Office) and accounts software - to retail for about £2000 and be suitable for solicitors starting out in practice.

George Sampson of the Scottish Law Society said this was not an attempt to impose computerisation on the profession but rather was based on the belief that IT could create "a much more efficient and cost effective" solicitors' office. "The worst possible thing," he said, "is to start out in practice without computers and then find you are unable to take on more work without recruiting more secretarial staff. Hopefully an inexpensive package will enable practitioners to get off to a better start".

### A PRESSING ADDRESS

As part of what the company describes as its "re-emergence" as a leading supplier of legal IT, Norwel Computer Services has opened new offices in the City of London at the Shoe Lane International Press Centre (☎ 0171-583 0363).

### SPEECH RECOGNISED

Congratulations to IBM UK, their VoiceType speech recognition system was one of 12 products awarded a medal in the British Computer Society's recent 1995 "Best of British IT" awards.

## MIXED RECEPTION FOR COOLFIN

Irish computer consultants the Coolfin Group were in London last week to give a presentation on the latest developments in their Pan-European Legal Telematics programme.

The project – which is being jointly supported by a consortium of hardware and software suppliers, with additional funding from the European (Community's) Business and Innovation Centres (EBIC) network – has the long term objective of establishing standards for an integrated workstation suitable for lawyers and paralegals across Europe.

According to project co-ordinator Gavin Maxwell of Coolfin (☎ 00 353 51 387477), there is a need for such an initiative because previous attempts by "national legal agencies such as the UK Law Society" (*sic*) have met with little success.

Coolfin also add: "We have been advising law firms for many years and our research has shown that the majority of firms are still trapped in traditional work practices with poorly integrated back and front office systems".

At present the project has a number of impressive names on board, including Microsoft, Admiral Legal Systems, IBM, as well as suppliers of touch-screen and voice recognition systems. The current timetable envisages the first pilot site being installed in a Dublin law firm by the end of this year. Next will come a UK pilot, followed by pilots in two other European centres, until eventually 25 sites (coinciding with EBICs) have gone live.

☞ **Comment...** We know the EU has an obsession for standards and funding pan-European research projects – and so on one level the legal telematics programme is probably "a good thing" and we therefore wish good luck to Coolfin, Admiral and Microsoft *et al*.

On the otherhand it is very difficult at this stage to see what the ➔

➔ practical benefits are going to be. Leaving aside the fact that the problem of poor back and front office integration has long been recognised by both suppliers and users alike, who is going to be able to afford this all-singing, all-dancing – or at least touch-sensitive and voice recognising – workstation?

LTI has spoken to a number of suppliers and consultants about the telematics programme – and all felt it was an interesting but apparently pointless exercise. Perhaps the pilots will help shed a little more light.

In the meantime, the position is probably best summed up by Osman Ismail of MCS: "When I first read the Coolfin proposal, I laughed and then put it in the bin. Lawyers are not interested in standards that may be available in a few years' time, they want business solutions they can buy and use today."

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## OH NO - AN OJ STORY

When Johnnie Cochran, the lead defence counsel in the OJ Simpson trial was in London last week, he took up an invitation from courtroom systems specialists Legal Technologies Ltd (☎ 0171-935 8242) to visit the Maxwell Trial. This is currently taking place in the Old Bailey annexe at Chichester Rents, where LTL's multimedia Showcase presentation package is in use, running in conjunction with Smith Bernal's Livenote transcription software. Just what Showcase – understood to be short-listed for the SCL Awards – would have made of Johnnie Cochran's own performance in the OJ Trial, when he spoke on a total of 33,000 separate occasions, is another matter.

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## NT NEXT TIME

Pressure on space caused by the need to cover late-breaking news has meant the scheduled feature on the Windows 95 versus Windows NT debate has had to be held back until the next (11th December) edition. Our apologies. □

### A NEW CHALLENGE FROM THE US ?

First came Elite, then Carpe Diem and now arguably the most useful of the lot, the Amicus Attorney system, which combines all the functionality of desktop time recording software with the ease of use of a PIM-style diary/address book/ 'to do' list scheduler like Lotus Organiser. Yes, another legal system of American origin has made the Atlantic crossing and is now looking for UK customers...

We have heard it all before although this new import probably has a better chance of success than some other US offerings, not least because it is being distributed in the UK by Gavel & Gown (☎ 01242-243344) a company set up by Alan Roberts whose track record includes time with Sumlock Legal and Admiral Legal – so he should have an idea of what makes solicitors tick.

Being a Windows system it is highly graphical – the screen layout looks like a cross between a FiloFax and a card index system. And – another benefit of Windows technology – it can easily be configured to import and export data to-and-from back office accounts systems.

However probably one of its biggest selling points is its price – it costs just £400 + VAT and will be sold as a shrink-wrapped commodity, in common with about 99% of all other Windows software applications. Alan Roberts reckons it is a load-up and go package, however there is a telephone hotline support service available for £75. (Additional training and consultancy services are available by negotiation.)

An attractive product, at an attractive price, as such it will clearly appeal to those larger practices who want to supply their fee earners with a desktop – or laptop – productivity tool.

In addition, because it automatically links contacts with actions in one integrated matter file, it can very easily serve as the foundations for a case ▶

▶ management system – at a price smaller firms and sole practitioners can afford.

☞ **Technical Note...** Gavel & Gown recommend a 486 PC with 8Mb of RAM. Free demo disks are available and Apple Macintosh users will no doubt be amazed to learn a Mac version (68020, System 7 and 4Mb RAM) is also available for the same price.

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### QUALITY OF SERVICE ROW

*Continued from front page...* rate equivalent to 26% of the company's installed KISOL and ARISTA user base. Numerically smaller than the AIM sample, Axxia believe it makes up in terms of quality, their survey being based on telephone calls (average duration 40 minutes) and a 10-point sliding scale from Excellent (10) via Industry Average (5) to Dreadful (1).

The findings were only unveiled at last week's Axxia User Group AGM and once again make very interesting reading. A total of 65% of those asked rated Axxia's staff as more responsive to their needs than the industry average, while a similar number gave the same verdict on the quality of the company's service and support. The survey also found that the few (3%) respondents who gave Axxia a 'Dreadful' rating based that on one-off bad experiences.

☞ **Comment...** Possible explanations might include the Robson Rhodes study having surveyed a different sample – or else the same people said one thing to their suppliers and gave entirely different answers to the management consultancy. Either way, the AIM and Axxia findings cannot be ignored and must cast doubts on the Robson Rhodes blanket view that there has been "a significant drop" in the quality of service provided by software suppliers.

☞ **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** will shortly be announcing details of a new initiative in the service quality field. ☐

### MACS ON MOVE

Apple Macintosh legal software suppliers Professional Productivity Solutions (PPS) have moved to new premises. The postal address is The Old Bishops House, 44 Brook Street, Watlington OX9 5JH. For details ☎ 01865-201801 or email ppslaw@atlas.co.uk In a subsequent edition LTI will be looking at the latest PPS products.

### AND MORE MACS

Mac systems house Can Do Ltd (☎ 01452-527603) have reduced the price of their CAT contact and document management software and are now able to offer RIBA approved templates including JCT contract forms. Free demo disks are available from Can Do.

### HELP WANTED

A law firm in Hong Kong with about 50 solicitors and fee earners has asked **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** if we can suggest a suitable legal accounts system supplier. The accounts rules in HK are broadly the same as the UK. Ideally it will run across a 486 PC network AND the supplier must be able to offer or arrange local support etc. Call the **LTi** office (☎ 01379-687518) for further details.

### NOVELL SALE

Latest rumours on the sale of Novell's **WordPerfect** business put three names in the running: **IBM**, **Oracle** and a buy-out led by former Novell CEO **Ray Noorda**. With both **IBM** and **Oracle** banging the anti-PC 'network centric' drum, buying an applications developer like **WordPerfect** could just make sense.

## COMDEX FALL - PC ERA TO END ?

**Comdex Fall**, which took place in Las Vegas earlier this month, is the largest computer show in the world, with 2,000 exhibitors and 200,000 visitors. It is *the* event at which IT suppliers announce their new products and - if they are important enough - expound their 'vision thing'. IT consultant **Delia Venables** was there for **LTi** ...

IBM has been quiet over the last couple of years, having suffered bad publicity from a number of failed ventures in the PC market, as well as declining sales from its mainframe business. But don't be fooled, with a turnover of US\$64 billion - 14 times as much as Microsoft - and a new direction from top man **Lou Gerstner**, Big Blue is on the move again.

Delivering the keynote speech, Gerstner's theme was network computing (or NC) and he coined a new phrase 'network-centric' to go with it.

His vision involves computers of all shapes and sizes, many much cheaper than today's PCs, as well as various household and business appliances, being linked together using the Internet as the communications infrastructure to make it all happen.

"A lot of customers," said Gerstner, "are waking up to the fact they have put the equivalent of a 1985 mainframe on the desks of every clerical worker" and are "beginning to wonder if they are getting full value" from personal computing, as well as tiring of having to upgrade their hardware and software so often.

Although stressing that "the network-centric world will not replace the PC world entirely," he then went on to add that as far as IBM was concerned: "I'd say we're betting much of our future on network-centric computing... The Internet has been a wild and woolly frontier but the settlers are arriving."

IBM has confirmed it is developing a 'network appliance' and will be shipping it to selected customers early next year. □

## TIMESLICE - LIFE AFTER THE TAKEOVER

Eighteen months ago the Horne family sold its majority shareholding in legal systems supplier **Timeslice** to the **City Computers** group. Since then the company has had a very low profile, moved premises and seen long standing director **Tom Huckin** depart. Last week **LTi** interviewed **Ibby Khair**, the managing director of **City Computers** and **Timeslice**, to find out what the future holds.

"We deliberately kept our heads down," said Mr Khair, "so we could concentrate on reorganising the company. We have restructured our finances, disposed of costly leases and merged a lot of our support, administration and R&D resources with **City**. The net result has been from making very big losses, **Timeslice** has now moved into profitability.

"The biggest change however has been the transformation of **Timeslice** from a marketing-oriented to a service oriented company."

What this means for users is more staff being recruited to support the company's sales and service activities, including a reorganised help-desk operation that provides a one-stop point of contact for all technical queries. (**City** already has ISO9001 and TickIT accreditation and **Timeslice** is on the way to achieving it.) But, isn't this just a holding operation? **Khair** is adamant **Timeslice** has a real future in the legal market and "having bot-tomed out, is now climbing up again".

As proof, he cites the fact that the company has developed and is now shipping new **Windows** front ends for its **ActionMan** and **LawMan** systems. This will give existing users the option of running both character-based and GUI screens within the same firm.

**Timeslice** has also relaunched its contacts and marketing database as a **Windows** system that can be accessed ▶

➔ through a graphical 'fee earner desktop', as well as enhancing its pre-litigation debt collection system to allow 'power dialling' by credit controllers.

The adoption of the Windows platform also means the ActionMan and LawMan systems can be integrated with popular third-party applications such as Word, WordPerfect, Laserforms, the Cognos Impromptu/Powerplay executive information (EIS) systems and the Carpe Diem time tracking system from Pro-Soft. Timeslice (☎ 0171-231 0073) has also become a UK distributor for Carpe Diem.

As to the longer term future; "I bought Timeslice as an investment, not as a tax loss," says Khair, "and I intend the company to grow".

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### **CARDIFF & MANCHESTER FIRMS CHOSE SOLICITEC**

The Cardiff office of the Eversheds group has just completed the implementation of Solicitec's SolCase mortgage enforcement system in their banking and finance department. The firm's mortgage enforcement manager John Simmons said that following the acquisition of a major new client, the department had to impose a very tight timetable with regards to 'live' dates. In the event Solicitec successfully completed all aspects of the implementation, including installation, training and tailoring the module to meet Eversheds' requirements in 17 days.

Another new Solicitec user is Besh Fox & Co in Manchester, who earlier this month switched on £100,000 worth of new hardware and software as part of the computerisation of the firm's personal injury and medical negligence departments. Respective department heads Neil Sugarman and Janine Tobias say they spent "countless hours with computer consultants" to ensure they got a comprehensive system.

Solicitec (☎ 0113-278 7757) say that since its launch at the 1994 Barbican Exhibition, over 40 SolCase systems have been installed in legal practices. □

### **NEXT... THE WORLD**

**Six months after the management buyout from Digital, Axxia Systems managing director Stuart Holden has been talking to LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER about the company's plans...**

In the coming weeks Axxia will be releasing enhancements to the company's main Arista products, including new Windows marketing database and case management systems, a new version of the fee earner desktop and a new screen-based billing system for practitioners.

Initially these will be available on SCO-Unix or Digital Alpha platforms, based around an Informix database but future plans include a port to Windows NT and making the system database independent. Original Kienzle users will no doubt be pleased to learn Axxia is also committed to continuing to support and upgrade Kisol Gold and envisages the system still having many years life left in it.

Holden says that while he believes Axxia products are already in a class of their own, the next challenge is level of service. To this end the customer hot-line service will now be open from 7-30am to 8-00pm, with an eventual target of a 24-hour, 7-day a week service. "If lawyers are going to be running business critical applications like case management, then they must have support services that cover them the same hours they work."

Axxia also plan to expand geographically - initially into Ireland, Scotland, France and the US. The company is already talking to six firms of prospective users in Dublin, has appointed a distributor in Scotland (see sidebar) and will shortly be going live with a French legal accounts system.

In the States, Axxia has started discussions with a US law firm who want to move away from Elite and Axxia see enormous potential in America as firms there realise the drawbacks of not having the consolidated database approach of UK practices. □

### **AXXIA IN SCOTLAND**

**Axxia Systems has appointed Beltane Technology (☎ 01506-829200) as its distributor in Scotland. Beltane, headed by former HG Usher director Charles Duthie, is tendering for business and has the Arista system on a number of short-lists.**

### **KISOL GOODBYE**

**Twelve partner London firm Stafford Young Jones is replacing its old Kisol system with the Practice II accounts and practice management system from Linetime (☎ 0113-250 0020). The firm, already users of the Linetime debt collection system, have also ordered Linetime's case management and conveyancing software.**

### HOT COURSE

Strathclyde University Law School has established a post-graduate LLM in Legal Informatics which will offer tuition by means of "electronic distance learning".

The course offers such topics as liability for defective software, computer crime, data protection and intellectual property. Students will be able to access a database of over 25Mb of teaching material in electronic format, the Lexis/Nexis online service and the University's Net connection.

Teaching and assessment will be conducted via electronic conferencing and email. For details contact Moira Simpson on ☎ 0141-552 4400 x3481 or email: moiraj@strath.ac.uk

## EVERYTHING IS COMING UP INTERNET

The steady progress of the Internet as the global framework for online communications and information services - as distinct from proprietary networks like CompuServe - seems to be gathering pace.

Within the last couple of weeks Microsoft has announced that the Microsoft Network (MSN) which was only launched in late August of this year, will be relaunched in February 1996 as an Internet based service. Explaining this U-turn, Microsoft UK business development director Gary Hunt told a conference in London earlier this month that "Microsoft... believes the Internet is the most important platform since the IBM PC in 1981".

This view is echoed by Judy Gibbons, a director of MSN UK: "The Internet has changed everything. Three years ago when we started thinking about MSN, the only thing you could run (on a world-wide scale) was a proprietary service locking in content providers. But now with the Internet 'anyone' can publish on the Web." An announcement on revised pricing is expected by the end of the year.

☞ **In a related development** Luxembourg-based Europe Online service, which is due to commence services on 15th December, has also pulled the plug on earlier plans to become a proprietary network and will instead be accessed over the World Wide Web, using Netscape's Internet browser software.

Along with the Net-based services, both MSN and Europe Online plan to offer "value added" services which will be located on private networks accessible from the Internet. The "service within a site" format looks like becoming an increasingly popular concept as it allows operators to provide basic services free of charge along with optional chargeable or subscription-based premium services. ➔

➔ Meanwhile other legal market-related Internet developments include...

- **BorderWare Firewall Server**, the Internet gateway and security system developed in Canada by Border Network Technologies, is now being distributed and supported in the UK and Europe by **Peapod Internet Ltd** (☎ 01753-581800), part of the same group that owns the electronic forms supplier Peapod Professional Solutions. The company reports growing interest in the concept of Internet "firewalls" and currently have an evaluation project underway in a "top 10" London firm.

- **Netscape Communications** who produce the market leading Navigator World Wide Web browser have opened a UK office in Windsor (☎ 01753-622061) to provide local sales, support and integration services to coincide with the launch of their "second generation" WWW software Netscape Navigator Version 2.0.

- **Court on the Web** is a new Internet Web site described as being of use to anyone interested in the workings of the British legal system, including litigants, defendants, practitioners and students. The site has been put together by David Adams of COTW Electronic Publishing and one of the next projects will be the creation of an Internet directory of legal practitioners. Court on the Web is at <http://www.dircon.co.uk/belmarsh/index.html> and David Adams can be contacted on ☎ 0181-316 7322 or email: belmarsh@dircon.co.uk

- Proposals to change the law of defamation so it is better equipped to tackle the problem of libel on the Internet, was one of the measures outlined in the recent Queen's Speech and will also be one of the topics covered in the next edition of the **Guide to the Internet for Lawyers**. Published by Delia Venables (☎ 01273-472424), the Guide plus the first five editions of the monthly update newsletter sells for £100. □

### TONER FRAUD ALERT

**It used to be bulk sales of carbon paper but now it appears the con-men of the office supplies industry are running scams based on so-called 'long life' toner cartridges for laser printers.**

Typically businesses receive an unsolicited telephone call extolling the virtues of a new long life toner cartridge for laser printers that lasts between two and three times as long as conventional cartridges and inviting them to "try a sample" of the product.

Leaving aside the fact that printer manufacturers Epson (UK) say there is no such thing as a long life cartridge, the callers omit to say that far from being a free sample, anyone agreeing to take-up the trial offer will be invoiced. Nor do they mention that the cost of these cartridges is between three and four times more expensive than the normal selling price for a conventional cartridge.

Currently the toner scam is being investigated by a number of local authority trading standards departments, with one of the biggest prosecutions to-date being in Yorkshire in July, when magistrates fined David Jones of Milton Business Products £5,500 for offences under the 1971 Unsolicited Goods & Services Act and the 1985 Business Names Act.

☞ **Comment...** CloudNine Technology, the publishers of **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** were recently contacted by an anonymous telesales operation offering to supply "double life" laser cartridges for the bargain price of £190 each - compared with the £44 we currently pay for conventional cartridges. We were also offered a bulk purchase deal of £260 a month for a minimum of 30 months - however the caller was deliberately vague as to what we could expect to receive for our money. Although we understand that confusing the prospective victim is a common sales technique, we nevertheless felt these were offers we could afford to refuse. □

### SLOUGH FIRM CONVERTS

Barrett & Thompson of Slough have installed the AlphaLAW legal management system on their network and replaced their older Miles 33 installation. The accounts data on the Miles system was converted and transferred electronically to AlphaLAW by **MSS Management Support Systems** (☎ 01252-371121).

☞ **Technical Note...** MSS, which recently became an authorised Microsoft Solution Provider, is now distributing the latest release of its AlphaLAW system Version 11.0. This contains a number of new features including a legal aid billing module, legal aid franchise control and audit reporting, conflict of interest searches, an enhanced nominal ledger and an attendance/comments note option.

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### QUILL MAKES THE LEAGUE

In a survey recently conducted by *Entrepreneur* magazine of owner-managed companies in the North-West of England, with turnovers of between £0.5-to-£5 million, legal software suppliers **Quill Computer Systems** made it into the top 50, coming in at number 44. The survey is based on figures taken from audited accounts filed at Companies House and also takes into consideration consistent growth over three years in terms of turnover and profitability.

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### SCL AWARDS SHORT LIST

Four products have been short-listed for the Society for Computers & Law's 1995 award for "the most outstanding application of IT to the law". Chairman of the judging panel John Irving said the "substantial number of entries" - which this year included everything from desktop applications for fee earners to Internet publishing - "represented the wide diversity that exists in today's marketplace". Final judging takes place next month, the date for the announcement of the winner has still to be set. □

### CURE FOR MACRO VIRUSES

**S&S International** (☎ Freephone **0800-136657**) have just produced the latest release of **Dr Solomon's Anti-Virus Toolkit** software, version 7.53, which now automatically detects and repairs new macro viruses like **Concept** and **Nuclear** (also known as **WinWord.Concept** and **WordMacro.Nuclear**) as a standard feature.

**The first macro viruses, which make use of the WordBasic macro language to infect wordprocessing data files, appeared 'in the wild' about four months ago and exploit the fact PC users exchange documents far more frequently than they exchange programs.**

# LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

## NEWS ▶ VIEWS ▶ MOVES ▶ DEALS ▶ DATA

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### Alexis Byter's COMPUTER LORE

"We must have one of the best legal systems suppliers in the country," said the lady standing next to me – a solicitor by profession – as we watched our respective 'significant others' trotting across muddy fields at a recent horse show.

"Nothing is ever too much trouble. Why, just the other month we felt it would be handy to have some special reports for our cashiers to help them process interim billing. So he produced them, and at a very modest cost."

As at this point her husband's horse decided to buck its rider into the water jump, I felt it might not be the best of times to suggest that her supplier's apparent willingness to oblige could actually prove to be a liability.

The problem is all this ad-hoc tweaking and 'patching' of software can lead to difficulties with overall 'version control'.

If your supplier is merrily customising your system, you can be pretty certain he is also doing the same for other customers. But, while this may be wonderful from the public relations angle, it is a support desk nightmare because there is no product standardisation.

Call the helpline service to complain hitting the 'F8' key when posting in the nominal ledger produces a ➔

➔ a certain error message therefore means nothing to them because no-one else – including the staff on the support desk – has the same configuration. Indeed there are probably other users who encounter an entirely different set of problems when they press the 'F8' key in similar circumstances.

Unfortunately matters can actually get worse such as when, for example, a software upgrade is issued. Either it will not work at all – at least not without further tinkering and 'patches'. Or else it does but at the expense of wiping out the earlier customising work, which of course merely creates more problems and user dissatisfaction.

When it comes to software, the best suppliers today are not those who bend over backwards to accommodate users' individual whims but rather the ones who adopt the Henry Ford approach to customer satisfaction: "You can have any colour you like as long as it is black".

### IN THE NEXT EDITION

- The future of electronic communications within the legal profession – we look at the SCL report.
- The Windows dilemma – to go for 95 now or wait until Windows NT arrives?
- On-Time – in time to become the profession's favourite group scheduling system?
- And Byter worries about the year 2000.

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