

CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

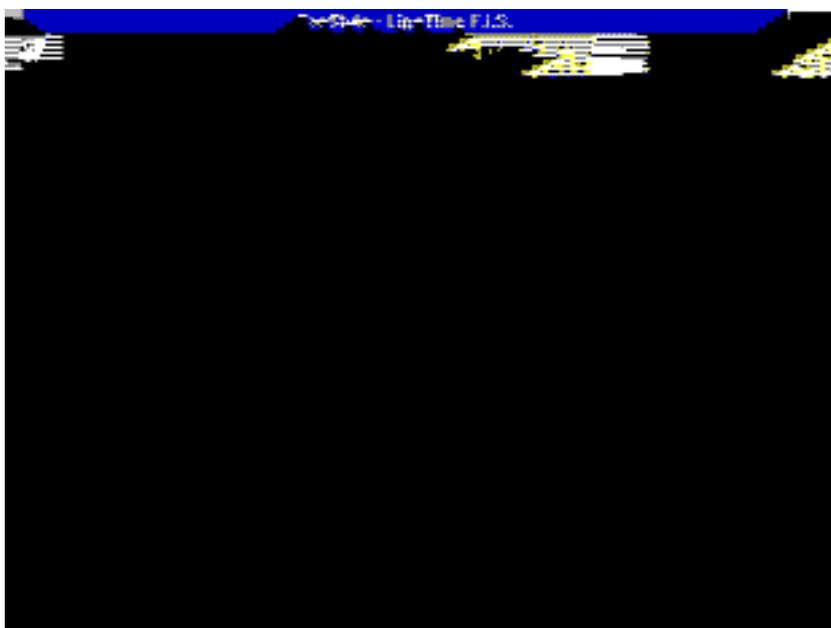
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO WHAT'S HOT (AND WHAT'S NOT) IN LAW OFFICE SYSTEMS

IN THIS EDITION...

- New Amstrad fails to cheer... 3
- Link set to be lawyers favourite comms system... 4
- The Windows dilemma... 5
- Alexis Byter has pre-millennial tension... 8

FEE EARNER DESKTOPS TAKE OFF

Although they were first seen at the Barbican Exhibition a couple of years ago, it has only been in the last few months that Windows based 'fee earner desktop' systems have appeared in the software portfolios of major legal IT suppliers, one of the latest being the new FeeStyle fee earner information system from Linetime... The underlying logic, says Linetime software development director Phil Snee, "is to make the data already on a firm's existing file-server or Unix system more accessible to fee earners, without requiring the firm to make a major investment in new administrative systems."



To this end the company's new FeeStyle system (see above) has been designed ➔

➔ to operate in a "mix and match" environment of terminals and PCs, so users can migrate to it over time.

Peter Rickson & Partners in Preston are already running a beta version of FeeStyle across a 40-user network and Linetime anticipate Version 1.0 of the software having its full commercial roll-out early in the New Year. This will include on-screen time recording, an appointments/critical dates diary and real-time access to the client/matter database.

By the time of the 1996 Barbican Exhibition Version 2.0 will be released, featuring desktop billing along with a more sophisticated scheduling/conflict checking function, to help comply with file review and other aspects of the Legal Aid franchising and Law Society practice management standards regimes.

Pricing has still to be finalised but Snee anticipates it being comparable with packaged PC software, not least because it is written in Microsoft's Visual Basic and so does not require expensive 'run time' licences.

But will lawyers actually use it? Linetime is confident they will as the system has been consciously designed to appeal to what Snee describes as the "stalwarts" rather than the "whiz kids". Hence the on-screen display is intended to replicate a conventional diary and card index, with large unambiguous command 'buttons' to press.

☞ **Comment...** Some indication of just how popular fee earner desktop systems are proving can be gleaned from Axxia's experiences. They anticipated selling 300 units in the first year but actually sold over 1000 in the first eight months.

USHERING IN A NEW ADDRESS

Usher Systems, now part of the AIM group, has moved to a new head office at: 36 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9EB (☎ 0131-339 8802).

EXPERTS ON DISK

FT Law & Tax, previously part of the Longman group, has launched the first edition of *The Law Society's Directory of Expert Witnesses*, which contains details of over 3000 experts in 4000 different specialisms. The *Directory* is published both conventionally and electronically (on disk or CD-Rom). For details ☎ 0800 289618.

RAM RAIDS - NOW ITS THE ARTFUL DODGER

No, this is not a preview for a showing of the musical *Oliver!* on television at Christmas - although it does sound like something from Dickens.

In a new twist in the RAM-raiding saga (the organised theft of computer components from offices - ☞ see Issue No 3 for full story) the Metropolitan Police report that latter-day Fagins are supplying teenagers - some as young as 14 years old - with stamped, addressed padded envelopes and sending them out to break into offices and steal personal computer processor and memory chips.

The police say the hi-tech Artful Dodgers seldom inform on their handlers and when questioned merely say they are working for market research companies! Meanwhile the computer security industry continues to devise new deterrents and remedies for the problem...

- Southampton-based insurance brokers **Burnett & Associates** (☎ 01703-442227) have announced three new services for clients of their Computer Breakdown and All Risks Insurance Schemes. These comprise: free security coding tags that can be attached to components and equipment to deter theft; a 25% discount off data recovery services on a 'no fix - no fee' basis; and special rates for the PC Shield service, which offers immediate permanent replacement of stolen or terminally damaged equipment.

- **IBM Business Recovery Services** has set up a new back-up and recovery service for computer users called E-Vault (electronic Vaulting). Unlike the more usual approach to back-up, which involves the user manually making copies of data, the E-Vault system automatically copies files at pre-arranged times and then stores them at secure off-site locations via high speed ISDN phone links. The system supports most common ➔

➔ hardware platforms, including DOS, Unix and Windows. Further details and a free demonstration disk are available, call Eric Vaughan on ☎ 0990-454454. ☐

COOLFIN AIM TO GO LIVE NEXT WEEK

The Pan-European Legal Telematics project, which is being co-ordinated by Irish computer consultancy the **Coolfin Group** (☞ see Issue No 4 for full story) expects to have its first pilot site go live next week with an installation at Kevin Brophy's Dublin-based law firm.

Another Dublin practice is lined up as a second site and Coolfin (☎ 00 353 51 387477) hope to be able to name four English participating firms by mid-January. Coolfin's Gavin Maxwell says Christina Archbold of the English Law Society has been invited to become involved in the project.

TIME FOR AN IT MOT ?

Management consultants **BDO Stoy Hayward** (☎ 0171-486 5888) and Axxia Systems have devised an independent audit scheme for users of Arista software, aimed at determining whether Axxia customers are making the fullest and most effective use of the facilities available.

☞ **Comment...** The rationale for what Stoy Hayward consultant John Irving describes as an "IT MoT" is to ensure that having spent thousands of pounds on a new system, users are aware and can take advantage of the full power of the technology, rather than leave potentially valuable reports and analysis tools to gather dust because no-one can remember how to operate them.

It is also interesting to note the scheme is based on a fixed price consultancy package consisting of a one-day on-site review, followed by the presentation of a report and action plan - which should allay user fears of being drawn into an open-ended commitment. ☐

NEW AMSTRAD FAILS TO CHEER

Ten years ago Amstrad transformed office automation for small firms and sole practitioners with the launch of the PCW 8256, a wordprocessor that sold at the price of a typewriter. This month Amstrad launches a successor, the PcW16 - but is there a role for it?

On the face of it the PcW16 seems to offer excellent value for money, with the stand-alone model retailing for £299 (+VAT) which is £100 cheaper than its predecessor of a decade ago. It comes complete with a useful suite of software, including wordprocessor, spreadsheet, address book, diary/alarm clock and calculator and is available in some attractive 'bundles' with printers - £399 with an inkjet, £499 with a laser.

The technology is also modern, with mouse, standard 3.5" 1.44Mb floppy drive, parallel and serial interfaces, auto-save, software ready installed on ROM (so no disks to load) and 1Mb of non-volatile internal memory, so data files will not be lost when the power is switched off. However, while the new machine can import LocoScript document files from earlier PCWs, one shortcoming has to be their choice of operating system, which is neither the PC's DOS nor the CP/M of the original PCW but a hybrid related to the Amstrad Notepad.

According to Keith Simons, the secretary of the Lawyers' PCW Club, the uncertainties caused by the choice of a proprietary system mean "we don't know if it will be a good buy for our members." In particular, although the new system has the potential to run third-party programs, until they become available, potential users will be excluded from using both PC and existing PCW applications software. There again the same criticisms were levied at the Psion Series 3 and that went on to be a market leader!

☞ For details of the Lawyers' PCW Club call Keith Simons on ☎ 0161-485 2789.

SCL SHORT-LIST NAMED

Four products have now been short-listed for the Society for Computers & Law's annual award for 'the most outstanding application of IT to the law'.

They are the ShowCase courtroom presentation system from **Legal Technologies**, the ExeComp executive pay compensation calculator from **Cadence Europress**, the intelligent legal electronic forms software from **Laserform** and the VoiceType speech recognition system from **IBM UK**. The winner will be announced in the New Year.

POOR CONNECTIONS

After a five-month search Energis, the loss-making telecommunications company owned by the National Grid, has appointed BT director Mike Grabiner as its new chief executive. His appointment is seen as signalling a shift in Energis' strategy with the company expected to place less emphasis on the bulk delivery of long distance telecommunications capacity to business users.

Energis built its service on a low cost nationwide telecommunications network created by wrapping high capacity fibre-optic cable around existing powerlines. The service was launched in 1994, with a number of businesses and professions - including the law - specifically targeted as being likely to benefit from lower-cost long distance calls. However despite the hype, sales have been consistently poor, with Energis losing £53million in the year to March 31st and another £40million in the six months to the end of September.

☞ **Comment...** If the experiences of CloudNine Technology, the publishers of **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER**, are anything to go by, it is not hard to identify the reason for Energis' apparent lack of success. Despite requesting information about the service on three separate occasions, we never heard a peep. And then BT cut its long distance call charges... ☐

PROFITS RECORD

Sanderson Electronics, the publicly quoted parent company of legal systems supplier Sanderson GA has reported a 25% rise in annual pre-tax profits to a record £5.3million.

TWO MORE GO NOVELL

Two more London firms, Winward Fearon and Jeffrey Green Russell, have adopted a groupware strategy using Novell's Soft-Solutions and Group-Wise products to handle document management and messaging. Said Jeffrey Green Russell IT partner Clive Whitfield-Jones: "Firms are radically re-engineering traditional work methods to contain costs, principally by the effective use and not mere installation of new technology."

A PC IS NOT JUST FOR CHRISTMAS

According to an Intel/Gallup survey more than 4 out of 10 consumers in Britain would choose a £1000 multimedia PC for Christmas in preference to other identically priced gifts (ie colour TV, hi-fi etc). Education emerged as the main reason (36%) for wanting a PC at home, followed by the ability to work from home (21%). The sample was 1400 people.

3 MILLION UK NET USERS

Another survey, this time by Continental Research, reports there are now around 3 million people in the UK with access to the Internet. However 5 out of 7 only have access at work. Nearly 70% of the 2600 people surveyed claimed to be aware of the Net but only 16% had heard of the World Wide Web.

NET AND LINK TO DOMINATE LEGAL COMMS

According to a report by a working party of the Society for Computers & Law into the future of electronic communications within the legal profession, the Internet and Legalease' LINK legal information network look set to dominate the sector...

Asked which systems they used and/or planned to use, 71% named LINK and 58% pointed to the Internet. In third place with 42% was CompuServe, with the next single largest system mentioned being LIX a long way behind with 16%. Although as the authors point out LIX does have a specialist following thanks to dedicated services such as court listings and the FELIX bulletin board for judges.

☞ **Note...** The survey was conducted in the spring of 1995 before Microsoft had launched or even announced details of the MSN network.

The survey also looked at the use of online information services (such as company searches, credit rating, Lexis-style legal research etc). By percentage, the most popular uses of online services were: company searches - 26%, legal research - 23%, Land Registry & credit rating - both at 16% and local authority searches - 12%.

☞ **Comment...** Although such services have traditionally been supplied as dedicated systems, they are increasingly becoming available either directly or via 'gateways' as value-added services on portmanteau systems like LINK and the Internet, thus further increasing their relevance to the profession.

Looking at the use of external electronic mail (email), the authors focused particular attention on the responses of 269 solicitors practices to gain some impression of its 'corporate' rather than 'personal' use. Overall 57% of the firms used email but on further analysis the figures reveal that while the

➔ larger the firm, the more important email becomes, in smaller firms (5 partners or less) almost half (47%) use no email at all. Incidentally, almost all email users use such systems both for messaging and to transfer documents.

While email may be gaining acceptance, the more structured technology of EDI (electronic data interchange) clearly has a long way to go. Or as the authors put it: "... the concept of EDI has not yet permeated the legal profession to a great extent".

This is perhaps surprising considering the people responding to the SCL survey are presumably among the more computer literate members of the profession. On the otherhand the authors are probably right in suggesting EDI will eventually take off, particularly as organisations like the Legal Aid Board start to use it. (An announcement from the LAB is expected in the spring of 1996.)

What about the down-side of electronic communications. We hear a lot about the perils of hackers and downloaded viruses but is it really a problem?

In fact the survey found that only 19 respondents reported having lost electronically transmitted data as the result of a virus. Instead a far more common problem was computer failure/other technical problems (line noise etc) - 81 complaints; followed by operator error - 77 complaints.

Given such a wide ranging and novel subject area, the authors concede it is difficult to encapsulate their findings in one paragraph. Nevertheless, they do raise one very important point which is to warn that if lawyers are going to make greater use of the Internet, they need to be aware of the lack of a guaranteed delivery mechanism and the danger of electronic documents being delayed or lost forever in cyberspace.

☞ Copies of the report are available from the SCL office, price £10 for members and £20 for non-members. Call Caroline Gould on ☎ 0117-923 7393 ☐

THE WINDOWS DILEMMA - 95 NOW OR NT LATER

We have seen the ads on television, we have read the newspaper reports and we have heard the 'Start Me Up' soundtrack. But we are still confused. If Microsoft's new Windows 95 32-bit operating system is so good, how come the same company has another 32-bit operating system called Windows NT, which is generally accepted as being a more sophisticated product?

Or, to put it another way, if a law firm is considering going through the disruption of upgrading to Windows 95, why not defer any decisions until Project Cairo - the next major object-oriented upgrade to the Windows NT system - starts shipping in early 1997? **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** tries to shed some light...

The distinction becomes clearer when you realise there are three entirely different product lines involved: The original **Windows 3.1/Windows for Workgroups**, which is not an operating system in its own right but a graphical user interface or front-end to the positively ancient DOS operating system.

The new **Windows 95** system, which is an operating system but has been designed to allow backwards compatibility so it can still run applications software designed for Windows 3.1. And, **Windows NT** which is part of Microsoft's larger strategy to create a client/server system to compete with other multiuser operating systems like Unix.

Coinciding with these different backgrounds, there are also different hardware requirements: Windows 3.1 will run on a 386 PC with 4Mb of Ram, whereas the effective minimum for Windows 95 is a 486DX PC with 8Mb. For Windows NT, 16Mb is a minimum. However, unlike 95, NT is not restricted to the Intel microprocessor (486/Pentium/etc) family but will run on other platforms, including Risc and Digital Alpha. →

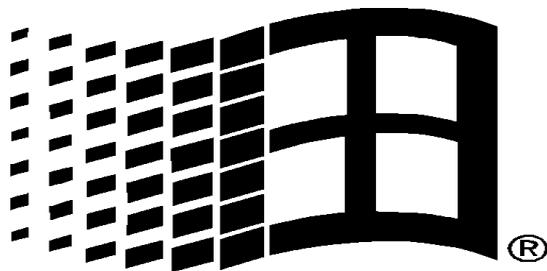
→ The 95 versus NT choice is therefore not a simple either/or decision but rather one involving a practice's longer term IT strategy. If you just want an easier to use system running front-office applications like wordprocessing and spreadsheets on the desktop and requiring a minimal investment in hardware resources, then Windows 95 will do nicely.

On the otherhand if a firm's back-office strategy is to head in the client/server direction then Windows NT enters the frame. (In the legal systems market Admiral is already offering this option and Axxia is likely to be releasing an NT version of Arista in 1996.)

Opinion remains divided as to whether sometime towards the end of the century - after Microsoft has released the Windows 98/Memphis and NT 4/Cairo upgrades - a new unified operating system will emerge. One school argues it is a commercial inevitability whereas another - including US IT analysts Forrester Research - reckon it is technically impossible as there can never be a 'one size fits all' operating system.

On a more practical note, to some extent the choices will be made for us. Anyone wanting NT has to make a deliberate decision to buy it. Otherwise from mid-1996 it will be increasingly difficult to buy new copies of Windows 3.1 whereas every new PC sold will come complete with Windows 95 pre-installed. □

Designed for



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JUST PLAIN LOCO

Elsewhere we mention Amstrad's new wordprocessor but users of earlier PCW models might like to note that Locomotive Software has developed a product called **LocoLink** for Windows which will translate PCW files into DOS and Windows file formats, including Word and WordPerfect via a serial cable link. It costs £69.95 and is available from **Dixons** or direct from Locomotive on ☎ 01306 747756).

BEAM ME UP SCOTTIE

London solicitors **Rowe & Maw**, who are currently well into the second phase of a major office automation project, have chosen a suitably hi-tech location for their Christmas thrash later this week - the **Star Trek** exhibition at the **Kensington Science Museum**.

NEW YEAR IN NEW YORK

The USA's leading legal IT event *Legal Tech New York* takes place at the NY Hilton on 22nd to 24th January. For details call ☎ 001-212 877 5619. The next edition of *LTi* will contain a list of forthcoming UK and US legal IT events.

TIME TO RE- CORD

East Sussex County Council's legal department is installing the Time-base time recording system from Total Computer Systems (☎ 01992-575151) as is Guildford Borough Council, who will be using the system on a combination of Windows PCs and Psion handheld computers as the basis for authority wide time recording.

ONTIME - IN TIME TO CORNER THE MARKET?

For larger firms one of the most useful items of office automation technology available is a practice-wide scheduling system, which allows the centralised coordinating of meetings and events. However while Lotus Organiser and Novell GroupWise are already well-known, the first choice for a growing number of practices is now OnTime.

Developed by Prisma Office Ltd, the system was designed from the outset to have a Windows-style graphical user interface and to be accessible across an enterprise-wide network. Add to that a low price, ranging from £56 per user for 100 users to £40 per user for 5000 users and it is easy to see why City of London giants like Denton Hall have installed OnTime on a one-per-desk basis, with approximately 1300 legal and support staff now using it.

Reflecting the trend towards client/server computing, OnTime is available on a number of platforms including DOS, Windows 3.1, Windows NT, Macintosh and, soon, Windows 95.

According to Prisma managing director Alan Watson OnTime's 'distributed, non-replicated database' allows users to access the most current and accurate calendar information from any server on a practice's network. OnTime also features 'real-time access, notification and response' so that, for example, as soon as you enter a meeting request, OnTime notifies the attendees and updates their calendars. And, as soon as they reply, a note is made in your calendar marking the attendee's response to your meeting request.

Prisma Office (☎ 01753-810899) also produce a more advanced application called On-Schedule, which combines calendars and task lists with a phone book, so as to create a contact and document management system for keeping ▶

▶ track of phone calls, fax messages and correspondence with business and professional contacts.

☞ **Technical Note...** On-Schedule can be integrated with a number of popular Windows office automation products, including MS-Mail, cc:Mail, Excel, Paradox, WinFax Pro and the mainstream word-processors Word 6, WordPerfect 6 and Ami Pro.

The latest Windows 3.1 release On-Schedule Version 2.0 became available at the beginning of July and has been followed by Windows 95 and Windows NT versions. Prices start at £99 for a single user version and, like OnTime, the software will also run on a network. □

HIGH COURT REJECTS RSI CLAIM LINKED TO COMPUTERISATION

Last week former *Financial Times* journalist Alan Ellis failed in a High Court action to win damages for injury caused by the alleged negligence of the newspaper in introducing computer technology.

Mr Ellis claimed he had contracted a chronic 'upper limb disorder' rendering him unable to work because: the *FT* had failed to foresee the problems of converting to computerised production, poor ergonomic conditions in the workplace, the repetitive nature of the work and lack of proper keyboard training.

Rejecting these claims the judge, Mr Justice Garland, found the plaintiff had been suffering from 'an acute psychosomatic disorder' caused by non-work related stress and that the newspaper had taken all reasonable care when introducing computerisation.

☞ **Comment...** Generally lumped together under the umbrella term 'RSI' (repetitive strain injury), cases like *Ellis* show the diverse nature of the problems that can arise and the fact the coincidence of ill-health and computerisation are not automatically causally-linked. □

CAUGHT ON THE NET

One of the biggest problems with the Internet is the speed at which it is expanding, as new sites appear on the World Wide Web every day. *Internet Magazine* believes it may have the answer with the launch last week of *What's New in the UK*, the first continuously updated, fully searchable online guide to new UK Web sites.

"Significant new sites are now appearing daily, but because the furious pace of activity has not been reflected by existing sources of information," said publisher Roger Green, "we decided to plug the online information gap."

The site is hosted by EMAP Computing's Online Media Centre and uses a specially-commissioned database search 'engine' to make it easy for users to find sites that reflect their interests.

What's New in the UK can be found at <http://www.emap.com/internet> and should work with most browsers.

Internet Magazine (available in most newsagents) also regularly monitors UK Internet traffic and the performance rates of Internet Service Providers (ISPs). Based on this data it recommends that the best time to log on to the Net is early in the morning.

Not only are call rates cheaper before 8.00am but due to international time zone differences, most North American Net users are still in bed. Conversely the worst time is mid-evening (around 8.00pm to 10.00pm) when US users start coming online at the same time UK surfers are still accessing the system.

Along with growing numbers of Web sites, there are also growing numbers of ISPs. One year ago in the UK there were about a couple of dozen of them. Today, despite a number going to the wall, the figure is nearer 120.

Among them is **JHC Internet Services** (☎ 0171-916 1188) part of an organisation probably better known to readers as the legal software supplier ➔

➔ JHC/John Hemmings, who develop AS/400 and Lotus Notes based systems. The JHC site is at <http://www.jhc.co.uk>

☞ **Comment...** Another interesting site to have recently come online is a joint presence developed by **Paradigm Software** (☎ 01424-212021) a division of Temple Lectures and Great Yarmouth solicitors Norton Peskett.

The connection at first seems rather tenuous until you realise Norton Peskett solicitor Julian Gibbons developed two software packages for criminal law practitioners - DOS-based CrimeFile and the Advocate which runs on a Psion Series 3/3a - which are commercially distributed and supported by Paradigm.

The site's home page is at <http://www.compulink.co.uk/~paradigmsoft/welcome.html>. As well as information about Norton Peskett, Paradigm and the software, it also contains some useful hypertext links to other legal and IT resources on the Internet. □

ITS GOOD TO TALK

Both marketing and practice managers should be interested to hear the **TDS Marketing Group** (☎ 0345-697630) has licensed the BT business telephone database and is now selling it on CD-Rom along with appropriate retrieval software.

Called TelePower Pro, the system contains all 2.4 million telephone and fax numbers of the 1.9 million UK businesses registered with BT on a single CD. To access the database, TDS have devised a Windows-based program that can retrieve numbers by name or a keyword with 'fuzzy' and phonetic matching techniques available to help locate misspelt names.

TelePower Pro has an RRP of £39.99 (inc VAT) and TDS suggest that at this price, if a firm needs to use Directory Enquiries more than once a day for business numbers, the system will pay for itself. TelePower Pro is available from retail outlets or direct from TDS. Periodic database updates are also planned. □

QUOTE UNQUOTE

The Internet "is the most exciting thing happening in computers today. It marks the progression of the computer from a computational device to a communications device," says Steve Jobs, the founder of both Apple and NeXT Computer. "Also, it is very exciting because Microsoft doesn't own it."

PROFOUND NEWS

At last week's Online Information show in London, **MAID plc** (☎ 0171-930 6900) unveiled its new service giving Internet users access to its **Profound Business Intelligence Online Service**. This contains over 100 million pages of structured business data.

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Alexis Byter's

COMPUTER LORE

In less than three weeks time, most of us will be donning our party hats for the annual New Year's Eve 'ring-out the old and ring-in the new' rigmorole.

And if you think that is going to be a good party, just wait until we ring-out the old century and ring-in the new millennium at midnight on 31st December 1999. However before getting too excited about the next century, it might be a good idea to heed the warning of Sir Robert Walpole: "They now ring the bells, but they will soon wring their hands".

Of course he was talking about one of the UK's more bizarre imperial ventures - the start of the *War of Jenkins' Ear* in 1739 - which may seem a long way from the subject of law office technology but bear with me...

Just as Walpole was worried about short-term euphoria blinding us to the realities of longer term problems, so getting carried away deciding what flavour vol-au-vents to serve at *that* New Year's Eve Party should not distract us from life in the year 2000.

In particular, how is your computer going to deal with the date? This may seem a dumb question to ask until you consider most computers use the DD/MM/YY format, thus today's date would appear as 11/12/95. But while

➔ 31/12/95 will change at the stroke of midnight into 01/01/96 without causing any software headaches, it will be a different story in four years time when 31/12/99 tries to shift to 01/01/00.

For example, if you try to run a report comparing the current year's billing figures with those of the proceeding 12 months, your system is likely to suffer the silicon equivalent of a nervous breakdown. This is because in its little mind the year "00" does not *follow* "99" but actually *precedes* the year "01" - as in 1901 - which is no use to man nor beast as no-one had computers then.

Don't despair, your existing accounts systems supplier should be aware of this problem. In fact a number of suppliers are already issuing upgrades to users to ensure their software can cope with the change of century.

But if they are not - start kicking them now, else New Year's Day in four years time will not be a happy affair. ☐

IN THE NEXT EDITION

- Electronic publishing - the latest titles on CD-Rom and the technology to allow practice-wide access to CDs.
- The Apple of their eye - we look at some of the legal applications software available for Macintosh users.
- Plus comprehensive 1996 diary of legal technology events.

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