
CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

INSIDER

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

IN THIS EDITION...

• Is voice mail now affordable... 3

• "Computerise or die." Ian Walker talks about case management... 4

• Unix on a laptop, US lawyers say why it can make sense... 6

CHANCERY LANE TO ACT

Sources report the Law Society in London is finalising a new "more proactive" strategy to help members select and acquire computer technology. More details in the next edition.

LAW FIRM IN INTERNET FIRST

As more and more lawyers focus their attention on the Internet as a way of marketing their practices, a firm in London's New Bond Street has taken the process one step further.

Thanks to sponsorship by the Internet Services Group of Jeffrey Green Russell (which includes a major Internet service provider among its clients) the Ernest Bevin School in South London has become the first state school in the UK to establish its own site on the Internet's World Wide Web (WWW) pages.

Although the school - which has been teaching computer studies since the early 1980s - plans in due course to take over the development of its own pages, the current sponsorship deal takes the form of both financial assistance with the set-up and running costs, as well as technical help on the creation of the Web site at <http://www.potomac.com/JGR/ernestbevin/>

In the autumn of 1994 Jeffrey Green Russell was the first solicitors practice in the UK to establish its own WWW site and the firm believes the Ernest Bevin project represents another 'first' in terms of legal sponsorship.

Commenting on why the Internet Services Group agreed to sponsor the school, senior partner Mr Clive Whitfield-Jones said: "The firm has always had a strong commitment to human resources development and technology. As a society we are moving into a digital era and Internet access will open up new opportunities to the school's pupils." □

RAM RAIDING BECOMING AN EPIDEMIC

In a new report, the Association of British Insurers (ABI) suggests the overall impact of computer crime, including the theft - or 'filleting' - of valuable components such as memory and processor chips - may be costing British businesses as much as five times more than originally thought.

According to the ABI, during 1995 insurance claims relating to computer theft came to just over £200million. However when other uninsured losses such as lost business opportunities and reduced customer service are taken into account, the true cost to industry is estimated to be much higher - perhaps totalling as much as £1billion a year.

The ABI goes on to say that despite an easing in chip shortages, far from being on the wane, computer thefts are increasing faster than any other type of crime. ABI deputy director general Tony Baker also warns that "constant technological changes and increasing demand for computer equipment mean that this crime will continue to rise unless businesses urgently review their security precautions and upgrade them if necessary."

The ABI believes one problem is many organisations "simply do not realise how attractive their equipment is to thieves and under-estimate the devastating impact which its loss can have on the business." The ABI has commenced a campaign to alert business to the risks and suggest ways hardware suppliers can make their products more secure.

Meanwhile **LTi** sources report a 'top 40' City of London firm in the Fleet Street area is among the latest legal practices to have been raided. □

PPS TO REVIVE MAC-LAW

Macintosh legal software specialists Professional Productivity Solutions managing director Nicholas McFarlane Watts (incidentally a practising solicitor) is to revive the MacLaw association for lawyers and legal academics interested in exchanging news and views about the use of the Apple Mac. Anyone interested should call ☎ 01865-201801.

☞ Meanwhile speculation continues to surround the future of Apple Computer, the company that developed the Macintosh system. Latest reports suggest Apple's Silicon Valley neighbour Sun Microsystems is now actively involved in take-over negotiations.

LASERFORM CONFIRMS KESTREL DEAL

Electronic legal forms specialist Laserform Law has now released further details of its acquisition of the Kestrel Solicitors Accounts software package from the David Salway/Graham Irwin partnership (☞ see Issue No 6 for initial report).

The package will continue to be available in DOS and Windows versions and has now been amended so as to be compatible with Microsoft's Access database. It is capable of handling up to 99 fee earners and virtually unlimited clients and matters, as well as offering full office accounting, including bank reconciliation and client accounting, including interest calculation.

The product's pricing has been changed, with a new entry-level price of £650 (down from £750) for a single-user PC, followed by £999 for a 5 user licence, £1499 for a 10 user licence and thereafter £400 for each additional 5 user licence up to a maximum of 50 users.

Manual time recording via a timesheet is included in the base price however on-line time recording is available at an extra cost of £50 per user. And, free demonstration disks are available from Laserform Law (☎ 01565-755154).

Turning to the future, a full 32 bit Windows 95 version of Kestrel is under development, as is the full integration of Kestrel with Microsoft's Office and Novell's PerfectOffice suites. The suites integration should be available April. ☐

MUST BE DOING IT RIGHT

"We must be doing something right, after two years, we are still in business and still winning new orders," is how Hine Stonehouse & Barrington partner David Stonehouse describes his experiences with Law Systems Ltd (☎ 01326-317529), the Falmouth-based software house he set up to develop and market ➤

➤ the Probate Plus package for handling the accounting side of probate and the administration of estates.

Since the software was launched in January 1994, it has been installed in nearly 50 firms, varying in size from sole practitioners to larger City of London firms. One of the latest orders came from Simmons & Simmons, while Nick Buckman of Kingsley Napley and a founder member of the Society for Trust & Estate Practitioners (STEP) is another keen user.

David Stonehouse, who also uses the software in his own practice, says it is particularly satisfying to see that it is primarily fee earners who use Probate Plus.

Currently only available on DOS, Law Systems are working on a Windows upgrade to Probate Plus based on Delphi and a Borland Paradox database. A release date is not yet available but Stonehouse plans to offer the Windows version as a free upgrade to Probate Plus users on an annual maintenance contract. In the meantime free demonstration disks of the DOS product are available. ☐

BAR SYSTEM UPGRADE

Following a change in Crown Prosecution Service rules, whereby barristers instructed by the CPS are now required to submit lists of outstanding fees for payment rather than use the traditional fee note, Applied Computer Expertise (☎ 0171-404 5577), the leading supplier of chambers' administration software, has developed an enhancement to its Infinity system to automate this task. Case names, reference numbers and other details can now be abstracted from Infinity's files to produce a report tailored to meet CPS requirements.

One of the first sets to try the new program was Furnival Chambers in Holborn, where according to senior clerk John Gutteridge: "Many hours have been saved in not having to manually compile the required data, which can now be made available in minutes and the list updated each time the report is done." ☐

VOICE MAIL - NOW AFFORDABLE TECHNOLOGY ?

Although the concept of voice mail - arguably a rather grandiose name for what in effect is a personalised telephone answering machine - has been around for a number of years, the potentially enormous capital outlay (one set of barristers' chambers in the Temple paid over £1400 per handset) has not surprisingly hindered its acceptance. However Cheshire-based Call Catchers believe they have devised an approach that makes the technology more commercially attractive...

Just as high capital costs deterred the first generation of computer users from buying their own systems and turned them towards using bureau services instead, so Sirius Voice Systems - the company behind the CallCatchers service - is effectively offering voice mail on a bureau basis.

The basic service comprises a call diversion system, so that when the subscriber's main telephone number is busy, unanswered or unattended, the caller is automatically diverted to the Call Catchers service and offered a choice of up to 10 separate mailboxes in which messages can be left.

As each mailbox is in effect a separate answering machine, there is considerable scope for customising the messages callers hear so that, for example, every fee earner could leave different messages and instructions, depending upon whether they were just out of the office for a few days or away on holiday for two weeks etc.

A typical scenario would therefore be that a caller is greeted by a general message to the effect they are connected to XYZ & Co's voice mail system and that if they would like to leave a message for Mr X press key 1 on their telephone, for Mrs Y press key 2 and so on.

Clearly such a system is not going to be appropriate for all firms or legal

departments. However for some smaller practices, it could well be a cost effective way of providing a round the clock, 365 days a year switchboard service.

Also, as one of the options is to have a dedicated CallCatchers number, this could be an attractive option for sole practitioners or criminal lawyers who don't want to give clients their home numbers for out of hours calls.

☞ **Technical Note...** Although there are minor set-up charges, the basic CallCatchers service costs from as little as £4.99 a month. The service can also be set up in such a way that subscribers can either call the service to collect messages or have CallCatchers call them periodically. For details call the 24 hour information line (☎ 01625-862000) or check the Internet site at <http://www.sirius.co.uk> ☐

NEW APPRAISAL SYSTEM

US software house Austin-Hayne has just launched a UK version of its Employee Appraiser software, which is designed to cut the time it takes to write-up staff performance appraisals.

It does this through a number of techniques including: a precedent library of 600 appropriate - but user editable - phrases and a "manager's notebook" which can be used to record important events throughout the evaluation period.

Reflecting the product's origins in the land of political correctness, there is even a "language scan" facility to highlight the use of potentially damaging phrases in an appraisal.

Employee Appraiser can import existing appraisal forms using Rich Text Format file exchange and runs on all 486 Windows PCs, as well as most PC network architecture. (There is also a US-based Mac version.) The retail price is £99 (inc VAT) and for sales enquiries contact either of Austin-Hayne's UK distributors Amanda House at **Softline** (☎ 0181-401 1234) or Kumar Mehta at **Technomatic** (☎ 0181-205 0176). ☐

RECORD RESULTS FOR DEC

After a traumatic couple of years, which saw drastic restructuring on a global basis, the Digital Equipment Corporation has signalled a return to financial health by reporting record quarterly revenues and strong profit growth. Digital say a key factor has been the growing demand for its high performance Alpha systems.

WINFAX PRO FOR 95

The Delrina Corporation (☎ 0181-207 3163) has launched a WinFAX PRO 7.0. a Windows 95 compatible version of its popular send and receive PC fax software. It has an RRP of £99 but users of earlier versions of WinFAX can upgrade for only £35.

RJW TECHNICAL NOTE

Russell Jones & Walker use case management and litigation support software written and supported by Alternative Team (☎ 0171-359 3595). The work types covered include trade union personal injuries, medical negligence and industrial deafness. Alternative Team developed the systems using DPS from MCS (☎ 0181-882 8811). RJW also uses a number of "off the shelf" DPS applications.

Starting with a 12 month pilot project in 1993, the use of DPS has been expanded from 13 users in one office to a total of 160 users in the firm's London, Leeds, Bristol, Birmingham and Manchester offices.

BETTER GET TECHNOLOGY - OR DIE

Much has been written about the technical aspects of computerised case management - but what about the business issues for firms using such systems? Recently Ian Walker, a senior litigation partner at Russell Jones & Walker, spoke to L*Ti* about the way the firm's Personal Injuries Department tackled the subject, especially as it has one of the largest plaintiff, trade union, medical negligence PI caseloads in the country. (There are also commercial, employment and criminal law departments - the last named acting for Larry Trachtenberg in the recent Maxwell trial.)

"The concept of having large numbers of highly trained, highly paid lawyers carrying out personal injuries work has gone," says Walker. "There is a financial squeeze on and at the end of the day you have to accept you are unlikely to be paid an economic rate. The only way to survive commercially is to rely heavily on legal assistants and junior staff. But, this in turn means you must have standard procedures for them to follow and be able to adequately supervise and direct them.

"This is where computers will assist you in being better organised. You can put all your lists of contacts and experts on the system. You can create diary reminders and warnings of pending activities - a key element as the need to strictly follow timetables is becoming increasingly important in civil litigation. And you can build precedent libraries of documents and procedures for everyone to follow and make use of."

Walker admits he is not a 'techie' and does not understand how computers work. Nevertheless he recognises office automation has a number of inherent benefits: "Humans are fallible, they forget things but computers don't. They also don't take lunch, go on holiday or fall sick. It is the equivalent of having two ▶

▶ people sitting in an office all day making and amending entries in an enormous diary."

Ian Walker used to sit on the Lord Chancellor's ITAC (Information Technology and the Courts) committee and has little doubt the Judiciary is coming to grips with computing. He personally believes you cannot run a big case without some form of document tracking/case management system and knows some judges take the view that if law firms don't have the technology, they should not be doing litigation work.

This may seem an extreme view but Walker has little doubt we are moving into a situation in which "better get technology or die".

"Solicitors," he says, "must firstly realise what IT can do for them - for example when we installed our current litigation support system we saw the output of our secretaries immediately increase by 25 percent. And, secondly, they must appreciate that if they are using manual methods and are up against firms with technology, they are not going to be able to compete."

He also takes the bullish attitude that instead of waiting for the economy to recover before investing in IT, firms should do it now so they are in a position to take advantage of opportunities immediately they arise. In other words they will actually be on the bandwagon when it starts rolling and are not left chasing behind trying to jump on.

As for the expense, he recognises you cannot just keep writing cheques for IT and that somehow firms must be able to cost-justify their investments. But, as he points out, with civil litigation rules becoming increasingly stringent (such as the new rules for striking out an action if you do not apply for a trial date) and every slip causing indemnity premiums to go up, on these grounds alone computerisation can probably save money!

However although pro-IT, Ian Walker does add a note of caution to the effect solicitors must ...continued on page 5 ▶

NO TRAFFIC HOLD UPS IN PRESTON

As part of an upgrade of IT facilities, the Preston firm of Whittle Robinson has gone 'live' with a new workflow system to handle road traffic cases...

"As a result of rapid expansion over the past five years, we had grown to the limit of what our old system could handle. And we also wanted to move to a firm-wide wordprocessing, workflow and file management system that could draw client and accounts information from a general database," said Whittle Robinson systems manager Joanna Backhouse.

The firm's solution was therefore to replace its old AIM One-2-Five accounts package with the new AIM Evolution practice management and integrated workflow system. This was introduced in stages throughout 1995 and along with more conventional applications, such as residential conveyancing, Whittle Robinson also installed the 'Evolution Road Traffic Accident Workflow procedure' from AIM Professional (☎ 01482-326971).

Initially this will be used to handle claims not involving injury and while only having gone 'live' in October, Duncan Stackhouse, the fee earner responsible for its implementation is suitably impressed. "Despite its ability to produce documents automatically, this system does not generate large volumes of meaningless paper work. The individual user has full control over the system and the material produced by it which ensures that it operates to the client's benefit at all times," said Stackhouse. □

STICKING FIRM

After a two year review of the options available to it, City of London firm Druces & Attlee has decided to stay with **Norwel Computer Services** (☎ 0161-945 3511) as the supplier of its next generation of administration systems and Windows support applications for fee earners. Finance partner Charles Attlee said an ➔

➔ inter-departmental review group felt that Norwel alone could deliver a full suite of software tools they would be happy to work with. □

NEW VOICE RECOGNITION COURSES

Kaye Tesler & Co partner Michael Kaye is about to begin a new series of lectures on the ways solicitors can effectively use voice recognition systems. The courses are based on his own firm's extensive experiences with the technology and have proved very popular. The next lectures take place on 14th & 15th February at the Great Eastern Hotel, which is next to London's Liverpool Street Station, with sessions commencing at 10.30am and 2.00pm on both days. Two more are planned for 7th March at the same location. For details either call ☎ 0181-809 6756 or email Michael D. Kaye via LINK. □

TECHNOLOGY OR DIE

➔ *continued from page 4...* ensure the systems they buy are sufficiently flexible to work the way they want them to do, rather than impose new procedures on the firm.

"It is quite apparent the way we handle litigation, based on our long experience, is different from the way other firms work and therefore it was essential to have a system that could readily be customised and adapted. Another problem with a lot of case management systems is the IT suppliers do not themselves have a good enough legal background.

"They seem to start from a belief you can predict at the outset how a case will evolve in the future and set the stages to be followed. But litigation is just not that predictable. If you need to implement new procedures, the system must allow you the freedom to do so. We feel we approached IT best by starting with how we work and what we do - rather than picking the sexiest looking all-singing, all-dancing system." □

EDIA NOW ECA

With the Internet creating increasing interest in electronic commerce, the UK's old EDI Association has widened the scope of its activities and reconstituted itself as the Electronic Commerce Association. The ECA has also taken over many of SITPRO's responsibilities. For further details check <http://www.eca.org.uk>

TIME RECORDING ON '95

Soho-based media lawyers Schilling & Lom are currently running a new version of the Quantime screen based time recording system from Applied Computer Expertise under Windows 95.

TADPOLE TECHNICAL NOTE

Hale & Dorr use the SPARCbook 3GX featuring user upgradable SIMM memory from 16-128MB; removable 340MB, 520MB, 810MB or 1.2GB SCSI-2 hard drives; PCMCIA slots supporting two Type I/II or one Type III device; built-in ISDN and 14.4K data/fax modem; on-board Ethernet, SCSI-2 plus one parallel and two serial ports.

☞ Tadpole Technology (☎ 01223-428200) suggest £9,200 as the UK list price for a SPARCbook 3GX configured with 16MB RAM and a 520MB hard drive bundled with the Solaris operating environment and Tadpole's NCE.

UNIX ON A LAPTOP ?

Although the idea of Unix in the legal back office is not new and growing numbers of firms are now equipping fee earners with laptop computers, from Boston in New England comes the following report about the 250-attorney legal practice of Hale & Dorr, which has been equipping lawyers in its corporate and litigation departments with laptops running Unix...

The technology platform Hale & Dorr has chosen is Tadpole Technology's workstation-class SPARCbook range of notebook computers which, according to director of computer services Robert Womack, means that partners "have full access to all files at all times" while the firm benefits from "the ability to ensure all these files are automatically refreshed".

By comparison, Mr Womack believes standard PC based laptops suffer from the drawback that lawyers on the road can only take subsets of information with them, so consequently version control between files held centrally and those in use locally can get out of synch.

The key to all this is Tadpole's NCE (notebook computing environment) system. This is a file synchronisation feature that enables automatic updating of files, databases and calendars between those on a remote machine and those on the server, so as to ensure all users with access to a file are always working with the latest version of it.

The use of the SPARCbooks has been further enhanced by supplying Hale & Dorr's litigation department staff with portable imaging systems. This means that while visiting a client to discuss a particular case, they can collect, scan and store documents directly into the firm's database.

Mr Womack says this combination of "organisation and mobility" has proved very useful as it enables the firm's attorneys to efficiently prepare clients for depositions and court appearances ➔

➔ without the clients needing to leave their own offices. By attaching the SPARCbook to an external monitor or overhead VGA display, attorneys and clients can also be provided with what Mr Womack describes as a large screen "war room" environment in which to prepare the overall case strategy.

"The challenge here is that litigation lawyers are often faced with volumes of material which they must condense to a usable form, both for themselves and for the client. The SPARCbook allows us to do that in a highly mobile environment. It's truly a remote office in a notebook," said Mr Womack.

As an example of this ability, Mr Womack cites one case in which witnesses from a high technology client required preparation before testifying in a Federal Communications Commission matter. Rather than sending five boxes of files and multiple attorneys to the client site to prepare the witness, Hale & Dorr was able to send one attorney with one SPARCbook containing several highly organised files.

"With the SPARCbook accessing our database, we can take a huge chunk of information and work it into a manageable chunk on a portable platform. This is primarily why we have had a very good success using the SPARCbook in litigation matters," said Mr Womack. "We're able to go into the field with a SPARCbook and an imaging system to work with the client in real time to develop depositions and prepare the client for the rigours of the trial process better than we could through any alternative means.

"The attorney and the SPARCbook are it - we don't need to have the client come here when we can do anything and everything we need to in the client's office. This equates to getting the best results for the client in a way that is efficient for their time and ours," concludes Mr Womack. "It is not enough to give our lawyers something that works well. The system also has to benefit our clients in the form of a more efficient operation." □

SONY LAUNCH NEW VIDEOCONFERENCE SYSTEM

Sony's Broadcast & Professional division has just launched what it describes as its next generation of video conferencing system. And, despite being a 'rollabout' model, it could give PC-based systems a run for their money...

Called the Trinicom 5000, the new system complies with all the latest ITU-T recommendations, including the H.320 and H.261 standards. ☞ This means the Trinicom will be able to communicate with other vendors' models which are also ITU-T standards compliant and so overcome the compatibility problems that used to arise when anyone wanted to hold a video conference linking different manufacturers' systems.

To-date the most common video conferencing application has been the *intra-company* meeting. For example one of the biggest law firm users of Sony video conferencing is Freshfields, who use the technology to hold face-to-face meetings between their London and international office staff. However Sony say the market has now reached a "critical mass" and that *inter-company* communications "will shortly assume as much importance as intra-company meetings". Hence the new emphasis on standards.

Although **Sony Broadcast & Professional** (☎ 01932-816000) plan to launch their own PC-based system later this year, another reason why they are still backing rollabout systems (the name stems from the fact the original models were on trolleys that could be rolled from room to room) rather than 'personal' or desktop systems (such as Intel's Pro-Share) is to be able to cater for another growing trend: the multiway conference.

Whereas the original demand for video conferences stemmed from a need for point-to-point communications, Sony anticipate more and more organisations wanting to hold conferences with

☞ multiple sites. For this reason the 5000 has been designed to accept three ISDN2 lines, without need for additional external gadgetry, such as MCUs or multiplexers. From the user's point of view this manifests itself as a 'quartet' split-screen facility, so the unit simultaneously displays speakers at up to four locations (including the self picture).

☞ **Comment...** What Sony says makes a lot of sense but for video conferencing to really take off, we still need the price of ISDN lines to come down to a point where more firms would consider them. ☐

DEALING WITH THE TECHNOLOGY LEGACY

Next month sees the London Marriott Hotel hosting the 8th annual **Information Systems for Lawyers** conference. **LTi** asked this year's chairman Martin Telfer, the IT director of Masons, what was on the agenda...

"The ISFL Conference offers practical advice and real-life experiences as well as visions of the future for IT in legal practices. This year, we have recognised that very few firms are now starting with a 'clean sheet' and that there will be legacies to deal with.

"Similarly, we are addressing the very real problems of organisational and cultural change which must accompany any successful implementation of IT. Along with some introspective sessions, we are also this year delighted to have some customer' viewpoints - both external and internal customers.

"To sum up," says Telfer, "We have it all, what to do, why to do it, how to do it and what to watch out for. If you want to get the best out of your investment in IT - be there!"

☞ The Information Systems for Lawyers takes place at the London Marriott on 27th-28th February. Call **Centaur Conferences** on ☎ 0171-434 3711 for details. *And see leaflet enclosed with this edition.* ☐

R/KYV GOES WEST

Document management systems specialist Ymij's Ltd (☎ 0181-518 1414) has opened a new office in San Francisco to handle its growing volume of US business. "It seems a bit like coals to Newcastle," said Ymij's managing director Bill Canning, "but our move is based on requests from the market. Just about every month we are sending someone off to the US to work on a major piece of international litigation."

☞ **The next meeting of the R/KYV User Group will be held at the offices of Norton Rose in London on 16th February.**

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Alexis Byter's COMPUTER LORE

Probably the biggest problem with modern personal computer systems is that they are so damned good. Of course we still get the occasional glitches in processor chips and bugs in the software but compared with the early pioneering years of the Commodore Pet and machines of that ilk, we are living on a different planet.

But, the downside to all this is that there is a danger of us becoming complacent. Think about it. Back in Ye Bad Olde Days when you thought you were lucky to have 4K of RAM, hard disks were unheard of and a "security back-up routine" meant copying files onto audio cassette tapes, everybody fell over themselves to ensure their data files were safe. They had to, otherwise some quirk in the operating system or a flaw in some sub-standard magnetic media risked consigning a 58 page lease into the Black Hole that is Silicon Hell.

Today by comparison, when thanks to cheap, reliable uninterruptable power supplies, robust hardware, non-Mickey Mouse operating systems, well designed applications software, auto save facilities and a host of other advances in personal computing, the office can be falling down around your ears yet still the hard disk keeps on turning. It's a wonderful world alright but that is where ➔

➔ the problems start to arise for while 99 out of every 100 computing "near misses" are survivable, every so often the proverbial !!!! still hits the fan.

A couple of years ago it was terrorist bombs, today the big bogey is the RAM raider who plunders a firm's IT resources. To survive that kind of disaster you must have good security procedures and that means regular back-up runs to DAT, tape streamer or even just floppy disks for smaller practices.

Not only that but the data must be periodically verified to ensure it is actually usable. This is the origin of the old Grandfather/Father/Son rotation of disks, so you do not find you have been merrily backing up onto a defective disk

All of which brings us to the current gossip doing the rounds in the City of London about a certain firm that found its data files had not been properly verified for nine months - and then had to employ a team of typists who spent five weeks rekeying information. And they call that practice management! ☐

IN THE NEXT EDITION

- Who won this year's Society for Computers & Law Award - and why?
- Readers add their voices to the Windows 95 versus NT debate.
- The latest utilities for conducting legal business on the Internet.

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