
CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

INSIDER

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

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AIM TO USHER IN NEW ERA

The AIM Holdings Group has completed its reorganisation of the Scottish legal software supplier Usher Systems with the surprise news that the U-Legal and Unity systems are being dropped in favour of a Scottish version of AIM Professional's Evolution system.

When AIM acquired the assets and business of the former H G Usher company in May 1995, the original plan had been to continue development of the Unity/Version 6 system both to provide an upgrade path for users of Usher's earlier U-Legal Version 4 product and to market it throughout the UK in competition with the Group's other practice management system AIM Evolution.

However, according to AIM insiders, in the months that followed it became increasingly apparent there were problems with the Unity system, not least the fact that nearly all the sites had slightly different versions of the software.

The crunch came in December 1995 when, faced with the latest version of Unity (code-named Release 2) still failing to meet AIM's internal quality standards for performance and integrity, it was decided it would be in the best interests of both the company and users to pull the plug on any further development.

So, where does all this leave users of Usher products?

The Edinburgh office of Usher Systems (☎ 0131-339 8802) will continue to provide support for existing users (approximately 30 firms all based in Scotland) of the U-Legal accounts package. ➔

➔ The Unity system, which has just one Scottish user but 12 English firms using it, is to be replaced by the AIM Evolution product. AIM are confident English users will find Evolution a more powerful and advanced product than Unity.

As for Scotland, Usher's new Advanced Products Team will be working on Evolution to ensure its financial procedures are fully compatible with Scottish lawyers' professional requirements. The system will then be offered both as an upgrade option for U-Legal users, as well as being sold in its own right in competition with other Scottish legal suppliers, such as Pilgrim Systems. The team will also develop workflow applications for fee earners to cover the main areas of legal service provision under Scottish law.

The future of Usher Systems' two other products - the U-Bond package for bonded warehouses and the Litigate! litigation support and document imaging system - is secure although further development work on Litigate! will now be centred on Usher's London offices, so as to be closer to firms like Titmuss Sainer Dechert who are already using it. ☐

BUSINESS AS USUAL

Legal publishers Sweet & Maxwell were one of the companies whose South Quay Plaza offices were wrecked by the Docklands bomb on 9th February. The company has now relocated all staff, including the digital publishing team responsible for the CD-Rom version of the *White Book*, to offices at 100 Avenue Road, London NW3 3PF. A transfer system should ensure phone calls to existing numbers are answered but in case of difficulty phone ☎ 0171-393 7000. ☐

SOLICITEC & SOS CONFIRM JOINT VENTURE

Legal systems suppliers Solicitec and Solicitors Own Software (SOS) have signed a joint marketing and development agreement covering their respective case management and solicitors accounts systems.

According to Solicitec sales director Mark Woodward: "This agreement formalises a long standing relationship between the two companies. We have maintained complementary product development strategies for the last three years and our software now integrates so closely that it is in effect a single product.

"The development of modern Windows software to the level of sophistication now expected by our customers is very expensive. This agreement combines our resources and complementary expertise to provide a development team capable of making the best use of the emerging technologies."

☞ **Comment...** When John Wilde of AIM Professional first mooted the concept of collaboration between suppliers, to help limit R&D costs, his suggestion was initially greeted with incredulity. This latest deal between SOS and Solicitec suggests that other suppliers are now realising it can be in everyone's best interests to avoid reinventing the wheel.

In a related development, Solicitec (☎ 0113 278 7757) now offers full integration between its SolCase case management software and Novell's SoftSolutions document management system. □

NO BAR TO APPLICANTS

The Bar Council has commissioned a new disk-based electronic forms system to streamline law student applications to chambers. The Pupillage Applications Clearing House (PACH) system will be developed using Magic Software's (☎ 01344 303045) MAGIC toolset. □

POT CALLS KETTLE BLACK

The Association of Legal Technology Suppliers (ALTS) will be holding a special meeting next month (time and location to be announced) to finalise the organisation's new constitution and code of practice. Also on the agenda is a possible name change to the Legal Software Suppliers Association.

Association chairman John Meehan said members were incensed by the continuing flak they felt they were getting from the (English) Law Society. "Given the press reports about Chancery Lane's own problems with its REGIS computer system for issuing practising certificates, it seems increasingly like a case of the pot calling the kettle black," said Meehan. □

NEW CASH FLOW SYSTEM

Crosstree Systems is now shipping Release 3.1 of the ExpressPLAN & CASH budgeting and cash flow forecasting software package.

This is a Windows based application, already in use in 10 law firms around the UK, that is fully integrated with the Excel spreadsheet and can handle forecasting for up to 12 departments and 150 different expense types. The cost is £495 +VAT per user licence (£149 for existing user upgrades).

For larger firms (up to 24 departments and 300 expense types) Crosstree can offer Executive Planner & CashFlow, from £895 per user licence.

Crosstree Systems (☎ 0181 381 1923 or email: info@crosstree.com) can also provide a technical consultancy service for firms needing assistance setting up reports routines.

☞ **Technical Note...** Software house Executive Computer Systems, who developed both packages, reckon it takes about one hour to learn to use the systems. They also say the software can reduce the time it takes to produce budgets and forecasts by around 90%. □

UPGRADE TIME

The latest version of Linetime's accounts system - Version 2.00-2 of Practice II - has now been released. For upgrade information, call the accounts support team on ☎ 0113 250 0411.

QUALITY TIME

Legal systems supplier Timeslice (☎ 0171 231 0073) has been awarded the ISO 9001 (formerly BS 5750) and ✓ Tick-IT quality standards accreditation.

130 YEARS OF CASE LAW ON CD-ROM

As a result of a joint venture between the Incorporated Council of Law Reporting for England & Wales and electronic publishers Context Ltd, from this summer the full text of the entire 130 years of The Law Reports will be available on CD-Rom in an electronic format that can be accessed using the latest database research techniques.

Called the *electronic Law Reports* (or eLR) the new format has the makings of being the most exciting thing to have happened to The Law Reports since they first appeared in print in 1865. Today, a complete set runs to 753 volumes, occupies approximately 110 feet of shelf space and presents a time-consuming headache for anyone carrying out research. A complete set costs £17,500.

By comparison, the eLR series will occupy between three and four standard CD-Rom disks. It can be accessed over a network or downloaded onto a hard disk and carried on a laptop. And, it offers a full range of computerised research techniques, including hypertext tags, keyword and Boolean searching, case links and dynamic document linking (DDL).

Robin Williamson, the managing director of Context (☎ 0171 267 8989) says a key element in the project was to ensure the system could be used by non-computer literate lawyers as well as law librarians and other trained legal researchers.

To this end a major independent research project was carried out by the University of Warwick's Law Technology Centre and it was their findings that helped determine how law reports should be presented electronically on screen. The process culminated in Context devising a new graphical interface (code-named LAURA) for the eLR. (In the future it is also likely to replace the JUSTIS interface Context currently use with some of their other electronic legal publications.) ➔

➔ As well as getting the interface right, both Context and the Council of Law Reporting recognise the importance of ensuring the database was accurate. With this consideration in mind, during the next few weeks the electronic law reports will enter an extensive beta testing phase, with both the 480,000 pages of data and the interface software being put through their paces.

This phase is expected to last at least three months, with the eLR being ready for its formal launch this summer.

Context say the target audience will be larger law firms, the Bar, the Judiciary and law schools. In fact, as a result of pre-launch promotion, a number of orders have already been received.

As for the price? Along with all the other benefits of CD over books, the eLR concept also seems to make considerable commercial sense.

The entire archive set costs £10,000 for commercial users, £8000 for academic/non-profit organisation users and £5000 for personal users. (Multi-user network site licences are also available.)

In addition to the archive, there is an update service that will issue a new CD-Rom disk, containing not only new cases but a completely revised index for the whole series, every six months. This costs an additional 10% of the archive price pa. (Context can also supply an on-line update service for individual cases).

And, if this were not enough to tempt users, all firm orders received before 15th June 1996 are eligible for a 20% discount off the archive price. This would bring the price for a solicitors practice down to £8000 – a saving of £9500 on the cost of The Law Reports in conventional book form.

☞ **Technical Note...** The *minimum* recommended system is a 486DX2 50MHz processor, with 8Mb of RAM, Windows 3.x, a double speed CD-Rom drive and at least 100Mb of spare hard disk space. Although eLR is being tested under Windows 95, it is not a 32-bit application. ☐

PUBLISHER DIES

Anthony Nares, the managing director of Centaur Communications (who publish *The Lawyer*) was killed in an avalanche at Klosters last week. Mr Nares' publishing successes included the launches of *Marketing Week* and *Money Marketing*. More recently he was responsible for Centaur's acquisition of the Lawtel service.

COURT REPORTING GOES ONLINE

The Lord Chancellor's Department has awarded the official court reporting contracts for the Appeal Court and Central Criminal Court to Smith Bernal International (☎ 0171 404 1400) and their LiveNote computerised reporting service.

BUSINESS UP

TFB sales director Simon Hill reports that the company's technology business is "booming" with the legal division generating a turnover of £4 million in 1995 from sales to 102 firms. TFB's overall profit was £300,000 on a total turnover of £7 million.

TFB's Desktop Partner

TFB POLISH UP THEIR WINDOWS

In common with many other legal systems suppliers, Technology for Business (TFB) are now going the Windows plus graphical fee earner desktop route in their system development strategy. But, do TFB's new *Desktop Partner* and *Managing Partner* products have anything fresh to offer - or are they just more of the same?

At a first glance Desktop Partner certainly looks to be just another dinky icon driven on-screen time recording and accounts enquiry system for lawyers, and as such, it appears to provide little more than other products have been offering since they first appeared on the UK legal scene in 1992/93.

Similarly, you might dismiss Managing Partner as being merely A N Other database and case management system with a smart Windows front end.

Under the surface however, things do start to get more interesting, thanks to extensive integration work. Significantly, this is with both TFB's own applications and popular third-party office automation products. Additionally, because the systems have been developed in C++ they will run on Windows and Windows 95.

➔ The net result is two-fold. There is a seamless integration between the Desktop Partner screen on the fee earner's desk and the firm's central database and case management system. (Desktop Manager itself can be accessed through its own icon within Program Manager or through the toolbars in Microsoft Office and Perfect Office.)

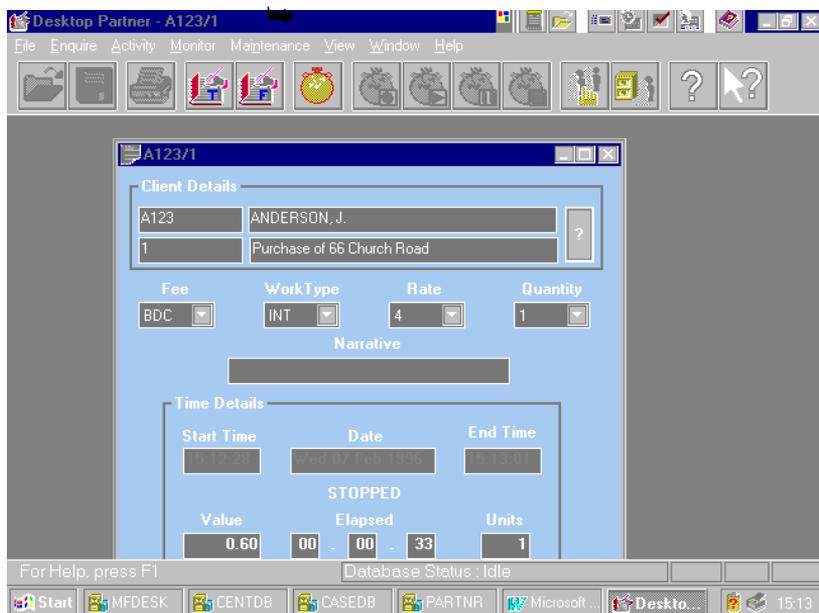
Secondly, the case management element can be fully integrated with both WordPerfect for Windows and MS Word (both V.6 for Windows 3.1 and V.7 for Windows 95). Similarly, any relevant diary dates can automatically be entered into either Novell GroupWise or Microsoft Schedule+ diary facilities.

☞ **Comment...** TFB sales director Simon Hill says he believes these attributes help the new systems stand out from the crowd as they take the integration of Windows, 4GL database, office automation and workflow technologies one step further than any other supplier in the UK legal systems market today.

Inevitably such a claim will be contested by TFB's commercial rivals - that is the nature of competition. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that in the six months since the latest version of Managing Partner was released, it has been purchased by over 30 firms.

In a related development, visitors to last year's Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition at the Barbican may recall TFB created a considerable stir on their stand with a demonstration of how the company's software applications could be integrated with Philips Dictation Systems' new "continuous" speech processing technology.

That was purely a demonstration system but since then TFB have been running a pilot project in conjunction with a large firm in the City of London to test the combination of desktop software and speech processing in a "live" legal practice environment. Based on this project, TFB will be making further product announcements later this spring. □



VIDESS HEADING DOWN EXPANSION PATH

Although West Yorkshire based legal systems suppliers Videss Ltd have been involved in the law office technology market since as long ago as 1977, the company openly admit that they have been remiss at promoting themselves.

As sales director Graham Anderson puts it: "A lot of our leads come from word-of-mouth recommendations and we have been so busy following these up that we have tended to leave marketing to a greater audience on the back burner.

"But, when we do go into a new area or demonstrate our systems at an exhibition, the response is always very positive. 'Where have you been?' firms ask, 'We have been looking for a system like your's for years,' they tell us."

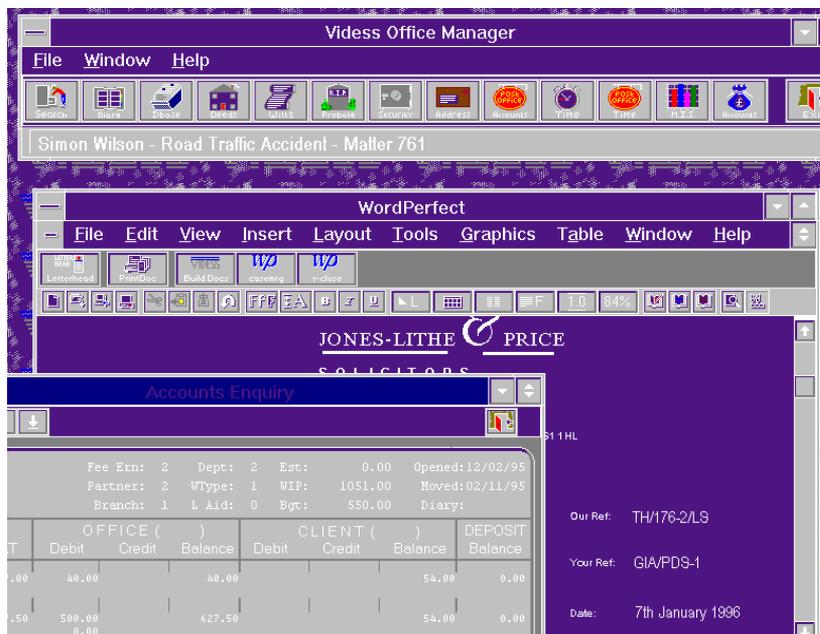
Anderson says Videss (☎ 01274 851577) will be raising their profile in 1996, one major development being the opening of a branch office in the south of England within the next few months.

The biggest boost to the company's confidence however is that all the development work is now complete on their "do anything, anywhere, anytime" *Legal Office* system.

Based on the Progress 4GL, the system has been designed to run on the widest possible range of hardware platforms, with both character based and GUI solutions being supported on a single system.

Anderson says this is essential to cater for the needs of firms that computerised relatively early and are unwilling, from the financial point of view, to replace all their dumb terminals and ageing 286 PCs with newer Windows hardware. (Along with Unix and most popular LANs, Videss also support Windows NT.)

Videss believe this strategy also makes sense for while "information providers" such as secretaries and accounts staff may be happy with character based screens, evidence suggests "information▶



▶ seekers" such as fee earners find it easier to work with a mouse. To this end Videss also ensure their networks are configured to support fee earners working out of the office with laptop computers. □

The Videss Legal Office system

NEW CODE FOR EVIDENCE

Following the 1995 Civil Evidence Act's change to the rules on the admission of computer records as evidence in civil proceedings the British Standards Institute has published PD0008, which is a code of practice for the admissibility of information stored on electronic document management systems. Copies of the Code cost £19.50 and can be ordered on ☎ 0181 996 7000.

PEACE DECLARED OVER CROWN COPYRIGHT

Legal publishers have welcomed the latest concessions by the Government in the ongoing dispute over Crown Copyright and the pending privatisation of HMSO.

In a reply to a Parliamentary Question, public service minister Roger Freeman said the existing concession whereby publishers can reproduce primary and secondary legislation in value added printed texts (such as law books) without prior permission or fee is now to be extended to electronic and microform publishing formats.

▶ **Comment...** So far so good but there remains the question of the copyright and charging policy for the Statute Law Database, a value-added electronic version of the whole Statute Book, which is now being prepared by the Statutory Publications Office. Policy on this will not be decided until 1997 but legal publishers are already lobbying for an open rather than exclusive licensing deal. □

HOW TO VOTE

Either cut out or photocopy the nomination form, fill in your entries for each category and return it to **LTi** by post or **DX**. You can also fax, phone or email in your entries.

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THE LOTTIES - A NEW AWARD FOR NEW TECHNOLOGY

The publishers of **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** in association with *In Brief*, the magazine for London's solicitors, are pleased to announce the launch of the *Lotties* - the 1996 Law Office Technology Innovation Awards.

The Awards are the UK's first readers' choice legal technology awards giving readers - the purchasers and users of law office systems - the opportunity to pick their favourite products, services and suppliers. As a result, the *Lotties* will accurately reflect what's hot - and what's not - in legal technology.

HOW DO THE LOTTIES WORK ?

The *Lotties* involve a two-stage selection process beginning with readers being invited to nominate one product, service or supplier etc for each of the eight categories listed below. (Don't worry, you don't have to make a nomination in every category if you don't want to.)

The closing date for nominations is the 18th April. In May both **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** and *In Brief* will publish a short list of the three most popular nominations in each category and then invite readers to vote for their favourites. The winners - all of them the readers' choice - will be announced in June.

CATEGORY

- 1. Law Office Technology Product of the Year** (any hardware product, software system or service, including bureaux, online systems & electronic publications.)
- 2. Best Legal Front Office Product** (any product, system or service that helps professional staff with *lawyering* and legal work.)
- 3. Best Legal Back Office Product** (any product, system or service to help in the administration and management of legal practices, including accounts & database systems.)
- 4. Best Law Office Automation Product** (any product, system or service to help run a legal practice, including WP software, video conferencing, speech recognition, dictation and disbursement monitoring systems.)
- 5. Law Office Technology Newcomer of the Year** (any new product, system, service, or supplier etc entering the UK market between 1st January 1995 and 31st January 1996.)
- 6. Quality of Service Award for Best Law Office Technology Supplier** (any supplier of hardware, software, services etc including providers of bureaux, online systems and electronic publications.)
- 7. Best Law Office Technology User Group**
- 8. Best Legal World Wide Web/Internet Site** (open to all *including* law firms.)

NOMINATION

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NOMINATED BY:

@work.co

This edition sees the start of a new regular section looking at the legal and marketing opportunities, as well as the technical developments and practice management issues, associated with the use of the Internet, online services and the World Wide Web by lawyers.

DTI MOUNT INFORMATION SOCIETY INITIATIVE

The Department of Trade & Industry has just launched a new awareness programme designed to encourage and promote greater use of electronic mail, the Internet, multimedia and other aspects of information and communications technologies by UK businesses.

Called the Information Society Initiative (or ISI), the programme could be described as the UK's belated answer to the Information Superhighway concept US vice-president Al Gore launched in America over three years ago. This earlier start probably helps explain why around 25% of business in the USA are currently regular users of email, compared with just 3% in the UK.

The ISI programme is scheduled to run for four years, from this spring until early in the year 2000 and, interestingly, is being specifically aimed at small to medium-sized businesses, including law firms, rather than mega-organisations who already have the technology.

Financial assistance will be available in the form of grants and awards to help "pump prime" innovative ventures. The DTI is providing around £35million of funding - details to be published later - and there is a promise of "many millions more available through European programmes".

Launching the initiative, the President of the Board of Trade Ian Lang said more and more businesses "are finding that their ability to make effective ➔

➔ use of information and communication technologies is crucial to their performance. The Information Society can transform the way you do business, making it more efficient, more effective and more profitable. It's a reality, not a pipe dream."

☞ London-based construction and IT lawyers Masons were one of the organisations singled out for praise at the launch.

"Understanding and exploiting new information and communications technologies will be vital if we are to have skilled workers and successful companies who can take on and beat the international competition. The DTI's Information Society Initiative provides a powerful framework for UK firms to achieve this and I urge them to discover it for themselves and follow the example of Masons," said Ian Lang.

John Bishop, Masons' senior partner, said the firm "are delighted to have been chosen as a case study to support this important initiative. It is very pleasing to receive national recognition for our innovative work on electronic communications, litigation support and know-how systems."

The ISI has a World Wide Web site at <http://www.isi.gov.uk> - the pages contain useful information about the proposed financial grant schemes. You can also obtain further information via email: info@isi.gov.uk and by phoning the infoline on ☎ 0345 15 2000. ☐

INTERNET EVENTS

The subject of the Internet crops up at two legal conferences this week...

☉ Clive Whitfield-Jones of Jeffrey Green Russell will talk about the Internet as a legal business tool at the **Information Systems for Lawyers** conference in London, 27th/28th February.

☉ IT consultant Delia Venables will be giving a paper on the Internet at the **ILCA's Law Office IT Awareness Day** on Wednesday 28th in Birmingham. ☐

HOT MONEY

Solicitor Nigel Morris-Cotterill has used the Internet to help publicise his new book *How not to be a money launderer*. As a result of publishing extracts on his WWW site, the first confirmed order for the book came in by email from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police College in Ottawa. The author can be contacted on ☎ 0956 701129 or via email: nigelmc@link.org

HOT ADVICE

Free legal advice published on the Internet by Scots criminal law firm Adams Criminal Defence is now one of the most popular sites visited by users of the Edinburgh Cyberia cafe. The site, at <http://www-edin.easynet.co.uk/adams/> features slick graphics, sound effects and over 50 pages of advice about police search powers etc.

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Alexis Byter's **COMPUTER LORE**

Technology standards are wonderful things. One moment they are enshrined on tablets of gold, then next thing you know they are in the dustbin.

For example it was not that long ago that the legal profession was obsessed with *Open Systems* standards, which for all practical purposes meant Unix with everything. (Yes, I know there are actually more commercial varieties of Unix than there are products made by Heinz but don't be picky.)

Indeed, I seem to recall software suppliers telling me at the 1990 Barbican Exhibition that "it was the year of Unix" and that in the future no-one would be buying anything else.

At the time hopping on the *Open Systems* band wagon probably made a lot of sense as some law firms were falling over themselves to buy Unix, in a bizarre example of a "Never mind the application or the functionality, lets just concentrate on the operating system" mindset.

I bet they now look back on some of the purchasing decisions they made in those days and laugh. Or, cry.

Funnily enough last week I met a salesman from one of these software companies who now reckons this year "is the last year anyone will be buying Unix". He believes we are now approaching a ➔

➔ Windows with everything future. And we probably are. Well at least until a new technology *standard* becomes flavour of the month in a couple of years' time.

Remember CP/M in the early 1980s? What price *network computers* replacing PCs in the late 1990s?

But probably the greatest drawback about standards is that there is never one around when you need it.

For example, have you ever tried connecting a laptop computer to a big VDU screen or some other kind of display unit, such as an OHP tablet or Barco projector? No matter how carefully you do your homework, you always end up with two incompatible connectors.

However, if you really want a nightmare on standards street, just try travelling abroad with a modem.

There is a company called Tele-Adapt (☎ 0181 421 4444) who currently make a range of 40 - yes forty - different adaptors which allow you to connect your laptop modem cable into the sockets of foreign phone networks.

Their catalogue makes interesting reading for while Poland and Russia (and many of the other states belonging to the former Soviet Union) share the same socket design, when visiting Germany, best advice is take a selection of five different adaptors with you. Remember that next time you find they've grabbed all the best chairs around the swimming pool. ☐

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