CHARLES CHRISTIAN's
LEGAL TECHNOLOGY iNSIDER

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

LAW SOCIETY SET FOR JUNE TECH LAUNCH

The English Law Society's much rumoured about – and delayed – foray into the legal software market now looks set for a public launch in June to coincide with the annual Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition at the Barbican in London.

Initial plans for Chancery Lane to actually sell and support software under a badging deal have now been dropped and instead there will be a range of relatively low cost software bundles, suitable for High Street practices, that have been approved by the Law Society and carry some form of *kite-mark* quality endorsement.

The intention is to provide smaller firms with a reliable starter pack of accounts and office automation (wordprocessing, spreadsheet, database etc) software retailing for around £1000. It was also hoped that it would be possible to offer prospects the choice between two Windows packages from the Microsoft Office stable and one based on Lotus SmartSuite/Notes. (Following its recent acquisition by Corel, there is now a possibility of a WordPerfect/Perfect Office offering as well.)

However, at the moment it appears that only one of the packages is sufficiently complete to commence Law Society performance monitoring in time for a June launch. This is a Microsoft Office (including Access database) plus Kestrel Accounts plus SoftSolutions document management and LaserForm electronic forms bundle. ➡

The fate of the second Microsoft Office package is unknown and **LTi** sources report that RT Business Systems in Bath, who are working on the Lotus Notes groupware product, have still to complete the legal accounting side of the project.

☞ **Comment...** One out of three ain't bad although given the Law Society's enthusiasm for open systems standards, it is hard to see how a proprietary technology like Notes fits into the picture.

Perhaps more worrying is the fact that Notes is increasingly being seen as a cul-de-sac technology. For example last week AT&T announced it was terminating all R&D on Notes software because it felt the future lay with *intranets*, which as well as being *open* are also far cheaper to set up and use.   ❒

TWO NEW OVERSEAS CONTENDERS

The UK legal market's fascination with overseas software suppliers seems to know no bounds, with the news that last week not one but two new products of foreign origin are now being marketed to the profession.

First off the mark was CMS OPEN. This is a US-based practice management system of modern design (relational database, C++ programming, fully Windows compatible etc) from CMS Data, a supplier probably better known in the UK for its PC-DOCS and DOCS OPEN document management software.

CMS Data first started sounding out English law firms nearly three years ago but although the CMS OPEN package generated considerable interest among some larger

IT WAS 50 YEARS AGO TODAY

Fifty years ago, in March 1946, IBM launched the 603 Calculator. Despite containing 18,000 valves, the 603 is now regarded as the world's first production line range of electronic computers.

MIL GET ISO 9002

Debt collection and case management software specialists Management Interface Ltd (✆ 01992 788288) has been awarded ISO 9002 quality standards accreditation. The consultancy side of the project was handled by BDO Stoy Hayward.

IBM UPDATE VOICE SYSTEM

IBM UK has released an upgrade to its VoiceType speech recognition system. Along with Windows 95 compatibility, Version 1.32 now includes improved text formatting and an email facility.

Although IBM (✆ 01705 492249) stress it is not intended to replace a full wordprocessing package, the upgrade permits users to perform some basic text formatting operations (changing fonts, underlining, emboldening, justification etc) while using the dictation window. The new email facility means users can transfer text direct from the dictation window to an email message.

☞ In a related development, Shakespeare SpeechWriter (✆ 01342 316456) has launched a new voice recognition product called Shakespeare NetSpeak which can speech activate most Windows and Windows 95 WWW browsers. The company says its capacity to hold up to 900 definable phrases or commands is enough to ensure you can send email and surf the Internet just by talking to your computer. The package costs £59 plus VAT and will run on a 486 PC with 8Mb of RAM and a 16-bit Creative Labs Sound Blaster/compatible sound card. ❒

OVERSEAS CONTENDERS

➡ *continued from front page...* London firms (Nabarro Nathanson were rumoured to be very enthusiastic) CMS held back because at that time it had not got a suitable sales and support operation in place in the UK.

This situation has now changed following the appointment of Essex-based distributors Quintec International as its sales outlet for CMS OPEN in the UK.

The second new system has a provenance to really raise eyebrows. Called Keystone, the product was developed in New Zealand by Solutions, an Auckland-based company. ➡

➡ Keystone is a multi-office, multi currency practice management system, written entirely in ORACLE products and running against the ORACLE V7 database. Although it only has a small user base in New Zealand, thanks to the activities of its UK outlet Keystone UK and general manager Colin Morris (a former Linklaters IT manager) the product is now starting to make an impression.

The IT director of a leading City of London firm described it to **LTi** in the following terms: "We like it's architecture, design and functionality, we like the company, and we're looking *very* hard at this product as we think it's head and shoulders above anything else we've seen. We understand the commercial risks but are taking steps to minimise these. Another top 20 firm is in a similar position, and several others have looked and are giving positive feedback."

☞ **Comment...** Just how many more of these overseas systems can the market take before supply exceeds demand? For example Elite have already won 17 sites in the UK – the latest to sign up being S J Berwin & Co and Radcliffes Crossman Block in London plus Wansbroughs Willey Hargrave in Bristol – leaving fewer and fewer prospects who are likely to be attracted by the two newcomers.

Of the two products, Keystone looks like being the one to watch whereas CMS Data may have missed the boat by not acting two years earlier, when Elite was not so entrenched.

CMS distributor Quintec may also find the market is not as attractive as it first thought because it creates a potential conflict of interest with other legal systems suppliers it already deals with in its capacity as a distributor of office automation products such as DOCS OPEN.

LTi understands one of the UK's largest home grown legal systems suppliers is reviewing its relationship as it sees the CMS OPEN deal as transforming Quintec from complementary distributor to commercial competitor. ❒

LINK SET FOR MAJOR FACE LIFT

The LINK legal information network is set for a major face-lift in May, when the current proprietary system is replaced by new technology that will offer benefits of one form or another to all of LINK's 7000 users. Called Link 96, the new system will be available in three versions:

☎Link 96 *Standard* is free of charge and broadly comparable with the current version of LINK however it will also offer an individual Internet email address (currently this is a chargeable extra) permitting users to send and receive messages to and from users of other email systems, such as CompuServe or Microsoft Exchange.

☎Link 96 *Professional* costs £100pa and along with all the features of the Standard version will also include World Wide Web browser software (but only for Windows or Windows 95 PCs) allowing full Net surfing capabilities. (Although note, this is only a *gateway* facility as Link remains a closed community. With the exception of email, you cannot access its services or discussion groups etc from the Internet.)

In addition, the *Professional* version will also offer access at local phone call rates. Regardless of the WWW angle, regular users of Link based outside of London may feel this feature alone is enough to cost justify the £100 charge. Incidentally, the majority of the services of Link will remain free – as they are today – of any additional online charges.

☎Link 96 *Corporate* costs from £750pa. While the new *Standard* and *Professional* versions are most likely to appeal to individual lawyers, the *Corporate* package is aimed at firms and sets of chambers.

Charges will be based on a sliding scale determined by the size of the organisation and for this subscribers ➡

➡ will get a corporate mailbox plus a copy of Link 96 *Professional* for every fee earner or barrister within that organisation. In common with the current version, it will still be possible to run Link 96 across a network and share a modem.

As the original version of LINK will be phased out, users should register their interest in the new system now by faxing for details on 0171 396 9300. ❑

READER OFFER... 25% OFF ALARM

Computer security, particularly the risk of RAM raiders stealing valuable internal components from PCs, is a subject we have all become familiar with. As a contribution to security, LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER has negotiated a special 25% reader discount off the price of the Barracuda alarm system.

The Barracuda is an easy to install light and motion sensitive device which sets off an ear piercing 120 dB siren if an unauthorised person tries to move an *armed* PC. In addition, if anyone tries to tamper with a PC, such as by opening it up to remove components, a spray of harmless but indelible dye is fired at the components, identifying them as stolen and making them virtually impossible to re-sell on the black market. (Because the alarm is password protected, it remains possible for authorised staff to move or open up a PC.)

The Barracuda normally retails for £79.95 + £5 p&p + VAT however it is available to **LTi** readers at the special discount price of £59.95 + £5 p&p + VAT.

☞ The Barracuda BAR0001 will fit in any standard DOS or Windows PC with a spare 8-bit expansion slot. An audible alarm-only version is available for £55.95 + £5 p&p + VAT. To order, call Mike Bazeley of Barracuda on ☎ 01234 713040 and ask for the Legal Technology Insider Barracuda special offer. ❑

WORKFLOW UPGRADE

Mercury Computing (☎ 01628 778222) has released an upgrade to its Windows-based InControl Legal workflow management software. The latest enhancements include a number of features designed to meet the needs of commercial conveyancers.

MBO FOR COURT TECH SPECIALIST

UK litigation and courtroom IT specialist Legal Technologies (☎ 0171 935 8242) has just completed an MBO from its US parent. Managing director Chris Baldwin says the move will "give the company greater autonomy and control over its activities in the UK". The company has also formed a "strategic alliance" with system house Transputec Ltd.

SOS IN BEDFORD ROW

Gregory Rowcliffe & Milners in London's Bedford Row has ordered a Windows based accounts and time recording system from Solicitors Own Software (✆ 01225 448664). The SOS system will run across a 40 PC network and the firm is also installing a new Solicitec case management system.

TIMMS LINK

Derbyshire law firm Timms, which has offices in Derby, Swadlincote and Burton-on-Trent, has installed new server and wide area network (WAN) technology to improve communications between the offices. The work was carried out by Linetime (✆ 0113 250 0020) who also supplied Timms with its core IT systems.

BEAUMONT HAVE ACID TEST FOR AIR ACCIDENTS

At the ILCA's recent IT Awareness Day in Birmingham, aviation insurance specialists Beaumont & Son stunned the audience with a chilling demonstration of the firm's ACID (Aviation Claims Incident Database) system.

The multimedia ACID system was developed inhouse under the auspices of communications manager Emma Farrant, with the objective of creating a comprehensive case file capable of holding all information relating to an air accident, including not just conventional text and graphics-based data but also audio clips taken from a black box recorder and video recordings taken from TV news reports.

Ms Farrant said the plan was to design a support system that could be taken on a laptop to meetings with underwriters and clients yet was straightforward enough to allow lawyers to concentrate on the law rather than the operation of their computers.

To this end ACID makes widespread use of graphical interfaces and *icons* dynamically linked to background data. For example, when the database is opened, it displays a seating plan of the aircraft involved in the incident, with seats colour coded to denote the fate of passengers. Clicking on a seat number enables the user to call up information relating to that passenger's claim for compensation.

☞ **Technical Note...** Apart from causing people to switch from air to boat or train for their holiday arrangements, one of the system's main claims to fame is that it is based on Macintosh technology although the underlying Claris FileMaker Pro 3.0 database will also run on Windows 95 and Windows NT platforms. Projects like this are presumably what the DTI had in mind when it launched the Multimedia Demonstrator Programme last month as part of its Information Society Initiative❒

NORWEL CONTINUE TO CONVERT

Norwich law firm Cozens-Hardy & Jewson is upgrading its Norwel-based IT systems, starting with the installation of new practice management software running on Data General's latest Intel based range of AViiON servers and following it up later this month with a network of PCs running Norwel's desktop system.

The firm, which has upgraded with Norwel Computer Services (✆ 0161 945 3511) three times in the past, expects to have completed the training and roll-out of the desktop system to 40 users by the end of 1996, with 20 more going on-line next year.

In a related development, Norwel is introducing a "buy back" scheme for existing users, to encourage them to move off older Wang and Data General MV proprietary hardware and onto a standard Unix platform. Sales director Alan Richardson says one benefit is it will allow the company to concentrate R&D and support resources rather than have to split it between different platforms. ❒

MORE SIGN WITH QUILL

Quill Computer Systems (✆ 0161 236 2910) report that sales for 1996 are running 30% up on previous years. Recent signings include Gittins McDonald in Wrexham, Pluck Andrew Hyde in Manchester, Mander Hadley in Coventry, Cloney & Croall in St Annes, McCarthy & Tilson in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Sherwood Dunham in Wellingborough.❒

WINDOW ON ELITE

Elite Information Systems (✆ 0171-330 3504) has completed implementation work on a new Windows-based client server version of its software. Special features include a data dictionary and a form designer, so users can design their own screens. The company has also increased the size of David Thorpe's team in the UK to include eight support staff.❒

HELP!

The technical section for buyers and users of legal IT, whether novice or advanced. If you need help with an IT problem or if you have views on a technology issue, advice or a hot tip you would like to share with readers, send it direct to **LTi** via post, fax, DX or email. The contact details are on the back page.

NETWARE VERSUS NT

In the latest twist in the 32-bit computing debate, a new market research study suggests that over the next 12 months Windows NT will increase its market share, primarily at the expense of Novell Netware.

According to a survey conducted by IFF Research on behalf of network software distributor Black Box Catalogue, in terms of the number of organisations using network operating systems, as of January 1996 the UK market was split: Windows NT - 27%, Netware 3.x - 62%, Netware 4.x - 23%.

IFF predict that over the next 12 months, NT will increase its share to 38%, Netware 4.x will also increase - to 36% but Netware 3.x will decline dramatically to a mere 20% share. Use of Lan Manager, SNA and Banyan Vines will also decline by around 60 percent. ❑

Q & A clinic

A Plymouth-based practice sent in the following question... "We are a small firm with 3 fee earners, and a wide span of work covering most things from family and conveyancing through to personal injuries and criminal.

Our three secretaries currently use WordPerfect 5.1 DOS on separate stand-alone PCs. We have a small accounts computer which satisfies current book-keeping needs but we are not at ➡

➡ present recording time on it. We are considering a case management system but we do not want to spend a lot of money. What are our options?"

Independent computer consultant Delia Venables replies... Case management packages are a lot harder to use and more expensive than might at first appear. For example they really do require a network to be in place, otherwise fee earners and secretaries will not know what each other is doing.

This in turn means fee earners need PCs of their own and must be fully trained to use the equipment. This will usually involve general wordprocessing skills as well as using the specific case management software purchased. And, they not only have to be willing to use the computer, they must also be keen.

The whole department, or firm, has to be willing to change working practices so the full benefits of the new equipment are felt. It is no use going on with conveyancing as before and omitting to tell the computer what replies have been received or questions asked.

If not made the centre of attention, a computer will just produce lists of tasks that have already been completed, which the fee earner will then call "rubbish" and toss in the bin! Many case management systems languish unloved and unused for precisely this reason.

For a genuinely small firm, it is probably better not to use *proper* case management at all but to develop the wordprocessing instead. Any WP software, including well loved DOS programs, can be set up with large stocks of precedents catalogued in some logical way. Then the fee-earner can just say "a contract type 3c for Mrs Jones, please, with the following special paragraphs added" and the job is efficiently carried out by the secretary.

In addition to developing the wordprocessing, a high priority for the firm should be to

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HOT TIP
One problem frequently encountered by users of electronic mail is that when messages are sent from one system to another, references to sums of money can become garbled as different systems interpret the £ sign in different ways. For example LTi has seen its £95 price reproduced as #95, Ù95 and even A395 from a GroupWise email message.

☞ **To have to write *UK Pounds Sterling* or similar after each sum is clearly impractical but there does now seem to be growing acceptance for the practice of using GBP as a prefix.**

THE LOTTIES

Nominations are already coming in for the Law Office Technology Awards. To enter, photocopy and complete the form that appeared on page 6 in Issue No.9 and return it to LTi by 18 April.

AND THE NOTTIES

LTi reader Trevor Coward, of Legal Accounting Services in north London, suggests the Lotties should have a category for Worst User Manual. He nominates the four photocopied pages supplied with the Law Society's *Expense of Time* calculation program, not least because the manual has not kept pace with the latest version of the software. Mr Coward also says the Law Society's help desk would be more useful if there was ever anyone there to deal with calls.

PRE-EMPTIVE VIRUS SCANNER

One problem with anti computer software virus (AV) protection programs is their ability to detect a virus depends on the author having prior knowledge of the virus' *signature* and loading it into the AV product's database, usually as a new release for which the user has to pay an upgrade fee.

But, on initial propagation all viruses are unknown and cannot be identified by a virus scanner. It is this period between propagation and identification where the problems can arise for PC users. One company that claims it has an answer is Second Sight UK (✆ 01865 821811 or email: ssl@easynet.co.uk) which has just launched what it calls a "generic" anti-virus product.

Called InVircible, the product has been commercially available in Australia and New Zealand for the last couple of years. It works on the basis of monitoring a PC's executable files and configuration parameters and – according to Second Sight – it treats any "suspicious" changes as evidence of possible viral activity, thus allowing the user to act immediately rather than having to wait for a specific AV cure to come along.

The InVircible software costs from £75 + VAT for a single user system and can also handle macro viruses, such as *Concept* which recently caused problems for some Word for Windows users.   ❑

PHONE DIRECTORY ON A NETWORK

TDS Marketing (✆ 0345 697630) who last year launched the TelePower Pro CD-Rom database of fax and phone numbers for 1.9 million UK businesses registered with BT (*see* **LTi** *Issue No.5, at p.7 for details*) has now launched a multi user version that will run on most popular PC local area networks. Prices start at £299 for a 10 user licence – licensing is on a *per seat* rather than *concurrent usage* basis.   ❑

JARGON BUSTING – EDM

Over the last five years the document image processing (DIP) and OCR (optical character recognition) scanning market has become increasingly sophisticated as suppliers have added litigation support plus case and document management facilities to their products.

Reflecting these changes – and also to help distinguish such systems from the more basic scanning plus electronic filing products from Canon and Kodak (which are in effect substitutes for microfilm) – we now have a new TLA (three letter acronym) to contend with, namely the electronic document management (or EDM) system.   ❑

PC PRICE WAR ON WAY ?

With manufacturers IBM, Compaq, Hewlett-Packard and Dell last week all cutting prices for PCs and servers by 20% to 29%, **LTi** predicts a price war on the way.   ❑

CASE MANAGEMENT

record time on the computer, assuming the software currently used can handle this facility.

For larger firms, with more money to invest, a network is the logical way to proceed. Then software such as DPS can provide an efficient way of carrying out the *standard* parts of the work efficiently, while leaving the tricky bits to be handled by more conventional (ie human) means.

Another approach is to ask the main accounts supplier if they can offer a case management software package.

The advantage here is it then becomes viable for information already entered onto the computer for bookkeeping purposes to be also used by fee earners for letters and documents. And, it also means that time recording information can be integrated with case management data to assist in the billing process. The disadvantage is that such systems can be relatively expensive to buy, as well as complicated to manage.   ❑

@work.co

All the latest news and developments on the use of the Internet, online services and the World Wide Web by lawyers and legal technology suppliers. Web users are welcome to create hyperlinks to the **LTi** home page at http://www.cloudnine .co.uk/cloudnine/

BT AND MICROSOFT REVAMP NET SERVICES

Both British Telecom and Microsoft are revamping their Internet offerings in an attempt to win larger shares of the UK consumer and small business markets.

The BT Internet service should start its commercial roll-out later this month and is intended as a no frills basic service. Pricing will be based on a one-off £20 registration fee and a flat subscription of £15 a month or £150 a year. (Prices are inclusive of VAT.) For this, users will get all relevant software, a personal email address and unlimited access to the Internet. Calls to the service will be charged separately at local rates.

☞ **Comment...** A possible fly in the ointment is the limited technical scope of the service. Subscribers will have to use an enhanced version of the Mosaic browser rather than the more popular Netscape and it will only be available on a Windows 3.1 platform.

BT's less than auspicious track record with previous online services – Telecom Gold, Teletex, Prestel, Network for Law – must also raise some doubts.

Meanwhile, from the first week of April, Microsoft is relaunching the Microsoft Network (MSN) as an "Internet online service" and dropping its previous proprietary status. Now renamed the MSN Club, the service will in effect be a members only self-contained community with its own unique content but with a ➡

➡ seamless link to the full Internet. Pricing is marginally cheaper than BT: unlimited access for £14.95 a month or £149.95 a year, with calls at local rates and no set-up charges. (The Internet link will be via Pipex.)

☞ **Technical Note...** Although also aimed at first-time Internet users, MSN will offer ISDN access, something not yet on the BT agenda. Another difference is MSN will not run on Windows 3.x but only on Windows 95. (But a Mac client will be available later this year.)

Along with MSN, Microsoft has also taken the opportunity to launch a whole raft of additional Internet products including: a Windows NT based Internet Information Server (the software can be downloaded free from http://www .microsoft.com/infoserv); a new version of Microsoft's Internet Explorer Web browser; add-on Internet "assistants" for Microsoft Office applications (so you can create and edit HTML documents using Microsoft Word): and a new version of Exchange linking Internet email to workgroup networks. ❑

NEW ON THE WEB

Two new WWW sites worth checking out both belong to legal technology suppliers...

☛Litigation and courtroom systems specialists Legal Technologies Ltd has a site at http://www.ltl.co.uk Although some parts are still under construction, this has the makings of being an ambitious site containing not only product and corporate information but also reports, discussion forums and details of free offers.

☛ US-based accounts and practice management supplier Elite Information Systems has a site at http://www. elite.bsis.com This includes an FTP bulletin board, user support facilities and extensive literature discussing how concepts such as *data warehousing* relate to the Elite system's design. ❑

CYBER SPELLING

INSO Corporation (✆ 0181 947 1122) has launched CyberSpell, an integrated spelling checker + dictionary designed to work inside Internet email packages. It is Netscape Navigator 2.0 compatible and can be bought direct from INSO. A 30 day trial version can be downloaded from http://www. inso. com

DOCUMENT MANAGER FOR WEB

Documentum Software Europe (✆ 0181 867 3000 or http://www. documentum.com) has launched its Accelera document management system for large scale Internet and Intranet sites. The system is compatible with standard Web browsers.

Alexis Byter's
COMPUTER LORE

I was at a conference last week where, surprise, surprise, the topic of the Internet was on the agenda. During the open forum session, however, a member of the audience raised the very interesting question of whether the Net's potential as a publishing system now threatened existing electronic publishing media such as CD-Rom.

Bearing in mind so many firms are now investing in CD-Rom hardware to take advantage of the growing volume of legal titles on CD, this is a pertinent question. Especially when *New Media* gurus like Nicholas Negroponte are describing CD-Rom as an "interim technology" soon to be replaced by online publishing systems. For example, in his book *Being Digital* he describes CD-Rom as "the Betamax of the 90s".

So, has the time come to toss our CD-Roms onto the bonfire of history? I think not. In fact if anything CD-Rom is only just emerging as a mainstream technology and its glory days are still to come.

Today a CD-Rom can hold about 600Mbytes of data – if you recall the story about the *electronic Law Reports* in the last edition, this is the equivalent of about 120,000 pages of law reporting. But, when the new *CD Extra* standard comes into more widespread use in a ➡

couple of years' time, storage capacities are likely to increase ten-fold. And then there are leading edge *techie* developments like the move from red to blue laser drives, which are expected to further increase storage capabilities.

Now consider what the Internet can offer instead. To download some 600Mbytes of data – even assuming you have the luxury of an ISDN line (which most people do not) – will take getting on for 20 hours. That is providing you can maintain the connection for that long.

But with CD-Rom – just pop in the disk and off you go!

Furthermore, CD-Rom drives are now becoming a standard feature, rather than an optional extra, on most PCs and are likely to stay so, as long as software applications remain so bloated. It is far simpler to load one CD than 10, 20, 30 or even 40 separate floppy disks.

The net result is whereas a few years ago electronic publishers had to give away CD-Rom drives to get anyone to buy their CD-Rom publications, today we are reaching a level of critical mass where CD-Roms are the norm rather than the exception.

This user base is not going to fade away and desert to the Internet overnight. In fact in 10 years' time I suspect we will still be using CD-Rom and in conjunction with not only the Internet but also conventional paper publications. ❐