
CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

INSIDER

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

IN THIS EDITION...

WordPerfect fills in some blanks... 2

LIX and ACE team up... 2

Mishcon de Reya to open up Internet access... 7

Does software have a life cycle? ... 8

PLUS... A MAJOR SURVEY OF LOW COST LEGAL ACCOUNTS SYSTEMS... 3, 4, 5 & 6

QUINTEC TO GO ALL OUT WITH CMS

Basildon-based Quintec International, a company until now probably best known as a distributor of American legal software utilities – such as Hot-Docs, CompareRite and Docs Open – will this Friday (26th April) make its bid for the big time with the formal UK launch of the CMS Open “financial and information management system” for law firms.

CMS Open also started life in the USA and since its debut in May 1995 has already gone live in 30 firms – including Wall Street giants Skadden, Arps whose 4000 end users are generating an average of 200,000 transactions a day. In addition, the system has either been ordered or is in the process of being implemented in a further 30 practices.

The system was developed by CMS Data Corporation, a player in the US legal software market since 1978 with its CLO mainframe and CLO2 Unix systems. CMS Open, however, has an interesting background in that the company originally planned to create a Windows front end for the Unix system but scrapped that project in favour of a Windows (C++) client/server solution.

As the product also incorporates a relational database (SyBase or SQL Server) and uses object oriented programming techniques, the net result is what Quintec managing director Andrew Lloyd Skinner reckons is one of the most advanced systems on the market. And, also one with a great future, with the next release scheduled to include the ➔

➔ Verity search engine as well as true 32-bit Windows NT/95 functionality.

CMS Open is based on what is termed a “hub”, around which can be added a range of modules covering most aspects of modern law firm diary, practice, financial and case management. These include many advance features, such as the ability to create reports using EIS-style “drill downs”. (Document management is handled by Docs Open, which comes from the same stable as CMS.)

Fee earners are also likely to be impressed by the icon-based Navigator file front end (a bit like Apple's At Ease) and the fact they can get to anywhere in the system from the Calendar screen.

Quintec's initial target market is the 200 largest London and regional law firms, which go down to 45 fee earners in size. But the system's scalability means it would still be an economic proposition for smaller firms – in the US it is used by a 15 fee earner firm.

☞ **Comment...** Quintec are already in negotiation with a number of London firms and hope to announce their first order within the next few weeks. But, the big issue here – and a cause of concern for some consultants – is not quality but whether Quintec has the resources to support CMS. Lloyd Skinner says “yes” and points to the fact Quintec are recruiting staff and CMS Data are committing resources so that by June there will be at least 8 staff in the UK working on CMS Open sales and support.

☞ CMS Open is launched at a half day seminar at the Law Society in London, starting 10.00am. For details call Mike Bailey of Quintec on ☎ 01268 270601. ☐

NORWEL TAKE A BATH
The 9 partner Bath firm of Withy King & Lee is installing a new practice management system from Norwel Computer Services (☎ 0161 945 3511). The deal includes a core Informix database plus Norwel's marketing module. The firm, which runs a 60+ user DOS PC network, currently has no plans to replace its DPS case management system.

STRIKE TO GO ON – AND ON
The strike by computer staff at the County Court Bulk Centre at Northampton has been extended by another fortnight until 7th May.

WORDPERFECT FILL IN THE BLANKS

The Corel Corporation has released further information about its plans for the future of its recently acquired WordPerfect wordprocessing business.

Along with the 32-bit Windows 95 versions of WordPerfect 7.0 and Corel Office/PerfectOffice (still scheduled for a UK launch in June although the price has yet to be announced and the name finalised) within the next couple of weeks the company will also begin shipping the Corel WordPerfect Suite.

This is basically WordPerfect 6.1 for Windows 3.1x on floppy disk plus various extra applications and utilities (including the Quattro Pro spreadsheet and Presentations packages) supplied on CD-ROM. (☞ Someone should tell Corel that most law firms don't have CD drives.)

It is a competitively priced bundle retailing for £225 (or £69 for an upgrade from an earlier version of WordPerfect) compared with nearer £240 (or £88 for an upgrade) for the Windows 3.1x version of Microsoft Word 6.0. A Windows 95 version of the WordPerfect Suite is scheduled for a May launch, as is a revamped version of the old Novell 16-bit PerfectOffice suite, now renamed Corel Office Professional for Windows 3.1x.

☞ **Comment...** The company has also removed some of the uncertainties surrounding non-Windows versions of WordPerfect by formally stating that the DOS product will continue to be supported with regular fixes and driver updates. This should be good news for the many firms still on a DOS platform.

In addition, WordPerfect will continue to be available on Unix although now only on Sun Solaris, Sun-OS, HP/UX, SCO Unix and IBM AIX platforms. This is rather fewer than the 20+ Unix variants once supported so some firms could find themselves out in the cold. Finally, a new Macintosh version will be released later in the year. ☐

L.A.B. CONSIDERING FORMS ON DISK

The Legal Aid Board has commenced a consultation exercise to determine the level of demand there is for legal aid forms and updates being published electronically on disk.

Although the LAB says it is committed to continuing to provide paper forms, the new proposals have met with a mixed response from legal aid lawyers.

One solicitor described it as "a cheek" as practitioners would be spending their time and using their paper to make the LAB's job easier.

While in a discussion taking place on a LINK conference, Welsh solicitor and occasional columnist for *The Times* Patrick Stevens suggested that because forms are changed so frequently "surely it is better to have them available on the Internet so they can be downloaded as and when needed. It means everyone can only use the current form and do not have cabinets full of redundant forms."

Readers who have not yet received a copy of the LAB consultation paper should contact Ann Lucas, I S Department, Legal Aid Board, 85 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8AA. ☐

ACE BUYS INTO LIX

Barristers software specialist Applied Computer Expertise (ACE) has acquired what managing director Rodney Voyce describes as a "major shareholding" in Legal Information eXchange Ltd, the company that developed the LIX document transfer service that is used by a number of barristers' chambers.

LIX also operates the FELIX messaging system used by High Court judges and the CL-LIX court listings service. According to Voyce, it was the court listings that initially attracted them to LIX as they realised that "together we could provide an increased quality of service to our customers and greater overall resources for the future development and support of our products". ☐

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

SPECIAL REPORT LOW COST SYSTEMS

SURVEY SHOWS LOW COST SYSTEMS SECTOR HEALTHIER THAN EVER

The survey of low cost legal accounts systems that is published exclusively in this edition of **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** shows that after several years in the doldrums, the budget end of the market has not merely recovered but is actually healthier than it has ever been in terms of the quality and choice of software available.

This is the fifth year the survey has been conducted and whereas in previous years the number of suppliers was in decline, 1996 has seen the number increase by nearly 50% from 16 to 23.

Not only are all last year's products still available - which is always comforting for prospective purchasers - but there has also been an influx of new systems and offerings from suppliers such as Curat Lex, Quill, Solace and SOS more traditionally associated with the bigger end of the market.

From the point of view of small firms with ambitions to grow, many of the systems listed in the survey must be potentially highly attractive as they are in effect cut-down, entry-level (or *Junior* or *Lite*) versions of accounts and practice management systems that are already in use in far larger practices.

On the otherhand, there is also no shortage of very cheap stand-alone systems suitable for sole practitioners who merely want to computerise their bookkeeping.

Compared with earlier years, low cost accounts systems are now more "open" in their architecture, in the sense that it is easier to integrate them with other software packages, including third party case management and office automation products.

This trend is likely to accelerate as more Windows 95 products supporting Microsoft DDE and OLE links start to ➔

➔ come on stream. Indeed the number of "true" Windows products available (as distinct from DOS applications running under Windows) at this end of the market tends to rebut the old complaint that too much legal software is over-priced and unsophisticated. □

SURVEY KEY

The survey results appearing on the next two pages should be self-explanatory however the following notes may be of assistance:

Price - The qualification for inclusion in this survey is for suppliers to have a legal accounts software system that retails for no more than £2000 for a single-user licence version.

To this must be added VAT plus the cost of hardware and any extras such as training and installation.

The survey also indicates if **Time Recording** is included with the core system or requires additional expenditure. We have indicated in **Bundles/Deals** where suppliers are running special offers on hardware and software.

Finally, with the Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition at the Barbican taking place in just over a month, the **Solex** column indicates if a listed supplier will have a stand there.

Although this presents a convenient opportunity to see a large number of suppliers in the same place at the same time, do bear in mind you will be severely taxing your powers of concentration if you hope to sit through over a dozen demonstrations of legal accounts systems in one session. Also, do note that a supplier's absence from or presence at the Barbican is primarily a matter of internal marketing policy and in no way impinges on the suitability of their software. Some love exhibitions, others hate them.

Pages 4 and 5 contain the survey listings while on page 6 we discuss some of the issues associated with the selection and purchase of low cost systems. □

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

One aspect of selecting a legal system that does not lend itself to quantification in a survey is the human factor. Is the supplier someone you feel you can work with - or do their staff drive you to despair? This is particularly important for small firms that cannot afford the luxury of IT professionals to sort out their problems for them.

➔ Don't base a purchasing decision on price alone. Satisfy yourself you are happy to enter a long term (at least 5 years) working relationship with the supplier.

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

SPECIAL REPORT LOW COST SYSTEMS

IS THERE A USER GROUP?

Why no mention of user groups, when one consideration that can often be a key factor for larger firms selecting new systems is whether there is an independent user group. The difficulty with smaller systems is that the firms and sole practitioners who buy them are usually too busy trying to earn a living to have the time or inclination to get involved with user groups.

☞ Thriving user groups are the exception rather than the rule in this sector, so don't be worried if there is not one associated with a prospective product or supplier.

SUPPLIER	☎	PRODUCT	PRICE	TIME RECORDING	SOLEX
Apex Software	0171 491 3660	ITALAX	£950	£350 extra	No
C-Law Solicitors Systems	01548 857775	C-Law Accounts	£449	£199 extra	Yes
Cognito Software Ltd	01363 775582	Cognito	£1500	Included	Yes
CPL Ltd	01758 613035	Accounts 2	£1100	£400 extra	No
Curat Lex Ltd	01423 359101	Sovereign Professional	£1500	Included	No
Edgebyte Computers Ltd	01253 899311	Lawbyte	£995	Included	No
Jackson Computer Solutions	0121 355 6789	Legal Ledger	£1375	Included	Yes
James Strachan & Co	0181 336 2700	Strongbox II	£595	Included	No
Laserform Law	01565 755154	Kestrel Solicitors Accounts	Dos £549 Win £799	Included	Yes
Legal Bureau Services	0181 778 7335	LawPak	£399	Included	No
IT Accounting	01803 856566	Cashier range, inc SP, 90 & 2000	£395 to £890	£250 extra	No
MSS Management Support Systems	01252 371121	AlphaLAW-Junior	£595	Included + bank recon & interest calculator	Yes
Perfect Software Ltd	0181 546 7656	Perfect Books 2	£575	£200 extra	Yes
Pracctice Ltd	01432 351041	Pracctice Integrated	£1495	Included + bill preparation and printing	Yes
Professional Productivity Solutions plc	01865 201801	PPS LegalCashier	£995	Extra	Yes
Professional Technology (UK) Ltd	01634 815517	Quaestor	from £598	From £399 extra	Yes
Quill Computer Systems Ltd	0161 236 2910	Laudit	£1500 + training	£750 extra plus £300 for 1 day mandatory training	Yes
Select Legal Systems Ltd	01482 644334	Select PMS Practice Management System	£2000	£790 extra	No
Solace Legal Systems	01780 64947	Solace Lite Accounts & Time Recording	£1895	Included	Yes
Solicitors Own Software Ltd	01225 448664	Practice Manager for Windows	£1500	£500 extra	Yes
System One	01730 267000	NOMOS	£1250	Included	No
Textstore Ltd	01403 257348 or 0860 709107	Solledger	£695	£195 extra	No
Videss Computer Systems	01274 851577	Videss Legal Office	£1995	£650 extra	Yes

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

SPECIAL REPORT LOW COST SYSTEMS

PLATFORM	INTEGRATION	BUNDLES/DEALS	UPGRADE PATH	COMMENTS
DOS, Novell, Windows	Yes	Discounts available on multiple copies of software	Yes - can handle firms of 20+ partner size	
DOS, Windows	No	Software can be purchased via instalment plan	Up to 19 fee earners can be catered for	
DOS, Windows	Can be linked to 3rd party (DPS) case management	Price quoted is for entry level sole practitioner version	Yes - can handle firms of 20+ partner size	Available through national dealer network
DOS	Can be linked to CPL case management	On negotiation	Multi-user version for larger firms	
DOS, Windows, Windows 95	Links to own case management plus MS Office etc	Software + Pentium PC, printer & MS Office for £3000	Larger firms can upgrade to Sovereign Law	Version available for Scottish market
DOS, Windows	Yes	Single user hardware and software bundle for £1845	Software is network ready	
Windows	Links to JCS case management + Word/WordPerfect	Software + training & support £1700 or £3250 inc hardware	Can migrate from single user to multiuser	
DOS	No	Software, 486 PC and printer for £1395	Up to 10 fee earners can be catered for	Up to 20 if run quarterly routine
DOS, Windows, Win/95 (32 bit Autumn 96)	Has Access-based practice database + DDE & OLE2 links	Introductory offer of 20% discount off normal price	1- 25 fee earners. Up to 50 with new SQL server version	Makes public debut at Barbican
DOS	No	No	Yes	
DOS	Can import/export data to and from 3rd party software	Software, 486 PC, printer and 1 day training from £1600	From Cashier through to Cashier 2000	
DOS, Windows 95 version Autumn 96	Via mailing list merge, Win 95 has full DDE, OLE2 links	Software + 1 year support + 1 day training for £995	AlphaLAW Net, cost of Junior deducted from price	
DOS	No	No	Up to 12 fee earners can be catered for	
DOS, Windows, Windows 95 & NT	Yes. Windows 95/NT version supports DDE/OLE2	Special deals for sole practitioners and on hardware	From stand alone to client/server version	
Windows, Apple Macintosh	Modular system, links to wide range of PPS software	PPS will launch a number of bundles at the Barbican	Modular system so firms can add more as budget allows	The entry level system includes 5 user licence
DOS	Yes + links to MicroCosts cost drafting	Yes. Note all prices based on number of matters on system	From Quaestor to Seriatim practice management	
DOS, Windows	Via database to case management & spreadsheets	Hardware, software (inc time recording) & training £4995	From Laudit to Quantum practice management	4 days accounts training @ £1200 mandatory
Unix to dumb terminals, DOS & Windows	Can be linked to own case management etc	Single user database accounts & time recording for £2500	Fully scalable from 1 to 50+ users	
DOS	Can integrate with Solace and Lawbase applications	Software, hardware, printer & modem for £4195	Can be upgraded to multiuser on Unix, NT, Novell etc	List price includes 3 days training
Windows, Windows 95	Yes, to Solicitec Solcase Windows case manager	No	Can be upgraded to multi-licence network version	SOS & Solicitec have close integration
DOS	Under development	No	Yes	
DOS	Under development	Software, 486 PC, printer and 1 day training from £1685	Market is 1 to 20 fee earners, largest Novell site has 45	
DOS, Windows, Unix	Yes, full integration with Videss legal applications	No	Yes - can handle firms of 20+ partner size	

HARDWARE UPGRADE TIP

For firms wanting to move to new software, nothing is more galling than to discover that perfectly good PC hardware bought new two or three years ago is now classed as obsolete. Further salt may be rubbed into the wound when it is found to be cheaper to buy a new Pentium than to try to upgrade an older 386 PC.

☞ If you have a good relationship with your hardware supplier - and your PCs are reasonably modern - one alternative may be to retain your keyboards, VDU monitors and mice and only replace the main processor & disk drive unit. It will save some money and make use of otherwise redundant kit.

☞ All facts & prices compiled from sources regarded as reliable and correct at the time of going to print.

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

SPECIAL REPORT LOW COST SYSTEMS

GETTING ADVICE

For smaller firms and sole practitioners on tight budgets, one of the problems they face is where to find good, impartial advice. Given the minimum you can expect to be charged by a computer consultant is £450 a day, this is a lot of money when you consider a complete system can be purchased for under £2000.

☞ The Law Societies of England & Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic now all run IT advisory services. Also worth approaching are organisations like the ILCA (☎ 0181 294 2887), the Institute of Legal Accountants of Ireland and the Society for Computers & Law (☎ 0117 923 7393).

SELECTION AND PURCHASE ISSUES – IT'S NOT ALWAYS BLACK AND WHITE

Investing in a new accounts system is a prospect many firms fear, not least because most lawyers know or have at least heard of someone who has suffered a computing "disaster". However as it became clear during the course of researching this survey, many of the concerns lawyers have are often the result of complex issues being portrayed as simple one dimensional "either or" decisions.

📍 **DOS or Windows ?** Windows is a new technology whereas DOS dates back at least 15 years. But does this mean DOS systems should automatically be dismissed as yesterday's technology?

DOS does lack many of the capabilities of Windows. On the otherhand, because it is a simpler system, there is less to go wrong. More to the point, if you only want a bookkeeping package to handle ledger work, as distinct from producing advanced management information, this can be displayed just as clearly on a character based system like DOS (or Unix) as it can on Windows.

It is also frequently claimed that legal cashiers find character based accounts systems quicker to use – which is presumably why a growing number of systems (including some of those listed in this survey) now offer users the choice between Windows and character based screens.

📍 **New or Old ?** In a similar vein, should an older system whose roots go back to the mid-1980s be regarded as inferior to a more recently developed product?

Clearly an older system will lack some of the functionality of later software. But, for smaller firms with more basic financial management requirements the key criteria is surely can it perform all the tasks required of it now rather ➡

➡ than does it have state of the art features which may never actually be used.

Also, older systems should be more "bug" free and have a reasonable number of current users who can be contacted for advice, assistance or the exchange of ideas, whereas with newer systems there is always a possibility that your firm will be the guinea pig.

📍 **Integration with other systems.** It is an attractive proposition to know that your accounts system is sufficiently "open" that it can be "seamlessly integrated" with other software used in legal applications, such as debt collection and case management.

But, does it actually matter? For example there are plenty of firms with thriving practices who survive quite happily without this degree of integration, either by having separate front and back office (ie accounts) systems or because their legal work does not readily lend itself to computerisation.

📍 **Upgrade Options.** From the survey it can be seen that while some systems are clearly single-user stand-alone products only suitable for the smallest firms, there are others that have the theoretical capability of growing with a firm all the way from the sole practitioner level through to a "Legal 500" sized practice. Once again purchasing decisions should be based on commercial realities rather than technological possibilities. Is the proposed new system capable of meeting your actual practice development plans for the next few years – as distinct from what might happen if you win the National Lottery.

As few legal practices operate in exactly the same way, one of the most heartening features of this survey is it reveals the very wide range of IT options now available to smaller law firms. Whether it is size, budgetary constraints, work type or expansion plans, there are low cost accounts systems available to meet the requirements of most firms today. ☐

@work.co

Web site operators are welcome to create hyperlink jumps to the **LTi** home page at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/cloudnine/>

M.A.I.D. WINS MISHCON'S HAND

Mishcon de Reya has announced it is switching to M.A.I.D. plc's Internet-based version of its Profound online business information database.

Mishcon de Reya has been trialing a Profound terminal in its library for over a year and, as a result of these experiences, has now decided the corporate data and financial information on the service is potentially so valuable that over the next three months Profound will be rolled out and made available to over 100 members of the firm's staff.

According to Kevin Gold, of Mishcon's Company/Commercial department: "Up-to-date information is as crucial to commercial law as the law itself. I used it twice in January and it gave us the edge to secure around £250,000-worth of new business. Profound has proven itself to be such a valuable business tool that we are rolling it out to every business manager's desk, so they can access the service directly on their PCs via the Internet. We cannot afford not to".

M.A.I.D. plc is on ☎ 0171 930 6900 or email larry_rees@maid-plc.com ☐

LATEST INTERNET SEMINARS

Three more Internet and the law-related seminars to note in your diaries:

☎ **26 April 1996 - Law and Cyberspace.** The IT Law Department of Wokingham solicitors Herrington & Carmichael hosts a free half-day seminar on Internet law on Friday. Call Carole Thomson on ☎ 01734 780017 or check <http://www.dreams.co.uk/hc/> for details.

☎ **12 June 1996 - The Future of Law.** The Society for Computers & Law's 1996 lecture this year features Richard Susskind and his talk will echo the theme of his forthcoming book *The Future of Law* on how IT could be the catalyst for a transformation of legal services in the UK. The lecture starts at 18.30 at the Royal Society in London, call the SCL on ☎ 0117-923 7393 or via LINK for details.

☎ **27 June - Developing Legal Practice Using Electronic Communications.** One day conference in London mounted by the University of Central Lancashire. Speakers include John Pritchard, Delia Venables, Neil Cameron and Graham Ross. Conference fee £170 + VAT. Call Jane Johnson on ☎ 01772-892253 or check <http://www.pavilion.co.uk/legal/internet.htm> for details. ☐

WEB VERDICT

LTi continues its review of new Web sites so readers can see if they are worth a visit. The review takes into account style, technical merits and content with pages awarded an appropriate *Smiley Rating*:

☺☺☺☺

Great - definitely visit

☺☺☺

Good - worth looking

☺☺

So-So - must try harder

☺

Sad - don't even bother

The **Metropolitan Police Service** Web site at <http://www.open.gov.uk/police/mps/home.htm> is an ambitious new site which although not immune to PR hype and waffle about the Met, does contain some useful features.

Particular praise must go to the **Operation Bumblebee** pages (<http://www.open.gov.uk/police/mps/bumbleb>). These contain surprisingly clear image files showing pictures of a selection of the latest stolen goods to have been recovered by the police but which are still waiting to be claimed by their owners. The current batch includes an L S Lowry street scene - how could anyone not miss that? *Smiley Rating* ☺☺☺. ☐

LTi WEB SITE WINS AWARD

CloudNine Technology, the publishers of LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER, have won the All-Internet Business-to-Business Directory's Top Business Site Award for its WWW pages. The awards are made by the US based All-Internet group.

☞ **CloudNine is currently building Web sites for a number of organisations within the legal community.**

BIRD ON THE WEB

Bird & Bird, widely rated one of the UK's top IT law specialists, have gone into print with what is believed to be the first major book on Internet law. Called *Internet Law Regulation*, it is edited by Graham Smith and published by FT Law & Tax, price £85.

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Alexis Byter's COMPUTER LORE

We all know the old political cliché about nothing being more powerful than an idea whose time has come. But what about an idea – or a “thing” – whose time is just about to run out?

The topic came up the other day when I was talking to the MD of a legal technology supplier about the problems Lotus Notes was now facing in terms of competition from both the Internet and *intranet* technologies like Microsoft's new Exchange system.

We both agreed that Microsoft's aggressive pricing policy (as little as £42 per user in a 100+ organisation, compared with £194 per user with Notes) was going to put the squeeze on Lotus. And, we also felt Notes was in danger of missing the bus because it was increasingly perceived as a closed proprietary system compared with more “open” Internet browser software.

“But,” said the MD, “don't you think all software products have a natural lifespan? One moment they are flavour of the month then, next thing you know, you cannot give them away.”

It is a provocative thought and I think he has got a point. Consider some of the applications software that was all the rage in the first part of the 1980s in the early days of personal computing. ➔

➔ Remember VisiCalc, the pioneer spreadsheet program ousted by Lotus 1-2-3, which in recent years has itself had its nose pushed out of joint by Microsoft Excel. Why did wordprocessing packages like WordStar and Wordcraft fall so heavily from favour?

What about the dBASE database? And, closer to home, the last twelve months have seen the Mosaic Internet browser almost wiped out by Netscape's Navigator.

To look through any software catalogue of even five years ago is like taking a trip back in time – full of dimly remembered but now largely departed product names.

However, it is not just software that goes out of favour. Anno Domini also takes its toll of software suppliers – a realisation that will no doubt strike regular visitors to the forthcoming Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition at the Barbican when they look at all the new names and wonder what happened to companies like Charterhouse, NBI, CPT, Hay Logic, Ulrex, Qdos, Professional Connection, Integrated Office Systems, Monocastle or Senton?

But, don't laugh. Law firms are equally mortal and there are many practices today whose combination of aging partnerships, aging clients and positively ancient office systems must cast doubt on their longer term survival prospects. □

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