
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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NT FEVER AS BERWINS PUTS IT ON DESKTOP

It looks like 1996 will be remembered as the year the legal market finally embraced Microsoft Windows NT, both as a server and as a desktop platform. In addition to NT clearly being "flavour of the month" at the recent Barbican Exhibition, the last few days have also seen two major NT-based orders being placed.

Fareham-based solicitors Blake Laphorn has just signed a £60,000 deal with Lawtech for the supply of the Windows NT version of The Beaver Corporation's Arms debt recovery system.

This was promptly topped by Mercury Computing winning an order, officially described as "worth in excess of £500,000", from Berwin Leighton who will be installing a network of 400 Pentium 133MHz PCs running Windows NT Workstation on the desktop. Initially the firm will be running NT 3.5.1 but will move to NT Workstation 4.0 once final beta testing is complete.

Berwin Leighton, which uses the Unix-based Norwel practice management system for core administrative operations, is also installing the Microsoft Office suite and Exchange email products, along with document management and imaging from Lava Systems.

Mercury Computing's commercial director Alby Smith said the move made a lot of sense as Berwin Leighton had previously been running ICL OfficePower on Unix and so could now "leapfrog the competition" by going straight to NT on the desktop, an option not open to

➔ other firms that had only recently moved into a Windows 3x environment.

Windows NT also made an impact on this year's Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition at the Barbican, with not just the big suppliers, such as Axxia Systems and AIM Professional, talking about their forthcoming NT launches but also a growing number of smaller suppliers now committed to this route. This month sees Hereford-based Practice commence live beta testing of its Windows NT upgrade at two of its user firms.

☞ **Comment...** Ten months ago Dundas & Wilson in Scotland rejected Windows NT as its practice wide platform because of doubts about performance. Today it seems no-one can get enough of NT. And its not just in the legal market. For example, Norwich Union has embarked on migrating 3500 PCs users from DOS, Windows 3X and OS/2 platforms to Windows NT workstations.

Chris Cann of Morgan Bruce, one of the first firms to commit to NT in a big way, says an incidental benefit they discovered with NT as a server was that it enabled them to continue using the existing link between the Swansea and Cardiff offices, whereas if they had stayed with a Unix/Novell platform, they would have needed to spend some £150,000 upgrading the comms hardware. ☐

IBM OS/2 FINISHED ?

The Corel Corporation, the new owner of WordPerfect, has announced it will no longer be supporting IBM OS/2 as an operating platform for what once was the legal world's favourite wordprocessor.

For full story see page 4... ➔

SELF ASSESSMENT IN 1997 ?

With self assessment for tax-payers looming in 1997, legal systems house Professional Technology (☎ 01634 815517) can now offer a range of tax calculation software to run in conjunction with its Seriatim and Quaestor accounts packages.

Professional Technology this year celebrates its 10th year in the legal IT business.

GOING FOR GOLD

Elan Software's GoldMine work groups contact management system is now available for Windows 95. New features include Internet integration so users can send and receive email. The UK distributor is AVG Sales (☎ 0171 454 1790).

AVENUE BACK ON THE RIGHT ROAD ?

After spending the last two years in the doldrums, Avenue Legal Systems has bounced back on form as one of the English market's "top five" legal IT suppliers with the launch of its next generation Wisdom system.

Building on the original "Time for Windows" onscreen time recorder and last year's FREDa (front end desktop from Avenue) concept, Wisdom is an all-new client/server system based on a relational database, which the company sees as the successor to its Solomon II product.

The system has a consistent graphical user interface which can be customised to meet the needs of individual users by the addition or removal of application modules.

These are denoted by Windows icons or "buttons" at the bottom of the PC screen and also reflected in the product's pricing structure. Rather than the more common arrangement of rigid "licence breaks" based on the number of concurrent users, Wisdom's price will be based on "the number of buttons per PC".

Wisdom is already available on Windows for Workgroups and Novell platforms, while the Windows NT and Windows 95 versions are undergoing final beta testing.

According to Avenue (☎ 01489 885888) sales director Michael Belas, the legal IT market is finally recovering some of its old buoyancy, with Avenue itself seeing a 30% increase in new business over the last six months, compared with the same period last year.

As well as having the new Wisdom product in its portfolio, Avenue has also been appointed the first UK dealer for Oyez Legal Software's electronic forms. Although Avenue was initially attracted to Oyez because it was unhappy with the direction its existing electronic forms supplier Laserform was taking, technical director Kevin MacDonald has examined the software from the point of view of ➔

➔ integration with Avenue products and believes the Oyez forms to be technically the most sophisticated on the market.

☞ **Comment...** Through its Kestrel accounts and Intelliforms systems, Laserform Law is now effectively a competitor of suppliers like Avenue. MCS has also dropped Laserform and others are understood to be reviewing their position.

Wisdom was developed by Avenue using Powersoft's PowerBuilder application development tool. Although not so well known in the UK, in the USA Power Builder is a head to head competitor of Delphi and Visual Basic.

PowerBuilder will support a wide range of ODBC compliant relational data bases although the default choice is Watcom, which was recently renamed Sybase SQL Anywhere. Avenue offer this, as do Access Legal Systems, which has also recently redeveloped its products around a relational database. ☐

SHELTONS GO FOR QNIX

Nottingham based Sheltons has placed a contract worth £180,000 with Sanderson GA (☎ 0121 359 4861) for a practice wide office automation and financial management system. The first phase will see PC local area networks installed in the firm's five offices, as well as the branches being linked by a WAN.

In the next phase Sheltons will install a new accounts system along with Qnix case management and time recording software. The firm is already trialling the Qnix conveyancing module. ☐

POSTAL STRIKE MEASURES

Although this week's threatened strike by UK post office workers should not have effected deliveries of the current issue, should the strike escalate, wherever possible **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** will be distributed by DX or fax. Fax recipients will also be sent their normal copies when the strike ends. ☐

JOB CRISIS LOOMING IN LEGAL IT SECTOR ?

Within the last ten days four of the UK's leading legal technology suppliers have announced that they either have or are about to recruit extra sales and support staff. But with a growing numbers of law firms also looking to recruit both senior and junior level IT staff, are there enough candidates to go around? LTI reports...

AIM Professional has recruited four additional sales staff. Avenue Legal and The Beaver Corporation are currently looking for additional sales staff who have experience of the legal market. SOS is advertising for four new staff sales and support staff. And Axxia Systems, which has recently appointed Bill Kirby (ex-Wellman Group/ Newbury Data) as the company's new sales director, has already recruited one additional sales executive and is now looking for two more.

Meanwhile on the other side of the fence, legal headhunters Longbridge Consultancy (☎ 0171 726 4011) has just opened a new division to provide permanent and contract IT staff for law firms.

Headed by Mark Atherton, the division will initially target "Top 100" firms in the London area with a view to meeting their needs for both strategic advisors at a senior level, as well as more junior staff involved in the day-to-day running of law firm IT operations.

Atherton believes the demand for such a service is set to grow as the IT planning and operations requirements of law firms become increasingly complex.

He also says this is an area of recruitment where technical skills are not enough as suitable candidates for higher level posts also need diplomatic skills.

"Candidates coming straight from industry or the commercial world can find it hard to adapt to the legal environment where personalities and partnership politics frequently override conventional management structures. It can leave ➡

➡ them feeling highly frustrated," says Atherton. "In fact several IT managers we originally approached about vacancies in their own practices have subsequently indicated they are unhappy and are also looking to move on."

☞ **Comment...** Nothing more clearly demonstrates the shortage of suitable candidates than the current two-way traffic between law firms and legal IT suppliers. For example one of Axxia's new staff, Helen Billing, is a legal executive who previously worked for a firm of solicitors. Whereas over at Jeffrey Green Russell, their IT manager Alison Sykes has a track record in legal IT with suppliers ICL, Star and Admiral Legal. ☐

MCS CLIP MURPHY'S WINGS

Following proceedings in the High Court in London, MicroComputer Services has secured an undertaking from former salesman Stephen Murphy not to "market, sell or help to develop for Applied Computer Expertise... software which competes directly" with the DPS range of case management systems.

The move follows Murphy's recent appointment as sales and marketing manager at ACE, prompting MCS fears that Murphy would use his inside knowledge to help ACE compete against DPS in the case management market.

The undertaking is effective for a period of nine months from the 4th June but ACE managing director Rod Voyce says the impact will be minimal as it was always intended that Murphy's primary responsibility would be for sales of the Infinity practice management system.

☞ Miles 33 intends to fight the legal claim recently brought against it by The Beaver Corporation (see *Issue No 12 for first report*) for £14,500 relating to unpaid bills and interest. A spokesman for Miles said: "it is not a case of we can't pay but that we won't pay. There are bigger contractual issues at stake". ☐

LEGAL IT DIRECTORY OUT NOW

The third edition of *The Legal Technology Directory* is now out. It contains details on 40 of the leading suppliers serving the legal IT market in England & Wales. Nearly 10,000 copies have already been distributed to law firms. Extra copies are available at £10 each from Marketeer on ☎ 0181 742 3388.

☞ **Publication of the English Law Society's rival *Information Technology Directory* (price £34.95) is now scheduled for mid-July.**

WORD NOW DOMINATING WINDOWS WP SECTOR

Latest statistics from independent market researchers Romtec show that for the period January to March 1996 Microsoft Word had an 80% share of the Windows word processing market. This compares with a figure of 64% for the same period last year. Romtec say WordPerfect is now down to an 8% share.

Microsoft Word marketing manager Joan Cummings says she is particularly pleased with the "significant amount of growth within the UK legal sector during the past 12 months, with interest from firms of all sizes".

Recent converts include sole practitioner Richard Best to Titmuss Sainer Decheret which has 250 users on Windows 95.

GROUPWISE 5 FOR AUTUMN LAUNCH

Novell has now commenced the final beta testing of its GroupWise 5 email and groupware system. The company says it "remains on target" to begin deliveries in the autumn.

The biggest difference between the new system and the older GroupWise 4.1 is it will now contain a fully integrated version of the SoftSolutions document management software.

Novell say the product has been re-designed so the "Universal Mail Box" element of GroupWise becomes the central desktop environment for people who make widespread use of internal email, so that "users now have one point from which they can create, view, edit and manage information, as well as communicate and share that information". □

OS/2 FINISHED... OR WILL SKINNY CLIENTS SAVE THE DAY?

➡ *continued from front page...* Speaking at a conference in London last week, Corel president Michael Cowpland said OS/2 was being dropped because the company felt it no longer had a future as a desktop operating system although he conceded it may still have a role as a server.

In support of this decision, he cited the fact Lotus had reported that sales of the OS/2 version of SmartSuite accounted for just 0.1% of total sales of that product.

☞ **Comment...** LTi has recently been investigating the popularity of OS/2 and found that Cowpland's analysis of the situation is not unreasonable.

Only one legal technology supplier - London Bridge Systems - still actively supports OS/2 but this company has always been close to IBM (it also supports AS/400) and with extensive interests outside the legal market cannot be classed as a typical supplier. ➡

➡ Among law firms, the one major practice still committed to OS/2 on the desktop is Nabarro Nathanson, while elsewhere the only other vocal supporter is Sherwin Oliver in Hampshire.

OS/2 does still play a role as a server although increasingly it is being replaced by Windows NT Server in the back office and relegated to less mission critical applications, such as a fax server.

Perhaps more worrying are the number of users who have recently abandoned OS/2 in favour of Windows 95. Reasons cited include complaints about its "unreliability", "excruciating slowness" and incompatibility with third party products. With the plug now pulled on WordPerfect, OS/2 looks like it has reached the end of the line.

Or has it?

In the course of the WordPerfect presentation, Dr Cowpland also unveiled Corel's plans for the Internet and the development of Java-based applications, in addition to the company's existing DOS, Unix, Mac and Windows lines.

Using the company's new Barista platform independent Web publishing system, Corel intends to develop a Java version of WordPerfect Suite which will have the same functionality as the new Windows 95 version but be accessible by any Java-enabled browser running on a client PC (including OS/2) attached to the Internet or a corporate intranet.

Corel describes the concept of linking PCs to the Net or an intranet in this way as a "thin" or "skinny" client, as it requires far less server support than on a conventional client/server network.

Michael Platt of Solicitors Own Software says that the developers of the Progress database at the core of SOS systems are also investigating the role skinny clients can play in office systems.

☞ **Technical Note...** Corel has also said it will continue to support the DOS 5.1, 5.1+, 6.0 and 6.1 versions of WordPerfect and that new Macintosh and Unix editions will be released later this year. □

ME AND MY PC

The last edition reported on former SCL chairman Jimmy Mackintosh's involvement with the new Troika trust accounts software. Though previously a partner with a large London firm, he has always been an advocate of the use of IT by small firms and here he tells L*Ti* how his own practice, Mackintosh & Co in Richmond, approaches technology.

Mackintosh describes his practice as comprising two people and a dog – himself and his practice manager/personal assistant/wife.

What is your main PC hardware set up today? A 486DX 33MHz PC with 16Mb of RAM, a 340Mb hard disk (doubled with Stacker to an effective 740Mb, with CD-Rom drive, SoundBlaster sound card and Colorado 250 Mb tape streamer. His practice manager has a 486DX 66MHz PC with 8Mb of RAM and a 405Mb hard disk.

His main printer is an OKI Doc-It 3000 all-in-one-box printer/fax/scanner/photocopier. There is also a MultiTech 14,400 bps modem although a move to a faster modem or ISDN is a possibility.

And tomorrow? Mackintosh says that if he was buying new PCs now he would opt for 100MHz Pentiums with at least 16Mb of RAM and a 1Gb hard drive. By coincidence he does have a “spare” PC of this configuration which is currently being “lent” to the children.

Which operating system do you use? Microsoft Windows for Workgroups 3.11 plus MD-DOS 6.2.

What are the main applications you run? Wordprocessing, accounts, spreadsheet, comms, diary/contact list plus a number of specialist “practice support” packages.

What are your main software applications programs? Microsoft Word 6.0, ➡

➡ Excel, PowerPoint, Calera's WordScan Plus OCR software and Delrina Winfax Pro. The firm is currently in the course of transferring to Gavel & Gown's Amicus Attorney for PIM and time recording functions and is using Laserform Law's Kestrel package to handle legal accounts.

In terms of specialist legal support applications the firm is running Laserform electronic forms and – no surprise – the Troika trust and probate system from FinApps. Currently being evaluated are Pilgrim System's LawSoft case and document management system and the QuickWill expert will drafting software from Information for Lawyers.

Information needs. For keeping up-to-date with the law, Jimmy Mackintosh uses a number of index services provided by Legal Information Resources (these run under Idealist for Windows) along with online systems such as LINK, CompuServe (also for Internet access), and Tolley's TaxLink for tax legislation and case summaries.

Mobile computing. When out and about Mackintosh carries a Hewlett Packard Omnibook “sub-notebook” Windows PC running the Microsoft Office suite. ☐

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ELECTRONIC EVIDENCE ROADSHOWS

The IT division of the BSI (British Standards Institution) DISC is mounting a series of one day seminars to promote and discuss the recently published **BSI-DISC Code of Practice for the Legal Admissibility of Information Stored on Electronic Document Management Systems (PD 0008)**. Speakers include Bird & Bird partner Graham Smith on the impact of the Civil Evidence Act 1995.

The seminar fee is £165 + VAT but there are discounts for members of sponsoring organisations. The venues are Manchester 26th June, London 2nd & 19th July, and Birmingham 11th July. For details ☎ 0181 996 7408.

BARBICAN NUMBERS UP
Truemist, the organisers of the recent Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition, which this year was opened by “self confessed techie” Cherie Booth QC, report that over 6500 people visited the event. This represents a 3% increase on the 1995 attendance figures. Truemist said that by the close of the event only a handful of the 100 + stands remained unsold for 1997.

☞ The regional Software for Solicitors show starts its 1996/7 programme in Birmingham (26/27 September), followed by Leeds (26/27 November) and Bristol (5/6 March). For details call ☎ 0181 742 3399.

IBM SPEECH SYSTEM GETS MAJOR OVERHAUL

IBM has given its speech recognition products a major overhaul with the launch of VoiceType Dictation 3.0 for Windows 95. The new system will be available in the UK from mid-July and along with a number of significant technical enhancements, also has a more attractive pricing structure.

The new system, which is only available on the Windows 95 platform, is described as an “addition to the Voice Type family” and IBM will continue to support Version 1.3.2 for Windows 3x and OS/2. But, unlike its predecessor, version 3.0 does not require a dedicated sound card and will run on the MWAVE or SoundBlaster cards found in most modern Pentium PCs. (The recommended configuration is a P90 with at least 24Mb of RAM.)

Although still only catering for *discrete* rather than *continuous* dictation, the big breakthrough with Version 3.0 is that it is speaker independent. IBM says it can achieve 90% accuracy for 80% of the population from the outset. If the “enrolment” procedure is used, accuracy levels can be increased to 95% and above.

The system comes with a 30,000 word basic vocabulary and the size of the additional vocabulary has been increased from 2000 to 27,000 words (☞ IBM say this is far larger than most people will ever need but have included it to meet user requests! The special legal language model from the earlier version will also run on the new product.)

Other changes include “deferred and delegated” correction to give users more flexibility when correcting and editing documents. (☞ The “delegated” function allows a secretary to access the files across a network, which seems to be taking the product down the same digital dictation route now being followed by Philips, as does the ability to add “wave files” – the audio equivalent of *Post-it* ➔

☞ notes – to documents waiting to be processed.)

Users can now dictate either directly into an application (Version 3.0 is fully compatible with Microsoft Word 7.0 but can also accommodate older products such as WordPerfect 5.1 for DOS) or via the IBM Voice Pad/dictation window.

The new software costs £555 (compared with nearer £825 for Version 1.3) and existing VoiceType users can upgrade to Version 3.0 for £79. ☐

THE FUTURE OF THE LAW IS TECHNOLOGY

Delivering the 1996 Society for Computers & Law Lecture at The Royal Society on Wednesday, Richard Susskind said that over the next quarter of a century the legal world be dramatically transformed by technology as we move from a “print based” culture into a “fully fledged IT based information society”.

Despite scaring some of the audience with his suggestion that in the future solicitors and barristers would disappear and be replaced by “legal information engineers”, Susskind, a special adviser at Masons and Visiting Professor at Strathclyde University’s Centre for Law, Computers & Technology, painted an optimistic picture, with the demand for legal services actually increasing as technology helps open up an as yet untapped “latent legal market”.

“In the future all lawyers, without exception, will be using the global information superhighway”. But he also warned the next few years could be a “confusing transitional period” as we struggle to overcome “the technology lag”, typified at the moment by systems that threaten to swamp users with more and more paper and data.

☞ The themes covered in the lecture are explored more fully in Richard Susskind’s new book *The Future of Law*, which is published by Oxford University Press in July, price £19.99. ☐

COMMUNIC@TIONS

FUTURES

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

NOW MICROSOFT TARGETS THE INTRANET

In a period of six months Microsoft has moved from being overtaken in the slow lane of the information super-highway to being once again leader of the pack. And, having got its Internet act together, last Thursday Microsoft unveiled its plans for the business intranet market.

According to Bill Gates, from the end of this year Microsoft will be able to deliver "a comprehensive set of products and services that seamlessly integrate desktops, LANs, client server applications, legacy systems and the public Internet to create dramatically more effective corporate computing systems".

New products previewed included **Microsoft Office 97** - a new version of the front office suite that will include Web technology to make it easier to work with intranets. **Microsoft Outlook** - a new desk top information management application to help users communicate and collaborate on intranets. And, the next versions of the **Windows NT Workstation** and **Windows** (codenamed **Windows 97**) operating systems, which will be integrated with the Microsoft's Internet Explorer Web browser to provide a consistent desktop interface to PC applications, the Internet and intranets.

Microsoft is also going to add Web publishing and site management software to the Windows NT Server system. □

AND SO DOES BT

While last week's announcement by British Telecom and US communications group MCI that they were to collaborate on a project - codenamed Concert ➔

➔ Internet Plus - has been widely welcomed as an initiative that will increase the speed and capacity of the Net in the years to come, it is important not to overlook some of BT's more immediate projects.

BT Managed Network Services has just launched "Managed Dial IP", a fully-managed network access intranet service, to meet the needs of IT departments facing increasing demand for corporate intranet solutions. BT believes its ability to deal with the problems associated with providing remote access to telecommuters and mobile staff will be of major interest.

The new service, which has already been tested internally by around 1000 BT staff, provides a nationwide 28.8 Kbps speed connection service, with ISDN access scheduled for the end of 1996. □

BUT LINK HITS A DIVERSION ON THE SUPERHIGHWAY

The launch of Link 96, the major upgrade to Legalease's Legal Information Network originally scheduled for this month, has been temporarily delayed because of problems over the choice of Web browser software.

Originally it was planned to include a copy of Netscape Navigator with the *Professional* and *Corporate* versions of Link 96 but because of difficulties over licensing, it has now been decided to move to Microsoft Internet Explorer 3.0, which is now in the final stages of beta testing. Legalease anticipate Link 96 will now be available in July. □

FOUR OUT OF FIVE AIN'T BAD

In a recent review of law firms with sites on the World Wide Web, *New Media Age* magazine put four English firms among the top five sites.

In first place was the US firm Schneider Kleinick Weitz Damasker & Shoot followed by Bird & Bird, Jeffrey Green Russell and Denton Hall with Nabarro Nathanson in fifth place. □

NEW EDITION OF INTERNET GUIDE NOW AVAILABLE

Delia Venables' Guide to the Internet for Lawyers has now been revised and the pricing structure changed to accommodate the bi-monthly Internet Newsletter. The price of the "combo" bundle, comprising the Guide, a set of tutorials and one year's subscription to the newsletter (6 issues) is £100.

For details call ☎ 01273 472424 or check <http://www.co.uk/legal/welcome.htm>

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Don't miss the next edition No 18 out: 1st July.

Alexis Byter's
COMPUTER LORE

Are the people who buy legal software getting smarter – or dumber? Discuss...

Wandering around the recent Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition at the Barbican in London made me realise how, over the last decade, exhibitors have become so much more sophisticated in their approach to such an event.

Gone are the scantily clad (and totally clueless) "personality girls" of yore. And the quest for marketing leads has got a little more subtle than being asked by a pimply youth in an ill fitting suit to "put your business card in a box and you may win a bottle of scotch".

I suspect we will also never again see the likes of the marketing mastermind who once dreamt up the "dare you plunge your hand into a tank of piranha fish to pull out a Rolex watch" stunt. In fact this wasn't quite so successful as he hoped as pimply artiled clerks in ill fitting (and shortly to be very ragged-sleeved) suits were queuing up from early in the morning to have a go and it cost the company a fortune in watches.

This year's favoured tactic was the "theatre style" presentation where instead of having a gaggle of visitors clustering around a computer screen watching software being put through its paces by a pimply youth in an ill fitting suit, they ➔

➔ were invited to sit down in a little theatre area – and then watch software being put through its paces by a pimply youth in an ill fitting suit.

For some exhibitors it worked. Axxia went away singing the event's praises. Whereas others just went away. AIM Professional has vowed never to darken the Barbican's doors again, believing it can spend the money on more effective marketing activities, including running regional seminars.

Ironically one of the more outspoken critics of the way IT is sold to solicitors is himself a solicitor. Nicholas McFarlane-Watts, whose Professional Productivity Solutions company has been active in this field for nearly a decade, is not only fed up with exhibitions but the whole sales process.

"Solicitors complain legal software is too expensive but they still expect you to travel the length and breadth of the country to make endless presentations to partners. And then the firm sends you a 60 page invitation to tender. They want a Rolls Royce sales service but are only prepared to pay Skoda prices."

McFarlane-Watts' theory is that if solicitors really want cheaper systems, they must be prepared to accept lower cost sales methods, such as buying through mail order.

What, no pimply youths in ill fitting suits? It will never catch on. ☐

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