
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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WEBBER BACK IN THE FRAME

With the exception of Bill Gates of Microsoft, probably no-one has done more to shape the face of law office computing in England and Wales than Dave Webber. The name may not mean much to many people but his solicitors accounts software has been in widespread use since the early 1980s - and next year he plans to launch an all new product.

Webber's original system first saw the light of day in 1981 and subsequently sold into over 750 practices around the country in various guises, including TFB's old Senior Partner 2 package and, more recently, Avenue's Solomon II.

Since leaving Avenue in 1994, Webber has been involved in two major projects. The first was setting up the specialist training and support company Legato Computer Services (☎ 01489 571690) in conjunction with his wife Liz Yelland. And the second was the development of Paragon, an all new financial and practice management system.

Taking advantage of the latest advances in software development tools, Webber has designed the new system around 32-bit architecture, so not only is it compatible with Windows 95, NT and their successors but it also seamlessly integrates with the Microsoft Office (Excel, Word etc) environment.

Again, in keeping with Microsoft's "front office/back office" strategy, users will have the option of running Access or SQL Server as their core database.

Paragon is already in use at three firms - Bells Potter & Kempson in Farnham, Barkerson & Isherwood ➔

➔ in Andover and Page Gulliford & Gregory in Southampton - but to ensure the system is properly "bedded in" active marketing will not commence until 1997.

Interestingly, Webber will not be selling the system directly but is instead setting up a dealer network. Professional Computer Group (☎ 01202 893040) has already signed up and Webber is also collaborating with Osman Ismail of MCS to develop links to DPS case management systems.

In terms of target markets, Webber says Paragon's price will probably put it out of the range of very small firms but he believes it will become "the dominant force" in legal accounting among smaller to mid-sized practices. □

WHAT'S IN A NAME ?

Peapod Solutions, which this month launches its low cost all-in-one system for High Street firms, has become involved in a dispute with the English Law Society over what the system can be called.

Peapod had originally chosen "High Street Kit" but changed this after Geoff Bignell, director of Law Society Services, objected that it was too close to the name of the Society's own High Street Starter Kit (HSSK) product, which is about to commence beta testing.

Peapod then proposed the "High Street Solution" but at the last moment this too was rejected by Chancery Lane and as a result Peapod was unable to run its first advertisement in a promotional campaign in the *Law Society's Gazette*.

Peapod director Ian Wimbush says he is now considering alternative names, as well as alternative magazines in which to run the advertising campaign. □

MONACO BOUND

Frere Cholmeley Bischoff has ordered its new practice management system from Norwel Computer Services (☎ 0161 945 3511). The system will initially link the firm's London, Paris and Monaco offices.

☞ Norwel has declined to tender for the Lace Mawer contract despite the fact the firm, which has offices in Liverpool and Manchester, is an existing Norwel user. The firm, created by a merger in 1988, also runs Axxia systems and that company is now expected to win the contract.

FIRMS EAGER FOR NEW GROUPWISE

Within the next couple of days Novell UK will begin shipping the final beta copies of GroupWise 5, the latest version of its groupware product that is scheduled for full release at the end of October. GroupWise is positioned as Novell's answer to Lotus Notes and Microsoft Exchange but does it really have a future in the face of such stiff opposition?

Although the core of the system contains the same email, diary and scheduling tools that made GroupWise 4.1 and the earlier WordPerfect Office so popular, Novell has re-engineered the product's workflow capabilities to gain Internet/intranet compatibility and also become a comprehensive information management tool.

According to Alison Sykes, the IT manager at Jeffrey Green Russell, one attraction is the way the system can serve as a universal in-box, handling not only email but also incoming fax and voice mail messages.

"GroupWise 5 also incorporates SoftSolutions document management software. When you combine this with the messaging and groupware facilities, you have the basis for a powerful, practice-wide information management system," says Sykes, who plans to run a GroupWise 5 pilot later this year.

Sykes is also impressed with the product's 32-bit architecture, which is compatible with the latest Windows NT Workstation 4.0 technology.

Another enthusiast is Henry Piatek, the systems manager at Sinclair Roche & Temperley. He has been looking at earlier beta versions of the software and believes it will become the essential desktop application for SRT fee earners, as it provides a single point through which they can access all their diaries, documents and messages.

"One of the biggest improvements," says Piatek, "is users can now ➔

➔ look across different *post offices* located on different network servers". This means, for example, a user in SRT's London office can access the diary of a user in the firm's Hong Kong office, to co-ordinate the planning of a project in the Far East, even though their GroupWise systems sit on different networks.

"We have a lot of travelling lawyers in this firm," explains Piatek. "With the new version, they will be able to access the system for messages and information from anywhere in the world, simply by plugging a laptop computer into a telephone socket".

In addition, because GroupWise now incorporates Internet/intranet technology, when SRT do implement version 5 next year, one of the items on the agenda will be to examine the viability of allowing clients to access some of the information on the system via low cost Web browser software.

Piatek has no doubts. He says the enhancements and improvements make the latest version of GroupWise "an exciting product". □

QUINTEC ACQUISITION COMPLETED

The Toronto-based PC Docs Group has completed its acquisition of the UK distributor Quintec International. The move comes at a time when sales of the DOCS Open document management system are, in the words of Quintec director Andrew Lloyd Skinner: "going through the roof", with Clifford Chance recently taking out a 2000+ user licence for the software.

☞ **Comment...** Interest is also growing in the CMS Open practice management system, which is also distributed in the UK by Quintec. Watson Farley Williams is understood to be reviewing its IT strategy and will be deciding within the next few weeks whether to continue with its Elite/Unix implementation or switch to a CMS Open/Windows NT platform. □

TIME RECORDING COMPETITION HOTTING UP

Competition in the desktop time recording software market is hotting up. In addition to the integrated products most legal systems suppliers already offer yet another third-party system is set to enter the UK market.

Called DTE (Distributed Time Entry) the system was developed in the United States by Advanced Productivity Software (APS), who last week appointed Text Systems (☎ 0171 403 4033) as its exclusive UK distributor.

Text Systems also has a similar distribution deal with APS for its Online LookUp system. This allows users to record costs associated with electronic and online research, including the use of CD-Roms, the Internet and dial-up services such as Reuters and Lexis.

The version of DTE that Text will initially be selling in the UK is a Windows product however a new SQL version is currently being piloted in the US and is expected to be available in the UK in the first part of 1997. DTE/SQL, which is also compatible with the DOCS Open document management system, is designed to minimise the administration associated with updating files.

☞ **Comment...** Although TimeSlips and Amicus Attorney may lose sales at the expense of DTE, the clear target must be the sector of the market that ProSoft's Carpe Diem system has so far had to itself. Indeed it is interesting to note Text is emphasising the fact that DTE can act as a time entry and recording system for both Elite and CMS Open - the two US practice management systems currently attracting a lot of interest in the UK.

In terms of track records, DTE hit the US before Carpe Diem and is market leader in the DOS sector. Among Windows users, Carpe Diem probably has the bigger share. In terms of pricing, a single user DTE licence is £275 but for ➔

➔ larger sites substantial discounts are available, with the price per seat for DTE falling below £50 per user in the case of very large firms.

But, APS president Jim Tharpe also reckons the software is "quick and easy" enough to be used by High Street solicitors working on a large number of files but typically only recording a small amount of time per day per file.

Despite the competition, ProSoft president David Goldstein believes anyone basing a purchase decision on design and functionality rather than price, will opt for Carpe Diem. And in fact later this year ProSoft will be announcing details of a new version of Carpe Diem. ☐

ANOTHER WIN IN IRELAND FOR AXXIA

The steady advance by Axxia Systems (☎ 01734 602602) into the Irish legal market continues, with Dublin-based O'Donnell Sweeney - one of the largest firms in the Republic - last week placing an order for the Arista case and practice management system.

The firm's managing partner Joe Sweeney reckons the case management and desktop time recording sides of Arista are "upwards of a year ahead of anything else on the market" and says the investment in IT will allow O'Donnell Sweeney "to make a quantum leap into the future" in terms of improved client service and increased staff productivity.

☞ **Related Developments...** City of London insurance specialist Hextall Erskine has completed the first phase of a major IT project to replace and upgrade its fee earner support, office automation and practice management systems.

As part of a project with an overall budget of £750,000, the firm has installed a new network running WordPerfect 6.1, GroupWise, Soft Solutions and Axxia System's Arista. The next phase includes working with Axxia on the development of case management workflow systems. ☐

CHRISTMAS IS COMING

In an unguarded moment, a legal IT supplier was heard confessing that the development of a new Windows system was taking much longer than expected. "We said it would be ready by Christmas - but we are very glad we did not say by which Christmas."

A FALSE ECONOMY

An IT manager recently admitted that at one London firm the daily routine had been to send a messenger with a set of back-up tapes to a secure off-site storage depot. It was only after a system crash that it was discovered the messenger had been pocketing the taxi fare he was given and travelling by Tube instead - not realising the electromagnetic interference generated by train wheels scrambled the data!

ADDRESS BOOK UPDATES

Litigation support specialist Elliott Slone Ltd has moved. The company's new address is: 54-55 Hoxton Square, London N1 6PB. The new phone number is 0171 729 2088.

☞ The Reading area is currently having its phone system updated. The new number for case management systems developer Fathom Technologies is ☎ 0118 975 0886 although the old 01734 750886 number will still work until the end of the year.

☞ The area code for US software house ProSoft, the developers of the Carpe Diem system, has changed. The new number is ☎ + 972 386 7769 or fax + 972 386 4491. ProSoft president David Goldstein can also be emailed at dgoldstein@pscorp.com

SUPPORT FOR WINDOWS NT GAINING GROUND

A new survey conducted by Tandem Computers has found a growing belief among the IT managers of UK "top 1000" companies that the Windows NT platform will catch up with Unix by the end of the decade.

Of the companies responding to the survey, 89% said they believed NT would gain ground at the expense of Unix, with the vast majority of the opinion that NT would hold an equal share of the server market within three to five years. In terms of immediate plans, 85% said they would be implementing NT projects over the next two years.

Windows NT scored very highly as a platform for mid-range and low-end servers, with 80% of the companies interviewed considering it to be better than Unix for applications at branch and departmental levels. Some 63% also considered Windows NT to be better than Unix for Web applications and 68% for Intranet applications.

☞ **Comment...** The only area where Unix was considered superior was as a mainframe replacement, which is not a relevant technology in the legal market anyway. Indeed the figures confirm the growing belief that NT is potentially a viable platform for nearly all practices.

☞ **Related Developments...** City of London firms Freshfields and Herbert Smith are now working with Resolution Systems (☎ 0171 588 7200) on the testing and implementation of a new Windows NT practice management system.

Called FirmWare, it is intended to replace Resolution's older Unix-based FirmControl package. This was originally developed for Mills & Reeve in Norwich before Resolution acquired the rights to the software from Foundation Systems. Current users of FirmControl include Linklaters & Paines. ☐

DIARY DATES

☎ 24 October - **Mobile Working** Seminar organised by Admiral Legal Systems on legal technology and mobile computing. Starts 10.00am at Forte Crest Hotel, Bloomsbury. Admission free, call Admiral on ☎ 01276 682268 for details.

☎ 28 October - **Internet for Professional Services** One day conference on developing a competitive advantage through the Net. Speakers from Bird & Bird, Masons and Clifford Chance. The event is sponsored by **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** and takes place at the Scientific Societies Lecture Theatre, London W1. Registration from 9.00am, for details call Amelia Tinsley of IBC UK Conferences on ☎ 0171 453 2709.

☎ **Legal Admissibility of Electronic Documents** The IT division of the BSI (British Standards Institution) DISC is mounting a series of one day seminars to discuss issues surrounding the storage of documents on electronic systems and their admissibility as evidence in courts of law. Speakers include Graham Smith of Bird & Bird and McGrigor Donald partner John Newall. Fee £195 + VAT with discounts for members of sponsoring bodies. The venues are Birmingham **28 October**, London **8 November**, Edinburgh **29 November** and Manchester **4 December**. For details call BSI-DISC on ☎ 0181 996 7408. *Plus see form enclosed with this edition.*

☎ 27 November - **LITigate '96** One day conference plus workshop sessions on legal IT, law firm re-engineering, case management and networks. Speakers include Richard Susskind, Neil Cameron, Gary Simon of Deloitte & Touche and Ken Olisa of Interregnum. The event is co-sponsored by **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** and chaired by **LITi** publisher Charles Christian. Venue: Café Royal, London WC2. Fee £380 +VAT, registration from 9.00am. Call Forum Conferences on ☎ 0181 445 8060 for details. ☐

HOT DOCS TO HAVE UK OPERATION

The US-based Capsoft Development Corporation's increasingly popular document assembly tools HotDocs and HotForms will now be supported and distributed in the UK by newly formed Capsoft UK Ltd

Operating from Edinburgh, the new company has been established to promote the benefits of using automatic document and electronic forms assembly software through the use of what Capsoft describe as "intelligent templates" instead of having to master a wordprocessing system's macro programming routines.

Russell Shepherd, the managing director of Capsoft UK, says the company will shortly be announcing UK versions of HotDocs and HotForms that contain ready-to-use sample templates, as well as changes to the documentation to make it more appealing to the UK market.

Capsoft estimate over 100 law firms in the UK already use HotDocs but Shepherd hopes this can be significantly expanded through setting up a reseller channel and running a marketing campaign to raise product awareness. Particular targets include corporate and governmental inhouse legal departments.

Capsoft UK is at 1a Lansdowne Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 5EQ, ☎ 0131 226 3999. □

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE OLD COMPUTERS ?

The rapid pace with which IT is changing frequently means that last year's state-of-the-art PC becomes next year's obsolete kit. But what should solicitors' practices do with their old hardware?

Upgrading old PCs to a higher specification is seldom as simple or as cheap as it might seem. Assuming the components (replacement hard disks, extra memory, new processor chips etc) are available to upgrade your existing system - and this is by no means a ➔

➔ certainty - the total cost in terms of parts and labour may be nearly as much as buying an all-new machine.

Alby Smith of legal systems supplier Mercury Computing also points out another complication with upgrading existing hardware, particularly on a D-I-Y basis, is that it can invalidate existing warranties. With new equipment contractual rights are more clear cut.

This still leaves the problem of disposing of the old hardware and here Mr Smith offers two suggestions: The first is to donate it to a local charity, special school or similar deserving cause. Not only will they find a very good use for it but there are also likely to be spin-off benefits for the firm in terms of goodwill and PR opportunities.

An alternative approach is to take advantage of the buy-back schemes some hardware suppliers are now offering to encourage sales. For example Digital Equipment will pay 10% of the price of the equipment when new to "buy back" old hardware. Bearing in mind the steep prices charged for Unix and similar mid-range systems four or five years ago, this could prove a very attractive deal. □

TALKING ABOUT VOICE TECHNOLOGY

This week sees the Voice 96 Exhibition taking place at the Olympia 2 in London (8-10 October). Exhibitors include Philips Speech Processing and Shakespeare SpeechWriter.

In addition, throughout October, November and December, IBM will be holding free seminars across the UK to demonstrate its VoiceType system, which includes a legal language module. For details call ☎ 01705 492249.

Finally, later this week Technology for Business is previewing its new speech recognition system to its user group. The product is based on Kurzweil technology and can be used in speech-to-text and case management applications. **LTi** will have a full report in the next edition. □

INSIDER INFO SERVICE

Need a telephone number, a product name, a contact point or any other elusive item of information concerning legal technology? We can help. As a free service - and only available to subscribers - you can call **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER on ☎ 01379 687518 and we will provide you with the facts you require.**

CASE MANAGEMENT ...SUPPLIER WANTED

A leading UK supplier of case management systems has informed **LTi that he is interested in talking to other suppliers with a view to acquiring their businesses. If the idea of early retirement appeals, call ☎ 01379 687518 and we will put you in touch.**

LATE NEWS

☞ Workflow and case management software specialist Hatton Blue (☎ 01789 470489) has finally settled on a name for its system. Previously code named Expedia, the product will now be called Vectus. *Full story in the next edition.*

☞ Microsoft has announced the widespread availability of Visual J++. This is a development tool to create fully Java compatible applets but also allows links to ActiveX technologies. The system costs approx £79 and further details are available on <http://microsoft.com/visualj/>

☞ Novell's new GroupWise 5 product will have its first public demonstration in the UK at NetWorld +InterOp which takes place at the Earls Court exhibition centre 29 October to 1 November.

THE WORDPERFECT VERSUS WORD DEBATE

The ongoing WordPerfect versus Word debate over the respective merits of the rival wordprocessing packages continues...

According to the verdict of a recent review in a US legal technology publication, which compared Word 7 with WordPerfect 7: "we feel that WordPerfect better suits the needs of legal professionals than does Word".

What seems to have swayed the reviewers is that WordPerfect currently contains a few more "legal bells and whistles" than Word. Plus, it is a little more user friendly when it comes to creating macro routines, templates and formatting styles.

However a number of UK legal systems suppliers LTI has spoken to say that although this may be true, most users seldom take advantage of these features.

Perhaps more importantly, the view of these and other professionals is that both WordPerfect 6.1 for Windows and WordPerfect 7 were "much buggier" and less stable than the latest Microsoft offering. This would seem to suggest that while WordPerfect may theoretically be the superior product, in practice Word is the safer option.

☞ **Comment...** It has always been the view of **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** that while quasi-academic debates about the respective merits of rival systems are all very well and good, what really matters in the real world are market forces.

For example, most techies will tell you that IBM's OS/2 operating system is superior to both Microsoft's Windows 3x and Windows 95 platforms. But in the real world this is irrelevant because Microsoft has won the marketing war and virtually wiped out OS/2 on the desktop.

The same trend is now repeating itself in the wordprocessing market. In ➡

➡ fact with Microsoft now supplying its Office suite to schools and educational establishments at little or no cost, we will soon be in a situation in which school and college leavers will be entering the jobs market with ready honed skills in the use of Word software. What sense then is there in employers retraining them to use WordPerfect? ☐

MAKING THE MOST OF LEGACY SYSTEMS

Gary Simon, who heads the Deloitte & Touche (☎ 0171 936 3000) management advisory practice, recently conducted a survey on the functionality of back office accounts and management information systems within "Legal 500" law firms.

The research found that despite the often substantial investments made in these systems and their undoubted suitability for high volume transaction processing of, for example, timesheet and disbursement entries, many of them were unable to deliver the type of analytical information practice managers now need.

Spreadsheets and EIS (executive information) systems can help in some instances but there is now a new breed of software - called "accounting intelligent middleware" - which its advocates believe has the potential to revitalise and breathe new life into ageing legacy back office systems, while at the same time bridging the gap to contemporary desktop PC applications.

One of the first of these systems to be available in the UK is MetaView Analyser, which is distributed by Timeline Europe (☎ 0181 956 2213). The company is headed by Mike Evans, who was previously with EIS specialists Comshare.

☞ Both Gary Simon and Mike Evans are speakers at the forthcoming LITigate '96 conference in London on 27th November, which is chaired by LTI publisher Charles Christian. For full details call Forum Conferences on (☎ 0181 445 8060) plus see *Diary Dates* on p.5. ☐

COMMUNIC@TIONS FUTURES

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

REGIONAL FIRMS WIN AWARDS UNDER ISI SCHEME

Two firms of solicitors - Dennis Faulkner & Alsop from Northampton and Tollers of Leicester - have been awarded £30,000 as part of the DTI's Information Society Initiative (ISI) Multimedia Demonstrator Programme.

The firms, working in conjunction with management consultancies Ashton Court Consultants (☎ 01604 864781), and Company Profiles Group, have devised a project called "Legal PAD" (Provision of Advice Digitally). This will allow existing and prospective clients to receive legal services via multimedia technologies, primarily CD-Roms and the World Wide Web. The project is scheduled to be launched in May 1997. □

MORE IT SUPPLIERS JOIN THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Two more legal IT suppliers - Norwel Computer Services and Solicitors Own Software (SOS) - have opened up sites on the Web.

The Norwel site at <http://www.commercial-directory.com/norwel/> has been designed as an online version of the company's current marketing campaign and accurately reflects the corporate image, right down to the use of the same graphics. There are also listings of job vacancies at the Norwel's London and Manchester offices plus plenty of email links to company staff.

The SOS site at <http://www.sosbath.co.uk/legal/> is a slightly more creative effort, which along with product news also contains discussion papers explaining the company's strategy on such topics as integration with other

Windows software products. The site has a mirror set of pages for users whose browsers do not support frames plus a facility to download a demonstration version of the SOS software. □

NEW WEB SERVICE FOR LAW FIRMS

A new "Internet start-up service" to help law firms establish a presence on the World Wide Web has been launched by legal systems supplier Peapod Solutions (☎ 01753 581600).

Based on a consultancy fee of £300 a day, Peapod can supply modems, communications software and basic WWW page design services plus advice on hosting a Web site etc necessary to get a firm onto the Net.

Peapod is also now distributing a new email encryption package, so firms can be certain their Internet messages remain secure and confidential. Called PrivaSuite, it retails for £69 + VAT. □

HOPES FOR GSM STANDARD

A group of twelve leading global IT and communications companies, including IBM, Cellnet, Intel, Microsoft, Nokia, Toshiba and Compaq have agreed to a "mobile data initiative". Under the scheme, the companies will ensure their computer and communications products are compatible with the GSM standard for mobile digital telephony.

Originating in Europe, the GSM standard has now been adopted by 105 countries around the world and one of the objects of the new initiative is to provide for digital communications in the USA where, apparently, both mobile phone users and IT companies have become tired of waiting for an official standard to be agreed.

One of the main benefits of the initiative should be to make life simpler for travellers with laptop computers who need to be able to exchange data and access email via mobile phone links. □

FAX OR EMAIL ?

A survey carried out by the market research group IDC found that if forced to choose between the two technologies, 80% of UK businesses would rather give up their email than their fax systems. The reason? Because there are more fax systems out there whereas email is still a relatively minority interest.

LEGALNET TO FACE COMPETITION
Mercury's LegalNet private telecoms network, which is currently used by 11 of the largest City of London firms, could soon face competition. A new service, called Law Exchange, has been set up by MFS Communications (☎ 0171 570 5700) to provide low cost voice calls in the London area and to Paris, New York and Tokyo.

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Don't miss the next edition No 25 out: 21st October

Alexis Byter's COMPUTER LORE

Among the more interesting phenomena to emerge over the last couple of years has been the rise of the para-legal.

While on the one hand firms are struggling to cut back on the length of the so-called administrative "tail" – and in particular the ratio of secretaries to partners and fee earners – more and more para-legals are starting to crop-up.

Admittedly some of them are merely occupying exactly the same roles once reserved for legal executives and old style solicitors' clerks. Others again are former secretaries who have now taken on some fee earning work – in fact in smaller provincial firms routine debt collection, conveyancing, wills and probate is almost exclusively the preserve of the secretarial para-legal.

However, just starting to appear on the horizon is a new breed of para-legal: the business information gatherer.

These people are the computer literate children of the Information Age – in fact one partner suggested the most appropriate name for them is "bright young things" or "BYTs".

Their role is as research assistants but instead of wading through law books – or even specialist on-line services such as Lexis – they would primarily be searching through the growing

▶ volumes of financial data, precedents, reports, marketing material, client records and know-how information law firms amass and now have stored internally on their own IT networks and databases.

And, of course, having once located the relevant items of information, they would then turn it into a format that partners and fee-earners could use.

As such there is a tacit admission here that something has gone sadly awry with the whole desktop computing revolution if we now need intermediaries to dig out information.

On the other hand, it clearly makes more sense to have BYTs costing, say, £20 an hour doing the research and compiling the reports than having fee earners and partners on billable rates of anything up to £250 an hour endlessly fiddling around with EIS systems and spreadsheet graphics.

In terms of business process re-engineering, in larger firms there is a potential demarcation dispute here with librarians and information services staff but surely the people most threatened by BYTs are those assistant solicitors – the middle rankers within a law firm – who will never make partnership grade.

If, thanks to computer technology, increasing quantities of their workload can be safely delegated to secretaries, BYTs and other para-legals, why employ so many assistant solicitors? □

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