CHARLES CHRISTIAN's
LEGAL TECHNOLOGY iNSIDER

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

LOW TECH WINS SCL HIGH TECH AWARD

In the most surprising result in its eight year history, the winner of this year's Society for Computers & Law Award for the most outstanding application of IT to the law was a four partner firm of solicitors from Exeter who still use DOS applications and Version 2 of Microsoft's Word for Windows running on old PCs.

Although apparently a low tech solution, according to awards panel chairman John Irving, what impressed the judges was the way the firm – Rundle Walker – used the relatively limited technology at their disposal to give them a genuine commercial edge. Irving also points out that the award rules talk about the "application of IT to the law" rather than specific legal IT applications.

The winning firm's four partners were all made redundant from their previous posts and, facing the task of creating a new practice in the middle of a recession, opted to use technology to support them as an alternative to recruiting secretaries and administrative staff.

The net result, according to partner Nick Sanders, is the firm can deliver the same quality of service as conventional practices but is more profitable because it does not have the same operating overheads.

Taking into account local salary rates, the firm reckons their operating costs amount to a total of £44,000 a year whereas a comparable firm with the same number of fee earners but using the traditional approach of employing ➡

support staff would face an annual bill of nearer £130,000.

In terms of technology, the firm relies on standard, low cost office automation software rather than more expensive specialist legal applications. According to Sanders one of their greatest expenses was buying a copy of Microsoft Office Professional!

Although they have invested in some legal forms and precedents on disk and use IT Accounting's Cashier system for legal bookkeeping, the rest of the firm's computing needs, including "case management", are met by applications such as Word wordprocessing, the Excel spreadsheet, the Access database and the *macros* that can be built around them.

☞ **Comment...** Clearly Rundle Walker had the benefit of being a green-field site, so the founding partners could structure the firm around IT instead of the more usual situation of having to structure the IT around the firm.

Probably the determining factor is that the partners were, in the words of Nick Sanders: "all like minded souls" who were prepared to put in the effort to make it all work.

At the outset none of them were computer literate but they taught themselves to type and operate computers, and now do all their own wordprocessing, client management, filing, accounts and diary scheduling. They even answer the phones themselves, make their own coffee and have mastered the art of left-hand mouse operation. This is so they can access data on the computer while simultaneously talking over the phone and writing down file notes with the right-hand.

SCOTTISH COURTS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT IT

In an unusual event, the Deputy Clerk of Session for the Scottish Supreme Courts last week closed one of the courtrooms in Edinburgh for two days to provide a venue for a demonstration of the latest case preparation and case management technologies.

Over the three day period (to meet demand the first demonstrations took place on the Sunday afternoon) over 120 judges, sheriffs, court officials, advocates and members of solicitors' practices attended a series of seminars organised by the Supreme Courts by Kelvin McGregor-Alcorn of DP Advisers.

The seminars looked at the way modern IT can help lawyers to prepare cases, judges to manage them in court and advocates to present evidence more effectively. There were also demonstrations of Smith Bernal's Livenotes real time case reporting system.

McGregor-Alcorn says the seminars received an enthusiastic reception and left him in no doubt the Scottish legal community recognises the important role IT will play in the litigation process.

☞ **Comment...** DP Advisers has been involved in the document imaging and litigation support market for a number of years. Following recent new investment and internal moves, the company is in the process of changing its corporate identity to DPA Egami plc – Egami is the trademark of its document management system. DPA is on ✆ 0171 834 4068. ❏

LEGAL IT GURU FOR HIRE

As good people with extensive experience of working with legal IT systems are always in short supply, readers might like to note a solicitor, who has previously worked in private practice as well as in the inhouse legal department of a public utility, will shortly be available for ➡

Dentons man in Elite move
Denton Hall's business development manager George Brandon is leaving the firm to work for Elite Information Systems. Gordon will be based in the company's Los Angeles office and will be joining the team responsible for developing Elite's new marketing system.

☞ Here in the UK Elite (✆ 0171 330 3504) has recruited two additional staff to bring its total complement to 12 and just secured a major order from actuaries Bacon & Woodrow. Although Elite is sold into other professions in the US, this marks the first order outside its core legal market in the UK.

➡ part and or full-time consultancy projects. His most recent position was as a partner of a substantial law firm where he was responsible for implementing a practice-wide case management system in the firm's London and regional offices.

Anyone interested in contacting him, call the Insider office and we will put you in touch. **LTi** would also like to hear from anyone else with legal IT job vacancies. ❏

MORE INSIDER SERVICES FOR READERS

As part of our policy of continually expanding our services to subscribers, this week **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY iNSIDER** announces two new services for readers...

☞ **Hotlinks** With increasing numbers of companies and law firms now quoting Internet addresses, to make it easier to access their Web pages, we will be posting a regularly updated list of *hyperlinks* on our own Web site.

Point your Web browsers towards http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/cloudnine/hotlinks.htm and you will find a listing of URLs (or in some cases email addresses) for all the organisations mentioned in the current issue. These are "live" links so just click on them and you will be taken straight to their Web sites.

☞ **LawNews** Launched last summer, LawNews is an email-based newsletter edited by solicitor Karen Brockman which goes out weekly to a large number of lawyers in private and public sector practice, both in the UK and abroad.

Along with news stories and a diary of events, it contains a very useful listing of job vacancies. From next week it will also be carrying a regular column supplied by **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY iNSIDER**.

For further information email: lawnews@badgerap.demon.co.uk To be added to the emailing list send the message: Subscribe LawNews Yourname to: listserver@badgerap.demon.co.uk ❏

INFORMIX IN DATABASE WAR

Informix Software Inc, the company behind the relational database system used by many of the UK's leading law firms and legal IT suppliers (including Elite and Axxia) has commenced legal proceedings against its largest competitor, the Oracle Corporation.

The action stems from Oracle's recent recruitment of eleven employees from the Informix product development laboratory in Portland. Among other claims, the complaint filed by Informix charges Oracle and a former Informix employee with misappropriation of trade secrets and unfair competition and seeks injunctive relief and punitive damages.

According to Informix chairman Phil White: "Our primary concern is that we protect Informix's intellectual property and trade secrets from Oracle. This is an extraordinary public admission from Oracle that it is behind in database technology. They could not develop competitive products so they had to buy Informix employees."

The lawsuit was filed in Oregon's Circuit Court for Multnomah County in Portland. In proceedings on 23rd January Informix was granted a temporary injunction against Oracle and the former employees reaffirming that the employees are not to divulge trade secrets or solicit other Informix employees for positions at Oracle. A full hearing is expected within the next few days.

☞ **Comment...** Informix has had the image of being a dull but worthy product when compared with Oracle. But, while Oracle has been grabbing the headlines with its network computers initiatives – and its chairman's slanging match with Microsoft – Informix has steadily beavered away on development to a point where its systems are now reckoned to be about two years ahead of Oracle.

Two elements have given it this strength. The first is its "datablades" ➡

➡ technology. These are add-on software modules built to a common "application programming interface" (API) which makes it relatively easy for developers to integrate third-party components within the overall Informix environment.

For example there is a Verity datablade that adds full text search and retrieval facilities to the database and a Java datablade is scheduled to ship later this spring.

The second element is Informix's recent move towards a "universal server" strategy, so databases can store, manage and search all forms of information including newer multimedia formats. The most recent byproduct of this new strategy was last month's announcement that Informix and Hewlett-Packard would be collaborating to make the Informix database the foundation for Internet and intranet Web servers. ❐

NEW INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR SUBSIDENCE REPORTS

The Coal Authority, one of the successor organisations to the old National Coal Board, has entered into an eight year contract with computer services company Cap Gemini to develop a geographical information system that will provide house buyers with reports relating to former mining operations.

The Authority has a statutory responsibility for certain classes of subsidence claim and currently provides over 250,000 mining reports each year to solicitors and other people involved in conveyancing. The new system – the Mining Reports & Surface Damage System (MRSDS) – is intended to provide a speedier and more comprehensive service that will eventually comprise the largest geographical information system (GIS) in the UK with records dating back to 16th century mining operations.

The total MRSDS project will cost £11million, is being funded through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and will be fully operational by March 1998. ❐

Jersey firsts

Jersey-based advocate Peter Harris has established the first two legal Web sites on the island of Jersey. One is a commercial site for his own firm Crills at http://www.crills. com **while the second is his own personal site which provides some brief but very useful information about the administration of law on the island. This can be found at** http://user. itl.net/~harp

Peapod move

Peapod Solutions has moved. The new address is: 1c The Harlequin Centre, Southall Lane, Southall, Middx UB2 5NH. The new phone number is ✆ 0181 574 8288.

Microsoft news

☞ **Latest market research statistics support claims by Microsoft that Internet Explorer is the fastest growing Web browser in the UK. According to Zona Research the use of Internet Explorer 3.0 by corporate users more than tripled, from 8% in August 1996 to 28% in December 1996.**

☞ **In March Microsoft will be launching Visual Basic 5.0, a new version of its software development tool which the company claims offers performance gains of "up to 2000%" on Visual Basic 4.0. According to Microsoft chairman Bill Gates, this new system means "the Industrial Revolution of software is finally upon us".**

AXXIA TO TARGET CORPORATE SECTOR

Axxia Systems, which has traditionally focussed on the private practice sector, has launched a new version of its Arista case management software which it hopes will appeal to corporate legal departments and inhouse lawyers.

Following last year's decision to "decouple" the Windows "lawyer's desktop" front end from the Arista back office accounts and practice management system, Axxia has now taken the process one step further. By reengineering its Case Manager case management software to reside on the desktop within a client/server architecture, it can then be supported by most ODBC compliant relational databases and "open" document management systems.

Axxia believes this will widen the product's appeal to corporates who typically want applications that can be linked to their own administrative systems or else will run in a stand-alone environment independent of proprietary back office legal accounts software.

☞ **Comment…** Axxia hopes to be able to announce its first sales into the corporate sector later this spring. Meanwhile Quill Computer Systems, another company traditionally associated with the private practice law firms, is also increasing its activities in the corporate market and recently won a major order from an insurance company. Full details will be released later but this is Quill's second insurance sale, the earlier deal being to supply a debt collection system, including hardware, to Albany Life.   ❏

NOVELL'S NEW PRICING

Novell UK has now released further information about its new IntranetWare for Small Business system – previously code-named Kayak (*see Issue No 31 for first report*). Optimised for organisations with 25 or fewer users on a network ➡

➡ and thus potentially very attractive to smaller law firms, pricing starts at £593 for a server plus 5-user licence.

The list price for a one user add-on licence is £43 but Novell say resellers will be able to offer discounts. Novell is also offering special upgrade pricing for users of both Novell and non-Novell operating systems. A server plus 5-user upgrade is £328 and £527 for a 10-user upgrade. IntranetWare for Small Business is available through the usual legal systems channels from this month.   ❏

LEGAL TECH NEWS

Unable to visit the January Legal Tech exhibition in New York? Here is a round-up of the more relevant new launches…

☞ The ProSoft Corporation announced that its Carpe Diem 2.0 time tracking software will now be sold *bundled* with the Seagate Crystal Reports EIS/report writing system.

☞ The Equitrac Corporation announced that it is to integrate its EPIC Internet tracking, monitoring and blocking system with the Timeslips time tracking and billing software. EPIC can be downloaded from Equitrac's Web site for a free 30 day trial.

☞ Israel-based software house Aliroo, best known in the UK for its PrivaSuite email encryption system, launched three new computing security products.

MediaMark is a "digital watermark" system that allows organisations to protect digital media (such as Web image and sound files) from copyright infringement. SealWare is intended to help authenticate computer printout while WitnesSoft is an invisible page marking system using microdots which can subsequently be read by a scanner to verify whether unauthorised copying has taken place. (*The Web sites for all these companies can be reached through the new* **LTi** *Hotlinks service – see page 2.*)   ❏

SPEECH RECOGNITION BREAKS PRICE BARRIER

Speech recognition pioneers Dragon Systems have broken the £100 price barrier with a new version of the company's DragonDictate software which sells from £89 (+ VAT).

The new product – called Singles Edition 2.5 – is a fully functional version of the standard DragonDictate Personal Edition system, including a 10,000 word active vocabulary and a microphone.

The key distinction between the two is Personal Edition (which retails at £399 + VAT) will work with any computer application on a PC, the Singles Edition is restricted to one selected application. For example certified Dragon reseller PerfectDocs (✆ 01271 42887) who specialise in the legal market (one of the company's directors is a practising solicitor), are selling the Singles Edition optimised for Microsoft Word.

☞ **Comment...** When the first speech recognition systems appeared in the UK in the early 1990s (these were also based on the DragonDictate engine) you were lucky to get any change from £6500. Now they are selling for little more than the price of a software utility such as a screen-saver.

At this price you can afford to experiment with speech recognition, for although you must still commit your time to getting the system up to speed, at least you no longer risk wasting money as well.

As for the Singles Edition's limitation to just one application, does this really matter as most lawyers only want speech recognition for one task anyway, namely voice-to-screen word-processing?

Incidentally, it does appear that some of the Singles Edition software now in the UK is actually the full Personal Edition product. It should also be noted that 2.5 is an upgrade on the previous version 2.1 and while it is now ➤

➥ Windows NT compatible, it is currently only available in US-English not British-English. PerfectDocs recommend a Pentium PC with a CD-Rom drive, sound card and a minimum 16Mb RAM as a hardware platform. ❐

SCL AWARDS – THE RUNNERS-UP

➥ *continued from front page...* Although it is not SCL policy to disclose why the runners-up did not win, with John Irving the chairman again this year, it is reasonable to assume he is continuing his "populist" policy of awarding products and applications that are likely to be of interest and relevance to the widest number of practitioners.

This year's winners clearly met that criteria but it probably told against one of the runners-up: Hexar with its FaxSwitch system, which is primarily aimed at large City law firms with heavy fax traffic volumes and a need for powerful fax network management systems.

Another runner-up was the Family Finance Toolkit from FT Law & Tax. This is a floppy disk based companion to the textbook *Matrimonial Property & Finance* by Peter Duckworth and Graham Reeds. This £150 Windows package contains useful calculators, as well as a library of standard orders and notices of application, but its appeal would also seem to be limited, in this case to counsel and other advocates specialising in more complex aspects of family law.

The final runner-up is the new and relatively unknown Fransys legal aid franchise management system from Lexology. Although state-of-the art in terms of software design (32-bit Windows 95/NT 4.0 and Java *applets*) Lexology has still to formalise a relationship with a supplier of a compatible legal accounts system to handle back office administration. Given legal aid practice is far from lucrative, the list price of £4500 (including PC) also seems steep. ❐

The awards ceremony

The winner of the SCL award was announced at a reception at the English Law Society's Hall at the end of January. The guest speakers were three of the leading advocates of computerisation within their own respective branches of the legal profession: SCL president Lord Justice Brooke, the Law Society president Tony Girling and Cherie Booth QC, who presented the award to Rundle Walker.

☞ **Trivia buffs might like to note the event marked the first public outing of Cherie Booth's new easy to maintain, election campaign friendly hair style..**

Need help or information ?

The names of imaging systems and probate software suppliers, outsourcing and the phone number for WordPerfect's UK helpline service - it is ✆ 0171 298 8515 in case you were wondering - are just some of the topics we have dealt with since the last issue.

☞ If you need a phone number, product name, contact point or any other elusive item of information concerning legal technology - including being put in contact with potential partners or new recruits - just call the Insider Info line on ✆ 01379 687518.

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT - CAN YOU HELP ?

Over the last month LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER has spoken to a number of substantial sized law firms who are now seriously considering moving over to outsourcing/facilities management (FM) as an alternative to running their own inhouse IT operations. But why this interest now?

Although FM and outsourcing are widely used in the commercial and local authority IT sectors, it is still a very novel concept for solicitors' practices. There appear to be two main reasons for the growing interest...

The first is a disillusionment with the seemingly endless roundabout of hardware and software upgrades, which can all too easily leave a firm spending the next five years paying for yesterday's technology. The possible eclipse of Unix by Windows NT, the shift towards Windows 95/32 bit software, the speed with which PCs become obsolete and the likelihood of even more changes on the way in the autumn when Windows 97 is released all fuel these fears.

The second factor, which applies more to larger firms, is the concern that their inhouse IT departments – and their budgets – are growing out of control as they embark upon increasingly complex development projects.

In such circumstances, being able to delegate or outsource these problems to third parties begins to look increasingly attractive. But, there is a snag in that to work properly, the contractual deal between a firm and its FM supplier must be watertight, so there are no grey areas over standards of service or demarcation disputes over who is responsible for what.

☞ **Help Wanted...** If you have practical experience of FM in the legal world and could offer advice to firms new to this area, please contact the Insider office and we will put you in touch. ❏

DIARY DATES

↻ **10 & 11 February** – **ACUA Conference** The AIM user group event this year focusses on "the future of law", speakers include the new Law Society secretary general Jane Betts. Call Roger Hancock on ✆ 01789 296096 for details.

↻ **25 & 26 February** – **Information Systems for Lawyers** The annual *Lawyer* conference and exhibition, at the London Marriott, has twin themes this year: exploiting existing technologies and planning for the future. Admission £697 (+ VAT), call Centaur Conferences on ✆ 0171 287 5000 for details.

↻ **26 February** – **1997 Law Office IT Awareness Day** The ILCA conference and exhibition at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. The event is sponsored by **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** and the theme is the digital communications revolution. Admission from £95, call ILCA on ✆ 0181 294 2887 for details.

↻ **5 & 6 March** – **Software for Solicitors** Technology exhibition featuring major legal systems suppliers, at the Bristol Marriott Hotel. Admission free, call Truemist on ✆ 0181 742 3399 for details.

↻ **10 & 11 March** - **Rethinking the Law Firm** Two day seminar organised by the International Bar Association and American Bar Association looking at all aspects of legal practice re-engineering including IT. Location: SAS Royal Hotel in Amsterdam. Admission £450 (£400 for IBA/ABA members). Call IBA on ✆ 0171 629 12061 for details.

↻ **13 & 14 March** – **Communications & Law '97** The Society for Computers & Law's annual conference. Day one looks at intranet technology, email and legal business opportunities on the Web. The second day focuses on Internet law and regulation, including forum shopping. At Great George Street, London. Call the SCL on ✆ 0117 923 7393 for details. ❏

COMMUNIC@TIONS FUTURES

Web operators are welcome to create links to the **LTi** site at http://www.cloudnine. co.uk/cloudnine/ **LTi** is a member of the HTML Writers Guild and supports the Electronic Frontier Foundation campaign for free speech on the Internet.

JORDANS MOVE INTO A NEW DOMAIN

Company registration specialists Jordans have moved into the digital era with the launch of a new domain name registration service for organisations wanting to establish a presence on the Internet.

In addition to the more frequently encountered .co.uk and .com suffixes, Jordans will also be handling .ltd.uk and .plc.uk registrations for private and public limited companies, thus providing a common framework for Companies House and DNS name registration.

In the UK Jordans will be working with NetBenefit Ltd. Along with UK and US domain names, Jordans' new service can also handle registration in most other countries. For details contact Geoff Wilcock on ✆ 0117 923 0600 or email psmith@jordans.co.uk ❐

SWEET & MAXWELL BEEF UP WEB PRESENCE

With a growing number of titles now being published electronically, Sweet & Maxwell has beefed up its Internet presence to provide readers with the latest information about its expanding range of Current Legal Information (CLI) subscription products and services.

Free sample copies are available by calling ✆ 01264 342795, while the new Cases Direct and Legal Information Direct services, provided by Legal Information Resources, are available on ✆ 01422 888012. CLI services can also be sampled and ordered through the company's Web site at http:// www.smlawpub.co.uk ❐

BT IN BACS INITIATIVE

BT has announced a joint initiative with BACS Ltd, the automated clearing house that is jointly owned by the major high street banks, to promote the benefits of switching BACS messages from magnetic media to on-line communications.

Under the promotion, which runs until 31st May, BT is waiving the £60 connection fee to its BT Dialplus service to existing BACS disk, tape and cartridge users, so they can switch to the newer BACSTEL online service.

BACS no longer accepts new magnetic media customers and aims to convert all existing customers to BACSTEL by December 1998. For its part, BT is increasing the performance of its Dialplus dial-up service and will have 34 sites around the UK offering 28.8 kbps access by the end of the year. ❐

INSURANCE LAW NETWORK ROLLED OUT IN USA

In North America, LawNT Inc has completed a project to provide "unique" Web site home pages and Internet email addresses for over 5,500 law firms in the United States and Canada who are involved in insurance work.

Insurance companies, law firms and consumers can access the Insurance Law List site free of charge at http://www.ins.lawnt.com and then search for firms by name, specialty or location.

According to Larry Bennett of LawNT: "The Internet provides law firms with an office that never closes. It enables every firm to display its credentials, advertise its services and provide copies of publications 24 hours a day."

☞ **Comment...** LawNT use their own patent pending technology to mass produce the Web sites although some of the Web site management software now commercially available could do the same job. Basic sites are free to Insurance Law List members but a charge is made for incorporating additional material. ❐

Fax news 1
Network fax specialist Kommunicate Ltd (✆ 01252 815514) has developed an add-on module for its RightFax system. Called Solar, it provides an automatic or one demand archiving and retrieval facility for all incoming and outgoing faxes.

Fax news 2
Clarity software has developed a new Internet fax system called Magic Fax. The system allows faxes to be sent via Web servers and Clarity claims it "substantially" reduces fax costs.

☞ Magic Fax will run on Microsoft and Netscape Web servers and is available for free by downloading from Clarity's Web site at http://www. magicfax.clarity. com for a public beta period. This will be available initially for UNIX or Windows NT servers as well as Windows and UNIX clients.

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Coming soon...

Don't miss the next issue No 33 out: 24 February which includes our "Consultants - do you love them or hate them" questionnaire.

Alexis Byter's
COMPUTER LORE
An alternative budget

As the seemingly endless saga of the English Law Society's High Street Starter Kit (HSSK) rumbles on, I am reminded of the views of Arnold Rosen, one of the people responsible for originally getting Chancery Lane to take the needs of the Sole Practitioners Group seriously.

It was his opinion that although sole practitioners and very small firms needed computerisation, they could manage with low cost, no frills systems. His own favourite was the Perfect Books accounts package from Perfect Software.

This now sells for around £575 and it makes an interesting calculation to see that instead of having spent in the region of £200,000 on the HSSK project, the Law Society could have bought 350 copies of the Perfect Books software.

Alternatively, taking a leaf out of Rundle Walker's book (*see SCL awards story on front page*) the money could have been used to buy 660 sole practitioners a copy of Microsoft Office. (Actually more as I am sure the Law Society would get a generous discount.)

And, if we look at the likely total cost of the HSSK development, assuming the extra £300,000 budget is approved, that equates to at least 1650 copies of Office or 900 copies of Perfect Books. ➤

No such thing as a free lunch on the Web

Gosh, wouldn't it be great if BT were to provide free local phone calls in the UK, just as telecoms operators do in the USA, as that would surely kick-start our move onto the fast lane of the information superhighway?

It is an old argument and one BT was hearing from internet service providers as recently as December. But then came the America Online (AOL) disaster when the largest provider of Internet access services in the USA changed its pricing policy from hourly connection charges to a relatively low flat-rate monthly fee.

Taking advantage of "free" local call rates, US users logged on. And then stayed on – and on with, in some cases, subscribers leaving PCs permanently online to AOL. From an average of 30 million total connect hours a month, within a matter of weeks the company was having to cope with in excess of 120 million connect hours a month.

Not surprisingly this surge in demand left many thousands of users unable to gain connections as the AOL network was swamped with calls. Being America, AOL now faces compensation claims from disgruntled subscribers and even threats of "consumer fraud" charges being brought by state authorities. It all makes BT look positively presentient. ❑

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