
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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HSSK SAGA COMES TO A CLOSE

The final chapter in the long running saga of the English Law Society's ill starred High Street Starter Kit (HSSK) project came to a close last week when the Law Society council decided to discontinue the project.

Faced with growing concerns about the commercial and technical viability of the HSSK - which was originally intended to be a low cost computerisation lifeline for small firms and sole practitioners - the mood at Thursday's meeting was so strongly opposed to spending any more money on the system that it was felt unnecessary to even take a vote on the decision to kill the project.

In fact one Law Society insider told **LTi** that the very phrase "HSSK" is now a source of embarrassment within Chancery Lane. But what happens next?

Although the HSSK project is now dead, with no further work being carried out either under the direct project management of the Law Society or contracted out to a third-party systems house, council members still feel they need to do something for their members.

Just what this should be is not so clear as there was also a strong feeling at last week's meeting that the Society should not be reinventing the wheel, developing products and services inhouse that are already commercially available in the outside world.

One positive development that came out of the meeting was that it was agreed ...continued on page 5➔

MORE INTRANETS ON THE WAY

A fortnight ago Information Hyperlink, in association with Informix and Sweet & Maxwell, previewed their Llama 2000 ready to run legal intranet. This week the Current Science Group, the company behind the soon-to-launch LawCity internet club (see *Issue No 29 for first report*) announced the formation of a new subsidiary called CSG Professional.

This is described as "a new publishing company that will specialise in building internet clubs and services for the legal and related professional communities". CSG's managing director is David Millett, who was previously an executive director of Butterworths.

➔ **Related Developments...** There seems to be some confusion as to whether restricted access Internet-based communities should be called internet "clubs", wide area intranets or even "extranets". Whatever the name, they offer all the benefits of easy to navigate Web browsers and hypertext links but without the security concerns of the public Internet.

Interestingly, Legalease is now pitching the new Link 96 system as a intranet, to allay the popular belief that anything to do with Internet technology inevitably attracts hackers.

One other new private intranet now under development is at Brethertons in Warwickshire. One of the first projects is to use Microsoft's FrontPage personal web server to host a site linking the firm's Rugby and Banbury offices. This will contain details of all the staff - so people from each office will know what their opposite number looks like! □

Solace price shock

Solace Legal Systems is proposing to charge users as much as £3000 to transfer data files from its old Unix system to its new Windows product. However, the IT consultant advising Solace users, Edwards Frai Abrahamson in Liverpool, has told LTI that it is completely unreasonable to charge this much for what should be a routine data transfer project.

According to the consultant, the job should fall within the scope of Solace's annual maintenance contract "But with charges like these, it will actually be cheaper for my client to buy a whole new system. And it will not be from Solace."

SOS WINS HAMBRO DEAL AS SYSTEMS DEMAND GROWS

Solicitors Own Software (SOS) has secured a major - if controversial - order from Hambro Countrywide plc to supply accounts, time recording and case management systems for Hambro's planned nationwide estate agency and conveyancing centre chain, which is employing licensed conveyancers rather than solicitors to handle all its legal work.

The contract is worth £100,000 in software licence fees alone in the first year and one installation has already taken place, so the system will be ready to go "live" in April, when Hambro's Woking conveyancing centre - the first in the chain - is due to open for business. A further four centres are scheduled to open by the end of the year.

The conveyancing system is based around Solicitec's SolCase Windows case management software, which is fully integrated with the SOS range of legal accounts systems.

☞ **Comment...** As a number of speakers at both last month's *Lawyer* and *ILCA* conferences mentioned, the use of case management systems - to allow routine legal procedures to be delegated to less highly skilled staff and to automate parts of the legal workflow process - is now a hot topic for both lawyers in private practice and inhouse legal operations, such as the new Hambro conveyancing centres.

Although the Hambro initiative is causing some sleepless nights among members of the English Law Society, there really isn't any reason why solicitors should not embrace the same case management technology to create their own rival solicitors' property centres.

In fact where IT has been adopted with enthusiasm and imagination, the benefits can be spectacular. For example, there is one firm in the Bromley area ➡

➡ of Kent where, thanks to a combination of one qualified solicitor and a room full of paralegals armed with PCs, the practice is handling all the repossession work for four building societies and enjoying a fee income of £4 million a year.

There could be even more dramatic developments waiting in the wings as LTI understands a number of firms are now actively investigating linking interactive World Wide Web pages to case management systems.

Practical applications here could include clients being able to file new debt collection instructions direct from the Internet or obtaining detailed quotations for conveyancing work on an immediate 24-hour-a-day basis. ☐

FALCON TURNS INTO TURKEY

The recent acquisition by Meridian Law (the second largest systems supplier in the English Bar computing market) of the Falcon One chambers management system from Pimcroft Developments (the third largest player in the Bar market) has not gone as smoothly as planned.

Pimcroft ran into grave financial difficulties at the end of last year and faced with either finding new capital or selling out, chose the latter option. However Meridian admit that it was only after taking over the business that they learned just how unhappy the majority of Falcon users were.

As one barrister, Richard Bruce, explained to LTI: "I bought the Pimcroft system in September but since then it has never worked properly. Pimcroft responded to my complaints with a smug complacency and I now fear my Falcon has turned into a turkey."

Meridian say most Falcon users have complained to them that they feel they were left in the lurch by Pimcroft and as a result Meridian are committed to making the migration from Falcon to the Meridian system as simple, economic and trouble-free as possible. ☐

EDS BACK ON THE CASE

After a two week delay caused by a technical hitch, the Lord Chancellor's Department says the roll-out of the Caseman county court case management computerisation project resumed successfully last week and is still on schedule to be installed in all 240 county courts in England and Wales by the end of the year.

The £25million contract to replace manual record keeping with computerised case file management systems was awarded to Electronic Data Systems (EDS) last year under a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) by the LCD and is due to last seven years. However, five months into the project a "bug" was discovered at one of the six courts that is serving as a Caseman pilot site.

The bug, which EDS attributes to a problem in the Unix version of Word-Perfect being used to provide the system's wordprocessing facility, meant courts were unable to print out any documents. EDS have now fixed the problem, which they describe as "a minor blip" and implementation has resumed.

The Lord Chancellor's Department say the most serious consequence of delay is that they will have to reschedule the training programme for some 3000 court staff. The LCD also says the Court Service is looking into the costs incurred by the delay and will be "considering the contractual implications with EDS".

Caseman is based on an Oracle database running under Unix on Digital hardware and is being piloted at county courts in Portsmouth, Leeds, Pontypridd, Edmonton, Northampton and Salford. □

TO THRIVE AND SURVIVE

MCS, the company behind the DPS case management system, report that the last twelve months have seen a "major upsurge" in demand for new case management software among both

➔ solicitors practices and inhouse legal departments, with the company now installing systems at new sites at a rate of over two a week. Combined with a steady demand from existing users to expand their DPS operations, this has been reflected in a 22.5% increase in turnover at the privately owned company.

MCS managing director Osman Ismail says the demand is being fuelled by a combination of factors, including a recovery in the residential conveyancing market "and a growing realisation among legal practices of all sizes that if they are to thrive and survive, lawyers have to be able to increase their case loads but without a corresponding increase in staffing and other administrative overheads." (See also story of page 2.) □

NEW FACE IN THE MARKET

Bedfordshire-based Key Network Systems Ltd have announced their intention to expand their presence in UK legal market with a portfolio of hardware supply and technical support services.

Sales manager Lisa Carpenter says the company's primary focus is on IT networking and systems integration, with particular emphasis on merging newer network operating systems with older legacy systems to provide users with a single practice-wide technology platform.

KNS also offer a build-to-order service for PC clones and file servers, with prices starting at £699 for an entry-level ready to run Windows 95 120Mhz Pentium PC.

☞ **Comment...** Given **LTi** readers continuing interest in the concept of IT outsourcing and facilities management, it is interesting to note that Key Network Services also offer an FM service. "We will take the burden of maintaining your systems in whatever capacity" says Carpenter.

KNS are on ☎ 01582 455560 and can also be contacted by email at enquire@keynet.demon.co.uk □

Quill and Gazette friends again

Quill Computer Systems has amended its latest advertisement which was recently refused by the *Law Society's Gazette*.

Quill managing director Tony Landes told **LTi**: "Whilst not entirely agreeing with the editor's point of view, we accepted it with equanimity. The ad has been reworked by our agency and is currently running in the *Gazette*."

Consultants - who needs them?

The first responses to the **LTi** survey on legal IT consultants are already in - and they do not make pleasant reading. Or, as one supplier put it: "I groan every time I learn of another failed salesman or IT manager becoming a consultant". There is still time to air your views so return the form that appeared in Issue No 33.

I'll be back

IT consultant Richard Blasdale has scotched rumours that Robson Rhodes will no longer be producing its regular legal IT survey. Blasdale told LTI that while pressure of work stemming from a number of major projects had ruled out a survey in 1997, there were plans to run another next year.

Blasdale also said that having a two year gap between the surveys was likely to produce more distinct trends, particularly in relation to emerging areas of technology, such as intranets.

Goodbye to Jane

In our last edition we said Southend lawyers Drysdales were celebrating their centenary by changing the firm's name to Drysdales & Janes. In fact they are changing the name from Drysdales & Janes to plain Drysdales.

COURT LISTINGS SERVICES - THEN THERE WAS ONE

Throughout last summer companies were queuing up to produce electronic court listings services for Crown Courts, with at one time four rival systems on the table. Since then the market has unravelled and today the Court News Service, which delivers Crown Court listings via TV broadcast technology, is effectively the only player left. So what went wrong?

First to fall by the wayside or, more accurately, to stumble on the starting block, was the proposed Link service when it became bogged down in all the problems Legalease encountered with the Link 96 upgrade.

Then there was the Web-based service from Sweet & Maxwell. Despite having the obvious attraction of being free, this has come in for criticism for its limited scope, including a restricted search facility and no way of storing case references for repeated searches.

Finally there was the CLLIX system which Applied Computer Expertise (ACE) acquired last year when it bought the LIX service. ACE however pulled the plug on CLLIX earlier this year, claiming it had become a loss making project that was costing the company "thousands of pounds a month".

Stephen Murphy of ACE told LTI the problem is that the market simply is not big to support two or more competing products. "Only barristers chambers need a listings service and when you discount those who don't handle criminal work and those who are too small to justify the investment, you are looking at perhaps just 80 to 100 sets. And that is not commercially viable," said Murphy.

☞ **Comment...** Although the Bar Council is now expressing concern that CNS will become a monopoly supplier, the picture is not as black as it is being painted. And, it should be noted, CNS ➡

➡ (who plan to expand their broadcast service to include High Court and some county court listings) say there is nothing to fear. Not least because they recognise the Bar is a price sensitive market that would not accept overcharging.

There still remains the Sweet & Maxwell offering, which can be found at <http://www.smlawpub.co.uk/courtindex.html> and is now part of that company's growing Web-based Current Legal Information Service.

Furthermore, with Link 96 now entering final beta testing of both the Windows 95 and Windows 3x versions (it is understood a final release of the software will be available within a matter of weeks) John Pritchard of Legalease says a Link-based listings system is now once more a serious prospect.

In a related development, Stephen Murphy has hinted that ACE is considering redeveloping the FELIX system, which currently provides judges with an email and online discussion facility, to widen its appeal to the legal profession - and provide direct competition for Link. ☐

RUNNER-UP SLATES SCL

Barrister Graham Reeds, who is one of the authors of the *Family Finance Toolkit*, the disk based companion to FT Law & Tax's *Matrimonial Property & Finance* guide, has accused the Society of Computers & Law of indulging in gimmicks to attract publicity for its annual IT award.

According to Reeds "this is not sour grapes" because *Toolkit* did not win (Reeds reckons the FranSys franchise management system from Lexology should have taken the prize) but concern that "three very good legal software applications were beaten by an entry with no product". (See *Issue No 32 for first report*).

"I think the quirky choice of winner certainly resulted in more publicity for the Society and the cynic in me thinks the thought that it might do so was a large consideration in the judges' minds," says Reeds. ☐

NEW APPROACH TO FILE MANAGEMENT

Although Devon based legal software house PerfectDocs is probably best known as a distributor of the Dragon Dictate speech recognition system, the company does have one other major string to its bow: the LegalDocs program. Recently LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER took a look at this product...

The LegalDocs application has been designed to meet the needs of smaller High Street firms (in fact Jan Samuels, one of the directors of PerfectDocs has his own solicitors' practice in Barnstaple) where the volume of work might not justify a dedicated case management system but there is still a sufficient caseload to make manual file management impracticable.

With these considerations in mind, LegalDocs provides the user with a series of routines to improve the efficiency with which correspondence and legal documents are produced and stored on a computer system.

The program runs entirely within a wordprocessing environment (Word for Windows, WordPerfect 6.1 for Windows and even the DOS version of WordPerfect 5.1) and is menu driven, presenting the user with lists of client/matter files, document types and court pleadings types (ie Statement of Claim etc). There are also some more advanced touches, such a database of courts and a facility to complete onscreen time recording slips.

Although the system will run on a stand alone basis, PerfectDocs envisage it coming into its own when it is used across a network, with documents typically being created by a secretary and the matter progressing/file management handled by a fee earner.

Inevitably some training will be necessary and users will have to possess a modicum of computer literacy but the prime qualification is really an understanding of High Street legal practice, as this system essentially produces on a ➔

➔ computer what solicitors have been doing for years with file notes, carbon copies and card index systems.

☞ **Comment...** Given the amount of red tape solicitors have to contend with – legal aid franchises, practice management standards etc LegalDocs should help ease the administrative burden.

It is also likely to prove popular in its pricing with a £445 entry level (£245 for DOS) and additional licences available at £50 user. But couldn't some of LegalDocs' work be handled by a standard document management system, such as SoftSolutions of DOCS Open? The answer is probably "yes" assuming you had the resources to set up the system properly. Sadly that is one thing most High Street firms lack whereas with LegalDocs you have a ready-to-go productivity solution. PerfectDocs can be contacted on ☎ 01271 42887. ☐

HSSK SAGA COMES TO END

➔ *continued from front page...* information technology is a far too important subject to be left solely in the hands of the Practice Development Committee. Instead IT will now be placed on the agenda of the Society's main decision making body, the Policy Committee.

☞ **Comment...** Further comment on this whole sorry and misconceived affair is probably unnecessary, save to mention the experiences of Peapod Solutions, who launched their own version of a low cost High Street system late last year.

Although pitched at a low price to appeal to the smallest of firms, Peapod managing director Ian Wimbush says that while sales of the *One Stop Solution* are running ahead of target, the orders are all being placed by medium-sized High Street practices buying on average 10 user systems. "The price is right but the very small firms seem to have little or no interest in the benefits that technology could bring their practices." ☐

WordPerfect for Unix wanted
Rugby-based Brethertons are interested in buying some WordPerfect 5.1 for Unix licences and would like to hear from any firms in the throes of ditching Unix for PCs running Microsoft Word or Office. If you can help, contact Rita Evans or Trevor Dyer on ☎ 01788 579579.

☞ **Brethertons partner Andrew Katz says he is not embarrassed to admit the firm still uses WordPerfect 5.1 for Unix and adds that instead of installing a 70 user PC network, he would ideally like to move to a more cost effective network computer (NC) environment during the next 18 months.**

"But in the meantime we need some Unix 5.1 licenses so we can increase the counter on our server to deal with an influx of new staff," says Katz.

Need help or information ?
We are continuing to receive enquiries from law firms interested in the concept of outsourcing their IT operations and would like to hear the response from suppliers.

☞ 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 new recruits - just call the Insider Info line on ☎ 01379 687518.

Hotlinks
Readers with Internet access can visit the Insider Hotlinks pages at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/hotlinks/> where you will find hyperlinks to the Web sites of organisations mentioned in this and previous issues.

THE LOTUS POSITION

Lotus Development is now shipping the latest version of its SmartSuite integrated office automation package.

Called SmartSuite 97, at present it is only available for Windows 95 and Windows NT 4.0 platforms and features new 32-bit versions of the Word Pro word processing, Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet and Approach database applications.

As with earlier versions of SmartSuite, the package is designed to run in a collaborative computing environment, so data can easily be shared with other users on a network or transferred by email to a remote location. SmartSuite 97 also comes bundled with both the Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator Web browsers.

SmartSuite 97 will retail for around £320, with upgrades available from £150. Later this month Lotus will also begin shipping stand-alone versions of the applications.

As well as Windows 95 and NT, Lotus expects to have an OS/2 Warp V4 edition of SmartSuite 97 ready by the final quarter of this year. However, there are currently no plans for a Windows 3x version of the software.

☞ **Comment...** Although Lotus is now a subsidiary of IBM, it is instructive to see just how low a priority the company has given to developing a version of SmartSuite that will run on IBM's own OS/2 operating system. With friends like that, OS/2 does not need enemies.

This dearth of OS/2 applications software was cited by Nigel Steward, of Sherwin Oliver in Fareham, as being one of the main reasons why his firm is now migrating from an OS/2 platform to a Windows NT server with Windows 95 workstations. Since Nabarro Nathanson abandoned OS/2, Sherwin Oliver has been the UK's biggest legal user of OS/2. The only remaining OS/2 user of any size is now Philip Hamer & Co in Hull. □

DIARY DATES

☎ **March 10 & 11 - 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.

☎ **March 11 - AIM Evolution Spring Seminar Programme** This week in Coventry and Bristol. The programme continues until the end of May. Admission free, with a choice of morning or afternoon sessions. Call Jo Hunter on ☎ 01482 326971 for details.

☎ **March 13 & 14 - Communications & Law '97** The Society for Computers & Law's annual conference. Day one is on Internet law and regulation, including forum shopping. The second day looks at intranet technology, email and legal business opportunities on the Web. At No 1 Great George Street, London. Call the SCL on ☎ 0117 923 7393 for details.

☎ **March 19 - Excel Spreadsheets for Beginners** A one day training course organised by Institute of Legal Cashiers & Administrators. At the ILCA offices in South-East London, fee from £100, call ILCA on ☎ 0181 294 2887 for details.

☎ **March 24 & 25 - BILETA Annual Conference** The theme this year is the future of legal education and practice. At Collingwood College, Durham University. Call ☎ 01203 523294 for details.

☎ **April 9 - Financial & Marketing Management for the Bar** Start of a series of weekly courses running until June looking at the way IT can help barristers and chambers manage their practices. The course has been developed by Central Law Training in conjunction with Applied Computer Expertise. Call CLT on ☎ 0121 362 7712 for details. □

COMMUNIC@TIONS FUTURES

SIX WEEKS OF FREE BUSINESS LEADS ON WEB

Next Monday (17th) Context Ltd, one of the UK's leading electronic publishers of legal and Parliamentary information, launches a new Web-based service carrying details of European and international public sector invitations to tender.

In accordance with European law, all calls to tender with a value exceeding agreed thresholds are published in the Official Journal of European Communities - Supplement (OJ-S). These are already published by Context as a daily updated, dedicated online service but this service is now being extended to make it accessible via the Internet.

Context have indexed every word of this global database, so procurement information can be selected by any number of search criteria, such as product, region or date. There are also several new features which have been developed specifically for the Web site, including a full hierarchical index of the Common Procurement Vocabulary (CPV) codes and a facility to store and rerun regular search routines. Context say this will be particularly convenient should the Internet connection be lost.

From its launch date on 17th March until 30th April, access to Context Tenders on the Web at <http://www.tenders.co.uk> will be free. For those subscribing between the end of April and 31st July, the reduced first year rate is £400. After this a full annual subscription rate of £600 will apply. □

VALID HAS NEW WEB HOME

Valid Information Systems has moved its Internet presence to a new Web address. The new URL is <http://www.valinf.com>

Valid, which last month changed its name from Ymijis, has also recently signed a contract with Norton Rose, ➔

➔ which will result in Valid's flagship R/KYV litigation support system being installed in the law firm's offices throughout the world.

Valid have already worked with Norton Rose on some major litigation projects in North America and the Far East, including one multinational dispute being arbitrated in Paris under ICC rules. The first of the new R/KYV installations is scheduled to go "live" in Singapore later this month. □

NEW WEB SITE OUTSOURCING SERVICE

CloudNine Technology, the publishers of **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER**, have launched a new Web site maintenance service. Called Web Master/FM, it brings the benefits of outsourcing to the amendment and regular updating of Web pages, thus avoiding the problem of out of date, tired looking Internet sites.

The service, which includes HTML coding, the testing of hypertext links and the uploading of revised pages, is offered on either an ad hoc basis or as a regular check, with users paying a set fee per page. CloudNine can also offer a combined Web site hosting and maintenance service.

For further details call ☎ 01379 687518 or check out <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/fm/> □

LEGAL MOVES

Reed Elsevier is beefing up its Lexis-Nexis online information service with the addition of financial news and daily market reports from Bloomberg. More details can be found at <http://www.lexis-nexis.com>

The Lexis story coincided with the announcement by Time Warner in the USA that it intended to sell its stake in American Lawyer Media, which operates the *Counsel Connect* online service. Time Warner intends to concentrate its resources on the Court TV channel. □

New on the Web

**Rugby based
solicitors**

**Brethertons have
just launched their
own Web site at:**
<http://www.brethertons.co.uk>

**Partner Andrew
Katz warns that
while there are still
some areas under
construction,
future plans
include Java-based
interactive
features.**

Email favourite

**A recent survey
claims that Eudora
is now the most
widely used email
application, with
over 18 million
users around the
world. For details
check <http://www.qualcomm.com>**

**The Eudora Lite
shareware version
of the software can
be downloaded
from <http://www.eudora.com>**

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Coming soon...
We look at the new
Mobile Office
dictation system-
from Sanyo. Don't
miss the next
issue, No 35, on
24th March.

Alexis Byter's COMPUTER LORE

Acronym corner

Confused by those awful acronyms the computer industry likes to call items of technology? In fact even the techies recently had to change the name of PCMCIA cards (Personal Computer Memory Card International Association) to plain "PC cards" when it became apparent no-one could remember what it stood for.

I am therefore grateful to the reader who sent me a list of acronyms and what they really mean. Thus the widely used COBOL third generation programming language is defined as: "Completely Obsolete Business Oriented Language". While BT's high speed communications network ISDN - which despite recent price cuts has singularly failed to set the world alight - is defined as: "It Still Does Nothing". As for PCMCIA, that is rather cruelly redefined as: "People Cannot Memorise Computer Industry Acronyms"

Old PCs' home

No, we are not talking of a place where policemen go when they finally hang up their truncheons but a rather useful scheme the Free Representation Unit - the English Bar's original *pro bono* ➔

➔ service - has devised to dispose of redundant computer hardware.

The FRU now has an arrangement with a charity called Recycle-IT to collect old computers from chambers (or individual barristers in chambers). Recycle-IT guarantees to erase any data left on the computer and then offer it to other charities. In return the FRU receives credit points for every computer collected, which can be offset against the purchase of more up-to-date computers. Recycle-IT can be contacted on ☎ 0171 928 2726.

Sledgehammers and nuts

I received a press release the other day from an organisation announcing a new software program called *Cyber Patrol Corporate*. The software - it says here - gives companies the ability to filter employees' use of the Internet so they cannot access "content inappropriate in the workplace", which is an interesting euphemism for pornography.

But, just how prevalent is the problem of porn or is its seriousness being grossly exaggerated?

I leave you to make up your own minds but is interesting to note that in its first five weeks of operation, the self appointed Internet Watch Foundation received just 34 complaints on its censorship hot line, of which just 6, out of the millions of pages of material on the Web, merited reporting to the police. ☐

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