
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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PATIENCE RUNNING OUT FOR SMALL FIRMS ?

For the last couple of years the English Law Society's attention has been focussed on meeting the IT needs of smaller firms. But are they beyond help? A change of policy by Laserform Law, who supply the Kestrel low cost accounts system, suggests some small firms may be their own worst enemies.

Responding to allegations that a number of users of Kestrel Accounts were unhappy with the service provided by Laserform, managing director Barry Hawley-Green told **LTi** he found that "selling and supporting an accounts package to the smaller practices is extremely difficult and labour intensive.

"Our experience is that very few understand the need for ensuring they have a well run computer environment, meaning good hardware, properly installed networks, up-to-date system software and decent backup procedures.

"We have also found that many of these smaller practices do not take the user training course and either try to get to grips with the accounts themselves or use relatively inexpensive accountants or cashiers on a part time basis."

Because of the problems this can cause and the disproportionate pressure it places on support services, Laserform has now changed its sales policy to make the Kestrel installation and training service mandatory and to start charging customers for resolving their general computing problems. ➔

➔ Justifying this change of policy, Barry Hawley-Green cites the example of one firm that ran Kestrel across a network but with different versions of the software on each PC and consistently ignored the error messages flashing on VDU screens.

"And then there was the book-keeper who decided he would not use normal data entry methods but would instead use journal entries for everything. He also ignored running a consistency check for errors until the year end. When told that the Kestrel manual advises against this ...continued on page 5 ➔

HSSK SITE FALLS TO QUILL

The MacMillan Partnership in Ipswich, which was the pilot site for the Law Society's ill-fated High Street Starter Kit (HSSK) project, has bought Quantum Legal Aid, an integrated accounts, database and Legal Aid monitoring software package from Quill Computer Systems.

Philip Coates, who acted as a consultant to the firm, said the practice put considerable effort into the HSSK project "but due to lack of support from other quarters the system failed dismally". Coates believes the Law Society's decision to abandon the HSSK was probably the right one.

"After this bad experience the firm was averse to taking any sort of risk on the technology front and opted for a proven, reliable, working system which would be up and running quickly. We ultimately discounted other potential suppliers because there were areas of technological uncertainty. Quill's system, above everything else, is established, we could see it demonstrated and talk to other users. □

Intranet briefing

Badger

Applications, the company behind the LawNews email newsletter, have produced a briefing paper explaining to law firms the commercial and professional benefits of using intranets. To obtain a free copy of *The Legal Intranet* call

Jeremy Brockman on ☎ 01603 870201.

Changing places

Sarah Worsfold, previously with Perfect Books marketing and selling legal accounts software, has joined Norwel Computer Services. She will be providing sales support for Norwel's practice management system out of the company's London office (☎ 0171 583 0363).

KEYSTONE WIN ANOTHER SITE

Stephenson Harwood has announced that as part of a £2million project to replace existing front and back office systems with the latest workgroup and document management technology, the firm will be installing Keystone Solution's practice management system.

The firm's chief executive John Pike says the practice has "considerable expansion plans" and believes the switch to Keystone "will radically improve both our administrative and client handling capabilities as we move into the 21st Century... We are great believers in investing in two vital areas: hiring the right people and acquiring the right information systems to achieve our goals."

☞ **Comment...** Since opening for business in London in early 1996, the UK arm of New Zealand based Keystone (☎ 0171 583 6393) has attracted a lot of interest, as well as the makings of an impressive client list. As well as Stephenson Harwood, other recent signings include: D J Freeman and Ashurst Morris Crisp, with at least one other firm now involved in contractual negotiations. □

SCOTTISH ANSWER TO HAMBRO ?

Edinburgh solicitor Graeme McCormick has just launched a low cost fixed fee conveyancing service which he hopes will become the Scottish equivalent of the new Hambro Countrywide estate agency-to-conveyancing centre chain.

Called Conveyancing Direct, the new service will rely heavily on office automation technology to help undercut competitors' prices by as much as one third. This will partly be achieved by employing paralegals, who will be guided through the conveyancing workflow by case management software, in this instance Pilgrim's LawSoft system. ➔

➔ Pilgrim has adapted the system to allow for the rapid entry of information, as most instructions will be taken directly from telephone callers.

The financial side of these transactions, which have to comply with the Scottish Law Society's *Accounting Rules*, will be processed by LawSoft's accounts module.

Conveyancing Direct also plans to market its services on the internet and is currently discussing with Pilgrim ways of allowing instructions entered on its web site to be loaded directly into LawSoft. □

UP IN ARMS

The Beaver Corporation (☎ 0171 936 2828) has confirmed that Scottish ARMS, the version of its credit management and debt recovery software optimised for Scottish law firms and local authorities, is currently being redeveloped so it can be ported from a DOS/Unix environment to a 32-bit Windows 95/NT platform. The new version will begin shipping later this year.

Further details about the full range of Beaver products can be found on the company's web site, which has a new URL of <http://www.beaverco.co.uk> □

MILLENNIUM COUNTDOWN

☎ **Government initiative** - The CCTA (the government's Central Computer & Telecommunications Agency) has published a new guide for businesses worried about Year 2000 computing problems. Called *Tackling the Year 2000* it runs to six volumes and costs £320 (or £440 for the CD-Rom version). For further details call ☎ 0800 146020.

☎ **Business failures** - Leading Y2K computer consultant Peter de Jager predicts that in "the best case scenario" millennium computing problems will only bankrupt one in 100 businesses. In the UK this amounts to 40,000 companies. □

JM COMPUTING SWITCH TO MOUNTAIN

Manchester-based JM Computing, one of the largest distributors of legal systems in the North, last week announced it was to become the exclusive north of England reseller for Mountain Software. The move marks an important change of direction for JM, which until now has been a dealer for Cognito and DPS systems.

According to JM's managing director Paul Tobin although the Cognito accounts and DPS case management systems are good products in their own right, there was a growing demand among JM customers for a fully integrated accounts and case management system.

Having encountered Grantham-based Mountain (☎ 01476-73718) as a competitor at a number of law firms, JM decided to look more closely at the company's products, particularly the new 32-bit range of Windows software which does not receive its formal launch until later this month.

Tobin's verdict is that "The new software from Mountain is exactly what the market is looking for" and will provide what he terms "larger town firms" with an IT system that is "practicable, scalable and flexible".

Commenting on the move, Mountain managing director John Brewin said the company "felt there was a need to have a strategically placed reseller, capable of providing the quality of support our client base has come to expect. In JM Computing we feel we have found the ideal partner".

Although JM has now formally ceased to be a Cognito distributor, it will continue to provide support for existing customers. Tobin also wants to make a similar "clean break" with DPS, subject to agreeing customer support issues.

☞ JM Computing (☎ 0161 792 6020) has appointed Andrew Shore to its

professional services division, where he will be joining the team that sells into the legal market. Over the past 12 months this division has increased its turnover to £3million and now has a number of major regional law firms on its client list, including Pannone & Partners, Cobbetts and Eversheds. □

IT INVESTMENT UP - BUT NOT IN THE HIGH STREET

The results of Grant Thornton's 1996 Inter Firm Comparison reveal a steady increase in the number of lawyers with computers on their desks. Compared with the 1993 study, which found PCs were only being used by 25% of fee earners, the 1996 figures show this has increased to 44% in firms with 1-4 partners, 57% in firms with 10-19 partners and 77% in firms with 20 or more partners.

The study also shows more firms are moving beyond basic word processing and accounting systems and into the realms of broader law office automation.

For example 46% of the firms in the 1996 study had computerised debt recovery systems, 32% used CD-Rom-based legal reference materials and 49% had electronic mail.

Although Grant Thornton say that investment in IT as a percentage of income is relatively low at 3.25% "and therefore an issue for concern," possibly a bigger problem is the poor showing by firms in the 5-9 partner bracket. They only invest 2.55% of income in IT and their usage of PCs (9% in 1993 and still only 35% in 1996) lags way behind that of far smaller firms.

According to Andrew Levison, of Grant Thornton's legal consultancy The David Andrews Partnership, these firms fall into the category of traditional High Street practices who relied heavily on legal aid work and were hit hardest by the recession. "Because they are struggling to survive, they have no money to invest in new IT and are having to hold on to older systems a lot longer," says Levison. □

Dart misses target

Dart Legal Systems has confirmed it is involved in a contractual dispute with the Cardiff office of Eversheds over an 8 user licence version of its PPL case and practice management system the company supplied last summer.

With a settlement near to being agreed, neither side is prepared to comment on the causes of the dispute however LTI understands a key issue was whether Eversheds actually ordered the system or merely took it for evaluation.

☞ **Dart managing director Geoff Morris adds that negotiations have not been helped by six month old stories about the Eversheds' deal appearing in current publicity material for the Barbican Exhibition.**

New address

Miracle 2000, the company that supplies password recovery keys for popular software applications such as Word, Excel and WordPerfect, has moved. The new address is: Ash House Business Centre, 8 Second Cross Road, Twickenham, Middx TW2 5RF or call ☎ 0181 893 4766.

New outlet

The second edition of the *Child's Pay software plus text book guide to the 1991 Child Support Act* is now available from Class Publishing on ☎ 0171 371 2119, price £299.

Wordwright

The telephone number given in the last issue for Wordwright Associates, who produce taxation costings software, should have read ☎ 01473 212752.

LOW COST CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM GAINING GROUND

The low cost case management system launched by Lindon Wood Management Consultants last summer is gaining ground and was recently installed at its 90th user site. LTI reports on the latest developments...

The company's managing director Terry Lindon admits that when he first began promoting Case Flow Manager, he encountered a good deal of scepticism from lawyers who could not understand how a £150 per user product could possibly offer the same facilities as systems costing £40/£50,000.

But, as Manchester solicitor Stephen Baker points out: "At £150 you can at least afford to take a punt and try the software". In fact this is what he did and Baker now has Case Flow Manager running throughout the firm supporting matrimonial, personal injury, probate, conveyancing and criminal work.

Baker's verdict is that while the Lindon Wood product may not have all the features of the Aristas of this world, it certainly does the job he wants. And, it is affordable.

Along with firms such as Linskills and Stephen Baker, Case Flow Manager is also being bought by accountants, estate agencies and Citizens Advice Bureaux. Lindon says the attraction is its flexibility and ease of use, allowing users to build systems as simple or as complex as they want. But, he also concedes that because the system does not have a relational database at its heart, it is probably better suited to firms handling large numbers of one-off matters.

☞ **Technical Note...** The system started out in life as an American product called Key Optimiser, a 16-bit Windows BTriev application designed for Novell networks. Since then it has been considerably enhanced to include contacts records, ➡

➡ to do lists and a diary, plus the ability to make file notes, record macros and even record time. Having its own word-processor it is totally self contained but there is also a DDE facility so it can be linked to third-party products, including Word, WordPerfect and Excel.

Probably the best way to view it is not so much as a cut-down case manager but as a sophisticated PIM/information manager on the lines of Symantec's ACT! or even Lotus Organiser. Lindon Woods is on ☎ 0151 236 1724. ☐

MIXED FORTUNES FOR NEW MICROPROCESSOR CHIP

Semiconductor maker Intel has launched its new generation of Pentium II processor chips for high powered multimedia PCs. The new chips effectively combine the features of the Pentium Pro with the MMX multimedia technology launched at the end of last year. Initially the chips are expected to appeal to organisations adopting the Windows NT platform for desktop operations but who also need additional processing speed to support power-hungry applications such as video conferencing and speech recognition.

Sixteen computer manufacturers, including Dell, IBM and Compaq are launching Pentium II models this month. Prices for the 233/266MHz models will initially be high - Dell is quoting £1,599 (+VAT) for a 233MHz Pentium II with 32Mb of RAM - but are expected to fall to nearer £1,200 towards the end of the year as they are followed by more powerful 300 and 400MHz models.

☞ Intel's launch has not been without problems. There have been allegations that the new chip contains a bug relating to the conversion of floating point numbers into integer numbers - Intel says it is investigating the claims. And, Digital Equipment has filed a lawsuit in the US alleging Intel has "wilfully and deliberately" infringed microprocessor patents belonging to Digital. ☐

MIL OPENS NEW FM SERVICE

Legal systems suppliers Management Interface Ltd (MIL) has launched a facilities management (FM) service for solicitors' practices.

Taking as its theme: "are you in charge of your network – or is it in charge of you?" MIL's service offers law firms the option of sub-contracting out the management of their computer networks.

MIL reckons its 15 year track record in the legal IT market gives it a very broad experience of dealing with network problems and that it can provide its services "at a fraction of the cost" of a law firm employing its own network specialist. MIL is ISO 9002 accredited and can be contacted on ☎ 01992 788288. □

PATIENCE RUNNING OUT FOR SMALL FIRMS ?

➔ *continued from front page...* approach, he said he was an accountant, that he knew what he was doing and never read manuals because he didn't need to."

As to the allegations of poor product quality, Laserform admits the original Windows version of Kestrel the company acquired from its developers Wheatsheaf in December 1995 was "flawed" and a potential source of "serious problems" for users.

However Barry Hawley-Green is confident these difficulties were overcome with the release of the redesigned and redeveloped version of Kestrel in August 1996. (This uses Access as the database. Laserform is now also *beta testing* a new SQL Server version of Kestrel.)

During these early months the company lost four of the original 12 Kestrel Windows users but since then the user base has been growing at about eight practices a month and now stands at just under 100 firms.

According to Hawley-Green, there are currently only two firms that are unhappy with their systems. ➔

➔ One has asked **LTi** not to disclose its identity as both sides are optimistic any problems may soon be resolved. The other firm is north London-based Abrahamson & Associates, where there appears to have been a complete breakdown in relations between them and Laserform.

There, the senior partner Barry Abrahamson accuses Laserform of having done nothing about his firm's problems in nearly a year and is now threatening legal action on the grounds the Kestrel software he was sold (the original Wheatsheaf system) is "unfit for purpose".

Laserform, for its part, concedes "he does have grounds for complaint and we will consider a reasonable claim". But the company also adds that although it has "tried very hard to resolve the problems to his satisfaction... he (Abrahamson) seems more interested in broadcasting his past problems than in getting on with the rest of his life."

☞ **Comment...** While we leave it to the two Barrys to battle it out (*perhaps an independent arbitrator might help*) the dispute does at least reveal why an increasing number of legal IT suppliers are steering clear of sole practitioners and small firms.

With no IT resources of their own, such firms make disproportionately heavy demands on suppliers' support services and tend to see problems as simple black and white issues, whereas the fault may lie elsewhere in inadequate hardware, poorly trained staff or badly configured networks.

Laserform is also not alone in seeking to impose preconditions on sales to smaller firms. The company's main rival in this corner of the market – Peapod with its One Stop Solution – will not sell to firms who are unwilling to also take its three day training and implementation scheme. In addition, where a prospective purchaser is intending to replace an existing computerised accounts system, Peapod insists that its own staff transfer the ledger balances. □

Linklaters to spend £750,000 on cabling

Linklaters & Paines has awarded a contract worth £750,000 to network and cabling specialists Cableship (☎ 0181 429 3333) to install "structured cabling" in the firm's two new office buildings in Silk Street in the City of London.

☞ **Cableship is installing Lucent Systemax and BICC Brand-Rex Blo-Lite structured cabling, as part of a new network infrastructure serving 9,600 outlets in two buildings, across 14 floors. The design will allow Linklaters to move towards a full multimedia environment supporting electronic document transfer and video conferencing across the practice.**

Courting litigation

In an attempt to deal with the "immense amount of litigation" being brought over the provisions in Order 17 of the *County Court Rules* relating to the striking out and reinstatement of actions (at the last count there were over 130 cases pending) the Court of Appeal has published the full text of its judgment in *Bannister v. SGB plc & Others* (which restates much of the existing law on the topic) on the Lord Chancellor's Department web site at <http://www.open.gov.uk/lcd/lcdhome.htm>

Disaster software

STAC Systems have launched a new disaster recovery system. The software is called *Replica* and details can be found at <http://www.stac.com>

COMMUNIC@TIONS FUTURES

Direct hyperlinks to all sites mentioned on this page can be found at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/hotlinks/> Details of the Web Master/FM outsourcing service for web site maintenance can be found at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/fm/> ☐

REED ELSEVIER IN ALLIANCE WITH MICROSOFT

The Anglo-Dutch publishing group Reed Elsevier – the parent of legal publishers Butterworths – has signed a letter of intent to form a five year strategic "alliance" with Microsoft.

The total value of the deal is said to be worth £18.5million and as well as standardising all Reed's 26,000 employees worldwide on Microsoft software, Reed will be using Microsoft's Commercial Internet Systems suite of applications as the basis for the electronic delivery of its scientific, legal and business publishing "products".

Reed is already exploring aspects of electronic publishing with its Lexis-Nexis online service and is also keen to develop the concept of information "communities" (☞ *in effect intranets or extranets*) that could, for example, allow lawyers to share legal information.

Reed also says that earnings from its electronic products are now growing at twice the speed of revenues from its conventional hard copy publications.

☞ On 1st June Butterworths is relaunching its web site to provide a more "content rich" service. New features will include: a "virtual bookshop" covering the combined Butterworths/Tolley catalogue with ordering facilities, an online version of the *Butterworths Law Directory*, a full library of legal "hot links" and a daily *Hot off the Press* current awareness review of newspapers and journals.

The site can be found at <http://www.butterworths.co.uk> ☐

LEGALEASE IN DOMAIN NAME INITIATIVE

Legalease, the legal publishing group behind the LINK network and *The Legal 500*, has launched a new service designed to make it easier to protect intellectual property rights on the internet.

Called Net Searchers, it offers a number of services including domain name searching and registration on an international basis. Further details are available on the company's web site at <http://www.netsearchers.co.uk> or call Nick Wood on ☎ 0171 396 5676.

☞ **Comment...** The Net Searchers service is primarily pitched at law firms who want to be able to protect their clients' intellectual property rights from infringement. As the company points out in its sales literature: "It happened to McDonalds and Harrods, Playboy and Panavision – and it could happen to your clients."

Given that the International Ad Hoc Committee (or IAHC, an offshoot of the Internet Society) has been holding largely fruitless meetings in Geneva since the beginning of May in a vain attempt to create a new global structure to manage the registration of domain names and resolve some of the trademark issues that have arisen in recent months, the arrival of the new Net Searchers service couldn't be more timely. ☐

DATA REGISTRY WARNING ON WEB INFORMATION

The Data Protection Registry (DPR) is warning web site operators that if they use their pages to collect personal information (☞ *typically though CGI-style fill-in boxes, "visitor books" or automatic "cookies"*) they must be registered under the 1984 Data Protection Act.

The UK subsidiary of the modem manufacturer US Robotics was fined £2000 earlier this year for contravening the Act by collecting personal details via its unregistered web site and the DPR ➡

➔ has now launched a drive to increase awareness of data protection law among internet users.

The DPR has also issued some new guidance notes on the subject and these can be found at <http://www.open.gov.uk/dpr/dprhome.htm> (See also *Diary Dates on this page.*) □

AUSSIE ACCOUNTANTS WORRIED BY WEB

Australia's largest professional body, the Society of Certified Practising Accountants, is warning accountants, lawyers and other professional advisers to check their professional indemnity cover before providing advice over the internet.

According to SCPA spokeswoman Pamela Hussey, the increasing incidence of professionals such as accountants and lawyers giving advice on the internet is making them unnecessarily vulnerable to lawsuits.

"The issue," she says, "is whether a professional relationship has been formed. If it is not in effect during an internet exchange then professional indemnity insurance may not be valid." Ms Hussey also believes most of the disclaimers firms carry on their web sites "will not hold up in court". □

MARKETING ADVICE

The web services consultancy WWW Strategies Ltd has launched a new marketing oriented web site that contains news and reference information both about basic marketing activities (PR, building contact databases etc) and using the internet and web sites as part of an overall marketing strategy.

Access to the site's pages are free, as the venture is being sponsored by the TDS Group, who specialise in database marketing technologies. The site at <http://www.marketinguk.co.uk> is also planning a job advertisements section for marketing professionals and recruitment agencies and a discussion forum. □

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY DIARY DATES

☉ **May 28 - Public Sector Business Opportunities** One day conference on EC procurement rules and procedures organised by electronic publisher Context Ltd Fee £225 + VAT. At Centre Point, London. Delegates also receive a free copy of the new Longmans book *Public Procurement Policy* by Paul Clarke, one of the speakers at the event. Call Context on ☎ 0171 267 8989 or check <http://www.justis.com> for details.

☉ **June 3, 4 & 5 - Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition** The UK's leading legal technology exhibition. The location is the Barbican Exhibition Centre in London and admission is free. The doors open each day at 9.30am and close at 6pm on Tuesday and 5pm on Thursday - on Wednesday there is 7.30pm late night closing. For details call Truemist on ☎ 0181 742 3399.

☉ **June 4 - Norwel Day of Difference** One day mixture of serious business and hospitality organised by Norwel Computer Services. Speakers include Chris Erban of Berwin Leighton and Peter Gibbons of Withers plus legal IT consultants John Irving and Janet Day. At Chiswell Street Brewery, London. Call Alison Bagnall on ☎ 0161 945 3511 for details.

☉ **June 10 - Society for Computers & Law 1997 Lecture** This year's speaker is Elizabeth France, the Data Protection Registrar, and her subject is *The Future of Data Protection in an Online World - can data protection survive in cyberspace?* Starts 6.15pm at Royal Society, Carlton House Terrace, London. No charge to SCL members attending lecture but there is a £20 fee for buffet supper that follows the lecture. Please note that accommodation is limited, so it is essential to obtain tickets in advance. Call SCL on ☎ 0117 923 7393 for details. □

READER SERVICES

Need help or information ?

If you need a phone number, product name, contact point or any other elusive item of information concerning legal technology, 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.

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Next issue...
Issue No 40 of the Insider will be published on Monday 2nd June, don't miss it.

MARKETING IT MATTERS

Pause for visual aid

While slides and OHP transparencies have long since given way to laptop plus PowerPoint presentations as the basis for illustrating seminar sessions and new product demonstrations, we have to admit that Mike Willstrop of The Beaver Corporation's concept of the computer as a visual aid takes some beating.

Speaking at an Institute of Credit Management conference at the end of last month, he wanted to drive home the message that it was no good gathering business data if no-one could access or use it.

So how did he get this point across? By taking a hammer and smashing a personal computer to pieces until he could pull out the hard disk drive. And "no" you will not impress your superiors by trying this at work !

Why not tell everyone !

Having compiled your marketing data, why not do something with it. An increasingly popular option in these internet-aware days is to collect prospects' email addresses so they can be hit regularly with electronic mailings.

To save keying in all those someone@somewhere.co.uk addresses ➔

➔ the flavour of the month technology is email *list server* software – the electronic equivalent of the photocopied mailing list. But, do watch out as some list servers transmit not only the message but also a copy of the whole mailing list, complete with full email addresses, to all recipients.

A major regional newspaper, that shall remain nameless, recently did this in an emailing to readers of its electronic web edition. Now several thousand businesses in its circulation area have a *gratis* mailing list of individuals interested in high tech matters. Many thanks.

Weasel words

As a result of some recent libel actions, both in the UK and the USA, it is now common practice for the distributors of press releases to carry disclaimers seeking to exclude liability for statements made in the wording of the releases.

Fair enough. But what are we to make of Computron, purveyors of financial software to Simmons & Simmons among others, whose own press releases on their own stationery now end with fulsome, weasel worded disclaimers of such length that they surely deserve an entry in the *Guinness Book of Records*.

Come on guys, if you have so little faith in what you are saying, how do you expect anyone else to be interested ? ☐

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