
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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LAWGROUP IDENTIFIES MAJOR IT SUPPLIERS

The solicitors' network LawGroup UK has just released to LTi the results of a major survey it conducted earlier this year into the use of information technology among its 86 member firms. With a total of nearly 3900 fee earners and an average of 10 partners per firm, LawGroup is well placed to provide an accurate snapshot of what High Street firms are really doing...

Starting with wordprocessing, while WordPerfect 5.1 Dos remains for the time being the most popular product, a growing number of firms either already have or are planning to move over to Windows products, including MS Word.

When LawGroup last conducted this survey in 1994 no-one was using Windows wordprocessing whereas today 45% are doing so and nearly half of the survey respondents said they planned to change to a "different" wordprocessing product in 1997. (☞ The survey also found that 96% of respondents were now using either WordPerfect or Microsoft whereas in 1994 these two companies only had a 78% market share, which suggests "minor" products such as Ami Pro are being squeezed out.)

Turning to accounts software, the survey found the LawGroup members' market was dominated by six suppliers: AIM Professional, Axxia Systems, Avenue Legal Systems, Technology for Business (TFB), Mountain Software and Videss. However LawGroup warn that these ➔

➔ companies "should not feel too secure" since 27% of members firms said they were considering a change of accounting system and/or supplier this year.

In terms of other areas of legal software, although the number of firms using case management systems has not increased substantially since 1994, nearly two-thirds of existing users were planning to extend their use this year and another 12% were looking to start using case management.

Computer systems are now used in 64% of firms to record deeds and wills. Laserform is the most popular electronic legal forms system, followed by Peapod. And, just under 30% of firms expressed interest in using document assembly systems such as HotDocs.

The survey also found interesting changes in the use of IT. In 1994 just 38% of firms had lawyers using keyboards and doing their own wordprocessing but by 1997 this figure had almost doubled to two-thirds. On the other hand the number using handheld computers, such as Psions, for time recording fell from 6% to just over 1%.

Commenting on the results, LawGroup head Peter Warner said that although most High Street practices were still a long way from becoming paperless offices and have "a very high dependency on secretaries" he felt lawyers were determined to become increasingly self-sufficient.

Mr Warner is also confident there will continue to be a steady rise in the use of integrated systems and Windows-based packages. "This migration to Windows," he adds, "is very timely as LawGroup is currently introducing an intranet system." ...continued on page 3 ➔

Solicitec recruit lawyer as new MD

Case management specialist Solicitec has appointed Richard Arney as its new managing director. Mr Arney was previously an equity partner with Birmingham solicitors Sydney Mitchell. He was also a founder member of the Motor Accident Solicitors Society and chaired the Society's IT working party.

RightFax on ISDN

Kommunicate, UK distributors of the RightFax network fax system, can now deliver the system incorporating the latest Brooktrout ISDN boards. One benefit of the new technology is it means incoming faxes can be sent directly to PCs without the need for separate routers. For details call ☎ 01252 815514.

FRANKLINS PUTTING PC POWER ON THE DESKTOP

Franklins Solicitors, which has offices in Northampton and Milton Keynes, is currently implementing the finishing touches to a £200,000 IT investment project, which over the last two years has seen the firm upgrade its network infrastructure and PC hardware.

For the firm's fee earners, probably the most noticeable feature of the new system is the sheer power of the desktop computing facilities at their disposal.

Whereas other practices may opt for minimum spec clones, Franklins new workstations have been standardised as Compaq Pentium DeskPro PCs with 48Mb of RAM and 1Gb hard disks. The network is Novell IntranetWare and the servers are 128Mb Compaq Proliants with 4.3Gb hard drives. (The firm has also invested in a number of laptop PCs.) But isn't such a configuration rather expensive?

According to Franklins' partner Mark Hemmings, the firm opted for "blue chip" technology because it wanted the reliability of product and quality of support service you get from companies such as Compaq. (The hardware was actually supplied by CTS and Pericom.)

As for the high specifications, with Windows 95/NT already needing 32Mb and major upgrades to both operating systems around the corner, the firm took the view that sooner, rather than later, they would probably need more RAM so it made sense to have it installed from the outset.

In terms of applications, Franklins has been a DOS organisation, with word processing based on WordPerfect 5.1. However, the firm is now in the process of converting its extensive precedents library and migrating to Microsoft Word. Other Microsoft Office 97 applications, including the Access database are also now being used by fee earners and staff.

The current IT project comes to an end later this summer, when Franklins ➡

➡ opens its new office premises in Milton Keynes. But, Hemmings says this is not the end of the story as the firm is also in the process of reviewing its case and document management systems. ☐

BATH FIRM CHOOSES SOS

As part of ongoing practice development, Stone King & Wardle in Bath is installing a new Windows-based 40 user accounts and case management system. The contract, worth a total of £80,000 in licence fees alone, has been awarded to Solicitors Own Software (SOS).

The practice's IT partner Owen Sentry said the SOS solution had been chosen because: "we like the synergy and integration between the time recording, accounts and case management software. It will allow us to use and add general industry wide software, such as Microsoft Office, and is not a slave to a proprietary system. This flexibility and future proofing was a key factor in our choice."

☞ **Technical Note...** The firm has adopted a rolling installation and training programme so that by September every member of the firm will have a networked PC on their desk. Lawyers and support staff will have access to case management and accounts, while fee earners will record billable hours in real time on-screen.

In a pleasingly enlightened move, the firm has also organised training courses at the local technical college for secretaries and fee earners, so as to help introduce them to the basics of Windows computing. ☐

LINETIME UPGRADE

Long standing Linetime client Boys & Maughan has signed a £26,000 contract to upgrade existing hardware and install new legal applications software in its Kent practice. The software includes Linetime's Windows-based Context Conveyancing system. ☐

PHILIPS AND IBM JOIN CONTINUOUS SPEECH RACE

Following last month's announcement by Dragon Systems that it was launching a continuous (or "natural") speech recognition system, both Philips and IBM have now thrown their hats into the ring.

IBM is expected to announce its new system in the USA in the middle of June. Rather closer to home, the Philips Speech Processing division is unveiling its first speech recognition "context" (or language module) for lawyers at the *Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition* in London tomorrow.

The context - covering property law - was developed by legal publishers Legalease and is part of the Philips SpeechMagic suite of continuous speech recognition products. Philips say that the product's beta test sites are reporting accuracy figures in excess of 90% and the potential for up to a 40% increase in fee earner productivity.

The Philips move coincides with reports that the new Dragon product may not be as impressive as was first hoped.

One important qualification is Dragon will initially only be releasing the Personal edition of NaturallySpeaking. This has no direct dictation capability, so users cannot talk and edit directly into an application, such as WordPerfect, but must instead cut and paste from an intermediary "dictation window". The original version of IBM's VoiceType and current Simply Speaking products also use this approach.

Unlike some other products, including the new Philips system, the Dragon system has no speech recording capability - so there is no audio file that can be played back to hear and check the original dictation.

UK speech technology developers AllVoice Computing, who have recently had discussions with Dragon's US management, say it is their

➔ understanding that a more fully featured "professional" version of the NaturallySpeaking product is planned for later this year.

AllVoice managing director John Mitchell says Dragon also "suggested avoiding over promoting" the NaturallySpeaking product to professionals, such as lawyers, at this stage because it is currently only available in an American English speaker and vocabulary version.

Mitchell says the US only speaker point may adversely affect accuracy much more so than *discrete* speech recognition systems, while the US vocabulary (and spelling) will be a hindrance rather than a help to most lawyers.

☞ **Related Developments...** US speech recognition specialist Lernout & Hauspie has licensed technologies to Microsoft that will allow the successor to the Windows 95 operating system to have a speech user interface (SUI).

- Dictaphone (☎ 01926 821266) has launched its new Dictaphone Online Transcription Services (DOTS). Effectively a digital dictation bureau, this allows users to dictate documents down a phone line for transcription by legal secretaries. The transcribed and typed documents are then returned by email, fax, on disk or as hard copy in 4, 12 or 24 hours depending on the service required.

Pricing is based on a cost per page (from £5 per page for the next day service) with discounts for volume but no minimum charges. Although some solicitors have signed up for the service, the vast majority of customers are barristers chambers, which have always favoured external secretarial services.

- Between now and the 10th July, AllVoice Computing is running a series of free seminars around the country on the subject of the latest developments in speech recognition technology. There is a choice of morning or afternoon sessions in Norwich, London, Bristol, Preston, Leeds, Birmingham and Plymouth. Call AllVoice on ☎ 01626 331133 for details.☐

LawGroup IT survey

➔ *continued from front page...* Called ProLINK, the new intranet is intended to improve and simplify the sharing of information and general communications between the majority of LawGroup and CharterGroup (the sister network for accountants) members by the end of the year.

☐

Bug Watch

☞ **US chip maker Intel has confirmed there is a minor bug in its Pentium Pro and Pentium II microprocessors that affect floating point operations. Intel has posted a software fix on its web site at <http://www.intel.com>**

☞ **Microsoft is taking steps to resolve the "save as" file format problem in Office 97, which saves Word 7.0 documents as .RTF files rather than .DOC files. Microsoft will next month launch a free Office 97 Service Release that includes a Word file converter to create native Word 6.0 files. The software will also be downloadable from the company's web site at <http://www.microsoft.com>**

Y2K UPGRADE POLICY LEAVES BAD TASTE

Cardiff-based solicitors Loosemores are refusing to buy a Year 2000 software upgrade because they feel they should not have to pay for an enhancement that is only necessary because the original developer "lacked the foresight" to make it millennium compliant.

The firm's Steve Parry-Langdon takes up the story: "Loosemores, like many businesses our size, use the Sage payroll package. I have just had a phone call from them to tell me there is now a new version of the Payroll program, which takes it just one version ahead of that we are currently using.

"Naturally, I asked what new features the software included, only to be told its main 'improvement' was it was now Y2K proof and that 'no' it was not a no-cost upgrade - Sage want to charge us £99 even though we already pay them for a support contract!"

Mr Parry-Langdon told Sage "it was a little rich charging for own their programmers' lack of foresight" and has declined to upgrade at this time.

Mr Parry-Langdon has also suggested to Sage that it should "rethink" its upgrade policy. **LTI** would like to hear from other readers who feel they are getting a raw deal from suppliers' over their Y2K upgrade strategies.

Sage is also being criticised over the terms of its *shrink-wrapped* licences. Portsmouth County Court next month hears a case brought by management consultant Geoffrey Darndon, who claims he was only able to learn of limitations in the Sage Financial Controller application *after* breaking the seal on the licence agreement. Sage deny any liability.

☞ **Related Developments...** Other Year 2000 computing stories include:

- Legal systems supplier Linetime is warning that the Altos 1000 server ➔

➔ range is not year 2000 compliant. For details call Rachel Rowling on ☎ 0113 250 0020.

- The National Audit Office has said one fifth of UK Government departments are unlikely to have completed their IT preparations in time for the year 2000.

- Westminster City Council suggests a major problem for many organisations will be "self developed" systems, where individual users have developed their own programs and "double digit" macros running on local PCs, that may escape the attention of IT staff running year 2000 audits.

- Robin Guenier, who heads the Taskforce 2000 group, has expressed concern that the BIOS chips in many personal computers are not year 2000 compliant.

Although Compaq, IBM and Dell all insist their new PCs can handle the millennium date change, one recent survey found that 79% of PCs with BIOS chips manufactured before 1997 could not roll over from 1999 to 2000 and a further 14% did not recognise the Year 2000 as a leap year. The same survey also found that out of 500 PCs containing BIOS chips with a 1997 manufacture date, only 53% were Y2K compliant. □

NEW EDITION OF ACCOUNTS SOFTWARE GUIDE

Management consultancy Hames Robinson Associates (☎ 01420 87395) has just published the third edition of its *Accounting Software for Solicitors* guide. This combines conventional narrative with data on an Excel 5.0 spreadsheet, so users can *weight* prospects according to their own practice's priorities.

Along with several improvements to the software, the guide has been increased in size to include information on 25 legal accounts systems vendors, compared with just 17 in the last edition. Additions include Avenue Legal, Quill and Irish supplier Rodine (☎ 00 353 51 872111). The guide costs £95 (+ VAT). □

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER LAUNCHES MAJOR NEW SERVICE

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER has launched a new service providing exclusive commissioned reports on strategic issues relating to the UK legal technology market.

Called *Insider Confidential*, the new service is designed to assist the managements of solicitors' practices and IT suppliers in their decision making processes by providing position papers, advisory opinions and SWOT analyses on competitive products, suppliers and technologies based on material drawn from the Insider's own extensive research and market intelligence.

The new service is particularly suited to firms who can devise their own ITTs, have inhouse IT skills and can draw up implementation plans but need additional in-depth analysis from an impartial third-party.

Insider Confidential reports are researched and written entirely to the client's brief, in complete confidence and can vary in scope from wide-ranging topics, such as overall commercial and IT trends within the legal market, through to, for example, specific reports on different approaches to Windows NT development projects.

Described by IBM as "the UK's leading commentator on law office technology" Charles Christian, the editor of **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** and the new *Insider Confidential* reports, is a former practising barrister. His inside knowledge and contacts in the UK and abroad come from nearly 20 years involvement in the market.

During this period he has written extensively on this subject for all the UK's leading legal publications, as well as the national and IT press, and has advised a range of companies, publishers, law firms and professional bodies on technology issues. For further details call ☎ 01379 687518 or email info@cloudnine.co.uk ☐

WHO IS SUPPLYING COMPANY SECRETARIAL SYSTEMS ?

In recent weeks **LTi** has received enquiries from a number of solicitors' practices interested in locating suppliers of specialist company secretarial software suitable for firms wanting to undertake company secretary work for clients.

Currently three companies are actively selling these systems to solicitors' practices. They are...

☎ **CSA Software** (☎ 0171 497 5511) whose Blueprint system was jointly developed with the Institute of Chartered Secretaries & Administrators. ICSA say the majority of *Times 1000* companies now use the Windows version of the software. (There is also a DOS version.)

Pricing is based on a complex formula based on size, number of subsidiary companies etc but as a rule of thumb, a law firm with 100 company secretarial clients could expect to pay around £2000 for a system.

☎ **CoAct Software** (☎ 01703 789107) are the authors of CoAct, a database oriented system specifically designed for solicitors and other professionals performing company secretarial work for clients. The software includes a billing module and a full compliance diary.

CoAct will be exhibiting at this week's Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition at the Barbican.

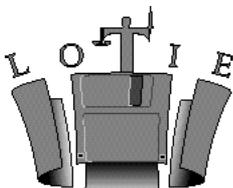
☎ **Michael Software Systems** (☎ 01283 500444) are a UK subsidiary of the Datacare Software Group, authors of the Secretariat system. The company has been involved in this niche market for about 10 years and has sites both in the UK and across Europe.

Datacare is exhibiting at the Barbican for the first time this year and will also be planning to launch a range of complementary products during the course of 1997. See also <http://www.secretariat.co.uk> ☐

Practice healthchecks Solicitors Own Software (SOS) this week launches a new financial management program called the Practice Healthcheck.

Developed in conjunction with a firm of accountants, the new system identifies and downloads, directly into an Excel spreadsheet, key financial performance indicators (such as work in progress, unbilled time, actual performance against budgeted targets etc) so practice management can gain an immediate snapshot of the firm's financial state of health.

SOS can be contacted on ☎ 01225 448664.



THE 1997 LOTIES... THE WINNERS AND THE RUNNERS-UP

The ballot papers have been returned, all the votes counted and we can now announce the winners of the LOTIES, the 1997 Law Office Technology Innovation Awards, which are jointly promoted by **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** in association with *In Brief* magazine.

CATEGORY

LAW OFFICE TECHNOLOGY PRODUCT OF THE YEAR: RIGHTFAX - the network fax management system from Kommunicate
2nd: CARPE DIEM from ProSoft
3rd: ONLINE LOOK-UP from Text Systems

BEST LEGAL FRONT OFFICE PRODUCT: IN CONTROL LEGAL - case and workflow management from Mercury Computing
2nd: FEE EARNER DESKTOP from Axxia
3rd: QUILL COMPUTERS CONVEYANCING

BEST LEGAL BACK OFFICE PRODUCT: ALPHALAW ACCOUNTS from MSS Management Support Systems
2nd: ELITE BILLING SYSTEM
3rd: ARISTA from Axxia

BEST LAW OFFICE AUTOMATION PRODUCT: FAXSWITCH from Hexar
2nd: MICROSOFT WORD 6.0 for Windows
3rd: HOTDOCS from Capsoft

LAW OFFICE TECHNOLOGY NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR: ELR - the Electronic Law Reports from Context Ltd

BEST LAW OFFICE TECHNOLOGY SUPPLIER: MSS MANAGEMENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS
2nd: HEXAR LIMITED
3rd: QUILL COMPUTER SYSTEMS

BEST LEGAL PUBLICATION ON CD-ROM: ELR - the Electronic Law Reports from Context Ltd

BEST LAW OFFICE TECHNOLOGY USER GROUP: NORWEL User Group
2nd: ELITE User Group
3rd: AXXIA Systems Solicitors User Group

BEST LEGAL WORLD WIDE WEB/INTERNET SITE: DELIA VENABLES LEGAL RESOURCES www.venables.co.uk/legal/
2nd: OLSWANG www.olswang.co.uk
3rd: INFORMATION FOR LAWYERS www.infolaw.co.uk/ifl/

BEST LEGAL GADGET OR UTILITY: THE FUTURE OF LAW by Richard Susskind
2nd: TIMECLERK from Quill Computers
3rd: ONLINE LOOK-UP from Text Systems

☞ **Comment...** Congratulations to the winners and commiserations to the runners-up although they should not be too down-hearted as the voting was very close in some categories.

One of the most significant features of this year's voting is the growing impact of specialist legal systems of American origin: Carpe Diem from the ProSoft Corporation, OnLine Look-Up which is distributed in the UK by Text Systems, the Elite Billing System and the HotDocs document assembly system from Capsoft.

However, by way of redressing the balance, it is worth noting that the heaviest voting was actually received from readers supporting home-grown products from firmly established UK suppliers, such as MSS Management Support Systems, Hexar, Quill Computer Systems and Axxia Systems.

Another trend revealed in the voting patterns - and one echoed in the results of the recent LawGroup survey (see front page story) - is that whereas last year WordPerfect, the old stalwart of the legal wordprocessing market was runner up in the Best Law Office Automation Product category, this year WordPerfect was not even nominated and instead we have the rival Microsoft Word 6.0 for Windows making a very strong showing in that category. □

COMMUNIC@TIONS

FUTURES

EQUITRAC SELECTS MICROSOFT BROWSER

Disbursement monitoring and cost recovery specialist Equitrac has chosen Microsoft Internet Explorer 3.0 as the basis for its EPIC internet client/server software.

EPIC is a tracking, monitoring and blocking tool enabling lawyers and other providers of professional services to log time spent online, monitor online research and track email for billing and project management purposes.

The *blocking* feature, which can be customised by department, time or workstation, enables administrators to deny access to porn, leisure and other non-work related web sites.

EPIC is due for release later this summer, the US list price is expected to be \$99 and further information, including details of a 30-day free trial offer, can be found at <http://www.equitrac.com> □

PATENTLY CLEAR

The UK Patent Office has opened a new web site at <http://www.patent.gov.uk> □

LAW ON THE INTRANET

Sweet & Maxwell subsidiary Legal Information Resources (☎ 01422 888022) can now supply its full range of Current Legal Information databases and the associated *Legal Thesaurus* in a format that will run on a practice wide intranet or Lotus Notes environment.

LIR also offers an automatic daily update service, whereby overnight it runs a field-level replication of the "mother database" via a modem or ISDN link, so each morning the intranet contains the latest case reports and legal information.

Pricing is based on the annual subscription for CD-Rom versions of the databases requested plus 30 percent. □

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

DIARY DATES

☎ **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.

☎ **June 24 - Internet Conference for Lawyers** One day conference looking at practical aspects of delivering legal services across the web. Speakers include Clive Whitfield-Jones of Jeffrey Green Russell. Fee £330 (+ VAT) or £220 (+ VAT) for Central Law Training members. Accredited for 6 hours CPD points. At Gloucester Hotel, London, starts 9.00am. Call CLT Conferences on ☎ 0121 355 0900 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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Monday 16th June,
don't miss it.

MARKETING IT MATTERS

Opportunity knocks - but is anyone listening ?

Some of the exhibitors at this week's Barbican exhibition are spending tens of thousands of pounds on stand design and related promotional material. But would part of that money be better spent on employing someone to deal with their correspondence?

It sounds an odd question but the Law Society Publications Department, who are currently putting together a new edition of their *Information Technology Directory*, report that despite repeated reminders about pending deadlines, they have still not received the completed entry details from a number of suppliers.

These include - ironically - some of the companies who complained most bitterly when they were omitted from the first edition of the *Directory*.

Lawyer signs up for Solex

Truemist, the organiser of the *Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition*, has announced that this week's event at the Barbican will be the last to be sponsored by the *Law Society's Gazette*.

From 1998 the official sponsor will be *The Lawyer*. The deal means *The Lawyer* is now associated with the

▶ UK's two leading legal IT events: the Barbican show and the *Information Systems for Lawyers* conference.

Hoisted with his own release

Incidentally, Truemist's managing director Keith Searby points out that most of the publicity material for the Barbican is generated from information originally submitted by exhibitors.

It therefore follows, suggests Searby, that if Dart Legal Systems are unhappy with some of the stories that have appeared about them (see *Eversheds item in last issue*), they should not have issued the material in the first place. Clearly a case of not all publicity is good publicity.

New look consultant

In an attempt to affect an air of gravitas, the promotional attempts of most consultants tends to fall into the dull but worthy category. Congratulations then to management consultancy Irwin Associates, where Graham Irwin has revamped the web site by adding a subtle colour scheme to brighten up the pages in a way that adds to, rather than detracts from, the essentially serious message the site has to communicate. The pages start at <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/irwin/homepage.htm> and even contain some useful free advice. □

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