
CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

INSIDER

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

In this edition...

Lancashire firm to use network computers... 2

New product launches... 2

Pilgrim wins controversial Scottish site... 3

The return of the man from Ulrex... 3

LAB system to cost £14.3 million and only a year late... 3

Challenger for Livenote ?... 4

Mixed fortunes for WordPerfect... 5

Communications & internet news... 6

After the GUI, the NUI ?... 7

Reader services and legal IT diary dates... 7

Lawtel reinvents itself... 8

And don't forget to visit <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk>

DART WAVES GOODBYE TO CREDITORS

Although it was recently reported that Dart Legal Systems had been taken over by another IT supplier (see Issue 42 for story), it now transpires it was not so much a takeover as a "fire sale" as Dart had already ceased trading.

Dart announced the takeover by Tech Computer Office (TCO) in a fax sent out on the 18th June. However, in an unsigned letter dated 19th June (but according to recipients only received at the end of June) Dart wrote to creditors saying the company had ceased trading and had no money.

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER has a copy of the letter which states: "It is with regret we have to notify you that Dart Legal Systems Ltd has ceased trading. We have sought advice and have been advised to do so.

"In February of this year we appointed a distributor for our product. With this agreement in place we successfully acquired two major orders. These two companies (*sic*) obviously made up quite a large debt to our company as the systems were installed.

"With one system fully installed and another 80% installed, due to a major dispute with the distributor both firms have questioned and therefore disputed the levels of support that the distributor should have offered. In both cases the customers have cancelled the contracts, leaving considerable debts to Dart, even though the work had been done to their satisfaction by Dart. We believe these disputes with Dart are ➔

➔ totally erroneous but Dart has no monies to litigate.

"Dart Legal Systems Ltd has no assets and we are very sorry but we have no funds in the company to meet the costs of voluntary liquidation. We have no objection if any creditor wishes to wind the company up compulsorily."

☞ **Comment...** At the time of going to press Geoff Morris, the former managing director of Dart, had not returned any of **LTi's** phone calls and without access to the company's accounts records it is not possible to tell if it had been trading whilst insolvent.

The distributor referred to is believed to be a company called Genesis however as Dart has had at least three other "partners" (ALS, Wang and Reflex) in its four year history, it could be someone else. The chronology of the letter of the 19th June is also a little confusing as one of the law firms with whom Dart has been in dispute is Eversheds (in Cardiff), where Dart claimed to have received an order as long ago as August 1996.

One Dart creditor **LTi** spoke to said they had no intention of running up legal bills chasing a man of straw but would in future not be allowing any company Geoff Morris was associated with to advertise in their publications or take stands at their events until all outstanding debts were paid in full.

At the time of Dart's launch in 1993, Morris made no secret of the fact the venture was partly financed by money from a damages award his wife had received after a road accident.

For the record, Dart Legal Systems was not a member of the Legal Software Suppliers Association (LSSA). ☐

Avenue to target larger practices

As part of its strategy to target larger law firms, Avenue Legal Systems (☎ 01489 609000) has appointed Brian Bennett as a senior consultant. Before entering the IT world, Bennett was a fee earner in the civil litigation department of a solicitors practice.

TFB launches speech link

Technology for Business (☎ 01932 781120) has just launched *Voice Partner*, a new system that combines the speech recognition capabilities of the Kolvox VoiceWriter system with TFB's own case management software, so fee earners can both navigate and control legal applications as well as carry out speech-to-text dictation through their PCs.

LANCASHIRE FIRM TO TAKE NETWORK COMPUTERS

One of the hot topics in computing during the past 18 months has been the debate between the advocates of conventional PCs and lower cost *network computers* (or NCs). Although some larger City of London firms are experimenting with NCs, their take up by the profession has been negligible, until now...

In what is believed to be the first order of its kind made by a "High Street" firm, Brighthouse Jones in Ormskirk is to take 18 network computers, in addition to a dozen conventional PCs, as part of a major office automation project.

Brighthouse Jones in to install the Videss Legal Office system, which includes both case and practice management applications within an integrated suite running in a client/server environment, and it was the realisation that different users had different needs that led the firm to consider network computers.

As partner Philip Garside put it: "Although fee earners may need to run additional software, most clerical staff simply require access to wordprocessing, which makes network computers ideal."

☞ **Comment...** In other words, why go to the expense of buying lots of expensive Pentium PCs for staff who are only going to use them as glorified typewriters and who require just a fraction of their processing power?

In the case of Brighthouse Jones, the firm is using Wyse Winterm terminals. Although these do not have disk storage or even an in-built operating system, drawing instead both their data and their applications from the network server, they are considerably more advanced than the old *dumb* terminals that used to be attached to Unix networks.

The technical term for them is *thin client* machines and on the Wyse units they use the Citrix ICA3 protocol to ➔

➔ communicate with the server so that, along with data and applications, the user also gets a full Windows interface and mouse controls. □

Product launches...

☉ **Trust & Estate Tax** Excelsior LawDesk Ltd, developers of the Probate-Desk system, have just launched a new product called FormDesk. The software is designed to calculate the Self Assessment Trust & Estate Tax Return (form SA900) for 1997 and includes all supplementary pages, including the working sheets from the tax calculation guide.

FormDesk sells for £225 (+VAT) for a single user version, additional user licences cost £125 (+VAT). Microsoft Excel version 5.0 or 7.0 is also required but is not included in the price. For details call ☎ 01273 494978.

☉ **Civil Taxation** The Costs Plus civil taxation and billing software system has been amended to meet all the requirements of recent changes to *Client Care Practice Rule 15* and the *Ancillary Relief Pilot Scheme*. The new Rule 15 requires a solicitor to provide frequent and accurate information on costs incurred to-date in all cases, while the ARPS requires written details of costs-to-date to be produced at every hearing.

Costs Plus prices start at £85 for the starter pack, rising to £1200. For details call Wordwright Associates on ☎ 01473 212752.

☉ **Wills Software** HSC Ltd has launched a new version of its Windows wills drafting program. Called Legacy UK Will Writer, it uses copyright free client questionnaires that match the on-screen forms in the software. The system's main users are currently accountants and financial advisers. Further information and a free preview program is available at: <http://www.demon.co.uk/hsc/wills> or call ☎ 01938 570428. □

Scottish news

PILGRIM GOES IN AT CONTROVERSIAL EDINBURGH FIRM

Pilgrim System's LawSoft package has been chosen by Turcan Connell, the new Edinburgh firm at the centre of controversy following the recent announcement it was to demerge from Dundas & Wilson.

At present Turcan Connell acts as the private client department of Dundas & Wilson CS, Scotland's biggest and oldest solicitors practice. However D&W is currently in talks with Arthur Andersen about joining its corporate legal network, a move which has caused a furore in the local press, who do not like the idea of a piece of Scottish history being swallowed up by an American firm of accountants.

An added complication is that as Andersens has no interest in private client work, D&W has decided to hive off Turcan Connell, which will now formally open its doors on 18th August as a separate firm with, coincidentally, the largest private client practice in Scotland.

This move is also controversial with rival Edinburgh firm Brodies WS taking the unusual step of publicly criticising the demerger, claiming it was "doubtless under pressure from their intended owners at Arthur Anderson". This allegation has been strenuously denied by Dundas & Wilson.

☞ **Comment...** Aside from the politics, there is an interesting technical story here for along with a data conversion job (Dundas & Wilson is a Norwel site) Pilgrim is also up against tight deadlines. From signing the contract, Pilgrim has been given just two months to install the system, load the data and train all 60+ staff in time for the 18th August opening. In the normal course of events, the average completion time for a project of this size and complexity would be nearer six months. □

HOT DOCS TO THE RESCUE

Edinburgh based Capsoft UK, distributors of the HotDocs document assembly system, report that as well as being widely used in the legal publishing world (the new CD edition of Croner's *Personnel & Practice* will incorporate HotDocs forms) the software is also proving popular among law firms wanting to migrate from one wordprocessing platform to another.

Consultants **LTi** has spoken to confirm using HotDocs as an intermediary is the easiest way to translate large numbers of macros in older WordPerfect formats (including 6.0 & 6.1 as well as DOS 5.1) into newer Microsoft Word for Windows 95 formats. HotDocs sells from £99 (+VAT). For details call Capsoft (☎ 0131 226 3999) or resellers such as Information for Lawyers (☎ 0181 878 3033). □

BACK ON PLANET EARTH

One of the legal IT world's more colourful characters Greg Watson was back in the UK last week – oddly enough looking for Geoff Morris of Dart (see *front page*).

When Watson was last heard of in the early 1990s (when his company Ulrex, which developed the at one time highly rated Legis case management system, went bust owing in his own words "about a million pounds") the rumour doing the rounds was that he was an *ex-hit man* for the old South African BOSS secret police and selling software to solicitors was merely an elaborate cover.

Watson, who is from South Africa and has reverted to using his original surname of Van Dyke, says the BOSS story is the funniest thing he has ever heard. But, truth is stranger than fiction – or in this case an episode of *The X Files* – as for the last five years he has been researching and writing a book about extra-terrestrials.

Watson says it gives "a whole new slant" to the subject of little green men and is scheduled to be published in the UK and USA by Penguin later this year. Clearly the truth is out there. □

LAB ready for Year 2000

The Legal Aid Board reports that its new corporate information system will now be fully on stream by April 1998 - this is 12 months later than originally planned. The system, which was developed in house at a total cost of £14.3 million, is intended to improve efficiency and management information, as well as "cut abuse and misuse" within the Legal Aid system. The Board says it will also "significantly resolve our exposure to year 2000 compliance problems". The LAB has opted for a 40Gb client/server solution running on Oracle.

1997 Legal 500 out soon

The 1997 edition of *The Legal 500* will be published on 23rd July, price £95. It will also be available on CD-Rom. For more details fax Sean Hocking at the publishers Legalease on 0171 396 9302.

Bowhawk offering label service
Litigation support specialist Bowhawk is now offering a labelling service as an alternative to paginating documents by stamping machine. Bar coded labels are also available. Bowhawk can be contacted on ☎ 01252 716694 and now has a web site at <http://www.bowhawk.com>

Paralegals wanted
Litigation support specialists Elliot Slone are looking for "American style" paralegals and solicitors to work on a number of projects. Call Martin Crosby on ☎ 0171 729 2088 or check <http://www.elliottslone.co.uk>

☞ **Latest figures suggest the going rate for law firms wanting to hire paralegals is between £15-to-£25 per hour depending upon experience.**

Litigation support

DOWN-UNDER CHALLENGER FOR LIVENOTE

Court reporting agency Sellers & Imago is now distributing a new real time litigation support/court transcription software package in the UK.

Called T/A-Law, the Windows based application was originally developed in Australia and offers a similar range of facilities to Smith Bernal's highly rated Livenote system (including instantaneous transcription and live annotation) except Sellers & Imago claim T/A-Law can be "up to 20% cheaper" than comparable products. The system can also be used in pre-trial document management applications.

Sellers & Imago is based at Ludgate House, 107 Fleet Street, London EC4A 2AD (☎ 0171 427 0089 or 0800 590012) and a useful overview of the system can be found on the company's web site at <http://www.sellersimago.com> □

COLLEGE OF LAW TO GO SYBASE ROUTE

The College of Law is to use Sybase products rather than rival systems from Microsoft as the basis for new database applications at the college's five sites around the UK.

College of Law development team leader Chris Harris rejected Microsoft Access and VisualBasic as "not man enough for the job" and instead ordered the PowerBuilder development tool from Sybase's PowerSoft division, along with the company's SQL Anywhere relational database. The new software will run on Windows NT.

☞ **Comment...** Although this is not an Avenue site, it is worth noting that PowerBuilder and SQL Anywhere are the same products used by Avenue Legal Systems in their new Wisdom suite. □

NOTHING BUT THE FAX

Kommunicate Ltd (☎ 01252 815514) is now offering users of its RightFAX network fax management software a choice of two upgrade routes.

For firms and companies planning to adopt Windows NT, the company has RightFAX NT v.5.0 – a 32-bit client/server system. The alternative product, aimed at larger organisations, is RightFAX Enterprise v.5.0, which can handle LAN, WAN and internet connectivity.

Kommunicate is also shipping CallXpressNT, one of the first CTI (computer telephony integration) systems available for the Microsoft Windows NT Server platform.

☞ **And finally...** By way of a fax horror story, a reader at Dell reports that he recently received a call from a solicitor working from home who could not get the desktop faxing software on his PC to work. Investigation subsequently revealed that the user was trying to send faxes by holding the documents he wished to send in front of the VDU screen and clicking on the "send" button with his mouse. □

Millennium countdown...

ANYONE AT HOME AT IBM ?

IBM is coming in for criticism from user groups for apparently not yet having a clear Year 2000 strategy for UK and Irish users of its AS/400 and AIX/RS6000 mid-range hardware.

Although more recent versions of AIX and associated applications software should be Y2K compliant, IBM will only say that its Assessment 2000 evaluation package, which is intended to provide a definitive answer to such questions, will be launched in the UK "soon" – whereas it is already widely available in the USA.

Some information can be found on IBM web sites at <http://www.software.ibm.com> and <http://www.ibm.com> or call Elaine Richards of IBM UK on ☎ 0171 202 5606. □

WordPerfect developments

STILL MIXED FORTUNES FOR WORDPERFECT

What was once the legal world's favourite wordprocessing system, WordPerfect, continues to suffer mixed fortunes.

On a positive note, Corel WordPerfect Suite 8 (for Windows 95 and NT platforms only) is now shipping in the UK and should be available through most software distributors. Expect to pay around £115 for an upgrade or £225 for the full version.

The suite is pitched as a direct competitor to Microsoft's Office 97 and to this end, along with spreadsheet and PowerPoint-style presentations programs, it also contains a PIM/organiser/to do list scheduler called Corel Central - the company's answer to Office 97's Outlook application.

As with the rest of the suite, Corel Central is strongly oriented towards internet integration and the creation of web pages - it also comes complete with a copy of Netscape's Navigator 3 browser. But there again the suite also contains a pile of stuff most users will never even look at, including 10,000 clip art images and over 1000 different typeface fonts!

Turning to the core wordprocessing element, the basic interface remains the same as in version 7 and (unlike Microsoft with Office 97) Corel has not tinkered with the file formats, so migrating documents from earlier versions should cause no problems.

There are additional drawing tools (another feature unlikely to be of interest to most law firms), the *tables* features are easier to use and WordPerfect now supports SGML (standard generalised markup language) which is used by some corporations and government agencies.

All this may not seem to offer many reasons for upgrading however it should be noted that Suite 8 is a more

➔ integrated product than the earlier Version 7.0, which gave the impression of being a lot of separate elements cobbled together. All this in turn means Suite 8 performs faster and actually requires less disk space and RAM memory than its predecessors - which may be reason enough to upgrade.

Corel is also promising a "professional" version of the Suite later this year. This is expected to include a new version of the Paradox database and additional features for users working across networks. And, in August, Apple Macintosh users will have a new version of WordPerfect. This will be the long awaited upgrade from Version 3.5 to 4.0 but it will only be the wordprocessing element, as Corel has ruled out a separate Mac version of the Suite.

☞ **Comment...** Offsetting these positive developments, it also has to be reported that it now looks as if there will not be a UK version of the WordPerfect "Legal Edition" (see *Issues No.36 & 37 for first reports*). This is due to what has been described as "a legal hitch" over software licensing and distribution agreements.

Perhaps rather more serious is the news that the company's platform independent - and much hyped great hope for the future - CorelOffice for Java Suite, which is aimed at the Unix/dumb terminals, network computers and *thin client* computing environments, has had its launch date put back from this month until October following complaints about its poor performance.

It looks as if Corel continues to be dogged by its "one step forward, two steps back" run of bad luck. However, readers might like to note that in the autumn Corel will be holding an exhibition and conference in the UK. Called *Corel World Europe*, it takes place at the University of Warwick on September 10-12 (call ☎ 01234 241234 for details). Information about Suite 8 can also be found on Corel's web site at <http://www.corel.com/products/wordperfect/cwps8/index.htm> ☐

All change

The Beaver Corporation and Lawtech Services have just swapped addresses. Beaver has moved from Temple Chambers to 21 Whitefriars Street, London EC4Y 8JJ and Lawtech has moved from Whitefriars Street to Temple Chambers, Temple Avenue, London EC4Y 0HP.

Both companies retain their existing phone and fax numbers. Beaver is on ☎ 0171 936 2828 while Lawtech is on ☎ 0171 583 2345.

☞ Lawtech also continues to run its *personal* number ☎ 07000 LAWTECH (or 529832). This works by dialling the numbers that equate to the relevant letters on an alpha-numeric telephone keypad, thus the digit "2" represents the letters A, B & C, "3" equals D, E & F and so on.

Seen around the Web...

☞ London law firm Lawrence Graham has launched a new web site at <http://www.lawgram.com> It contains sections on all the firm's 36 areas of expertise and includes direct email links to the partners in charge.

☞ Barlow Lyde & Gilbert is to introduce an A-Z listing of partner profiles, as well as more regularly updated material on its web site. Developed by a Canadian company, the firm currently has mirrored sites at <http://www.blg.co.uk> and [blg.com](http://www.blg.com) but plans to standardise on one URL.

☞ The Morgan Rigby/Business Legal Support group has opened a web site at <http://www.mar-group.co.uk/morgan/> It is called the *World of Law* and seems to consist of little more than links to other sites. **LTi** also found access speeds were slow.

Communications & the Net

LAW SOCIETY TO REVAMP WEB SITE

The English Law Society is to embark upon a major upgrade to its web site after winning funding from the Department of Trade & Industry.

Although the project is still in its planning stage (the relevant official at the Law Society, Gerald Newman, says he is interested in receiving suggestions from solicitors - he can be contacted on ☎ 0171 320 5715) it is envisaged the site will make Law Society material more accessible to solicitors and serve as a showcase for the business "opportunities offered by the information age".

The Society has received a grant of £43,000 from the DTi (☞ presumably through the Information Society Initiative see <http://www.isi.gov.uk>) and features planned include an on-line legal news service, an information centre for Law Society policy material and a "legal recruitment market place".

☞ **Comment...** The Law Society's original web site (which is still at <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk>) was in its day a surprisingly ambitious undertaking and the upgrade project looks like taking this one stage further.

References to content including legal news and recruitment suggest Chancery Lane may also be planning to produce or incorporate an online version of the *Law Society's Gazette* - a move no doubt prompted by the recent launch of a web site at <http://www.the-lawyer.co.uk> by its arch-rival *The Lawyer*. (See also *Lawtel story on page 8.*) ☐

ACCELERATOR WARNING

The story in the last issue of **LTi** (see page 6) about the NetAccelerator software from IMSI (<http://www.imsisoft>) prompted a number of readers to warn that such systems are inherently "a bad thing" as ➡

➡ they swallow up valuable *bandwidth* on the internet by significantly adding to the volume of data traffic travelling between web servers and web browsers.

The problem is that whereas with conventional surfing, the phone lines are quiet while the user takes time to read the latest page to have been downloaded, with an accelerator, pages are continually being downloaded in the background.

It may seem an academic problem but it could be potentially disastrous for a company or law firm with an internal *intranet*, as too many accelerators would overwhelm most inhouse servers, prompting major systems crashes. **LTi** understands some organisations have barred the use of net accelerators for this very reason. •Additional reporting by Lawrence McNulty. ☐

MORE UK GOVERNMENTAL LEGAL WEB SITES

Three more UK government agencies have launched web sites of interest to the legal community.

These are: the **Law Commission** at <http://www.gtnet.gov.uk/lawcomm/homepage.htm> which includes copies of latest publications. The much maligned **Crown Prosecution Service** at <http://www.cps.gov.uk> although this is probably of more interest to students and members of the public. And the **Official Solicitor's Office** at <http://www.offsol.demon.co.uk/index.htm> which includes details about the Lord Chancellor's Department's child abduction unit.

☞ **Related development...** Following the story in the last issue of **LTi** (see page 6) about ITSEC, the UK government-backed IT security and certification body, Tim Spriggs of Admiral Legal Systems has been in contact to point out that sister-company Admiral Management Services is one of five CLEFS (*Commercial Evaluation Facilities*) listed at the ITSEC site at <http://www.itsec.gov.uk> Admiral's own web site is at <http://www.admiral.co.uk> ☐

FIRST THE GUI, NOW FOR THE NUI

Just as we have all become familiar with the concept of the *graphical user interface* (or GUI), Microsoft has announced that the next version of its Windows 95 operating system - code named Memphis/Active Desktop will be based around a *network-centric user interface* or NUI.

The move reflects the growing importance of a seamless integration between end-user applications and communications in desktop computing, in particular between document creation (ie wordprocessing) and the internet (ie email or publishing to web pages).

To this end Memphis can best be described as a marriage between the existing Windows 95 interface and Microsoft's next generation web browser Internet Explorer 4.0.

Needless to say Microsoft has coined its own term for the NUI concept: it calls it *Total Web Integration* (or TWI).

Equally predictably, the product is running late, with the first beta test versions only going out this week and a final version (ie Windows 97/98) due for release either later this year or more likely in the first quarter of 1998. Microsoft also say the next version of the NT Workstation system (Version 5.0 scheduled for a 1999 release) will also be TWI enabled.

☞ **Comment...** A full version of Internet Explorer 4.0 should be available for downloading later this month from <http://www.microsoft.com/ie/> while you can find out more on Windows 97/98 at <http://www.microsoft.com/backoffice/sbc/>

It is also worth noting Microsoft is not the only company preparing to move from the GUI to the NUI. IBM has already done so with its OS/2 Warp 4 (check <http://www.software.ibm.com/os2warp> for latest developments) and Netscape will shortly be launching its Constellation cross platform system (see http://www.netscape.com/comprod/tech_preview/) ☐

ALTA VISTA GOES MULTI-LINGUAL

The Digital Equipment Corporation's Alta Vista search service (<http://altavista.digital.com>) can now offer web search results by language, so as to cater both for surfers whose first language is not English and for the estimated 25% of the web's content that is written in languages other than English. Initially Alta Vista will offer 25 different language options. ☐

LOW COST ISDN TERMINALS

Racal Datacom has launched a new low cost ISDN terminal adapter offering high speed 128 kbps access for both internet users and home-based fee earners wanting to access office networks.

Called WINstream, it is a Windows 95 "plug and play" device and retails for £179 - which is about the same as a conventional 33.6 kbps modem. WINstream will be available through various distributors from later this month. For sales enquiries call ☎ 01256 763911. ☐

Legal IT Diary Dates

☉ **July 15 & 16 - Practical Use of the Internet Workshops** In conjunction with NKT Computer Consultants, Michael Kaye, of Kaye Tesler & Co, is giving presentations on how solicitors can use interactive internet services to generate new business and expand their practices. Venues: Ingram Hotel, Glasgow (15th) & Grosvenor Hotel, Edinburgh (16th). Fee £40 (+VAT). Morning and afternoon sessions, followed by workshops. Call ☎ 0181 809 6756 for details.

☉ **July 16 & 17 - DPS Regional Roadshow** MCS is running a series of regional roadshows primarily aimed at showing existing users enhancements to the DPS case management range. The first of these take place this week at the Huddersfield Hilton (just off the M62). Call ☎ 0181 882 8811 for details. ☐

☞ INSIDER 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 there are hyperlinks to all the web sites mentioned in this and previous issues.

Insider Confidential

A new service providing exclusive commissioned reports of strategic issues relating to the UK legal technology market. For further details call ☎ 01379 687518 or email info@cloudnine.co.uk

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

NEWS ▶ VIEWS ▶ MOVES ▶ DEALS ▶ DATA

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

For editorial & subscriptions...

Ferndale House
North Lopham
Diss, Norfolk
IP22 2NQ

☎ 01379 687518
Fax: 01379 687704
Email: editor@cloudnine.co.uk

Editor:
Charles Christian

Next issue...
Issue No 44 of
the Insider will be
published on
Monday 28th July,
don't miss it.

Online legal information

LAWTEL REINVENTS ITSELF - AGAIN

Last month the Lawtel online legal information service, which is now owned by Centaur Communications, made another attempt to reinvent itself and so gain a wider audience.

The latest changes include a wider coverage of English case law, a full text "library service" of case transcripts, a new pricing structure and some redesigning to take greater advantage of the fact the system is now based around web browser technology. But, will any of this make a difference to Lawtel's seemingly perennial status as a legal market *also-ran*?

Since its launch back in 1980 on the now defunct Prestel viewdata system, Lawtel has been dogged by the fact that although it is an excellent concept and a good product - the legal queries research bureau has always been very popular - the service has never taken off as a mass market legal service.

Even today, 17 years on, Lawtel still only has about 1500 user sites. Considering this includes inhouse legal departments and local authorities as well as barristers' chambers and solicitors practices this is pretty small beer.

While the latest changes may improve its prospects (although **LTI** ➔

➔ wonders if the shift from pay-as-you-go to an up-front fixed fee price structure may deter some smaller cash-strapped users) the big problem Lawtel faces is the size and strength of the competition.

Most of the major legal publishers now offer some form of online/web-based current awareness service. Some of these are free, such as *Legal Times Online* on Link. While others (such as Context, Sweet & Maxwell and *New Law Online*) offer greater depth and/or specialism.

With Butterworths having just upgraded its *Law Online* web facility, the Law Society planning a major revamp (see story on page 6) and the CSG/*LawCity* venture still in the wings, the competition is getting hotter - not easier - for Lawtel.

☞ A useful comparison of the latest web offerings from legal publishers can be found at <http://www.venables.co.uk/legal/publish.htm>

Late breaking news...

Later this week the Bar Council will announce details of a new initiative to improve communications links between barristers' chambers and the wider legal community. The move follows an earlier project with video conferencing and includes the creation of a *virtual private network* in conjunction with Energis, the alternative telecoms supplier.

ISSN 1361-1240 © CloudNine Technology 1997 all rights reserved. Reproduction without prior consent is forbidden. This newsletter may not be photocopied etc within the terms of any licence granted by the Copyright Licensing Agency. The information contained in **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** has been carefully compiled from sources regarded as reliable. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy no guarantee is expressed or implied as to its validity, the Publisher cannot accept liability for any loss or damage of any kind which may arise from any errors or omissions. All trademarks, product and brand names etc are acknowledged and recognised as belonging to their respective owners. **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** and **LTI** are trademarks™ of CloudNine Technology.

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER is only available on subscription. UK rate: £95 for 24 issues pa or £170 for 48 issues. (Overseas £125 for 24 issues pa or £225 for 48 issues - payment by International Money Order or bankers draft in £ Sterling drawn on London.) To subscribe complete & return this form to: **CloudNine Technology, Ferndale House, North Lopham, Diss, Norfolk IP22 2NQ**

Name..... Title.....

Firm/Organisation.....

Address.....

Post Code..... Tel No:..... Email:.....

I enclose my remittance of £..... (cheque made payable to Cloudnine Technology)

Send receipted invoice..... Please invoice me..... Purchase Order Number.....