

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

iNSIDER

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

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BIG THREE CONTINUE TO MAKE GROUND

Despite the fact they are all relative newcomers to the UK, CMS Data, Elite Information Systems and Keystone Solutions have spent the summer further increasing their hold on the top end of the legal systems market.

Keystone has just exchanged contracts with Masons, a firm widely recognised as being at the forefront of the use of technology to deliver client services. Masons' managing partner Tony Bunch said he saw Keystone's practice management system as being a "vital factor" in supporting the firm's international growth.

Another firm with a reputation for being at the leading edge of technology is Jeffrey Green Russell (JGR) which has just ordered the CMS Open practice management system.

This is the fourth order CMS Data has won in the UK and JGR will be implementing the system on a Microsoft SQL Server/Windows NT platform over the next six months, with the project due to go "live" in the spring. At the same time JGR is taking the opportunity to migrate its SoftSolutions document management system over to PC Docs Open.

JGR senior partner Clive Whitfield-Jones said the firm has long believed IT "provides a way for law firms to survive and thrive by giving them the tools with which to re-engineer their practices, so fee earners work in more effective ways and clients receive a truly value-added service."

Finally Elite, a supplier associated with large Informix implementations running on Unix, has begun widening ➔

➔ the appeal of its practice management system by moving onto other platforms.

Macfarlanes is now implementing Elite on an Oracle database running across Windows NT, while Laytons has opted for Informix running on NT. □

RECRUITMENT... HEADING FOR AN IT SKILLS CRISIS ?

As law firms implement increasingly sophisticated IT installations, so they are also having to recruit increasingly high calibre people to manage these projects. Well, at least that is the theory. Over the last six months some of the largest City of London firms have been haemorrhaging highly paid senior IT staff faster than they can find replacements.

So what is happening? What sort of deals should law firms be offering to recruit and keep IT directors? What salary levels can they expect to pay and just what are the key skills to look for.

By way of enhancing its coverage of all aspects of the legal IT market, **Legal Technology Insider** is now liaising with Longbridge International plc, the UK's leading legal IT recruitment consultancy, and in the weeks to come will be carrying regular reports on what is really happening in the jobs market.

☞ As part of its ongoing policy of improving reader services **LTi** is also exploring publishing an electronic edition that can be distributed by via email, the web or Lotus Notes. □

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LATEST NEWS COMMENT & ANALYSIS

PCS wins dealer award

The legal division of West Midlands based PC dealer Professional Computer Solutions (PCS) has won the *Top UK Dealer award for the DPS case management system for the third year running.* PCS (☎ 01675 470774) is now the largest supplier of DPS software to the legal market.

New software from Jordans

The company formations agency Jordans is in the final stages of beta testing a new version of its PC Sec company secretarial software. The product, described as being "Windows compatible" can handle Companies House forms and export data to wordprocessing applications. For further details contact Carol Prince on ☎ 0117 918 1284.

LINK IN MAJOR TECHNOLOGY RETHINK

In a remarkable policy U-turn, the Link legal information network, run by Legalease, has abandoned its recently launched Microsoft Internet Explorer platform and moved back to the FirstClass groupware software at the heart of the original Link service.

Although it was only in April of this year (some 12 months later than originally intended) that the New Link (formerly Link 96) service finally appeared, its web browser based approach was less than enthusiastically greeted by existing Link users.

From the often heated comments being posted onto the various online discussion areas, it was clear the majority of users did not want a state-of-the-art virtual intranet but merely an upgraded and more stable version of the old Link service.

It remains a moot point whether this was because (as is being suggested by Link) users found the intranet approach too "complicated" or simply that they were deterred by the unhappy experiences reported by users who had made the upgrade. (☞ One of the more frequent complaints was that Internet Explorer messed up users' existing communications configurations, so causing systems to crash with annoying regularity.)

So, what does Link 3.5 (as it is now called) have to offer users? The short answer is a smoother operating and currently far more reliable version of the original pre-Explorer Link service.

Once again it is based on the FirstClass application and supports users on Windows 3.x, Windows 95 and Macintosh hardware. LTi has loaded and used both the Windows 95 and Mac versions and found the upgrade from the old service takes place without difficulty.

Being a more modern product, Link 3.5 can also support the latest high speed modems, including PC/PCMCIA ➔

➔ cards, whereas this was a definite failing of the old system.

Legalease has also taken the opportunity to rationalise the hopeless muddle that the discussion groups area had become, so it is now a lot easier to find information. (Although some of the old chargeable services, such as company searches, have been dropped, Link will continue to supply the free *Daily Legal Update* news service.)

And in a development that ought to appeal to anyone living outside the London area, for a charge of £70 (+VAT) pa, it is now possible to access Link at local call rates. (Link has also cut the cost of corporate mailboxes and is giving everyone a "free" internet email address.)

☞ **Comment...** It would be nice to think Link is out of the woods and indeed the compliments being posted in the *General Chat* area suggest the 3.5 upgrade has won more fans in a fortnight than New Link managed in four months.

But, there are still some grounds for concern, in particular what has happened to customer relations at Link?

If dropping Explorer was prompted by user demand, how come no-one paid attention to the fact that for the past 12 months users were saying all they wanted was a better version of the old Link?

Couldn't the upgrade have been handled more tactfully? The first most users knew of it was the arrival in the post of a set of disks on 7th August, along with a letter warning them to upgrade immediately as the older software would no longer work after 11th August.

Excluding the weekend, that's a whole 48 hours notice. That is assuming you were not away on holiday!

Finally, although the new Link 3.5 disks are being distributed free of charge (call Nigel Armitage on ☎ 0171 396 5610 for a set) as of January 1998 everyone will be charged £30 (+VAT) pa for an internet email facility regardless of whether they actually want it. So much for consumer choice! ☐

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NEW NATIONAL LEGAL IT SHOW ON THE WAY ?

Plans are underway to launch a new national legal technology event, to be held at the National Exhibition Centre on the outskirts of Birmingham, which is intended to rival the annual *Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition* at the Barbican in London.

The event, called *The National Legal Office & Legal Services Exhibition*, is being run by Nationwide Exhibitions (UK) Ltd of Bristol. From the company's literature, it appears that the formula will be the same as that already used by Truemist, who organise the Barbican exhibition, with a hall full of exhibitors' stands and an optional facility for theatre-style presentations.

Nationwide (contact Nigel Stevens on ☎ 0117 970 1370) which only began selling the event at the end of July, is expected to make announcements later this week naming the first signings (rumoured to include Axxia, Quill and Peapod) and a major sponsor. **LTi** understands Nationwide has been negotiating with the *Law Society's Gazette*, which until June sponsored the Barbican show.

Commenting on the competition, Keith Searby, the managing director of Truemist Professional Exhibitions said: "Having successfully served the legal market for 16 years with the Barbican and other exhibitions, we were rather surprised to see a new event being launched, particularly by an organiser with no previous legal event experience. The venue is key for vertical market events and Birmingham has never been recognised as a prominent centre."

☞ **Comment...** Over the years various organisations, including the Society for Computers & Law and the Legal Software Suppliers Association (although any LSSA project is likely to be hit by John Wilde's departure - see story page 4) have all talked about mounting legal IT ➔

➔ events that would be bigger, better, cheaper or whatever than the Barbican.

In fact the only organisation to succeed in developing an event of similar stature is the Centaur publishing group with its annual *Information Systems for Lawyers Conference* but that has a different formula being primarily two days of seminar sessions accompanied by a mini exhibition.

It is also interesting to note that Centaur, through *The Lawyer* magazine, is now sponsoring both the Barbican and next month's new Northern Legal Office Exhibition in Manchester. This too is organised by Truemist, who have just announced that the floor space available has had to be expanded by 15% "to accommodate the growing interest from suppliers".

Nationwide may pull it off but by scheduling the event to run for three days starting 3rd March 1998, they have picked one of the busiest periods for both prospective exhibitors and prospective visitors. Searby describes it as an "already congested time of the year in the legal diary" for not only does it come one week after *Information Systems for Lawyers* and the ILCA/Legal Cashiers' annual IT event in Birmingham but it also directly clashes with Truemist's annual *Software for Solicitors Show* in Bristol. ☐

IBM CONTINUOUS SPEECH SOFTWARE FOR UNDER £100

IBM has announced that its ViaVoice general purpose continuous speech recognition software for Windows 95 and NT will retail for £84 (+VAT) when it goes on sale in the UK later this month. This will substantially undercut the rival Dragon NaturallySpeaking product.

Latest figures from *Chart-Track* suggest IBM products now have a 75% share of the speech recognition systems market. For further details call Elaine Richards on ☎ 0171 202 5606 or check IBM's web site at <http://www.software.ibm.com/is/voicetype> ☐

Litigation support news

☞ **Legstat**
Litigation Support of 59 Carey Street, London WC2A 2JB, has changed its name to Lawscan Ltd. The company has also enhanced its software to improve the handling of bar coding on documents and can now support file names with up to 256 characters. Lawscan is on ☎ 0171 242 9601.

☞ **DPA-Egami plc, which is listed on OFEX and recently raised £450,000 via a private share placing, has announced it will be collaborating with Legal Technologies Ltd to provide law firms with the most effective litigation support solutions. For details of DPA's forthcoming seminars call Jane Scott on ☎ 0171 592 8009.**

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Mortgage Express to use Solicitec

Mortgage Express, which recently became part of the Bradford & Bingley Group, has installed the SolCase case management system from Solicitec to handle repossession and conveyancing work in its legal department.

☞ Marketing assistant Lisa Sanderson leaves Solicitec this week to begin studying for a new career as an arboriculturist (aka tree surgeon). We always knew she was a chip off the old block.

Woolf at the door

Five partner firm Clarksons & Steele in Halifax has upgraded its IT systems and installed new case management software supplied by Linetime. Partner Michael Steele said part of the impetus for the purchase came from Woolf Report recommendations.

SUPPLIERS REPORT SUMMER BOOM

Forget the "silly season", according to UK legal IT suppliers, such as Quill Computer Systems, far from a quiet period, this summer has seen record sales being recorded.

Norwel Computer Services reports that a number of sites, including Morton Fisher in Worcester and Walker Smith & Way in Chester, have been upgrading their practice management software to include executive information systems (EIS). And, that the company's fee earner desktop (FED) is proving a great hit with larger firms, with Berwin Leighton (see also *Microsoft story*), Trowers & Hamblins and Withers ordering a further 600 FED licences between them during the last couple of months.

Another company in a bullish mood is Axxia Systems, reporting a 20% increase in turnover to £8.3 million during its 1996/7 financial year and predicting similar growth levels for the current trading year.

☞ **Comment...** Axxia claims it is now the UK's largest legal systems supplier and to meet the demand for its products and services, the last 12 months have also seen the company increase its work force by 20 percent.

But, as reported on the front page, this boom in legal IT is bringing with it a skills shortage. For example, Applied Computer Expertise (ACE) say they are "inundated with orders" and now need good quality project managers and staff trainers to support them. Call Stephen Murphy of ACE on ☎ 0171 404 5577 if you are interested. ☐

WHAT NEXT AT MICROSOFT ?

Microsoft has confirmed that the next version of its Windows 95 operating system (code-named Memphis) will be called Windows 98 and be available in the UK by early February. Initially the ➔

➔ product will only be for Windows 95 users. Firms still running the older Windows 3.x system will have to wait a further three months before they can upgrade directly to Windows 98.

By way of adding confusion to practice upgrade plans, Microsoft has also hinted Windows 98 will be killed off by the end of the decade and that business users should instead go directly to the Windows NT Workstation system.

Microsoft is expected to launch the first full beta version of NT 5.0, the next upgrade to the Workstation product, at a conference in San Diego later this month, with the finished system shipping between March and late summer 1998.

☞ **Comment...** Microsoft's upgrades timetable is leading many people to consider skipping Windows 98 in favour of going straight to NT from earlier systems. For example Peapod Solutions is investigating standardising on NT for its customers, while Janet Day's team at Berwin Leighton is understood to be planning to move directly to NT 5.0. ☐

JOHN WILDE LEAVES AIM

As a result of his recent and sadly still ongoing ill-health, AIM Professional Systems managing director John Wilde has left the company. Commenting on the move John said he had "decided to take up a less frantic way of life".

Mr Wilde, one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Legal Software Suppliers Association (LSSA), will in future be concentrating on writing, lecturing and the development of operations management tools. He will also retain his links with the AIM Group as a shareholder and through consultancy projects.

AIM deputy chairman Mike Booth told **LTi** that John Wilde had "made an outstanding contribution to the company, including setting in motion a number of significant developments we will be announcing later this year." ☐

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WORDPERFECT... STILL LOOKING FOR A STRATEGY ?

Attempts by Corel, the current owners of the WordPerfect processing system, to restore the product to its former glory continue to be dogged by an apparent lack of a coherent strategy.

After announcing and then having to abandon plans for a UK version of the WordPerfect Legal Edition because of "a legal hitch" (see *LTi* 43, page 5), reports from Toronto suggest Corel has now also scrapped its Java initiative.

First advocated by Corel president and CEO Michael Cowpland over 15 months ago, the Java software version of WordPerfect was intended to be a cross platform application that would run on PCs, OS/2 hardware, Unix, network computers and dumb terminals. However, launch dates were postponed earlier this year following complaints about poor performance.

So where next for WordPerfect? The answer is apparently backwards, for while the rest of the software industry is busily developing 32-bit applications for the Windows 95/98 and NT operating systems, Corel has just announced a new 16-bit application: WordPerfect Suite 7 for Windows 3.1.

☞ **Comment...** Instead of adding more bells and whistles to a product that is already packed with unwanted or seldom used features (who really needs a choice of 1000 typeface fonts) why cannot Corel do something useful, such as bringing out a new version of WordPerfect for the main Unix platforms? ☐

MIXED FORTUNES IN CASE MANAGEMENT SECTOR

Milton Keynes sole practitioner Neil Jopson, who three years ago developed a low cost solicitors accounts system, has now completed work on two low cost case management programs. ➔

➔ One handles litigation and the other conveyancing. Both are 16-bit applications based on the Microsoft Access database that will run on Windows 3.x and above. Prices are in the region of £150 and Neil Jopson & Co can be contacted on ☎ 01280 817394.

While Neil Jopson is just breaking into the legal software market – six firms, including his own, are now using his systems – Preston-based MIPAC Ltd has now left it.

The company first surfaced in legal circles in early 1996, when it was making presentations to law firms in Lancashire of a proposed legal accounts and case management system based on an American financial program from Great Plains Dynamics and fee earner support applications written in Lotus Notes.

Although the presentations were favourably received, in late 1996 MIPAC Ltd ceased trading and the business has since been taken over by MIPAC Services Ltd. The new company continues to be a Lotus Notes developer but is no longer either a Great Plains Dynamics dealer or involved in the legal market.

☞ **Comment...** JM Computing in Manchester (☎ 0161 792 6020) is a Great Plains Dynamics distributor although it is not one of the products its legal division sells to solicitors practices. ☐

SELECT FEELING BULLISH

Humberside-based Select Legal Systems (☎ 01482 644334) has just begun its fourth year in business by winning a major order from Bridge McFarland in Grimsby for a 70 user network running practice and case management systems across three offices.

Select software is now in use in over 30 firms and director Steve Ness believes the launch of the company's new fee earner desktop module, which is already running at Eking Manning in Nottingham) will help establish Select as a major player in the legal IT market. ☐

Millennium countdown

☞ **Data Protection News** warns that unfixed Year 2000 computer problems that cause stored personal data to become inaccurate could result in a contravention of the 1984 *Data Protection Act*.

☞ **The latest in Delia Venables' series of information "nuggets" looks at ways law firms and barristers chambers can minimise the risk of Year 2000 computing problems. Coping with the Millennium Bug costs £10 (+VAT) and can be purchased off the web at <http://www.venables.co.uk/legal/nuggets.htm> or call ☎ 01273 472424.**

☞ **Do not assume that because your computer displays four digit date fields it is Y2K compliant. The first two digits may be inert constants so instead of rolling forward to 2000, the program will revert to 1900.**

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Seen around the Web...

☞ **Butterworths**, in association with the RM Group, has launched a "pay as you go" company search facility on its web site at <http://www.butterworths.co.uk> All visitors to the site are offered one free search.

☞ **Fax and communications specialist Kommunicate Ltd** has launched a web site at <http://www.kommunicate.co.uk>

☞ **Two new American legal resources web sites worth checking are Regent University Law Library's directory of nearly 300 legal mailing lists and email newsletters** at <http://www.regent.edu/lawlib/lists/list-law.html> and **Heros Gamos directory government and legal sites from around the world** at <http://www.hr.org>

☞ **The UK Court Service is testing a web based listings service for the Commercial Court** at http://www.open.gov.uk/courts/court/cs_home.htm

BT LAUNCHES SECURE ANYWHERE FAX SERVICE

British Telecom's Mobility Solutions Group has launched a new service that gives users full control over where, when and how they receive their faxes throughout the UK.

Called BT OneFax, the service has been designed to meet the needs of professionals, such as lawyers, who may have secure fax facilities in their offices but are often on the move and have concerns about how faxes can be forwarded on to them when they are travelling, staying at hotels, in meetings or visiting clients, while at the same time still ensuring confidentiality.

The way OneFax works is a subscriber is given a single 07070 number (so there is no need to give contacts a string of alternative fax numbers) and can then programme the service (by calling an 0345 number charged at local call rates) to deliver or redirect faxes as required.

So, for example, over a weekend the service could be set up to deliver faxes directly to a conventional fax at the subscriber's home whereas during the week, the instruction may be to hold faxes in a mailbox (OneFax can hold upto 80 A4 pages for up to 30 days) for the subscriber to access when convenient via a laptop PC and fax modem. Users can even have the service linked to a pager, so it can alert them when a fax arrives in their mailbox.

In addition to phone calls to the 0345 number, OneFax customers pay a monthly subscription of £5 and a one-off connection fee of £20 (+VAT). This is subject to a minimum contract period of 12 months although as part of the launch promotion, customers signing up before 4th October will receive the first three month's subscription free.

Further information about the BT OneFax service is available by calling FREEfone 0800 070 000. ☐

MAID ACQUIRE MUSCAT

MAID, the online business information company, has acquired a 70% interest in Muscat Ltd, the developers of information retrieval software that allows natural language queries to be run across unconstructed databases.

☞ **Comment...** MAID will be building Muscat technology into their own range of online products, including some corporate intranet services that are still under development. In addition, Muscat will continue to service its own customer base, which includes the BBC, Reuters and, closer to home, Valid Information Systems.

Valid use Muscat software both in the Vault secure document archiving and electronic retrieval service the company launched in conjunction with Securicor in July (see **LTi 44** for full story) and in the soon to be available Version 8.0 of Valid's R/KYV litigation support system.

For more information check <http://www.maid.com> <http://www.muscat.com> and <http://www.valinf.com> ☐

SEE ME, HEAR ME

BT has cut the price of its PC-based DVS100 PC videophone system from £1,350 to £699 (+VAT). The price does not include the cost of the PC or installing an ISDN line. BT has also extended the range of hardware platforms supported by DVS100 to include Windows 95 and NT. For details call FREEfone 0800 800 800. ☐

PENPAL EMAIL HOAX BACK

Over the last couple of weeks the **LTi** office has received numerous email messages warning of a hard disk destroying virus that is spread by email.

The warnings say the infected emails are usually headed *Join the Crew* or *Penpal Greeting* but, as mentioned in a story on this topic in May (see **LTi 38**, page 6), tales of these viruses are actually a hoax spread by malicious practical ☞

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➔ jokers with nothing better to do than spread fear, uncertainty and doubt among the growing ranks of the often less than computer literate people now surfing the internet.

Not only do these viruses not exist but they are often technically infeasible. You can find out more about the problem by accessing some of the "hoax alert" sites on the web. Three of the better are at <http://kumite.com/myths> <http://ciac.llnl.gov:80/ciac/> and <http://www.drsolomon.com/dpanic/> □

STILL CONFUSION OVER HIGH SPEED MODEMS

Although in July it appeared that the 3Com/US Robotics x2 standard for high speed 56 kbps modems was emerging as the front runner, subsequent developments suggest the rival K56Flex camp is making a come back.

Although recent x2 signings include AOL Networks, a subsidiary of the AOL online service provide, and Legalease has said it will be installing x2 modems to support the new 0845 local call rate option for Link 3.5 (see also page 2), from the conversations **LTi** has had this summer with commercial internet service providers (ISPs) it would appear that at least 60% of them are opting for K56Flex.

☞ **Comment...** The best advice seems to be that if you are going to buy a new 33.6 kbps modem that will support 56 kbps ISP services, choose a model with either a *flash* ROM (upgradable by a software download) or a replaceable EPROM chip (allowing a hardware upgrade) so it can accommodate whatever eventually becomes the internationally agreed standard for 56 kbps communications. □

AND FINALLY...

Could someone please explain why so many law firms and IT suppliers make a big fuss about launching web sites but then never publish their URLs? □

LEGAL IT DIARY DATES

September 9/11/16/18 - Corporate Mail Clinics Series of seminars on email technology and security issues organised by Peapod Group at the company's Southall offices. Admission free, includes lunch but preregistration required. Call Peapod on ☎ 0181 574 8288 for details.

September 16 & 17 - NT in the Legal Office Two half day (9.30am to 1pm) seminars and mini exhibitions looking at the growing importance of Microsoft Windows NT as a network operating platform. Keynote speaker is **Legal Technology Insider** editor Charles Christian. Participants include PC DOCS, Pilgrim Systems, Kommunicate, DPA-Egami and JM Computing. Takes place at Elland Road, Leeds on Tuesday and Haydock Park (between Manchester and Liverpool) on Wednesday. Cost (including lunch) is £50 (+VAT). Call JM Computing on ☎ 0161 792 6020 for details.

September 22 & 23 - Rundle Walker Workshops Exeter solicitors Rundle Walker, winners of the 1997 Society for Computers & Law IT Award, are holding two one-day seminars on IT for High Street firms in Exeter in September. The cost is £295 (+VAT), call Jeremy Wickham on ☎ 01392 209205 for details.

September 25 - Effective Use of Litigation Support in Case Management One day conference, including case studies and mini exhibition of litigation support technology at Royal Lancaster Hotel, London. Systems demonstrated will include: Livenote, Apollo from Bovy, Egami and BSG Litigator's Notebook. Organised by IBC in association with Elliott Slone. Speakers include Jonathan Maas of Simmons & Simmons, Martin Telfer of Masons and Graham Smith of Smith Bernal. The cost is £399 (+VAT) and the event is accredited for 5 CPD hours. Call Abigail Elwick on ☎ 0171 637 4383 for details. ➔

➔ *Legal IT Diary Dates continued...*

September 30 - Effective Communications Two 2-hour mid-day seminars on latest communications technologies at Institute of Directors, London. Organised by Kommunicate Ltd, admission free and includes lunch but preregistration required. Call Sandy Smith on ☎ 01252 815514 for details.

October 21 & 22 - Northern Legal Office Exhibition New two day IT exhibition organised by the same people who run the annual Barbican event. At the Windsor Hall at the GMEX Centre in Manchester. Admission free. Opening times: 9.30am to 7.30pm (Tuesday), 9.30am to 5.00pm (Wednesday). Call Truemist on ☎ 0181 742 3399 for tickets.

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Next issue...
Issue 46 of the Insider will be published on Monday 15th September.

SUBJECTS IN THIS ISSUE

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