

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

iNSIDER

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

In association with

LONGBRIDGE
INTERNATIONAL PLC

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LIVENOTE LAW REPORTS ON THE WAY

In a move likely to further increase competition among the suppliers of online legal information services, electronic publishers Context and court reporters Smith Bernal International have announced a new law reporting service.

Called *JUSTIS Daily Judgments*, the new service will be updated each day to provide a database of the full text of all Court of Appeal judgments transcribed by Smith Bernal under their contract with the Lord Chancellor's Department.

A pilot version of *JUSTIS Daily Judgments* will be available free of charge from November, with the full "professional" service going live before the end of the year.

If you would like to take part in the free pilot contact Context on ☎ 0171 267 8989. Context will be announcing the pricing structure for this service in November but suggest basic subscriptions will be in the region of £1000 pa.

In addition Smith Bernal (the company that also developed the LiveNote system) will be launching a public service providing the lay user with the text of these judgments via their web site (<http://www.smithbernal.com>).

The internet service will be free but it will not be updated so frequently and will lack the sophisticated database search and DDL (dynamic document linking) facilities of the *JUSTIS* version. □

SCL 1998 IT AWARDS

Nominations have opened for the Society for Computers & Law's 1998 award for ➔

➔ "the most outstanding application of IT to the law in the UK and the Republic of Ireland". The rules are the same as in previous years and nomination forms are available from judging panel chairman John Irving at BDO Stoy Hayward (☎ 0171 486 5888).

Entries can also be submitted online via the SCL web site at <http://www.scl.org/award>. The closing date for entries is 31st October 1997. The winner and runners-up will be announced at an awards ceremony in London on 26th January 1998.

☞ **Comment...** Controversy surrounded the 1997 award, which was won by a relatively low tech law firm with no product. In fact the decision prompted one runner-up – barrister Graham Reeds, one of the authors of *FT Law & Tax's Family Finance Toolkit* – to accuse the SCL of indulging in gimmicks to attract publicity. In the light of these criticisms, it will be interesting to see just how many serious entries the award receives from the legal IT industry. □

STOP PRESS - MICROSOFT IN SPEECH TECH DEAL

Microsoft has just announced it has paid \$45 million to acquire an 8 percent share in the Belgian-based speech recognition technology company Lernout & Hausie. Since acquiring the rights to the Kurzweil speech recognition technology earlier this year, Lernout has become one of the big four players in this market, along with IBM, Dragon and Philips.

Microsoft said it was taking the stake to speed up the development of speech enabled software, including desktop applications and the Windows operating system. See also story on page 3. □

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TFB gains ISO 9002

Legal systems supplier Technology for Business (TFB) has gained ISO 9002 quality standard accreditation for its customer care department.

☞ Manchester law firm Fentons has ordered a 19 PC network running the TFB (☎ 01932 781120) Partner case and practice management systems. The firm's conveyancing and personal injury departments will also be installing speech recognition software. See *Diary Dates* on page 7.

New option from Pilgrim
Pilgrim Systems (☎ 0131 226 5528) has added a new trust and portfolio module to its LawSoft practice management system. The new module, which allows firms to manage client investments, makes its public debut at next month's *Northern Legal Office* show in Manchester.

PHONES STILL HAVE KEY ROLE TO PLAY

While the rest of the legal world is displaying growing fascination with the internet, Cheshire law firm Brian Camp & Co is investing in a more basic communications technology - the telephone.

Having built up a substantial fixed price conveyancing and uninsured loss recovery practice over the last decade, senior partner Brian Camp is convinced that as well as being the first point of contact a client has with the firm, the telephone "remains the principal means of communication".

To support its client-facing activities, the firm has now installed a new phone system that along with call routing and paging, also provides voice mail and computer telephony integration (CTI) facilities. The system has already been integrated with the internal email network and the next part of the project will be to link the phones to the firm's Solicitec case management software.

☞ **Comment...** Brian Camp claims that back in the early 1980s, his firm was the first practice in that part of the world to install a fax machine. The new phone system, called Axxess from Inter-Tel UK (☎ 0116 290 3000), was installed by Piggott Telecommunications. Curiously, it was seeing Axxess in use at Tranmere Rovers football ground that prompted the firm to look at the system. ☐

ALL CHANGE AT MILES

Following Joe Amerasinghe's recent departure from Miles 33 and move to Oracle, his former colleague Andrea Pointing has now also quit Miles and become an account manager with responsibility for the Midlands and South West at rival supplier Axxia Systems. John Skarin now heads the legal systems team at Miles 33, with Murray Boaz looking after sales. ☐

MOUNTAIN NOW INSTALLING NEW WINDOWS SYSTEM

Mountain Software has commenced the installation of its new Windows-based accounts and time recording system.

The product, which has been developed over the last couple of years in Microsoft Visual Fox Pro, is a Year 2000 compliant 32-bit application and is being offered as a free upgrade to all existing users of Mountain's old DOS accounts package.

☞ **Comment...** In the highly competitive "larger town firms" sector of the legal IT market, Mountain's offer of a free upgrade must be causing their rivals to wince. Not least because some suppliers have been getting away with murder, charging users for everything including upgrades that are little more than bug fixes.

Although the accounts system is a stand-alone product, it also forms part of Mountain's new fully integrated case and practice management system, thus giving users an upgrade path. Mountain (☎ 01476 573718) is selling both directly and via its recently appointed distributor J M Computing (☎ 0161 792 6020). ☐

RESOLUTION SYSTEMS BACK IN THE FRAME ?

Resolution Systems (☎ 0171 588 7244), currently the only home grown UK legal IT supplier making any headway among the so-called "magic circle" and "first division" top ten City of London law firms, is understood to be preparing a new marketing campaign to win fresh orders for its FirmControl/FirmWare practice management system.

Although FirmControl (originally developed by Foundation Systems in conjunction with IT consultant Neil Cameron), has always been critically acclaimed, over the last 18 months Resolution (who acquired the system from Foundation) has been busy with major implementations at Linklaters & Paines, Freshfields and Herbert Smith. ☐

SPEECH RECOGNITION - YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE MORE RAM

Over the last few weeks a number of readers, including one prominent QC, have complained that the new NaturallySpeaking continuous speech recognition software from Dragon Systems is actually slower than the earlier generation of discrete systems that reduced users to talking like robots. But is this a hardware problem or could the software be fundamentally flawed?

LTi asked Jan Samuel, a speech technology enthusiast who is also a practising solicitor, about the problem. According to Samuel, although there are still areas where the software could and will be improved, a far bigger problem is having hardware that is sufficiently powerful to support the system.

Interestingly, it is not processing speed that is critical but the amount of RAM memory available. Samuel advises a minimum of 48Mb but suggests 64Mb would be better! This, incidentally, is substantially more than the 32Mb of RAM still being recommended by some suppliers.

As to the choice of processor, while the software will run on a standard 166MHz Pentium, Samuel says that to take full advantage of the expected enhancements to the system, users should opt for a faster multimedia (ie 200MHz+) MMX or Pentium II chip.

But, what about the NaturallySpeaking software?

Current complaints include: the fact you cannot dictate directly into an application but have instead to cut and paste from a separate dictation window; that you cannot carry across the voice pattern files you may have already built up with an earlier Dragon discrete system – so you have to start again from scratch and that the *command and control* aspects of the software (so you can operate your computer in a hands-free ➔

➔ mode by telling it what to do ie print this document, save that file etc) are not as good as those available on discrete speech recognition systems.

Samuel, who has worked closely with Dragon through his own company PerfectDocs (the company is a certified Dragon reseller) admits there are problems but expects them to be resolved in forthcoming software upgrades.

He also points out that within the last 10 days Dragon has launched a British-English version of NaturallySpeaking, which he reckons reduces the time it takes to get up to speed with the program to between two and three hours.

➔ **Comment...** Current thinking seems to be that if you want to input large volumes of text, you should opt for a continuous speech system, such as NaturallySpeaking. But, if you are inputting figures, make use of wordprocessing macros or want command and control facilities, you would be better advised to buy or stick with a discrete system.

In fact as a result of recent price changes by Dragon, it is now a viable option to have the best of both worlds.

DragonDictate Classic Edition 3.0 retails for £139 for the CD version (add VAT to all prices.) You can also upgrade from other Dragon products from as little as £39. Classic 3.0 is the latest version of Dragon's discrete product which has been enhanced to give it a text-to-speech capability – so the computer can read back to you, along with greater Windows NT compatibility and support for Microsoft Office 97 applications.

NaturallySpeaking now retails for £279 (although a price cut to £229 is imminent) however Classic 3.0 users can in turn upgrade to NaturallySpeaking for just £149. This means for £290 you can have both a discrete and a continuous system, giving you the option to switch between the two.

Demo disks of NaturallySpeaking are available free of charge from PerfectDocs, call ☎ 01271 42887 for details. ☐

Litigation support news

➔ **The latest release of the GenDIS document management system from Dectel Information & Security Systems (☎ 01268 727586) incorporates new features that comply with the requirements governing the legal admissibility of electronically stored documents set out in BS7768 and the associated Code of Practice DISC PD0008.**

➔ **Legal IT specialist Elliott Slone is expanding its activities and looking to recruit someone to fill a new post of litigation support operations manager. Howard Slone describes the job as a "hands-on role for a techie" with database management skills. The job is located in the City of London area, the salary is £22,500 to £27,500 plus bonus. Call Brigitte Pinkus on ☎ 0171 729 2088 for more details.**

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No change on Lloyds finance

As a result of the recent Lloyds TSB banking merger, the business technology finance division of Lloyds Bowmaker has been sold to Newcourt Credit of Canada. IT suppliers who previously dealt with Lloyds Bowmaker should note the same services will now be available through Newcourt Credit Business & Technology Finance (☎ 0117 924 8080).

Lloyd's law reports on CD-Rom

LLP Limited (until recently called Lloyd's of London Press) has launched *Lloyd's Electronic Law Reports* on CD-Rom. The CDs contain the full text of the *Lloyd's Law Reports* series since 1987. Updates will be issued every three months and the system uses the JUSTIS search engine. Call LLP on ☎ 01206 772866 for details.

IT DIRECTOR IN A MAJOR FIRM - IS IT AN IMPOSSIBLE JOB?

During recent months there has been a lot of movement at the top end of the legal IT jobs sector, with a number of major law firms, including Ashurst Morris Crisp, Nabarro Nathanson and recently merged Cameron McKenna, all losing IT directors.

The increase in the number of law firm mergers – both actual and rumoured – inevitably leads to disquiet and unease among IT directors. And, it is also clear that a few individuals have fallen foul of the personality clashes and internal politics that pervade some firms.

But these factors alone do not explain the sheer volume of movement in the market. At one point nearly half the IT directors of the 20 largest firms in London were either moving or looking to move. So why is it apparently such a difficult task to succeed as an IT director and what skills are needed to survive?

Certain skills are prerequisites in any industry or profession. Craig Coverman, managing consultant at legal recruitment agency Longbridge International (☎ 0171 726 4011), suggests these include strategic thinking allied to strong delivery, implementation and planning abilities.

In addition, says Coverman, the individual must be good at people management, budget management and supplier management, to keep staff motivated and costs in control, as well as gaining the best deal for the practice. And, technical skills are vital to keep abreast of the latest developments, so firms can exploit changes in technology.

However according to Masons' IT director Martin Telfer, these skills take on a unique twist when placed in the context of a law firm. For example, offering a career structure for IT staff is a difficult task. How do you provide management or technical advancement when you are running a small team or ➔

➔ systems that technically lag behind the rest of the world. How can you accurately measure return on investment (ROI) in a solicitors practice?

The consensus seems to be that while conventional skills are necessary, the *soft* skills an individual possesses are almost more important in promoting a successful career in law firm IT.

Janet Day, the IT director at Berwin Leighton, points out law firms are unusual in that outside the academic world there are very few environments where so many users are educated to at least degree level. This in turn can lead to an extremely demanding user base with limited patience and understanding of the problems IT directors face.

In fact credibility and sales skills seem to be a necessity if an IT director is to succeed.

The IT director has to gain credibility in the eyes of the user community – Martin Telfer reckons one of the easiest ways to achieve this with lawyers is to impress their clients. Sales skills are important in championing the IT cause while at the same time setting realistic expectations for the partners and senior management.

Janet Day suggests it is in “managing the art of the possible” that most individuals fall down and why so many IT projects are perceived as having failed. This can often occur because in their concern not to deter the decision makers from moving ahead with new systems, IT directors underestimate the costs, implementation times and ROI timeframes.

Coverman concedes an IT director from industry encountering partnership culture for the first time may find the legal IT world a frustrating place. But, on a more positive note, he also believes the business management disciplines many practices are now introducing mean IT directors are finally being allowed more freedom to get on with the task of putting in place the IT systems to support and drive firms forward. □

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NEW LOOK MSS UPGRADING IT AND WINNING ORDERS

Legal IT supplier MSS Management Support Systems, which recently gave its corporate image a much needed new look, has confirmed it is actively reviewing the functionality of its AlphaLAW software.

The most recent enhancement has been the introduction of support for Microsoft Word 97 in the latest release of the AlphaLAW case management system. MSS software designer Patrick Epps says this reflects the growing demand for Word as more and more firms move away from WordPerfect for their wordprocessing. MSS is also developing a prototype for integrating case management software within an internet/intranet environment.

☞ **Comment...** In common with many suppliers, MSS is enjoying excellent business this year, including winning a number of orders worth in excess of £100,000. Among the firms placing new orders or upgrading were: Widdows Mason in Leigh, Bevirs in Wiltshire, Lewis & Potts in Camberley, Blakemores in the Midlands and Leo Wallwork in Chorley.

MSS (☎ 01252 371121) which this year was voted "Best Legal Technology Supplier" in the *LOTIES* law office technology awards, also reports that over 50 small firms and sole practitioners have ordered its low cost AlphaLAW-junior entry level accounts system during the past six months. □

MICROSOFT FIXES OFFICE

After a two month delay caused by software bugs, Microsoft has finally issued a service release (SR-1) to fix some of the problems associated with Office 97. SR-1 includes a file converter so Word 97 documents can be saved in the familiar Word 6.0/95 format. SR-1 is available free of charge on CD to registered users, call Microsoft on ☎ 0345 002000 for details. □

SOFTWARE REVIEW... CLICK AND GO REVISION COURSE

With so many law students and law schools now making extensive use of computer technology, it was inevitable someone would spot the opportunity for a computer-based revision course.

And, who better to do it than a team of lecturers from The College of Law who have joined up with a software specialist to produce a series of revision programs on floppy disk for anyone about sit the LPC (legal practice course) exams.

The team call themselves Leagles and by the end of the year there will be six modules available, covering: business law & practice, civil litigation, criminal litigation, wills & probate, conveyancing and solicitors accounts. The series editor Chris Spencer reckons the programs can also serve as a useful post-qualification refresher course.

☞ **Comment...** These may be budget priced products (see below) but their technical quality is excellent. Written in Microsoft Visual Basic, the programs provide the functionality ease of use and reliability now expected from the better types of Windows software.

LTi tested the conveyancing module written by Frances Silverman, the author of, among other things, the *Conveyancing Handbook* (published by Law Society Publications).

This program takes the form of a series of case studies and multiple choice questions on a variety of topics including: domestic freehold purchases, business leasehold sales, mortgage and CGT relief, powers of attorney and even obscurer matters such as the protection of third party interests in unregistered title land.

Working through the topics is then a simple matter of "clicking" on the options you think are correct and, this being an interactive program, correct answers are highlighted in green while incorrect ones are shown in red.

Users can also choose between going through the course in an "exam ➡

➡ mode" with responses being logged and timed (with a maximum of two minutes per question) or the more leisurely revision mode, where you can take as long as you like and check your answers as you go.

Like a lot of software, the Leagles LPC revision course is actually more cumbersome to describe than it is to use. But, what is particularly attractive is the way it mimics on screen the paper based revision and self testing methods students have traditionally used.

For more details about Leagles, call Jeannie Hughes on ☎ 0171 720 7093. Readers should also note the price of LPC revision modules has just been cut from £45 to £27 (inc VAT) each. □

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Seen around the Web...

☞ **The Family Law Consortium, the Covent Garden based multi-disciplinary practice that includes solicitors, mediators and marriage guidance counsellors, has launched a new web site at <http://flc.co.uk> (there is no www in the URL). The firm (set up in anticipation of the Family Law Act 1996 which puts emphasis on trying to save marriages) say the site's main role is to explain the benefits of counselling and mediation. The site was developed by Internet Assist, for details visit: <http://internet-assist.net>**

☞ **A new web based support facility for the Probate Plus for Windows probate accounts software from Law Systems Ltd can be found at <http://www.lawsystems.co.uk>**

☞ **Gavel & Gown now has a web site for its Amicus Attorney organiser software at <http://www.amicus.ca>**

COMPUSERVE SOLD TO AOL AND UUNET

After months of rumours it has been announced that CompuServe, one of the pioneers of the online information services market, is to be sold by its US owners, the tax returns preparation service H&R Block.

Although it is expected that the complex series of inter-related deals will take several months to finalise, Block has agreed to sell CompuServe to the US telecommunications company WorldCom for \$1.2 billion. (WorldCom is probably better known for being the parent of the UUNet/Pipex group, the largest suppliers of internet services in the UK.)

At the same time, WorldCom will exchange some of its services with rival online services provider America Online (AOL), which is in turn involved with a joint venture with its European partner, the German publishers Bertelsmann.

☞ **Comment...** It is a complicated, drawn out deal but it is likely to be of considerable benefit to CompuServe and AOL subscribers - especially as there have been complaints about quality of service from users of both systems.

When the deal is finalised, the combined AOL/CompuServe user base will total over 11.6 million (including 1.5 million in Europe) and have access to an additional 100,000 modems. This should avoid some of the network traffic jams that have been encountered in recent months. It has also been confirmed that CompuServe will continue to operate as a separate service in terms of content. ☐

EXPLORER LAUNCH DATE

Microsoft will launch the next version of its web browser software Internet Explorer 4.0 (IE4) on 30th September. If you do not want to upgrade just yet, IE4 will also be an integral part of the NT 5.0 Workstation and Windows 98 operating systems being launched next year. ☐

ISDN BARGAIN BUNDLE

TDS Connectivity has launched a cut price bundle of ISDN connectivity products. Called the X4 solution, for £149 (+VAT) users get free connection to BT's ISDN service, an ISDN adapter (the ISDN equivalent of a modem), a bundle of ISDN software applications (including high speed fax software), a CD directory of 1.9 million business phone numbers and two months free ISDN line rental.

☞ **Comment...** TDS describe this as a "throw away your modem" deal for the smaller firm or home office that previously could not afford ISDN for high speed file transfer, video conferencing or internet access. The pricing is certainly keen. As the hardware/software element would normally retail for £300, ISDN connection costs £199 and BT ISDN line rental for two months is £92, there is a potential saving of £440.

Given the data transmission speeds available - Internet access at 128 kbps - the price also makes it a viable alternative to the 56 kbps promised by high speed conventional modems. And *promised* is the appropriate word as industry reports suggest that in practice most 56 kbps services actually only deliver speeds of 43-to-44 kbps.

For details about the X4 ISDN package call TDS on ☎ 01494 556802. ☐

ORANGE COMMUNICATOR IS NO LEMON

Orange, the digital phone network, has launched a new version of the Nokia Communicator combined mobile phone, email terminal and palmtop computer for users of Orange network services.

Although the Orange device is substantially the same as the Nokia 9000, it is much cheaper, retailing for £229.99 (+VAT) compared with £499.99 (+VAT) for the 9000.

For further information call Orange on ☎ 0800 801080 or visit the web site <http://www.orange.co.uk> ☐

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FREE DOMAIN NAME SEARCH

The European domain name registrar Virtual Internet has launched a global name search service that is able to search 420 top level domains simultaneously, so users can both check for the availability of any domain name worldwide and look for possible trademark infringements. The company says the average search can take as little as six seconds.

The service, which is free, can be found at <http://www.vi.net> and features a "danger list" of 64 countries (including the UK and the USA, as well as more exotic locations such as Azerbaijan and Zaire) where domain names can be registered without reference to existing trademarks and intellectual property rights.

Virtual has also introduced a name watch service. This is a database driven system that can highlight domain name registrations that come close to customers' registered trademarks. Virtual Internet believe this will be of interest to law firms who need to monitor for possible trademark infringements and passing off disputes. For further details call ☎ 0171 610 6610. □

HIGH SPEED PC CARD

Pision Dacom has launched a new "ready for anything" PC/PCMCIA card. Called the Gold Card Global 56K, it currently supports GSM and K56flex high speed modem standards and will shortly be upgradeable to support ISDN.

Prices start at £299 (+VAT). For details call ☎ 01908 261686. □

MILLENNIUM COUNTDOWN

A useful web site for anyone wanting information about the latest software fixes for tackling Year 2000 related problems in the BIOS element of personal computers can be found at <http://www.solace.co.uk/> The site contains the results of tests run to compare the effectiveness of different products. □

LEGAL IT DIARY DATES

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 on show 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. Cost: £399 (+VAT) and the event is accredited for 5 CPD hours. Call Abigail Elwick on ☎ 0171 637 4383 for details.

September 25 - Interactive Internet Sites for Lawyers

Two half-day seminars hosted by Michael Kaye of Kaye Tesler & Co looking at the way law firm web sites using the NKT Interactive system can generate new business. Takes place in Manchester with sessions commencing 10.00am and 2.00pm. The event qualifies for 3 CPD hours and further seminars will be held in Newcastle (8 October), Birmingham (29 October), Leeds (12 November) and Bristol (27 November). Call NKT Computer Consultants on ☎ 0181 802 6817 for details.

September 30 - Effective Communications

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

➔ *Legal IT Diary Dates continued...*

October 1 - Services for the Legal Profession Breakfast briefing (starts 8.15am) by Coutts & Co, Technology for Business (TFB) and Coopers & Lybrand looking at developments in electronic banking, voice recognition plus case and practice management systems. Takes place at Coopers & Lybrand's Leeds offices. Call Jacqueline de Gernier of TFB on ☎ 01932 781120 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 47 of the Insider will be published on Monday 29th September.

SUBJECTS IN THIS ISSUE

In addition to an issue-by-issue index, a cumulative index for **LTi** for 1995/6/7 will be published early next year.

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