

CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

THE SOURCE FOR INDEPENDENT LEGAL TECHNOLOGY NEWS, COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

VAZ WARNS ON NET CONTENT CONCERNS

In a speech at the opening of last week's SOLEX exhibition, Keith Vaz MP, the new parliamentary secretary at the Lord Chancellor's Department (LCD), warned of the need for "safeguards and regulation" to control the development of any online legal services being offered to the general public.

According to Vaz "While almost everyone agrees that it would be useful to place more legal information on the Web, a number of respondents to the LCD's *civil.justice*

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SUN FAILS TO SHINE ON SOLEX

It may have been the sunniest three days of the year but a dark cloud hung over the Barbican centre in London last week where exhibitors were complaining of the most poorly attended ever Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition (SOLEX).

Some blamed the downturn in the legal systems market in the run-up to Y2K but most blamed Imark, the owners of the event, for inadequate publicity and a jaded format.

Michael Belas of Avenue Legal described it as "not a complete disaster" but with Avenue's "lead count" down by 60 percent on the previous year, he felt "let down" by Imark. Solicitec's Juliana Ewin said that on Tuesday she gave just four system demos whereas in previous years she would have given more than that in the first hour. Paul Mankoo of IGL said there were not even "tyre-kickers" this year. And Equitrac's Rupert Murray said three days at Royal Ascot would have generated more business leads.

Imark event manager Nicola Bateman admits there were problems, largely inherited from the show's former owners Truemist, and that it could take three years for the event to pull around. However she is confident the innovations being planned, including new branding, a new floor plan, an earlier date (16th to 18th May) and new show features, with more seminars and product presentation facilities, will re-establish SOLEX as the UK's leading legal IT event.

Bateman says she is committed to ongoing consultation with exhibitors about further improvements but in the meantime Avenue Legal, Elliott Slone, Solicitec, Pilgrim, DPS, Equitrac and Technology for Business have all said they have serious concerns about returning to SOLEX.

■ Attendance figures have still to be finalised by Imark but third-party estimates suggest SOLEX will be lucky to have seen 3000 visitors this year and it could be less than 2000, a huge drop on 1997's all time record of 6600 visitors.

SOLEX new product launches - see Page 5

WINDOWS 2000 SET FOR OCTOBER ?

Microsoft has confirmed that its long awaited Windows 2000 operating system (previously known as NT 5.0) is now on target for a 6th October release date. But, given the added distraction of Y2K, is there any point in migrating to Windows 2000 in the closing weeks of this year?

The answer is probably "no". In fact some US IT analysts are already warning that if this system is anything like other new Microsoft products, it will effectively be little more than a final beta release that users will have to test for unrecorded bugs. Perhaps more importantly, it is also worth noting that the Windows 2000 Data Centre edition, which is being touted by Microsoft as the high-end scalability and reliability Unix-killer version of the OS - will not be available until at least February 2000.

■ Microsoft also says it is planning to launch a 64-bit version of the operating system in the final quarter of next year. This will take advantage of the 64-bit architecture of the new Intel Merced processor chip that is due to be released in June 2000.

INSIDER LAUNCHES VIRUS ALERT SERVICE

The Legal Technology Insider web portal now provides access a new *Hoax, Bug & Virus Alert* service for lawyers worried by reports of software bugs and Internet viruses. Along with coverage of the new Worm.ExploreZip (or ZippedFile) virus, the service will also provide guidance on whether some of the virus warnings in circulation are genuine or just hoaxes. The service is free and provides links to a range of bug and virus web resources.

■ Visit the Insider web portal for last minute news, additional services and sources of information.

<http://www.legaltechnology.co.uk>

PEOPLE AND PLACES

■ Accounts software specialist SAGE has created a new "time tracking professional services group" to provide training, implementation database design and consultancy services for law firms using its CARPE DIEM system.

<http://www.timetracking.com>

■ NABARRO NATHANSON is sponsoring the 1999 Thames Valley IT Awards, for IT companies based in the Swindon-Slough corridor. For an entry form contact Elissa Simpson at Nabarro's Reading office. The awards will be announced in November.

e-simpson@nabarro.com

■ The NAT WEST banking group has become the new co-sponsor of *The Lawyer* magazine's annual awards. Formerly known as the Lawyer/HIFAL awards, last year's winners included LOVELL WHITE DURRANT for "Best use of IT" and LINKLATERS, who won the "Innovation Award" for its Blue Flag service. The Insider will carry the 1999 results in the next issue.

■ US paralegal and training consultancy ULTRACORP is for sale. For details phone + 323 936 6461.

ultracorp@aol.com

■ The AIM HOLDINGS group, the parent of legal systems supplier AIM, has reported healthy results for the trading year to 30th April 1999. Turnover increased by 13 percent from £8.3 million to £9.4 million, while operating profits increased by nearly 300 percent from £281,000 to £1.03 million. The strong positive cash flow has allowed AIM to redeem £350,000 of loan stock and leave the balance sheet free of debt. The company has cash reserves of £900,000 and an order book equivalent to six months' work.

■ Long-time legal IT market specialist ALLAN HODKINSON has been appointed the managing director of SANDERSON SYSTEMS, part of the publicly quoted Sanderson group. Allan will continue in his role as director for legal systems but will also become more involved in other market sectors targeted by the company.

PEAPOD BUYS STRONGBOX SYSTEM

Peapod Solutions, best known for PRINTAForm electronic legal forms and as a distributor of the Osprey accounts system, has acquired the rights to the Windows version of Jim Strachan's Strongbox accounts software for sole practitioners and very small law firms. A 16-bit version is already available and a new 32-bit version - STRONGBox 2000 - will begin shipping in the autumn. Prices start at £975 for a single cashier version. The deal does not affect users of the DOS version of Strongbox, who will continue to be supported by Jim Strachan's own company.

VAZ WARNS ON NET CONTENT

Continued from front page

consultation paper had made the point that there would be a need to be a validation of web sites and to provide some form of quality control.

"I am sure that we are all familiar with the downside of the Internet: its lack of regulation enables the dishonest, the misinformed, and anyone with an axe to grind to set up web sites full of false information. We would need to be very careful to find a way of letting the public know which sites they can trust and ensure there is a way to protect confidential information. I can give you an assurance that those concerns will be addressed."

The minister also went on to say: "It is important to emphasise that online services will never replace the work done by professionals in complex situations. Rather, such services should be seen as complementing the work of legal advice providers. Easy to use, easy to access information, in simple language, could help people to understand their rights and show them how to enforce them."

Turning to the *Community Legal Service Consultation Paper*, which was issued by the LCD at the end of May, Vaz said it was envisaged a Community Legal Service web site, scheduled to be launched early in the year 2000, would act as a "first port of call" for people seeking legal information advice and assistance via the Internet.

"Initially the web site will signpost users to advice services and provide links to existing online information, co-ordinating access to avoid the lengthy hit and miss searching that is currently required. From this foundation," said Vaz, "it is envisaged that the site will be expanded to include further information and interactive guidance, taking advantage of advances in technology to develop a virtual legal advice network".

■ Copies of the *Community Legal Service Consultation Paper* (CP5/99) can be obtained by phoning 020 7210 0733/1325. The text is also available on the LCD web site.

<http://www.open.gov.uk/lcd>

Responses should be sent by 30th July 1999 to Nick Hunt at the LCD's Community Legal Service Division.

cls.lcd@gnet.gov.uk

CAMERON FORMS SON OF KPMG CONSULTANCY

Leading legal IT consultant and former Society for Computers & Law chairman Neil Cameron has teamed up with six other consultants to form the Neil Cameron Legal Technology Consultancy (0973 165130).

The other six are Mark Fresko, Amanda Young, Simon Hughes and Paul White who, along with Cameron, have all at one time or another worked as consultants with KPMG, plus Tina Brody and Clive Morris.

The new group have also formed an association with the German IT consultancy Bohmer Uhrig in Frankfurt to add an international dimension to their operations. And, they may well need it, as rival consultant Andrew Levison of Grant Thornton is predicting a down turn in legal IT work as law firms begin putting all new projects on hold until after the millennium.

■ Cameron is currently involved in a major project for Thompsons, the largest personal injury practice in the UK, who are in the throes of implementing a 500 user case management system based on Hatton Blue's Vectus software. The firm, which has been running the software since the autumn of last year, is now finalising a version for handling fast-track cases under the new Woolf rules.

Insider sources say one of the biggest issues at Thompsons has been "cultural" rather than technical, with the firm having to handle the associated business process re-engineering side of the project very tactfully to avoid upsetting its heavily trade-unionised workforce.

■ Full details of the new consultancy can be found on the web. The site was developed by Go Interactive and features the usual Go hallmarks of drop down menus and washed out grey tones, plus plenty of grey Photo-Me booth photos of men in suits. Some of the site's links are also missing.

<http://www.neilcameron.co.uk>

SOLICITEC UP 60 PERCENT

Solicitec estimates its turnover to the year ending 30th June 1999 looks like being in the region of £5 million, a 60 percent increase on the company's 1997/98 turnover of £3.2 million. Pre-tax profits are up 200 percent from £250,000 to £750,000.

Recent orders include British Telecommunications, which is to expand its use of Solicitec's SolCase case management software by its inhouse legal teams (the system is already in use in Sheffield and will now be rolled out to lawyers at BT's London head office) and Eversheds (East Midlands), which reports a doubling in the volume of business handled by its new debt collection service since the service implemented SolCase six months ago.

■ The Insider has also learned that Browne Jacobson in Nottingham is currently implementing SolCase Online. The firm will run the system in conjunction with its Resolution FirmWare practice management software.

DEALS AND TENDERS

■ Sixty-user RICHMONDS, with offices in Worksop, Doncaster and Retford, has just gone live with a new Windows NT practice management system supplied by NORWEL. Although the firm had already chosen Norwel (Peter Kelly of GRANT THORNTON was the consultant), the project was brought forward at short notice when the firm's existing AVENUE Solomon accounts system crashed and was out of action for 14 days.

Within the last couple of days Norwel has also announced a new "win" at GEORGE DAVIES & CO, the Manchester music, medical negligence and sports law niche practice, plus upgrade orders from CRANSWICK WATSON in Leeds, ROBERT MUCKLE on Tyneside and GRAYS in York.

■ Manchester's PANNONE & PARTNERS has installed NOVELL GroupWise to replace an old SOFTSOLUTIONS document management system and provide the backbone for a new intranet.

■ WITHY KING in Bath is to use software supplied by SOLICITORS OWN SOFTWARE to provide the IT infrastructure for a new one-stop conveyancing service the firm will be launching in the West of England within the next few weeks.

■ The IRON TRADES has dropped CARTWRIGHTS and HEXTALL ERSKINE from its panel of preferred insurance litigation firms. The move comes as a blow to THE CONSORTIUM, which had been set up by the two firms, in conjunction with JACKSONS on Teeside, to create a case information system to provide commercial clients with direct access to matter records. Jacksons is still on the Iron Trades panel and the Consortium members says they remain committed to the project, which is based around the AXXIA Advantage system.

■ TREVANIONS in Poole, which 100 years ago had the distinction of being the first solicitors' practice in Dorset to install a telephone, has replaced its old ACE accounts software with a Progress based VIDESS practice management system running on Windows NT.

LEGAL PUBLISHING NEWS IN BRIEF

■ SWEETS CHANGE AT THE TOP

Sweet & Maxwell has appointed Wendy Beecham as its new managing director. Ms Beecham, who formally takes up her new job on 1st July, is the vice president of content development at the US online legal information provider West Online, another part of the Thomson publishing group that also owns Sweet & Maxwell.

■ Having previously had responsibility for content acquisition and development for both the Westlaw and Westlaw.com services, her appointment is seen by others within the publishing industry as a sign that Sweet & Maxwell is finally getting serious about the Internet and electronic publishing.

■ REED ELSEVIER - STILL NO CHANGE AT THE TOP

Butterworths' parent company Reed Elsevier has just issued its third profits warning in six months.

The company blamed the latest problems on harsh economic conditions within the US magazines market and the Internet, which is providing strong competition for its Lexis-Nexis online legal and business information services. However the *Financial Times*, which described Reed as "the lame duck of the media sector, says the real underlying problem is the company's continued failure to find a new chief executive, with the result that the group's "caretaker management is losing its grip".

The *Wall Street Journal* went even further, suggesting that Reed is now a potential takeover target for the Dutch Wolters Kluwer group, Bertelsmann in Germany or even Microsoft.

■ INSIDER FREE-ZINES

Legal Technology Insider publishes a series of free current awareness e-mail newsletters (free-zines) providing news and comment on legal practice. The titles are: *E-Business + Law*, *Watching Brief Online* (local government law) and the *Litigation Support Digital Newsletter*. To subscribe send a note of your e-mail address to: info@legaltechnology.co.uk

ONLINE TAX LAW SERVICE LAUNCHES

Today (23rd June) sees the launch of Butterworths Tolley's new *Tax Direct* service on the Internet.

The service, which includes access to a web site that is updated every five minutes plus news alerts delivered by e-mail, covers legislative and legal developments in direct tax, VAT and National Insurance. VAT tribunal decisions will be reported the next day after availability, there is a Finance Bill tracking service covering Parliamentary developments clause by clause, there will be real-time coverage of Budget Day and all news stories have hypertext links to online versions of Butterworths and Tolley's full range of standard works, including *Simon's* and *De Voil*.

Steve Savory, Tolley's head of Internet publishing, said one of the attractions of the new service is both the web and e-mail aspects can be customised, so instead of being bombarded with masses of material, users can focus on the specific areas of tax in which they practice and determine the volume of cases and news reports they receive.

The service is designed for all tax practitioners, both accountants and lawyers, working in City practices or High Street firms. And, according to Savory, not only are some of the features, such the Finance Bill tracking service, incapable of being replicated on conventional media but the online pricing structure (from £245 for the news service only and from £1445 for the full service) is "substantially cheaper" than the total cost of buying the equivalent materials, articles, reports and books on CD or paper.

MORE PUBLISHERS GO ONLINE

Two more legal publishers have gone online with web sites.

■ The PLC publishing-to-conferences group (the flagship title is *PLC* magazine) has a workmanlike product promotional site marred only by the use of cookies, never popular with lawyers, and sloppy programming - some of the HTML coding tags are still visible on the home page.

<http://www.plcinfo.com>

■ Although some of the content on the new Blackstone Press site looks an afterthought, the overall concept - an online searchable catalogue of law books and CD-Roms for students and practitioners, with a facility to order and pay for books online by credit card - is good. But, overall site navigation is confusing and an excessive use of special effects means the home page is slow to download. As a rule of thumb a page should not take longer to download than you can hold your breath. When the Insider visited the site, despite an ISDN link we still needed oxygen.

The site was developed for Blackstone by Nettek plc (020 7514 9500), who are also the authors of the "Powercatalog" software used to drive the searchable database and electronic commerce sides of the site.

<http://www.blackstonepress.com>

<http://www.nettec.net>

SOLEX NEW PRODUCT LAUNCHES

The visitors may have stayed away from this year's SOLEX event but there were still plenty of new products on display.

■ PROLAW LANDS IN THE UK

ProLaw Software, the US developers of the ProLaw case and matter management system that has been taking the US legal market by storm, has established a foothold in the UK by appointing SCS Systematic Corporate Solutions (01707 824824) as its first UK business partner and distributor. Because ProLaw software is fully compatible with both the Elite and CMS Open practice management systems, SCS will initially be targeting Elite and CMS users in the UK.

Latest *AmLaw Tech* statistics show that 16 US law firms and legal institutions ordered 100 user or larger ProLaw installations within the last three months. These include the Alabama Attorney General's office, with a 300 user order, and Fish & Richardson in Boston with a 500 user site.

■ iMANAGE BEEFS UP UK PRESENCE

NetRight Technologies, the developer of the iManage document management system, is expanding its presence in the UK by appointing three more distributors in addition to its existing master distributor CSE (01483 453900). The three are: G3 Consulting (020 7357 9441), SCS (01707 824824) and BEI Metastorm (020 7371 0222).

Although there are currently only ten iManage sites in the UK, in the USA sales growth has been exceptional. Twelve months ago there were 6500 users, today there are over 50,000 and NetRight estimates that by the end of 1999 it will be in use in 75 of the top 100 US law firms. According to Rizwan Khan of NetRight, a growing number of US orders come from firms, such as Morgan Lewis & Bockius, who are swapping out their existing DOCS Open systems in favour of iManage.

On the technology front, iManage is now shipping on SQL Server 7.0 and will be launching version 5.0 of the system in the autumn. According to Khan, the new version will complete the transition of iManage from simple document management to a document and knowledge management system. There will also be a new web browser interface to create what Khan terms a "corporate portal" to a firm's repository of documents and information.

■ LEXOLOGY IN H-P LINK

Lexology (01642 482000) has developed an integrated link between its own practice management software and the new Hewlett Packard Digital Sender (see **Insider 81**). By pressing a dedicated "Lexology" button the Digital Sender, a paper document can be scanned directly into a file on the Lexology system. The Digital Sender is also compatible with the DOCS Open document management system.

■ AIM'S NEW E-SOLUTION

AIM (01482 326971), a company probably better known for solid accounts and practice management software, has just unveiled its own highly innovative "corporate portal" system. Called the Aim e-Solution, it can offer fee earners access to know-how material and clients direct access to quotations and status reports. The system, which stems from a project originally carried out for Pickering & Butters, uses a web browser interface and has its own onscreen search engine.

Next year AIM will be introducing a new version of its Evolution software that uses ActiveX objects to provide users with a browser interface to the system.

■ OSPREY SMALL FIRMS DEAL

Pracctice Ltd (01432 351041), which is a Law Society *Software Solutions Provider*, has introduced a new Small Firms Edition (SFE) of its Osprey accounts and practice management system. Prices start at £1500 for the software, which includes support for Legal Aid franchise management and block contract bidding. Pracctice say the Paradox-based system is suitable for up to five users but suggest larger firms need the full SQL Server "Professional" edition of Osprey. Pracctice has produced a free audio tape cassette providing further information on SFE.

■ SOS GETS NEW OUTLOOK

Solicitors Own Software (01225 448664), another *Software Solutions Provider*, has given its SOS Practice Management accounts and PMS software a new look with the introduction of redesigned client/matter and ledger screens, with an overall appearance that is Microsoft Outlook in style. Managing director Michael Platt said that while the redesign helped make the system "more accessible" to fee earners, the changes were not so fundamental that existing users would need retraining.

The SOS system also includes new reports and utilities to handle the Inland Revenue's work-in-progress rules, as well as the Legal Aid Board's franchise management and block contract requirements. Another innovation is a program for reconciling online banking transaction statements with the cash book records held by a firm's cashiers.

WEB NEWS IN BRIEF

■ **NEW LOOK SITE HITS GOLD**
Golds Solicitors in Glasgow has just relaunched its web site and now offers a range of content that is both informative and amusing.

Because some of the graphics files are large and the site makes widespread use of applets, download times verge on the slow side. The intermediary page, that has to be clicked through before reaching the home page/site menu, serves no purpose and the choice of grey text on a grey parchment effect background does little for legibility.

That said, navigation is excellent - there is even on-site search engine - and the original cartoons used to illustrate the site are both professionally drawn and - amazingly - genuinely funny.

The humour element even pervades the partner profiles on the site, creating the impression that these are people you might actually enjoy working with.

Golds partner Jonathan Edwards says that if stranded on a desert island for a year, he would like to take with him the entire works of the rock band Jethro Tull. Anyone with the complete works of Jethro Tull deserves to be stranded on a desert island for a year.

<http://www.golds.co.uk>

■ LAW CENTRES SITE

The Law Centres Federation has launched a site containing information about law centre vacancies, events and activities.

<http://www.lawcentres.org.uk>

■ LTI-NET - THE DIGITAL EDITION OF THE INSIDER

LTI-Net is the digital version of Legal Technology Insider. It is available in an HTML file format that can be delivered as an e-mail attachment or accessed via a secure subscriber-only web site.

LTI-NET comes complete with live hypertext links and is designed for firms wanting to access the newsletter across intranets and Lotus Notes databases or individual subscribers who just want to read and print it from the desktop.

Subscription rates start at £135 (inc VAT). To obtain a free sample copy e-mail info@legaltechnology.co.uk

MORE ONLINE LEGAL SERVICES

If the number of recent developments in online legal services are any indication, we really are moving into the age of the virtual legal practice.

■ LAWYERS ONLINE TO OFFER FREE ACCESS

Dedicated legal Internet service provider Lawyers Online has restructured its services and is now offering free e-mail accounts and Internet access to subscribers. (Users still pay local call rates for the time they are connected to the Internet.) The free deal also gives subscribers 5Mb of server disk space on which to establish their own web sites. For a copy of a CD containing the necessary software and login details call 01432 356711.

■ JCS TO BECOME VISP

Legal accounts software specialist JCS is to become a "Virtual Internet service provider" (or VISP) offering, initially, JCS software users a range of e-mail and web access services. The service will be launched at the SOLEX North exhibition at the Manchester GMEX in October.

<http://www.lawyersweb.net>

■ LAW ZONE GOES LIVE

Sift plc, the Bristol-based online services company that developed the AccountingWEB site for accountants, has made its first foray into the legal market with the launch of LawZONE. The site, which went live last week, currently offers a free legal news service, search facilities and access to a database of company information. More services are expected to be launched over the coming months.

<http://www.lawzone.co.uk>

■ BLUE FLAG EXPANDS SERVICES - AGAIN

Linklaters & Alliance (020 7456 2000) this week launched another new module to its Blue Flag commoditised online legal information service. Called *Blue Flag ESP*, the service is designed for HR departments and inhouse lawyers involved in the development of employee share plans. Linklaters partner Janet Cooper, who heads the employee benefits team, says she believes using the service could save multinationals tens of thousands of pounds on legal fees in comparison with conventional legal advice.

■ FREESERVE DESKTOP LAWYER

Epoch Software has introduced a new "shopping wizard" to its Desktop Lawyer system, which is currently being used to sell legal documents via the Freeserve web site. The new wizard simplifies the selection and purchase of documents.

■ Epoch managing director Vange Evangelou estimates the potential UK market for online legal services is worth £1.8 billion a year. The typical Freeserve user spends 16 minutes a day online whereas Freeserve Desktop Lawyer users stay online for an average of 111 minutes per session.

HELP DESKS - THE 70 PERCENT SOLUTION

Following the replacement of an older "non user friendly" help desk system and the introduction of its new Assyst service management software from Axios Systems (0131 220 4748), Norton Rose reckons it now operates a resolution rate of 70 percent at the time calls are logged.

The firm's IT service department provides daytime support (8am until 8pm) to around 1000 UK users plus 200 people in offices throughout Europe, the Middle East and South-East Asia via a wide area network.

Handling between 200 and 250 calls each day on a wide variety of hardware and software problems, as well as other IT-related issues, the firm's team of six front-line "call agents" are backed by separate second-line support teams specialising in server problems, desktop product concerns and IT infrastructure queries. Most calls are received by phone, with queuing time being three calls at most, but incidents can also be logged via voicemail and email.

Along with the 70 percent resolution rate, the workflow aspects of the new software have shaved about 30 seconds off the time it takes to actually log each call. Another big time-saver has been the system's ability to link multiple problems, incidents and changes and therefore close down all linked features simultaneously.

But, according to Larry Poulton, who has been involved with the project at Norton Rose from the outset, one of the biggest benefits of Assyst has been the management information it now generates.

"The old system couldn't provide the knowledge base facilities we required. It lacked the basic ability to store, let alone provide, details of resolutions and reporting was non-existent. We needed to know where and why problems were occurring and to use change management processes to address the root causes."

"We didn't want the help desk to continue to simply log calls and provide each and every fix in isolation. We wanted a system that could handle incidents and problems, as well as keep track of any changes made. We also wanted a system that could provide trend analysis."

Norton Rose is now in the process of establishing and exploiting the system's "knowledge base" capabilities. Once that process is in full swing, Poulton is confident that call resolution rates will be raised even higher, thus generating further improvements in customer satisfaction levels.

In the meantime, the Norton Rose IT service team is benefiting from Assyst's centralised store of information. This is now being used for incident management, service level management, decision support and management information, supplier and contract management, workflow and process management, and configuration and asset management.

The Assyst system at Norton Rose has a client/server configuration running on Sybase.

<http://www.axios.co.uk>

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY DIARY DATES

■ **AVENUE SEMINARS** - A series of free seminars around England and Wales to promote Avenue Legal Systems' new software, including its Woolf-compliant case management system. For details call Linda Moore on 01489 609010.

■ **A VISION FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM** - The Law Society of Scotland's 50th Anniversary Conference opens at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre on Thursday 8th July and runs through until Saturday 10th. IT speakers include Richard Susskind, Neil Cameron and Chris Gough of Grant Thornton. There will also be a small exhibition on the Thursday and Friday and an Internet cafe running for all three days. Prices start at £35 (+ VAT) for one-day student fees through to £300 (+ VAT) for a full three day ticket. Call the organisers Meeting Makers on 0141 434 1500 for more details.

■ **IT SOLUTIONS '99** - A product promotional seminar organised by Sanderson Systems in London on 13th July. Admission is free, call Lisa Quinn on 0121 359 4861 for more details.

■ **YEAR 2000 COMPLIANCE** - Two one day conferences on assessing and managing the legal risks on 27th July (London) and 29th July (Dublin). Organised by IQPC Events (020 7430 7300). Full details are on the web.

<http://www.iqpc.co.uk>

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COMPUTER LORE

■ ALL WIGHT ON THE NIGHT

Congratulations to the D J Freeman team who won the recent Manches Cup series of yacht races off the Isle of Wight on the good ship *Knight of the Orient*.

The skipper of the seven man crew was Rupert Murray, better known as the head of Equitrac's operations in the UK but who also happens to hold "yacht master" qualifications. A total of 32 yachts competed in this year's event, which is only open to law firms.

■ NO-ONE KNOWS YOU ARE A DOG

There is a saying that "on the Internet, no-one knows you are a dog" meaning it is very easy to hide your true identity behind a digital facia. Apparently the same rule also applies to contacts databases.

As part of ongoing litigation between accountants Deloitte & Touche and one of their former employees Ken Goddard, Goddard has claimed the firm contravened the provisions of a software licence by continuing to use a contacts database application he created. By way of proof he points to the fact his dog is still receiving promotional mailshots from Deloittes, Mr Goddard having taken the precaution of seeding the database with some fake data, including the name of his dog, for control purposes.

Deloittes say it is "inappropriate" to comment on the dispute, which has dogged them since 1996.

■ AND WHOSE FAULT IS THAT ?

A reader reports that he recently attended a seminar on electronic commerce at which Elizabeth France, the head of the Data Protection Registry (proprietor HM Government) expressed surprise when she heard lawyers were using Internet e-mail without encryption. Apparently she is concerned that users have no idea of the route the message may take or into whose hands it might fall - unlike, of course, conventional mail.

What the Data Protection Registrar seems to have overlooked is that the main reason why encryption is seldom used in the UK is because the Department of Trade & Industry has spent the past three years dithering over what policy to adopt towards encryption standards.

Perhaps this week's scheduled publication of the long awaited E-Commerce Bill will provide some of the answers.

■ FOCCACIA TO GO

One aspect of e-commerce that is alive and well in central London is the city's first online takeaway sandwich shop. Log on to Sandwiches Online before 11.00 in the morning and you can both order and pay for a wide range of the more exotic varieties of sandwich, which will then be delivered to your office. Make mine a roasted vegetables and hummous on foccacia bread, with a packet of balsamic vinegar and sea salt kettle crisps to go.

<http://www.sandwichesonline.com>