CHARLES CHRISTIAN's

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY iNSIDER

THE SOURCE FOR INDEPENDENT LEGAL TECHNOLOGY NEWS, COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

FOUR BATTLE IT OUT FOR SCL AWARD

The Society for Computers & Law has named the four finalists for its annual IT award. This year's finalists for the award (which is not confined to specific products but can also include the best use of IT by a law firm) include strong representation from the online legal services world.

The four are: Capsoft UK's Everyform series of free web downloadable electronic legal forms; the InterAction relationship management system from Interface Software; the Rapidocs, DirectLaw and Desktop Lawyer family of legal e-commerce products from Epoch Software; and the Virtual Solicitors Chambers project, which was set up by Neil Davidson's Peterborough-based Solicitors Chambers group, in conjunction with Lexology and Lawyers Online.

■ The winner will be announced at the SCL awards ceremony on 24th January and the results reported in the next issue of the Insider.

YES TO E-COMMERCE IN 2000

According to a survey of the 160 firms and inhouse legal departments attending the recent Solicitec Legal Systems annual conference, over 55 percent are planning to implement legal e-commerce applications during the next twelve months. Equally heartening was the finding that of the remaining 45 percent, only three percent definitely had no plans for e-commerce projects during the year 2000.

■ COMMENT - Although Solicitec, with its SolCase Online case management system, has a vested interest in legal e-commerce, its survey echoes reports heard by the Insider both from other IT suppliers and law firm users that with Y2K out of the way, e-commerce is the next big thing.

LEGEND IN HIS OWN LIFETIME

Professor Richard Susskind, the UK's all-round legal IT expert and author of *The Future of Law*, has received well deserved official recognition for his efforts to drag lawyers in general, and judges in particular, into the digital age. In the recent New Year Honours List he was awarded an OBE (Order of the British Empire) for his services relating to the use of IT in the law and the administration of justice.

■ For non-UK readers unfamiliar with the honours system, OBEs are out-ranked by CBEs, such as the one awarded to former "Monty Python" star Michael Palin, but beat MBEs, such as the one awarded to Noddy Holder, the former lead singer with the 1970s glam-rock band Slade.

IN THIS ISSUE

STOP PRESS

■ BLAKE DAWSON EXPERT IN LONDON
Elizabeth Broderick, the head of the legal technology group at Australian law firm Blake Dawson Waldron will be speaking on the topic of virtual legal practice in the 21st century at Strategic Event's legal e-commerce conference in London next month. **See Diary Dates for details**

VISIT THE INSIDER WEB SITE

Visit the LEGAL TECHNOLOGY.CO.UK web site for regularly updated legal technology breaking news - fresh reports are now filed every Monday, Wednesday and Friday - plus links to additional free services and information, including a diary of forthcoming legal IT events and access to a searchable archive of issues 1-to-85 of the Insider in PDF file format.

ALL CHANGE FOR SOLEX IN 2000 ?

Imark, the organisers of the SOLEX Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition at London's Barbican Centre, is making big changes to the event in preparation for its year 2000 outing.

As well as bringing forward the show dates from mid-June to 16-to-18 May, subject to some final contractual formalities, the American Lawyer Media group, which runs the successful LegalTech events across the United States, should also be getting involved.

Although it was originally announced that American Lawyer Media would be organising its own LegalTech exhibition plus conference in London in November 2000, as a result of the latest moves the November event has been scrapped and the programme will now be combined with SOLEX.

The LegalTech organisers say a London show will provide an ideal launch platform for US legal systems suppliers hoping to break into the UK market or looking for UK distributors.

Imark is hoping to announce details of its main media sponsor (rumoured to be *The Lawyer*) within the next few weeks. In addition, *In Brief* magazine will be involved with SOLEX and announcing the LOTIES awards winners at the event.

NEW LAFQAS DATES

Following the success of its inaugural meeting, the informal Law Society/legal IT suppliers liaison group on the new LAFQAS legal aid franchise quality standard has set the dates for its next two meetings. These will take place at the English Law Society in Chancery Lane, London, on 7th February and 8th May. For details contact the meeting's coordinator Gary Day on 0171 316 5533.

BUZZWORD CORNER

■ HOURGLASS MODE (*noun*)
A seemingly endless wait for something to happen. The term is derived from the hourglass icon used by Microsoft Windows to indicate the system is busy and cannot handle any additional tasks.

ELITE AND CMS MERGER ON THE CARDS

Just before Christmas the boards of Australian-based Solution 6 Holdings and the Los Angeles-based Elite Information Group announced they had entered into a merger agreement that would see Solution 6 acquire Elite.

The merger is intended "to reinforce Solution 6's position as the world's largest supplier of practice management software to the time-based professional services market". Solution 6 products already include CABS, which is widely used by accountants, and CMS Open, which is rated as one of the top two selling PMS systems for larger law firms - the other one is Elite!

Although it might appear CMS and Elite are rival products, Solution 6 say the rationale behind the merger is "the convergence of the accounting, legal and consulting industries". Solution 6 say the deal will also strengthen the company's ASP (application service provider) strategy through Elite's new dot.com arm, which already provides ASP services to some US law firms as an alternative to installing conventional inhouse accounts systems.

■ CMS last week announced the release of CMS Open Version 4.10. The company describes this as the product's "most comprehensive software update since 1995".

New features include: the conversion of all applications to a 32 bit environment; the ability to split selected time and disbursement entries; fee rate overrides allowing unlimited variable rates for given clients or matters; and an enhanced time entry application allowing overtime fees to be billed as disbursements.

■ WHITEHILL AND ELITE LINK UP
As the result of a new "strategic alliance", Elite will now offer Whitehill Technologies of Canada's Wordflow bill formatting software as an integrated part of the Elite Billing System. Previously the Wordflow software was only available in the UK through Axxia Systems.

iMANAGE EXTENDS SUPPORT

Document management software supplier iManage now supports Lucent's Unified Messenger system. The move means iManage/Unified Messenger users can manage and archive voicemail, fax and e-mail messages, as well as conventional documents.

■ iManage is holding a series of free half-day seminars on legal document management issues in London on 27th January and 8th February. For details call 01483 453900.

PLASTIC - THAT'LL DO NICELY

Legal Technology Insider is reviewing its subscription renewal procedures and would like gauge readers' views on payment via credit card. If you would find it useful or prefer to have the option of renew via VISA, please e-mail the Insider office at: **info@legaltechnology.co.uk**

PEAPOD SPLITS FROM PRACCTICE

After three years of working together legal system suppliers Pracctice Limited and Peapod Solutions have decided to end their highly successful joint marketing venture.

Since November 1996 the companies had been selling their respective 32-bit accounts, case management and forms software under the "One Stop Solution" brand but following what are described as "disagreements over future strategy" the two have decided to go their separate ways.

Pracctice will now be selling is Osprey accounts and practice management system (which for the second year running has been included in the English Law Society's *Software Solutions for the Smaller Firm* guide and now includes a SQL Server version suitable for larger firms) directly and is no longer using Peapod as a distributor.

In turn, Peapod is now bundling the 32-bit version of its recently acquired Strongbox legal accounts system in with its forms and case management software to create a new low-cost package called LEGALOffice 2000. With an entry level price of £750, Peapod believes the product will also appeal to very small firms, including sole practitioners.

ELECTRONIC LEGAL FORMS MARKET STARTS TO HEAT UP

Capsoft UK's EveryForm free electronic legal forms service (one of the finalists for this year's SCL IT award) may have only been in operation for 14 weeks but it is having a big impact on the traditional pay-to-use market, with over 3000 organisations having already registered to use the service. Over 70 percent of downloads are by the legal profession - half by firms with four partners or less. And, in what may be the start of a market shake-out, Laserform has confirmed it is involved in talks with a competitor that has decided to pull out of the electronic forms business.

■ In other electronic forms news: users can now download Welsh-language versions of eleven of the most widely used Companies House forms free of charge from the EveryForm web site. And, the Registers of Scotland executive agency is offering free unlimited use of its electronic forms to lawyers accessing its new eFORMS service.

www.everyform.net
www.ros.gov.uk/eforms

SURVEY FORMS RETURNED ?

Within the last couple of weeks every legal IT supplier in the UK should have received a copy of the *Legal Technology Insider Quarterly Legal IT Market Survey* form for the period October 1st-to-December 31st 1999. Please note that the closing date for returning forms to the Insider office is 31st January. If you have misplaced or not yet received a survey form, please contact the Insider.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ MANAGEMENT INTERFACE (MIL) has completed a 14 user NT/PC network implementation at PIPER PADFIELD & DERBY in Ilford. The project included the upgrade and data transfer of the firm's SOLACE Unix-based accounts and old LEX wordprocessing systems to Microsoft Word and LASERFORM.

■ The Hull division of AIM has received the INVESTORS IN PEOPLE (IIP) quality standards award.

■ HOWELLS in Sheffield, which has new legal aid cases coming in at the rate of over 100 a week, has been testing the new LAFQAS and LAB statement processing elements of the 32-bit version of the SOS Practice Manager systems. SOS will also be launching a new contact management and marketing module later this spring.

■ DAN BINDMAN, who has covered IT for the LAW SOCIETY GAZETTE for the past four years, has left the magazine to concentrate on writing in other areas.

■ VIDESS COMPUTER SYSTEMS has won a £100,000 contract to upgrade and extend the IT systems at BANNERS following the recent merger with another Chesterfield firm JONES & MIDDLETON to form BANNER JONES MIDDLETON.

■ The inhouse legal department at CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL has ordered a 14-user EpitomeOMS office and document management system from PERICOM/FWBS (01908 265533).

NEW LSSA MEMBERS

Two more IT suppliers - Solicitors Own Software (SOS) and Datix Business Systems - have joined the Legal Software Suppliers Association (LSSA).

LSSA, which is currently talking to a number of potential members, has also waived its £1000 joining fee until April, so new members can join on payment of just the £1500 annual membership fee. For details contact LSSA secretary Roger Hancock on 01789 296096.

www.lssa.co.uk

SEARCH DIRECT.COM GOES LIVE

Today (19 January) sees Longbridge International's new online recruitment service Search-Direct.com go live.

The first product of Longbridge's newly formed eBridge e-commerce and Internet business subsidiary, the service differs from other "online" recruitment web sites in that it is not just another collection of job advertisements but instead creates an interactive environment in which employers can actually headhunt online with no agency intermediary or success fees payable. Initially targeted at the legal community, prospective candidates can register details free of charge while employers can place any number of vacancies for £900 a month.

www.search-direct.com

WILDE HAS PEAR SHAPED VISION

John Wilde, a former managing director of systems supplier AIM until poor health forced his departure, is back in business with a new management training and systems consultancy called Wilde Visions.

The consultancy also runs a web site carrying a monthly magazine for people starting back in business after a major setback, such as illness, or wanting to change career direction. Access is free.

www.pear-shaped.org.uk

BAND ON THE RUN

The story in the last issue of the Insider about Axxia Systems run-in with the music industry over the use of the Arista name in the United States clearly struck a chord as the highlight of the Axxia's Christmas party was a set by the little known band Top Margin.

Consisting entirely of Axxia sales staff - Richard Booty on lead guitar and vocals, Paul Clyde on drums, Jaimie Brown on bass and Suzanne Toms on keyboards - they made their way through Queen's *We Will Rock You*, Five's *Keep Movin'*, Robbie Williams' *Angels* and *Millennium* and Elton John's *Crocodile Rock* and were only allowed to leave the stage after two encores. Next stop MTV.

GOOD FOR LINUX, NOT SO GOOD FOR COREL

Corel, the company behind WordPerfect, is continuing to enjoy mixed fortunes.

Just before Christmas the value of its shares fell by over a quarter after it issued a profits warning. Corel's chief finance officer also resigned after the company, which had been expected to make a profit, said it would now make a loss in its fourth-quarter trading.

Coming on top of allegations - strenuously denied - that Corel's chief executive Michael Cowpland has been involved in insider trading, rumours (also strenuously denied) have been circulating that Corel might be the subject of a takeover bid by Linux software house Red Hat.

On a more positive note, Corel has announced that, following a decision to integrate with the GraphOn Bridges software utility, Corel's new Linux OS Desktop operating system will be the first version of Linux that can run standard Windows applications without the need for intermediary hardware or operating systems licences. Corel is launching WordPerfect Office 2000 for Linux in February, it should be available in the UK from March.

■ Despite the inroads made by Word, Corel is still enjoying success with the Windows version of WordPerfect Office 2000. Recent deals include a 290 user order from Paisner & Co and a 300 user order from Nicholson Graham & Jones. In both cases WordPerfect's ability to handle the exchange of documents with clients using Word clinched the sale.

■ The credibility of Linux continues to rise with both Intel and IBM now expressing support for the platform. IBM said it believes Linux has a great future and plans to invest "hundreds of millions of dollars... to take advantage of the momentum building behind Linux". Longer term plans include merging Linux with IBM's own AIX flavour of Unix.

Meanwhile, at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas Intel said it was planning to launch a series of "web appliances" later this year that would provide a non-PC alternative for Internet access at work, in the car or even in the kitchen. Interestingly, to help keep prices down, these appliances will run Linux rather than Microsoft Windows.

LAW SOCIETY BACKS UKILELI

After a hitch last month, when a Law Society committee rejected a request for funding, the Society has now had a change of heart and agreed to offer £25,000 to support the UKILELI (UK & Ireland Legal E-Library Institute) initiative. Since the initiative (which hopes to create a free online source of statute and case law along the lines of the Australian AustLII service) was launched at the "Free the Law" meeting in November, the project has raised promises of substantial funding and commercial sponsorship.

■ Next Monday (24 January) Society for Computers & Law vice chairman Laurie West-Knights will give a presentation outlining the latest developments on the UKILELI project.

YEAR 2000 IT SEASON OFF TO FLYING START

It usually takes at least a couple of years for an exhibition to become fully established but next month's Legal IT 2000 event looks like being the exception that proves the rule.

With still a fortnight to go the exhibition side of the event is sold out while ticket pre-registrations for both the exhibition and the keynote conference sessions are running at levels way above the organisers' expectations.

Exhibitors include legal publishers, voice recognition and office automation system suppliers, litigation support specialists and legal Internet services providers, plus case, document and practice management software vendors representing over 90 percent of the UK legal market.

Product-wise, the event should be of interest for everyone from sole practitioners, through to High Street firms, large "City" commercial practices and inhouse legal departments. Among the products making their public debut in the UK will be: CMS Data's CMS Open Version 4.10 practice management system (**see separate story**) and the new Windows NT-based Artiion PMS product from Axxia Systems, which is intended to eventually replace its market leading Arista software.

The company will also be showing its web-enabled case management and client reporting system Axxia Advantage. It is a sign of the times that when this product first appeared 18 months ago, few customers were sure what to do with it, whereas today law firms are wary of IT suppliers who cannot offer some form web-enabled, Internet-ready, legal e-commerce, client direct-access technology.

As reported elsewhere, Solicitec - who will be previewing their second generation SolCase 2000 web enabled case management system at the event - recently found that over 55 percent of their users were planning to implement legal e-commerce applications this year.

Reflecting this trend, it looks as if the Legal IT 2000 exhibitors will be focussing heavily on interactive, online technologies. Expect to see various forms of "corporate portals" being demonstrated by all the leading practice and case management systems suppliers.

There will be systems integrators, such as Tikit and The Data Base, who can help firms develop intranets, extranets and ASP (application service provider) infrastructures.

And there will also be plenty e-commerce and online legal services specialists including Epoch Software, who will be demonstrating the latest version of their DirectLaw service, and Peapod Solutions, who will be unveiling a new secure electronic document exchange system that in its bureau form will be affordable by even small firms.

■ Legal IT 2000 takes place on 2nd & 3rd February at the Business Design Centre, London N1 (close to the Angel underground station). Admission to both the exhibition and the keynote conference sessions is free. To pre-register for tickets call 020 7221 1155.

The Insider will review the event in its 16th February issue.

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY DIARY DATES

■ JANUARY 24, LONDON - Society for Computers & Law's annual IT awards ceremony at the Law Society Hall, Chancery Lane. The awards ceremony will be followed by a presentation on the latest developments on "Free the Law" initiative, with which the SCL is involved. This seeks to make more legal information freely available on the Internet. Starts 18.00 - no admittance after 18.30. For tickets and further details call Caroline Gould at the SCL on 01179 237393.

■ JANUARY 24-to-26, NEW YORK - LegalTech NY, the biggest and best legal IT show and conference in the United States. Organised by American Lawyer Media, the event takes place at the New York Hilton & Towers.

www.legaltechshow.com

■ FEBRUARY 1, LONDON - E-commerce in the Legal Marketplace. One day conference (6 CPD hours) on the commoditisation and online provision of legal services at the Chiswell Street Brewery, EC1. Speakers include Mark Boggis of Linklaters Blue Flag, Richard Cohen of Epoch and Neil Cameron on e-commerce. The event is sponsored by Legal Technology Insider and organised by Strategic Business Events (020 7733 3700). Fee £549 (+VAT) with early booking discount plus £50 discount for firms with less than 10 partners.

www.strategicbusinessevents.co.uk

■ FEBRUARY 2 & 3, LONDON - Legal IT 2000. Brand new legal technology event that includes an exhibition with over 50 IT suppliers, four keynote conference sessions and a series of supplier seminars at the Business Design Centre, Islington. Sponsored by Legal Week, in association with Legal Technology Insider, the event focuses exclusively on legal IT issues, including the Internet. Times: 9.30am to 6.00pm Wednesday and 9.30am to 5.00pm Thursday. Admission to all parts of the event is free of charge. For tickets call Cordial on 020 7221 1155 or pre-register online.

www.cordiale.co.uk

SITES TO BOOKMARK

■ The NATIONAL REGISTRY OF WILLS now has a web site carrying information about its services.

www.willregistry.co.uk

■ The *Law Society Gazette* has launched an online version of its CHARITY & APPEALS DIRECTORY. As part of a project to make it the primary site for UK charity information, later this year it will be extended to include a search facility to locate law firms handling wills work.

www.charityexplorer.com

■ The PC DOCS/FULCRUM document and knowledge management group has a new web site showcasing the software's advanced search and listings technology.

www.hummingbird.com

■ Sussex-based LEGAL WEB DESIGN is another new web site design consultancy focussing on the legal market. Current clients include two sets of barristers' chambers: 35 Essex Street and Barnards Inn Chambers (BicLaw).

www.legal-web-design.com
www.35-essex-street.com
www.biclaw.demon.co.uk

■ The LAW SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND has completed a major redesign of its web site to provide a greater degree of interactivity, including the provision of more downloadable publications and information for the general public. There is also an online directory of solicitors and a members-only discussion forum.

www.lawscot.co.uk

HAPPY EVERYTHING

Naturally the Insider mail was bulging with Christmas cards - both paper and digital - over the holiday season however special thanks go to Graham Irwin for sending his "Happy Everything" card for those people "who only care enough to send something once a year".

It has an interesting design combining Christmas, St Valentine, St Patrick, Easter, Thanksgiving, Guy Fawkes and Hanukkah motifs and can now be downloaded from the Insider web site.

www.legaltechnology.co.uk/xmas.htm

LEXOLOGY IN PHOENIX LINK UP

SPS, which now runs the Phoenix discussion forum and e-mail service for lawyers as a successor to the old LINK system, has announced a strategic alliance with legal systems developer Lexology. Lexology previously provided consultancy services for LINK and one of its directors - John Benson - was once LINK's technical manager. The two companies are currently working on a CD-Rom of software that will allow users to access Phoenix via dial-up modems or the Internet and developing a new web site.

www.elaw.org.uk

BERWIN LEIGHTON TO MOVE INTO ONLINE LEGAL SERVICES

Just before Christmas City law firm Berwin Leighton announced details of a new web-based delivery mechanism for legal services. Called Be-Legal, it will provide direct access to selected areas of the firm's know-how and document assembly systems, so clients can download and create their own legal documents and precedents. The first module - providing documentation, including IP and non disclosure agreements, for Internet and high tech start-up companies - will be launched later this spring.

■ COMMENT - Further details are not yet available however the firm says that "many of these documents will be available on a low cost or even no fee basis". It is also interesting to note that as well as offering the Be-Legal service directly, the firm also anticipates that third-party vertical market portals (vortals) will want to host the service. Berwin Leighton suggests these vortals may either want to develop their own specialist documentation or offer Be-Legal in association with complementary services, such as domain name registration.

The Be-Legal project is headed by Berwin Leighton corporate partner and "First Tuesday" adviser Quentin Solt, strategy director Howard Rosenberg and IT director Janet Day. Document and knowledge management consultancy was provided by KnowHow Systems (01483 757457).

www.berwinleighton.com
www.knowhowsystems.com

NO MONEY - JUST A HOAX

If you are sent an e-mail message telling you that, as part of a new product beta testing project by AOL and Intel, you will receive US$ 200 from Microsoft for every person you forward the message on to, just ignore it - it is another hoax. Think about it. Why would Microsoft, a major commercial rival of AOL, pay you money to help test an AOL product? Variations of this hoax talk of a merger between AOL and Intel or suggest it is Intel that will send the "check" but either way it is still a hoax.

WILL THE REAL LINK PLEASE STAND UP ?

Last month it appeared LINK was dead and that Phoenix (**see separate story**) would be its successor in the UK legal discussion forum and e-mail services market.

This month comes news that Legalease is formally handing over running of LINK to a new management team comprising Andrew Randall, Jeremy Johnson, Conor Foley and Kathrin Dressler. The team, which includes two lawyers, an IT professional and a former *Legal 500* editor, are forming a new company to operate the service and promise business as usual for the next six months.

In the longer term, the team plans to introduce "a small monthly subscription" from July 2000 to fund regular running costs and ongoing investment. Enhancements planned include more servers, greater disk space and an upgrade to the FirstClass client software.

www.link.org

NEW VIRTUAL DIRECTORY

Law Web, a new company set up by north London solicitor Jim Meyer (020 7687 1510), reports a positive response to the launch of Lawpage, its "virtual" directory of solicitors in England & Wales. Entries, which are based on an annual subscription of £200 (+VAT), are searchable by name, location and specialist fields of law. Law Web can also offer maps providing a bird's eye view of a firm's location, as well as web site design and domain name registration services. Further services, including WAP access, are planned.

■ The last few weeks have also seen the launch of an international online directory of barristers and trial lawyers called Barristers-at-Law. Although the site warns lawyers they will be charged for their entries, no details are provided on pricing. The Insider has also been unable to obtain any response from the site's information line.

www.lawpage.co.uk
www.barristers-at-law.com

DEACTIVATION NOTICE ALERT

If your organisation has a domain name registered via an Internet service provider (ISP), you may have recently received a "Deactivation Notice" from Network Solutions in Virginia, the web's principal domain registry, warning that you are about to lose your domain name because of the non-payment of annual registration fees.

A number of ISPs are reporting that Network Solutions' payments records system seems to have broken down and is currently causing great confusion by churning out inaccurate deactivation warnings to web site owners whose domain registrations have been validly renewed.

If you receive one of these notices, don't panic and don't immediately pay them the US$ 70 fee requested, instead contact your ISP's accounts department for clarification.

READER SERVICES

■ INSIDER E-ZINES

Legal Technology Insider also publishes two current awareness e-zines (e-mail newsletters). These are: *New Media Lawyer*, which covers all aspects of the Internet and new media law industry, and *Watching Brief Online*, which carries commentaries on the latest local government law cases. Subscription is free. To be added to the distribution list send a note of your e-mail address to:

info@legaltechnology.co.uk

Copies of the latest issues, plus a full archive, can also be found on the web:

www.newmedialawyer.co.uk
www.watchingbrief.com

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info@legaltechnology.co.uk

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Y2K ? WHY OK !

So midnight came - and midnight went. The London Eye ferris wheel refused to turn. The Thames "river of fire" fireworks spectacular failed to fizz. The Millennium Dome experience left many "VIPs and ordinary people" wishing they had stayed at home. And, to cap it all, the much feared Millennium Bug failed to make an appearance.

Was it all an enormous waste of money (worldwide an estimated US$ 4 billion was spent on bug fixing - enough to build 350 Millennium Domes) to fight an over-hyped risk that never existed in the first place? Or was it money well spent that will continue to have spin-off benefits for the legal community in the years to come?

There was always going to be an element of "damned if you do and damned if you don't" about Y2K compliance projects. Had nothing been done and the legal world thrown into a technological meltdown on the 1st of January, the prospects would have been too awful to contemplate - and would have also terminated the career prospects of many law firm IT managers.

As it happens there were no major Y2K computing disasters so now the complaint is that money was wasted and the bug was nothing more than a hoax. Nonsense. The mere fact nothing happened does not mean nothing would have happened. It just means that everyone did their homework properly and were well prepared.

And a good job too as, according to the initial findings of a survey carried out by Grant Thornton, out of 300 firms in the sample, nearly one quarter (23 percent) did not have a Y2K contingency plan in place in December 1999.

So what was the impact on the UK legal world? To-date the Insider has only heard of three firms with Y2K problems.

Two involved sole practitioners running DOS accounts packages, who were surprised to discover their 486 PCs displayed 1980 dates when they fired them up after the holiday break, while the third involved a non-compliant Unix accounts system.

In all three cases it appears the firms had chosen to ignore the numerous warnings and recommendations made by the government, the media, the Law Society, the SIF and their IT suppliers over the previous 18 months.

And the benefits? As a result of Y2K many firms, that normally would not even be reviewing their IT for a couple more years, brought forward their timetables to combine systems upgrades with achieving Y2K compliancy.

Out went DOS and dumb Unix terminals and in their place came Windows PCs that not only support the latest database and office automation systems but are also loaded with Internet access and web browser software and thus are ready to take advantage of the anticipated boom in online legal services.

NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of Legal Technology Insider - No. 94 - will be published on Wednesday 2nd February 2000.