

CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY iNSIDER

THE SOURCE FOR INDEPENDENT LEGAL TECHNOLOGY NEWS, COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

FIRMS TO KEEP PMS SYSTEMS FOR 10 YEARS

New research conducted by Legal Technology Insider suggests that instead of replacing or implementing major upgrades every five years, a growing number of law firms plan to keep their core practice management systems for at least 10 years, far longer than was previously the norm.

From the firms we have spoken to, the catalyst seems to have been their experiences with Y2K compliance upgrades. This saw them spend relatively large amounts of time and money on selecting systems, installing new IT infrastructure (typically shifting from Unix to NT) and training, only to find that despite the upheaval their replacement systems merely performed the same bean-counting tasks as their previous accounts packages and delivered no real benefits in terms of business functionality or competitive edge.

IT directors tell us the priority now is for solid back office systems sufficiently open in design that different elements - such as portals, CRM, marketing, case and document management - can be swapped in and out on a best of breed basis as a practice's needs evolve but without requiring wholesale upgrades every few years.

FORMER LAW REPORTS BOSS HAS DATE IN COURT

Norman Stanley Fletcher-Bagnall, better known as Kenneth Bagnall QC, the founder and former chairman of next-day law reports publisher New Law Publishing, is due to appear in court on 2nd April to face charges arising out of the 1997 takeover of New Law by Croner Publications. In October 1998 Bagnall was charged with nine counts of theft totalling £375,000. The money is alleged to have been stolen in a series of transactions that took place during and in the immediate aftermath of the Croner takeover.

SUPPLIER MELTDOWN - NOW ITS TEN UP FOR SALE

Following on from the story in the last issue of the Insider about the number of UK legal systems suppliers whose founders or major shareholders are looking to get out, the Insider has learned there are now a total of ten suppliers up for sale. On our estimates these companies account for nearly 60 percent of all practice management software in use in UK law firms today.

MORE BAD NEWS FOR ASP SECTOR

After last month's report by Keystone Solutions that 92 percent of law firms were currently reluctant to adopt the ASP business model, international IT analysts Gartner Group have published a report suggesting that ASP will not achieve mass acceptance until at least 2004. Gartner also warns that the intervening period "will not be a boom time" and predicts that 60 percent of the companies providing ASP services today will have gone out of business by the end of this year.

AND ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST ?

CB Business Systems, one of Scotland's three remaining independent legal IT suppliers, has gone into voluntary liquidation. The company, which began life in 1978, is best known for its Signet legal accounts system but also had a commercial systems arm it sold earlier this year. The liquidators are trying to assemble a rescue package to provide support for its user base which, although primarily located in the Scottish high street sector, also includes Stronachs in Aberdeen, Thorntons in Dundee and Henderson Boyd Jackson in Edinburgh.

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www.legaltechnology.org

Keep up with the latest developments in legal technology and new media law by visiting the Legal Technology Insider web site. Along with regularly updated news, a diary of legal IT events, virus reports, an archive of Insider back issues and extensive search facilities, there is the Legal Technology Solution Finder service.

COLLABORATE OR DIE SAY PILGRIM

The international systems house J D Edwards is currently running an advertising campaign using the slogan "collaborate or die" to stress the need for companies, their trading partners and their customers to adopt a collaborative approach to systems integration so they can take maximum advantage of the internet.

In the legal IT market this approach is widely known as best of breed and one of its strongest advocates is Pilgrim Systems which has now decoupled its LawSoft software to give users a choice of everything from a fully integrated case and practice management system, through to a pick and mix selection of different practice, case and document management elements.

Current alliances and integration partners include iManage, Documentum, PC Docs, InterAction, Miles 33, Keystone, Elite, Hatton Blue and Solicitec. However, according to Pilgrim's chief operating officer Benny Placido, what we are seeing today is effectively just 'supplier best of breed'. The weakness with this approach is it frequently leaves law firms very little true choice of product and all the drawbacks of multiple user interfaces.

Placido predicts that what will happen next will be a shift towards a more user oriented best of breed that not only delivers a wider choice of integration partners but also sees the various different applications buried behind a web browser interface as part of a uniform practice-wide intranet portal. (In fact the latest version of LawSoft, Release 3.0, supports a web client front end and Pilgrim already has a number of firms planning to use it to provide extranet access to their clients.)

Pilgrim also reckon the move towards portal technology will see law firms adopt a more relaxed approach to their legacy administration systems, such as accounts, because if the existing system's functionality is adequate and can be accessed via a browser, there will be no need to replace or upgrade it on such a regular basis, merely to keep pace with the latest flavour in operating system architecture.

Pilgrim's latest wins include Balfour & Manson in Edinburgh, Burness, one of the largest law firms in Scotland, and Westminster-based Bircham Dyson Bell. Linklaters is also running a case management application in one of its departments that uses the workflow elements in LawSoft in conjunction with Documentum. Burness has chosen Pilgrim's LawSoft Release 3.0 web enabled PMS system to replace its old London Bridge Trial/400 accounts package, while Bircham's is installing the case management element of LawSoft which it will run in a best of breed environment in conjunction with its Miles 33 accounts and iManage document management systems.

The stock market flotation, originally planned for last year, has been postponed once again by Pilgrim's bankers ING Barings because of the depressed state of technology shares. It has now been rescheduled for the autumn.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ OGIER MIGRATING TO IMANAGE

Jersey-based Ogier & Le Masurier is now in the final stages of implementing iManage as a replacement for its old GroupWise document management system. The project is being handled by Kramer Lee & Associates. Other recent KLA iManage projects include Cobbetts, Tarlo Lyons, Birchan Dyson Bell and Lawrence Graham - which also involved the firm swapping out DOCS Open after running that as its DMS system for the previous eight years.

■ SYSCORP SELLING LAW.COM PMTI

Legal systems distributor Syscorp (01909 824824) has confirmed it will continue to be responsible for the sale and support of the PMTI Practice Manager CRM and document management system in the UK. US-based PMTI was acquired by Law.com last year.

■ WALSH JOINS WORKSHARE

Allison Walsh, until recently Microsoft's account manager with responsibility for the legal market, has joined Workshare Technology - the company's DeltaView redlining software is currently the fast selling product in the US legal market.

www.workshare.net

■ MIDWARE LAUNCH WEB CRM

Australian-based Middleware Systems has launched Consero, which it claims is the first web based client relationship management system specifically designed for the legal market. Middleware says a key benefit is it provides anytime, anywhere access to live, not warehoused, data.

www.middleware.com.au

■ BALLARD JOINS CMS

Solution 6 has appointed Michael Ballard as a legal account manager for its CMS Open system. Ballard is a well known name in the UK legal IT world, with a track record which includes stints with Oyez, H G Usher and AIM.

■ SHEEHAN QUILTS CCH.NEW LAW

Sarah Sheehan, product development manager at CCH.New Law, has quit the company following its recent takeover by Sweet & Maxwell.

WEBBER IN LATEST PERICOM DEAL

Pericom's Legal Services Division (01904 728223) is hoping its latest deal - signing an exclusive long term distribution agreement with Paragon Legal Software - will establish it as a major player in the UK legal systems market.

For the last couple of years Pericom has been a distributor of the FWBS Epitome OMS case and document management system and the new move adds the Paragon accounts and PMS software to its portfolio, so it can now offer law firms a complete front and back office solution.

The Paragon system was designed by Dave Webber, the well-known legal software developer who was previously with suppliers such as TFB and Avenue. Paragon was originally distributed by PCG. More recently sales were handled by Gillian Sanderson at Legato Computer Services. Although Sanderson has now left due to ill health, Legato has been contracted by Pericom to provide implementation, training and support services for Paragon users.

In other recent developments, Pericom has acquired David Amies' York-based CTS business - Amies remains with Pericom as legal services sales director - and recruited Stephen Chivers, previously with Avenue Legal Systems, as its new sales manager.

www.pericomlegalservices.co.uk

CITRIX DOES OFFER SAVINGS

Responding to recent criticism of the pricing structure for Citrix MetaFrame, while admitting it would be nice if Citrix was cheaper, Linetime chairman John Burrill said he believed it was still possible for law firms to cost justify the use of MetaFrame thin client technology.

According to Burrill, with WANs the cost justification is based on the much reduced bandwidth required to support Windows applications running across wide area networks. Whereas with LANs, the benefit of the thin client approach is it avoids the need to replace PCs every two to three years to keep pace with current PC application demands. In addition, it provides the ability to centrally control multiple desktops from the IT department, thereby reducing network management costs.

LEGAL IT VACANCIES - FREE POSTING TO THE JOBS BOARD

If you are a legal systems supplier or a law firm looking for IT-related staff, including positions in sales, development, support and training, you can now post all your vacancies free of charge on the Legal Technology Insider web site.

Current vacancies listed include Hot Docs developers at a 'magic circle' firm in London. Email the details of jobs to:

info@legaltechnology.org

www.legaltechnology.org

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ MUNDAYS DROP AVENUE

Mundays, one of the largest commercial practices in Surrey, has embarked on a £300,000 upgrade to its IT infrastructure that will see the firm drop its current legal systems supplier Avenue in favour of Axxia. The firm will be installing Axxia's Windows-based accounts package Artiion, along with its fee earner desktop time recording and enquiry system for end users. For matter management, the firm has opted for a practice-wide roll out of Axxia's Case Manager product, which will eventually be used by 105 staff in three offices.

■ TAKING THE SYSTEM FOR A SPIN

Australian-based document assembly system developer SpeedLegal (see *last issue for first report on the company's new SmartPrecedent system*) has rebuilt the 'test drive' section of its web site to demonstrate features of its soon-to-be-released SmartRepository software and show its online, automated drafting process. Additional demonstration documents will be added shortly.

www.speedlegal.com

■ CLAIMS PUT IN THE PICTURE

Llanelli-based law firm Randall Saunders Phillips & Lloyd, which is handling compensation claims on behalf of 2000 former coalminers suffering from chronic bronchitis, has installed a low cost Motion Media (01453 313444) MM-120 videoconference system. Linked to a document camera, the new system avoids the need for regular visits to Sheffield for conferences with the DTi's claims management company. The firm reckons the system enables it "to get through eight weeks of work in one four hour videoconference session."

www.motion-media.com

■ WEASELS AVOID JET ENGINES

Euro systems house Falcon Software NV has moved to new offices at Veldkant 35a, 2550 Kontich, Belgium. The phone number is +32-3-450 42 52. We were more than a little bemused by the fact the change of address note ended with the comment: "Eagles may soar, but weasels don't get sucked into jet engines".

SCOTLAND'S BEST KEPT IT SECRET IS OUT

As the demand for best of breed case management systems increases, Solicitec and Pilgrim look as if they may have to share this market with the Infographics BenchMark system.

Until recently this was Scotland's best kept IT secret (users include Shepherd & Wedderburn, Tods Murray and Biggart Baillie) but over the past few months the system has also been winning orders south of the border, including Nabarro Nathanson, Morgan Cole and Nelsons in Nottingham, thanks in part to its ability to integrate with back office systems from Elite, CMS and Miles 33. In addition a variant of the system, called TeamWatch, is winning business in the commercial sector, where it is being used in HR and training applications.

Brendan Mullan of Infographics (01592 750677) believes the success of BenchMark is primarily attributable to its highly flexible and intuitive "knowledge capture framework" which allows fee earners - not IT staff - to create or amend workflows within minutes - and without first having to master programming or scripting languages. In addition, the system makes widespread use of Microsoft technology, including the latest 2000 products and an Outlook-style interface. Or, as Mullan puts it "Whatever Bill does, we do."

www.infographics.co.uk

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ SMARTLOGIK UNVEILS SMARTLEGAL TEAM

Smartlogik, the search engine company that is starting to give Autonomy a run for its money, has created a specialist Smartlegal (020 7930 6900) team to focus on knowledge management within law firms. The team is headed by Chris Hooton, who has previously worked in the legal sector on the Status/IQ and BRS/Search free text retrieval system projects, and includes Abigail Peniket, previously with Hummingbird/PC Docs. Smartlegal's first legal offering is a client extranet system called Wavelength.

■ LINDON WOOD CHANGES DIRECTION

Liverpool management consultancy Lindon Wood has pulled out of the legal IT sector, changed its name to the Claims Advice Centre and will now focus on providing claims management services for law firms. The company also used to sell a low cost case management system to firms in the North West.

■ ELLIOTTS GO WITH RAMESYS

Manchester litigation and licensing law specialists Elliotts used Ramesys Professional Services to supply and install its new office automation and email infrastructure, plus a network of 72 Compaq PCs and servers. Ramesys also handled the integration with the firm's existing accounts and wordprocessing software.

PUBLISHING NEWS

■ STOUT'S EXPERT SYSTEMS MOVE

Stephen Stout, the current UK head of Butterworths Tolley, is leaving the legal publishing group to become the chief executive officer for the new London arm of the Australian company SoftLaw. The company is one of the few active players in the legal expert systems market and has won a number of high profile users among Australian government agencies. Stout will be succeeded at Butterworths by Paul Virik, who takes over as chief executive officer with effect from Monday 2nd April. Virik was previously with Reed Business Information.

www.softlaw.com.au

■ WESTLAW UK GETS NEW HEAD

Sweet & Maxwell has appointed Maria Hamrefors to the newly created position of director of Westlaw UK. Hamrefors was previously the managing director of Fakta Info Direkt, one of the leading legal publishers in Sweden and another part of the Thomson Legal & Regulatory publishing group which also owns Sweet & Maxwell. Hamrefors, who reports to Sweet & Maxwell managing director Wendy Beecham, will have overall responsibility for the strategic direction of online services at Sweet & Maxwell, including the commercial development of Westlaw UK.

In a related development Mike Boswood, the managing director of TLR Europe has confirmed plans to extend the Westlaw service outside the USA and UK into a "global network of Westlaw operations around the world". Westlaw services in Australia/New Zealand, Canada and Spain are all scheduled to launch in the first half of 2001.

■ PUTTING FORMATIONS ONLINE

Jordans has been rolling out a series of integrated products designed to make life easier for firms involved in company formations and company secretarial work. Jordans' Formations Online web service can export incorporation data directly into the PCSec administration software, which in turn can also import data from the JordanWatch company information and search service.

www.jordans.co.uk

SCL - SUBS UP 60% AS LOSSES INCREASE

The Society for Computers & Law has just increased its subscription fees by 60 percent to £80 a year. Although this is the first increase since 1992, the move coincides with the publication of the SCL's report and accounts for the year to 31st March 2000. These reveal total outgoings of £223,443 (1999 - £209,950) against a total income of £192,755 (1999 - £209,231). The £30,000 shortfall has been met by funds drawn from cash reserves. This now leaves the SCL, a registered charity, with just £70,000 in the bank. However, last year did include a one-off grant of £20,000 to the BAILII free law reports initiative.

Other major areas of expenditure included £96,500 for administration, £10,000 for running the SCL web site and a loss of £36,000 on the magazine *Computers & Law*. The Society's main source of income remains subscriptions (£121,000) but the report also warns that while the SCL has 2638 paid-up members, including 20 percent who joined within the last 12 months, overall numbers have not increased. The Society believes this churn rate "reflects the growing trend of increased job mobility within the legal profession".

NEC SHOW VERDICT - TWO OUT OF THREE AIN'T BAD

We have received mixed reports on the outcome of this month's Solicitors National Legal Office Exhibition at the Birmingham NEC. Some exhibitors told the Insider they had people queuing up to see product demonstrations whereas, inevitably, others complained that they spent the whole three days of the show twiddling their thumbs.

Overall, attendance was down on last year with poor visitor traffic on the first day but it was much better on the other two days. It is also worth noting that this was the final outing by Nationwide as organisers of the event. Next year Imark Communications (01932 730700), in association with American Lawyer Media, take over the management of the show and are promising lots of new ideas. The event is being rebranded as LegalTech Solicitors and will run for just two days on 13th & 14th March 2002.

INSIDER TO BACK LEGALTECH

Legal Technology Insider editor Charles Christian has been signed up by Imark to act as a consultant on its LegalTech London event. As part of an exclusive three year deal, Christian will be advising on the development of the conference programme. To avoid conflicts of interest, Legal Technology Insider will not be renewing its sponsorship of the Legal IT event which next takes place in February 2002. LegalTech London will be held at the Excel centre on - and these are new dates - 31st October and 1st November 2001.

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY EVENTS DIARY

An extensive list of both legal IT and new media law conferences and exhibitions can be found on the Insider web site.

www.legaltechnology.org

■ **MARCH 22, LONDON.** Law On-line. The annual PLC symposium on providing legal services and know how solutions online. Speakers include Philip Wood of Allen & Overy, Ed Dean of Lovells, John Salmon of Masons out-law.com and Gavin Bacon of Simmons & Simmons elexica. The event, which takes place at the Crowne Plaza, qualifies for 6 CPD points and the delegate rate is £495 + VAT. For details call Marcella Barron on 0207 401 7878.

■ **MARCH 26 & 27, FOREST OF ARDEN,** ACUA (AIM Computer Users Association) National Conference. Two day event at the Marriott Forest of Arden Hotel, near the Birmingham NEC. The theme is the convergence of marketing, e-commerce, case management and risk management in the running of a profitable law firm. The event qualifies for 12 CPD points and the full delegate rate (including accommodation) is £340 (+VAT). For details call the ACUA on 01789 296096.

■ **APRIL 26 & 27, NEWPORT, WALES.** The Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) spring conference at the Celtic Manor Resort. Along with formal conference sessions there will also be a two day exhibition of legal products and related services. For more details call APIL on 0115 958 0585.

■ **MAY 16, LONDON.** IT Strategies & Internet Strategies for Law Firms. One day conference organised by CLT in association with Legal Technology Insider. Topics include are people more important than technology and the prospects for virtual legal practice and outsourcing. Chaired by Insider editor Charles Christian, the speakers include Janet Day of Berwin Leighton and Neil Cameron of Keystone. The event qualifies for 6 CPD points and costs £295 + VAT for CLT members (non-members £410 + VAT). For details call 0121 355 0900.

SEARCHFLOW NLIS WIN

The Searchflow online property service has won a licence as a channel provider for the National Land Information Service (NLIS), the government initiative designed to simplify and speed up the conveyancing process.

The Searchflow service (which was created by the Property Search Agency conveyancing search consultancy in association with geographic information systems specialists ESRI) will allow solicitors to identify and submit relevant search requests through a secure internet connection. Most local authorities should be able to supply search data via NLIS by the end of 2001.

www.housing.detr.gov.uk/hbs/index.htm

LCD TO PRESS AHEAD WITH LEGAL WEB GUIDELINES

Despite the apparent lack of public interest in the concept of official guidelines for web sites containing legal advice and information, the Lord Chancellor's Department is pushing ahead with its plans and last week posted a notice onto the HM Treasury web site inviting tenders "to provide consultancy to support the introduction of guidelines relating to the architecture and quality of web sites providing legal information and advice to the public". The proposed contract is worth £98,000.

By coincidence, earlier this month LCD junior minister David Lock made a speech reporting on the progress of the Community Legal Service during its first year of operations. According to Mr Lock "the CLS web site Just Ask! has continued to develop, receiving both critical and public acclaim". This may be true but unfortunately the site is not attracting the visitor numbers it deserves - in fact it did not even make it into our most recent top 25 chart of the UK's busiest legal web sites. Perhaps the LCD could make better use of that £98,000 by spending it on marketing the Just Ask! site?

BT AND ADSL - IT'S HELL

There has been a lot of coverage in the national press in recent weeks about the problems associated with the roll out of high speed, broadband internet access via ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) service and the fact that currently only 45 percent of the UK population are located near ADSL enabled local exchanges.

Unfortunately it appears that even if ADSL is available locally your problems are by no means over, particularly if BT is trying to install the service. One London publisher told us it took a total of 72 complaints and call-outs to engineers before their system was working properly, while a Cheshire management consultancy said "Our experience with BT has been scandalous although we managed to get them to release us from their 12 month contract, after a lot of grief, so we could move to another supplier."

ONLINE NEWS

■ EVERSHEDES IN US ALLIANCE

The American eLaw.com service, which provides subscribers with access to various web-based 'work products', such as memos, briefs, letters and agreements drafted by practising lawyers, has announced a 'strategic alliance' with Eversheds. Eversheds partner Paul Smith said the deal with eLaw.com "is a unique opportunity for us to display our distinctive competencies to both current and prospective clients. We're excited to have the opportunity and exposure that eLaw.com provides us, our participation with eLaw.com will help us attract new US based clients."

■ PRINTADOX NOW SHIPPING

Peapod Solutions (020 8574 8288) has launched its new PRINTADox system for exchanging confidential forms and documents over the internet. The product is in effect an entry level virtual dealroom that allows firms to post documents onto a secure web site where they can then be viewed and printed off by clients, barristers and other contacts. Sold on the basis of annual licence (there is currently a £500 per firm introductory offer) the system includes unlimited distribution of the viewer software to third parties.

www.peapod.co.uk/legal

■ ELEXICA HANDS IT TO PALM

Elexica.com, the legal market ISP service set up by Simmons & Simmons is now publishing some of its content in a PDB file format suitable for user of Palm Pilot compatible handheld computers and PDAs. The service's editor Jonathan Maas says recent Palm projects have included a Budget speech commentary.

www.elexica.com/index3.htm

■ 5GM & PEAPOD IN SALES DEAL

The secure internet comms software developer 5GM has signed a distribution agreement that will see Peapod sell and support its software throughout the UK and Ireland. Peapod's legal division, Peapod Solutions, will add the 5GM product to its "hacker shield" portfolio of internet security systems for lawyers. A 10 user licence costs £150 a month.

DICKINSONS USE SMS FOR REMOTE CONTROL

Dickinson Dees reports wide ranging benefits as a result of using Microsoft's System Management Server 2.0 (SMS) to manage the 400 user PC network at its Newcastle head office and new Stockton-on-Tees branch office. According to IT manager Ewan Porter "We wanted to manage the new office remotely. At the same time, the growth of our existing office in Newcastle, combined with plans to open a second office in the city in the near future, led us to look at ways of managing our IT resources more effectively."

Along with the ability of SMS to install software on PCs from a central location and provide remote helpdesk support, Porter says the system has "more than paid for itself in the first few months of use" by avoiding the expense of setting up an IT support team at the Stockton office or even employing extra staff in Newcastle who could be on call to travel to Stockton, particularly because "retaining and recruiting IT staff is a challenge these days".

Porter says another useful feature of SMS is its ability to build a full inventory of network software and hardware, both from the point of providing a detailed breakdown of IT assets for the firm's accountants and ensuring it keeps on top of software licensing issues. According to Porter, without this capability the firm would have to conduct a time consuming manual audit of its IT inventory everytime it planned to upgrade applications or operating systems to ensure its PCs and servers could support the new software.

Because Dickinson Dees runs Microsoft BackOffice, it already had the core elements for rolling out SMS. The implementation work was carried out by Lynx Technology. The firm estimates the system cost £20,000 to install.

TAHOE GETS THUMBS DOWN

Microsoft's new SharePoint document management system (previously called Project Tahoe) is coming in for criticism on the UKLIT legal IT online discussion forum. The biggest concern relates to SharePoint's strategy of using the Microsoft Exchange store for its file system. According to critics of this approach, using a database for a file system creates potential performance problems. For example, the time required to save/retrieve documents is much slower than with a raw file system. In addition, the ever changing sizes of thousands of documents can cause fragmentation, requiring a periodic 'compaction' of the database.

Martin Telfer of Mallesons Stephen Jacques added that a recent MS Exchange conference in Australia, the main topic of conversation was information store corruption. "If Exchange corrupts the information store, you have to restore from backup and replay the log files. If someone has deleted a document and wants to recover it, you have to restore from backup and extract the single item. This all takes time. For a law firm to have it's email and documents in one big, vulnerable store does not make sense."

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EX-CAPSOFT GANG OF THREE JOIN RAPIDOCs

Capsoft UK's former managing director Terry Lawley and two of his colleagues - Gary Rodrigues and Tom Callway - have joined Epoch Software. All three are taking sales and management posts with the team responsible for Rapidocs, one of the leading challengers to Capsoft's HotDocs document assembly software.

Lawley joins as professional services director, Rodrigues as business development director and Callway as account manager. All three departed from Capsoft UK three months ago in the aftermath of a failed management buyout bid.

Legal Technology Insider figures suggest HotDocs has over a 90 percent share of the UK legal document assembly market but, as previously reported, competition is hotting up with not just Rapidocs but also GhostFill, JetForm and SpeedLegal all seeking to win some of this business.

TWO NEW ONLINE CLAIMS SETTLEMENT SYSTEMS

Among the product launches at the NEC event were the arrival of two new online claims settlement systems. These were TheClaimRoom.com - the service goes live on 1st April - which has been set up by Graham Ross, a well known solicitor/online legal services entrepreneur in the North West of England, and WeCanSettle.com which, we understand, is a breakaway business created by a former associate of TheClaimRoom team. Both provide 'blind bidding' alternatives to negotiating monetary settlements and hope to challenge Judicium's eSettle system, which has effectively had the UK market to itself since its launch last December. The long promised challenge by the rival US Cybersettle service has so far failed to materialise.

www.theclaimroom.com

www.wecansettle.com

L&H TURFS OUT LERNOUT

In the latest twist in the saga of the troubled Belgian speech recognition software company Lernout & Hauspie, best known in the legal market for its Dragon Dictate and Dictaphone subsidiaries, the new CEO Philippe Bodson has forced co-founder Jo Lernout to resign both from the company's board of directors and as its chief technology officer. The other co-founder Pol Hauspie resigned last year.

Mr Bodson told a recent news conference he hoped to be able to reveal by the end of the month what had happened to the \$100 million that vanished from the accounts of its Korean subsidiary but he did hint fraud was the most likely explanation. He also confirmed that negotiations were underway to sell off various subsidiaries and that the company had scheduled an EGM to implement its restructuring plans for 27th April.

NEC NEWS IN BRIEF

■ CRIMINAL CASE MANAGEMENT

Balecrest (01444 457890) a new name in the legal IT market, has launched a case management system for criminal lawyers. Called Crimprog and designed to run on laptop, it was developed in conjunction with Alistair Harper & Co solicitors in Haywards Heath and covers all aspects of criminal work from police station interviews through to sentencing.

■ COST DRAFTING ON A PC

Another new face - Just Costs (020 8658 8043) - has launched a PC-based time and disbursements recording system for producing costs claims in civil, family and criminal cases, as well as franchise contract reports, including WIP values.

www.just-costs.com

■ CRIMINAL BILLING FOR CARYDAN

The latest version of the Carydan (0161 941 3790) integrated accounts and case management system includes criminal billing, with the automatic generation of unique file numbers and CDS forms.

■ WEB DESIGN FROM TFB

Technology for Business, in association with Newview Communications, has launched a web site design service for lawyers. The service will include the integration of TFB's Web Server extranet with law firms' web sites.

www.webdesign4lawyers.com

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