



Will LITIG bite the hand that fed it ?

Next week IT directors from around 20 mid-to-large-sized firms (defined as practices with annual fees in the £3m-to-£300m range) are planning to hold a meeting in London to discuss the possibility of turning an informal IT networking body - the Legal IT Innovators Group (LITIG) - into an independent industry organisation capable of lobbying legal systems suppliers, as well as regulatory bodies and quangos such as the Law Society, the NLIS channel providers and the Land Registry, on technology related issues.

What concerns LITIG is not only the perennial complaint about the prices legal systems suppliers charge and the relatively poor service some offer in return but also the fact there appears to be no co-ordination on the formulation, timing or implementation of the various electronic data interchange (EDI) standards law firms must now comply with.

Ironically, if LITIG does take off as an independent body, this could be an example of biting the hand that fed it, as the group was originally set up and funded as part of an initiative by a supplier - Solicitec - to gain a closer appreciation of the strategic concerns facing law firm IT operations today.

The Insider web site

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Are UK firms missing the profit motive ?

According to a new study conducted by the management consultancy Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, the UK's larger law firms are falling behind their US counterparts by focussing on growth - typically through mergers and acquisitions - at the expense of profitability.

Thus while the eight largest UK firms grew by 92% during the period 1998/2001, the eight largest US firms could only manage a 43% growth rate. Yet when the same firms are ranked by profit per equity partner (PEP) only one UK firm makes it into the global top 10, with the other nine located in the US.

Although conceding that the challenges firms face are "as much cultural as operational," CGE&Y vice president Bob Scott suggests a number of performance 'levers' could help improve profitability. These include better cost management (for example why in some firms is only half of their overall expenditure attributable to direct costs and overheads whereas in other firms it is over 80%) and changes to client billing. Recommendations here include introducing different pricing models, adopting new technology so the delivery of legal services can be speeded up through increased automation, and billing all the hours worked - according to CGE&Y over 40% of US firms bill more than 45 hours a week, which is probably 50% more than most UK firms.

■ A PowerPoint presentation on the Cap Gemini study is available on the downloads facility on the Insider web site.

Virik out at Lexis after 18 months

LexisNexis Butterworths Tolley has confirmed that its CEO Paul Virik left the company at the end of September. Virik had been with the Reed Elsevier group for more than 30 years in various capacities before joining the LNBT legal division in April 2001.

He took over from long-time legal publisher Stephen Stout who last year quit Butterworths to join an Australian legal expert systems company. Now, after just 18 months in the Halsbury House hot seat Virik has left the legal publishing world and is also "looking forward to doing something completely different."

LNBT's PR agency said Virik "left by mutual consent" and that it would be business as usual until a permanent successor is named. In the meantime senior managers at LNBT will report directly to Judy Vezmar, the CEO of LexisNexis Group Europe.

Insider launches top 100 firms' IT systems watch

You can keep track of which legal systems the UK's top 100 law firms are using by visiting the Insider web site and downloading our Top 100 Chart as an Excel spreadsheet. It currently covers practice, document and case management systems, plus digital dictation and CRM products and we plan to include further categories of products over the next few months.

News in brief

■ **TLT/INTERACTION DOUBLE AT KLA**
Systems integrator Kramer Lee & Associates has become the latest reseller and implementation partner for Interface Software's market leading InterAction client relationship management (CRM) application. KLA has also scored its first win with InterAction, securing an order from TLT (the firm created by the merger of Trumps and Lawrence Tucketts) in Bristol.

■ **RINGTAIL ACCREDITS BUREAUX**
Ringtail Solutions has set up an accreditation scheme for litigation support bureaux in the UK wanting to supply data in the Ringtail format for their clients. Called the Ringtail Alliance Partner Programme, among the bureaux to have already gone on the course are Ikon, Williams Lea, LDM, Millnet and Paradigm. For more details contact Ringtail's UK supplier G3 Consulting (020 7787 2740).

■ **MURRAY BEITH ORDER ELITE**
Scottish law firm Murray Beith Murray WS has signed contracts to implement Elite's full product suite, including practice, document, and client relationship management systems. The firm will also be rolling out Elite's WebView browser interface to provide a portal for staff and clients.

■ **LASERFORM TAKES FAST CLASS**
Premier IT has provided Laserform with a new approach to training for Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE) status. Called FastClass, it combines e-learning with traditional instructor-led training and can reduce the time staff spend out of the office on classroom training from 33 to 18 days. Six support staff at Laserform have already successfully used this approach to qualify for MCSE status in Windows 2000.

www.premierit.com

■ **MORE UPGRADES FOR AIM**
Swansea council and Essex firm Attwater & Liell have both contracted to upgrade their existing AIM Professional IT systems. Attwaters will be implementing an 80 user case and practice management system, while Swansea's legal & administrative services department is upgrading from a Unix platform to the Evolution Client/Server system. Swansea will be using the system in case and risk management applications.

Laserform rolls out web and matter management

This week sees the first practices go live with the new web enabled version of Laserform's CaseControl case management software. Firms with the facility will be able to offer prospective clients online quotations and requests for information via their web sites, while a simple 'export & upload' utility means existing clients can access progress reports via a secure extranet.

Laserform has also incorporated a matter management system within its accounts and practice management software. This is designed to provide diary, workflow, document and file management facilities for day-to-day work that does not lend itself to being handled by a dedicated case management system. Features include close integration between the Outlook diary and matter to-do lists and the ability to add both incoming and outgoing emails to the matter history.

Laserform sales director Mike Boynes sees the system having a role both as a productivity enhancer for individual fee earners and a risk management system (looking after Rule 15 letters and conflict of interest searches etc) for the firm as a whole.

■ The company has begun a low-key rebranding exercise that over the next year will see 'Laserform' repositioned as the name of its electronic forms division while the business as a whole (which has expanded over time to include case management and PMS products) will trade as the LFM Group.

■ Laserform's trading partner for web design and online services is DataCare Solutions of Liverpool. For details contact Alex Taylor on 0870 7578 1000. www.datacaresolutions.com

Have we got standards for you

Our story in the previous issue of the Insider about the growing number of EDI standards with which law firm IT systems need to be compatible, prompted a number of requests for further and better particulars. Excluding web sites that are currently under construction, further information can be found at these locations:

Amtool www.amttool.com

Appareo www.appareocorp.com

Bridgware www.bridgware.com

Legalgard www.csc-fs.com/MARKETS/litadv/litadvsvcs.asp

Serengeti www.serengeti.com

Bridgware and Serengeti are probably the most useful sites however Appareo is used by English Partnerships and John Hokkanen, of Latham & Watkins, suggests another key player, at least in the United States, is DataCert www.datacert.com

Cheaper phone calls via Legal TX

Legal TX (0800 652 9192) has launched a new phone network exclusively for the legal market. The service, which claims to offer a call rate 60% cheaper than BT, was set up after research found that 40% of calls made by solicitors are to other law firms.

OpenHand seeks to open up mobile data

With Zed for Business dead in the water and the RIM Blackberry failing to repeat its US success and set the UK legal world alight, the hunt is on again for an effective data communications solution for lawyers on the move.

The latest contender is 1eEurope (020 7569 2658) which is piloting its OpenHand system at a number of City firms. Along with accessing email plus any attached files and Outlook style contact and calendar information, the current pilots have involved the development of interfaces to access inhouse databases and applications, such as Hummingbird DMS and Carpe Diem billing.

1eEurope managing director Graham Higginson says a factor distinguishing OpenHand from earlier rival offerings is that it is totally platform independent. OpenHand will therefore run on PDAs such as the Palm and Compaq iPAQ, on mobile phones like the Nokia 9210 Communicator, via Bluetooth links to laptops and in conjunction with Microsoft Exchange and Lotus Notes servers (Groupwise is on its way) so firms can make use of existing IT rather than have to invest in a fresh set of gadgets. Higginson is also keen to talk to other software suppliers about integrating their applications with OpenHand.

Pricewise, the average user can expect to spend around £7.50 a month on mobile call charges. In addition there is a server charge for running OpenHand which works out to about £150 per user per year. 1eEurope's ROI (return on investment) argument to cost justify the system is that if the efficiencies of having anywhere, anytime access to information allows a lawyer to bill just one extra hour of time each year, the the system will have paid for itself. www.openhand-mobile.com

Leeds Legal IT show a success

The volume of visitors attending the Legal IT exhibition at the Leeds Armouries earlier this month effectively scotched rumours that the legal market is in the depths of a recession and nobody is interested in IT systems. With nearly 800 people visiting over two days, this was one of the largest audiences seen at a legal IT event outside of London for many years. The seminar programme (organised by the Insider) was also a success with over 200 unique delegates and an average of 80 attending each session. Exhibition organiser Cordial Events is now finalising plans for next year's show, which is provisionally booked for 15 & 16 October 2003. *See exhibition products review on page 5.*

Still time for TLA competition

You still have time to enter our competition to find the best TLA (three letter acronym) to describe digital dictation systems. We've champagne for prizes and the closing date for entries is 31 October. Email your entries to tla@legaltechnology.com

News in brief

■ DLA BSG ORDERS LINETIME

DLA's Bradford-based Business Services Group (BSG) has placed a £250K order with Linetime for software and services to support its bulk debt collection and property services divisions. BSG will have 120 users for Linetime's Debttime SQL module, another 20 using the conveyancing system and a further 20 with access to Linetime's Liberate accounts module. The Linetime products will replace BSG's existing systems which were originally developed inhouse in 1987.

■ LIBERATA ERM TO GO IN AT LCD

The Lord Chancellor's Department has placed an order with Liberata plc (020 7217 4500) for an outsourced electronic records management (ERM) service. The service will initially be available at the LCD's main office with a view to extending it to cover up to 3000 users at 70 sites around the country.

■ COUNCILS "MUST HAVE" AXXIA

Over the last quarter three local authorities - Middlesbrough, Wakefield and East Staffordshire councils - have ordered time recording, case management and report generating software from Axxia Systems. Commenting on the order, East Staffs' legal services manager David Duckitt said the pressures now placed on local government departments to demonstrate 'best value,' within what is now effectively a competitive marketplace, meant "the (software) tools we are deploying are very much enabling 'must haves' rather than nice to haves."

Looking for IT staff ?

Looking for IT staff, including positions in sales, development, web services, know-how, library services, support and training? Then post your vacancies free of charge to the Jobs Board on the Insider web site by emailing the details to jobs@legaltechnology.com

■ This week's top job: Intelligent Resources is looking for a **professional support lawyer-knowledge expert** with corporate restructuring & insolvency experience. The salary offered is between £65,000 to £95,000 base + benefits, according to experience. For details of this and other vacancies visit the Jobs Board at www.legaltechnology.com

Legal software pioneer dies suddenly

John Bridge, one of the pioneers of legal accounts software design in the UK, died in his sleep earlier this month. Ironically Bridge, who was 64, had been due to retire from his post as senior product consultant at Axxia Systems only a few days later.

Bridge began his career with Kienzle Data Systems, as Axxia was then known, in 1968 as a trainee programmer. He went on to specialise in the design of packaged solicitors' accounts software, starting with visible record card systems and moving on with each new technology platform right up until Axxia's latest generation of web enabled practice management systems.

Axxia managing director Stuart Holden said Bridge "was a good man taken well before his time" but felt "it is some small consolation that his memory will live on through the technology he helped pioneer."

People & Places

SV Technology, developers of the LawPort system, has appointed **Jay Moeller** as vice president of sales & marketing. Moeller joins SV after founding **Icon Technology** in the early 1990s. Icon specialised in financial management and data warehousing and developed the system now sold by **Keystone** and now through **Solution 6** as Net Results.

Thompson Moore Associates has moved from Bagshot to new offices at Cedar House, Cedar Lane, Frimley, Surrey GU16 7HZ. The new phone number is 01276 692260.

BigHand has expanded its development, training and support operations with the recruitment of **Martin Hughes, Emma Naji, Gill Sadler** and **Jason Pawson**.

The correct phone number for **Access Legal Systems** is 01270 766774.

Keep up with the news

Keep up with the latest news between issues of the Insider by subscribing to our free ezine the **Legal Technology Insider Newswire**. It is delivered direct to your desktop as a plain text email. To be added to the distribution list, send a note of your email address, including the word 'News' in the header, to news@legaltechnology.com

Speech technology news in brief

■ THREE GO LIVE WITH STAT PLUS

Gellhorn Cooney Laugharne in Guildford has moved from analogue tape to a Philips digital dictation system supplied by Stat Plus Speech Processing Solutions. The firm has also installed broadband ADSL to create a virtual private network to support movement of files between authors and transcribers. Hilliers has gone for a similar option, with the firm now able to switch transcription digitally between its Stevenage and Kempston offices rather than physically move tapes between them. Hunt & Hunt in Romford has installed digital dictation with a view to upgrading to a workflow system and speech recognition at a later stage. Stat Plus is holding seminars on its speech products in Birmingham on 19 November and Exeter on 5 December. For details call Nicki Porter on 020 8254 5112.

■ PANNONES WIN FOR SRC

Pannone & Partners is implementing a WinScribe digital dictation workflow and Dragon speech recognition system from SRC. In the initial phase the technology is being rolled out to 96 staff in the firm's personal injury department. Pannone was previously a BigHand site however this was with an old Philips system rather than the company's own TotalSpeech product.

■ NFLOW ROLLS OUT CMS & DOCS INTEGRATION

nFlow Software has released integration modules for the CMS Open practice and DOCS Open document management systems. The modules were developed by nFlow in conjunction with their flagship site Reynolds Porter Chamberlain and will now be supplied as standard add-ons to the company's DictaFlow digital dictation workflow system. The CMS integration means fee earners can easily link dictation to client matter codes, while the DMS link speeds up the completion of DOCS profile cards.

■ LEGALDOCS-WINSCRIBE INTEGRATION

LegalDocs UK (020 7501 8516) has announced the integration of its eponymous LegalDocs - *see Insider No.138* - document production software with WinScribe's digital dictation workflow management system. The integration automates the link between transcription and matter management so as to cut the time secretaries spend on routine administration and reduce the risk of documents being misfiled. LegalDocs is now working on a similar integration project for the G2 digital dictation system.

Digital dictation question time

The Insider is hosting a Digital Dictation Question Time at the London offices of Reynolds Porter Chamberlain on 28 November when readers have an opportunity to put their questions to a panel of experts, including Julie Berry, the head of IT at RPC, Berwin Leighton Paisner IT director Janet Day and Baker Robbins consultant Andrew Levison. Insider editor Charles Christian will chair the event, which is sponsored by nFlow Software. The event starts at 6:00pm for 6:30pm. Admission is free, to book a place visit www.nflow.co.uk/events

Legal IT Leeds review

New products and services on show at the recent Legal IT 2002 Leeds exhibition included: a CDS/criminal billing system from **Carydan** (01606 333 333). The software has already gone live at two firms and later this month the company will be rolling out a new probate system. Carydan is also planning to decouple its accounts software from the case management element so organisations such as local authorities, who do not need a full solicitors accounts system, can still have case management and time recording.

JCS Computing Solutions (0121 543 6996) was previewing its WebCase extranet which allows clients to access their case management files, progress reports and billing data via the internet. WebCase, which will be shipping from December, also includes a useful feedback feature giving clients the ability to post their own comments and file notes to matter records. Still with online services, **Norwel** (0161 945 3511) used the event to launch its new Desktop Online system. This was developed in conjunction with Cobbetts in Manchester and lets both lawyers and clients access matter data remotely via a web browser. Users can drill down into accounts records and export data into Excel via Norwel's NRGView system and, like WebCase from JCS, Desktop Online also has an electronic 'Post-It' notes facility.

Finally **TFB plc** (01489 609010) launched an NLIS link for its Partner for Windows system, giving users access to any of the three NLIS local search services directly from their conveyancing matter files. TFB also unveiled its LMS integration package. This automates the posting of milestone information directly into the STARS (Solicitors Tracking & Reporting System) for firms belonging to the Legal Marketing Services network.

News in brief

■ SCOTTISH DEBT RECOVERY FIRM GOES ONLINE

One year after implementing a SolCase case management system supplied by Solicitec Scotland (01506 418548), leading Scottish debt recovery specialists Yuill & Kyle have rolled out SolCase Online, a web enabled version of the software providing clients with extranet access to their matter files.

■ MANDO CAN DO WEB SITE DEVELOPMENT

Liverpool-based design agency Mando Group (0151 282 4040) has won orders to design new web sites for three firms in the northwest - Hill Dickinson, YJO Solicitors and Pannone & Partners. Mando also developed the Cuff Roberts web site.

www.mandogroup.com

■ CONTEXT AND GAMMASITE IN TAXONOMY DEAL

Electronic publisher Context (020 7267 8989) has become the first legal publisher to use GammaSite's GammaWare automatic categorisation software. The deal will enable Context to build and maintain legal information taxonomies (indexes) and in turn offer readers improved search facilities. Context's first Gamma project involves a taxonomy to classify case reports.

Legal technology events diary

■ **OCTOBER 28, LONDON.** The HotDocs UK User Group will meet at Wragge & Co's London office at 3 Waterhouse Square, 142 Holborn EC1. The meeting is scheduled for 5:00pm to 7:00pm and will include a preview of the new HotDocs 6 system. To book a place contact Maria Stein on 0870 606 6050 or email ms@capsoft.co.uk

■ **OCTOBER 30, CARDIFF.** NLIS channel TM Property Services is holding a series of one day seminars on PI risk management for conveyancers. The event qualifies for 4 CPD points, the fee is £59 including lunch. There are further seminars in Southampton (31st), and Newcastle (November 6th). Full details are available at www.tmproperty.co.uk

■ **NOVEMBER 1, LONDON.** Getting more from your existing applications. A briefing session organised by Tikit and taking place at their Holborn offices. For details contact Lucy Morrell at lucy.morrell@tikit.com

■ **NOVEMBER 6, LONDON.** Taxonomy & Portals. A briefing session by KM guru Derek Sturdy and Marty Metz, the developer of SV Technology's LawPort. Takes place at Tikit's Holborn offices. For details contact Lucy Morrell at lucy.morrell@tikit.com

■ **NOVEMBER 7, LEEDS.** Laserform Open Day seminar looking at how to increase billing and avoid negligence claims. Guest speaker: Insider editor Charles Christian. The event qualifies for 4 CPD hours. The times are 9:15am to 1:30pm and the event includes refreshments. There is another seminar in Bristol on 20 November. Call Laserform on 01925 750020 or visit www.laserform.co.uk

■ **NOVEMBER 12 & 13, LONDON.** LegalTech Europe at the London Hilton Metropole Hotel. Rate from £650 + VAT but with discounts and deals for teams from the same firm. The event qualifies for 9.5 CPD hours and features a range of speakers not normally seen on this side of the Atlantic. Topics covered in the seminar and panel sessions include getting value for money from IT, managing email, electronic evidence discovery and business continuity.

www.legaltechshow.com/London

News in brief

■ BAKER MACK ORDER VRISKO

Baker McKenzie is to install the NewsTracker online news administration service from Vrisko (020 7891 2402). NewsTracker, which was launched into the legal market earlier this year, is designed to help law firms to manage the huge volumes of incoming email news alert messages fee earners now have to contend with - **see also main story on this page**. Vrisko estimate that over the course of a year lawyers within a large firm could waste of £500K in fee earning time sifting through email news bulletins. In August Linklaters announced that it was also installing the NewsTracker service.

■ ACTIVE LAWYER TIES THE KNOT

Law firm web site developer ActiveLawyer has tied the knot with IT systems house Transputec. Although ActiveLawyer is now a division of Transputec, the company Steve Vincent formed in 1996 will continue to provide the same services as before from its Farringdon offices (020 7239 9050). Vincent said one of the attractions of the deal was that Transputec has extensive technical skills that ActiveLawyer will now be able to offer to customers wanting content management systems for their intranets and extranets.

■ ZETAFAK AMICUS INTEGRATION

The latest version of the Zetafax fax server system from Equisys can now be integrated with Amicus Attorney case management software. Gavel & Gown (01780 480764), who distribute Amicus in the UK, will become a Zetafax reseller. Recognising the continued popularity of WordPerfect in the legal sector, Equisys (020 7203 4000) has also added support for WordPerfect 10 to Zetafax.

■ VIRTUAL PLEAS PILOT UNDERWAY

Manchester Crown Court has begun a six month pilot of a new system that allows prosecution and defence counsel to submit information to the court online so instead of attending oral hearings, plea and directions hearings take place via a secure web site.

■ SEEING RED SEEING WRONG URL

Gremlins in our last issue meant we gave the wrong URLs for web designers Mosaique New Media and its Red eBusiness division. The correct URLs are www.mosaique.co.uk and www.redebusiness.co.uk

Washed away on a tide of spam and quorn

To verify complaints that email users are being bombarded with growing volumes of junk mail and viruses, the Insider last month conducted an audit of its incoming message traffic.

Just under 20% were what we classified as pure unsolicited spam. These included porn site invites, health schemes and outright attempts at fraud - typically variations on the Nigerian 419 scam. However by far the largest number of spams, constituting over 10% of all email traffic, were sales pitches from the IT industry trying to sell us new PCs, web site search engine services and, ironically, email security software. Get rich schemes were the next most popular spam with, surprisingly given the hype, porn the least frequently encountered.

We also monitored self inflicted spam or, to keep with the meat substitute analogy, what we called 'quorn'. (Not to be confused with Quorn™ which our editor lives on.) As quorn we included out-of-the-office automatic responses to emails - just under 5% of the total. While we appreciate law firms need to keep their clients informed, none of the messages we sent actually required a response and it would be interesting to work out just how much of the internet's bandwidth and law firms' server capacity is taken up by these largely redundant messages. However by far the largest amount of quorn stemmed from ezines - 20% of the total - that we had once subscribed to because they occasionally carried an interesting story and had never got around to cancelling. Although the 20% figure for spam might be acceptable, once quorn is added to the equation we are looking at a situation in which 45% of all email is junk. And that is not even taking into account internal junk mail.

For the record, we also detected virus attacks coming in at a rate of one virus for every 52 emails received. This suggests that even for small firms anti-virus software and related security methods are now a day-to-day necessity rather than a luxury.

Web site of the month

This month we were bombarded by nominations for some complete dogs that broke all the rules of good law firm web site design. It was therefore with great relief that we lit upon the new site for Ollerenshaw Solicitors in Leamington Spa.

It is short - only five pages, sharp and to the point. While its typography is far from leading edge, it does load quickly, there are no unnecessary gimmicks and, most importantly, it has been developed from the point of view of its visitors - the typical small business/private client of a High Street solicitors' practice. No legal jargon - talk of 'moving home' instead of conveyancing, the terms of business and range of services are spelled out clearly and it is sympathetic to the fact most people find using a solicitor intimidating. Also, as the site was developed using the Website IT self build system - **see Insider No.132** - we suspect the firm paid only a fraction of the cost that most firms spend on web site projects.

www.ollerenshaws.com

Email management and security news in brief

■ **TIKIT NOW RESELLING ANTIGEN ANTI-VIRUS**
 Sybari Software, the developers of the Antigen server-based anti-virus, content filtering and email security system, has appointed Tikit (020 7400 5960) as a preferred reseller for the UK legal market. Antigen for Microsoft Exchange is already in use in six of the top 12 UK firms, including Freshfields.

■ **TWO MORE FIRMS SELECT DESPATCHBOX**
 Lewis Silkin and Nicholson Graham & Jones are the latest firms to implement the DespatchBox (01296 398100) DDX email security system. DDX, which is compatible with Outlook, Lotus Notes and GroupWise, uses a 'poste restante' approach with the message remaining on the sender's server and only released after the intended recipient has responded with a password.

■ **ANTI-VIRUS FIGHTS OFF BUGBEAR**
 Shortly after introducing anti-virus scanning on its network gateway, Kings Lynn solicitors Ward Gethin found the system had virtually paid for itself by detecting numerous messages infected with the now rampant Bugbear virus. The firm is using the Equinet (01793 603759) NetPilot Plus system, which comes ready loaded with Sophos virus scanning software.

■ **SHAREWARE ENCRYPTION SOFTWARE**
 Smaller firms with limited budgets might like to check out a new security system - Wincrypt 2 - that allows users to encrypt email attachments by 'dragging and dropping' files. Documents can then only be read by recipients holding the correct password. A shareware version of the application is available at www.wincrypt.com/download.htm

■ **OUTSOURCED VIRUS SCANNING**
 To circumvent the problem of firms buying anti-virus software but still getting infected because they never update it, Select Legal Systems (01482 644334) is now marketing a service called Maildefender. This performs an off-site scan of all incoming and outgoing email traffic: the attraction to smaller firms is they do not need to install any new software or change their email systems. All they need do is redirect their email traffic to loop it through the Maildefender scanners. The services costs £900 pa, subscribers also get access to extensive email activity reports and Select is currently offering a 5% discount to law firms.

■ **BLACKBOX CHALLENGE TO KVS VAULT**
 Corporate Internet has begun piloting a new email management system, called BlackBox, with a major London firm with a view to shipping from December. The elevator pitch for BlackBox is not only does it provide a backup for Exchange (like KVS Vault) but it also addresses the compliance issues associated with email archiving. Corporate Internet is holding seminars on BlackBox over the next few weeks. For details call Gary Levy (yes, he used to be with Text Systems) on 020 7403 9900. **There is also a white paper available via the downloads link on the Insider web site.**

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Pisces - no longer a fish out of water ?

Two weeks ago the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors held a meeting to kick off a domestic conveyancing working party for the PISCES electronic data interchange standard.

Although PISCES has enjoyed some success as a nascent standard in the commercial property field, the purpose of this meeting was to test the water for its expansion into the broader market by, firstly, allaying any fears on sharing data - the message here is PISCES is just a means of describing data in a computer understandable format and does not lay down new business procedures as to who tells who what or require changes to existing procedures. And, secondly, outlining potential business benefits, such as the time saved in re-keying data, improved accuracy and the ability for all parties to improve their business process automation.

During the panel sessions, some delegates put forward the view that because mortgage providers are effectively at the "top of the food chain," unless they adopted PISCES, it was doomed to failure. This was countered by the news that the Council for Mortgage Lenders is already looking into the standard. And, by the argument that even if all the mortgage lenders did all go their own way and create their own EDI standards, the fact the information was in a digital format meant instructions could still be transferred to and from a PISCES format automatically through conversion software. This was echoed by a delegate from a volume conveyancer who said his firm already had to develop different interfaces for different lenders but if a PISCES standard was available, it would at least provide a uniform starting point for all subsequent data exchange projects.

The audience, in the words of one delegate "was pretty much a who's who of the conveyancing world" including volume conveyancers, panel managers, lenders, the government, the Law Society and service providers such as the Legal Software Suppliers Association, NLIS channel providers and title insurers. According to Neil Ewin of Solicitec, who was also there with his LSSA hat on "The feedback was generally supportive although with recognition that there is still a long way to go to before it becomes a de facto standard. Nevertheless, if we can continue the momentum and bring a good cross section of the audience into the initiative, PISCES has every chance of succeeding."

Just close your eyes and jump

The Insider award for bravery above and beyond the call of duty goes to Louise Hamilton, the marketing officer at Solicitors Own Software, who last month took part in a charity parachute jump that helped raise over £5000 for the Solicitors Benevolent Fund. Also taking part in the jump, which coincided with the Law Society's annual conference (SOS sponsored the conference) was Nick Gurney-Champion, the president of the Hampshire Law Society. His jump was a little hairier as his main canopy failed to open properly, so he had to rely on his reserve chute.

Over 11,000 votes cast for LOTIES awards

Over 11,000 votes have been cast by for the law firms, products, services, companies and people short-listed for this year's LOTIES legal office technology innovation awards. Voting has closed and the votes received (including one from a Hampshire vicar voting for an online conveyancing service he used to buy a house) are now being audited to weed out any blatant attempts at spamming. The winners will be announced at a gala dinner to be held at the Café Royal in London on 14th November. The LOTIES are organised by *In Brief* magazine and sponsored by the Insider.

All our yesterdays

This month the Insider celebrates its seventh birthday. Reading through the stories in our first issue is like a visit to the computing galleries at the Science Museum. Hot topics in October 1995 included the news that Sinclair Roche & Temperley was upgrading from WordPerfect 5.1 for DOS to version 6.1 for Windows and that Dundas & Wilson was sticking with Novell NetWare because it did not think Windows NT was a stable enough network platform. There again, given the criticisms we are hearing about the latest incarnation of NT - Windows XP - perhaps things have not changed that much after all?

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■ **Coming soon:** The next newswire is scheduled for 30 October. The next issue of the Insider newsletter (No.141) will be published on Wednesday 13 November 2002.