



Legal IT - the show was 'buzzing'

After the disappointing events we witnessed in 2003, last week's Legal IT Exhibition in London clearly demonstrated that there is still life in the trade show format, with exhibitors as diverse as Thomson Elite and Gavel & Gown expressing satisfaction with the quality and numbers of people seen. One supplier went so far as to say it was the best show he had attended for years. The organisers' decision to introduce a series of product shoot-outs also proved popular and will be back next year - Legal IT 2005 is set to take place on 9 & 10 February 2005.

This year's visitor numbers (2261) were down by about 300 on 2003 but then again last year's show did attract a lot of the 'we're only here for the CPD points' brigade. Or as one vendor put it "last year there were too many people wandering around with nothing on their mind".

True, there were some *Groundhog Day* moments, with some suppliers still showing the same old products on the same old stands however we leave the final verdict to Osman Ismail of DPS Software: "Our visitor traffic was up 20% on last year. This show was buzzing whereas others were dying."

Legal IT new products report on page 5.

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Fourteen make it into Law Society guide

A total of 14 legal accounts and practice management systems suppliers made it into the 2004 edition of the English Law Society's annual *Software Solutions Guide*, which was formally launched at last week's Legal IT exhibition in London. The initial response has been positive. Some firms are saying it is the best edition to-date, while further afield the Law Society of Scotland is planning a similar initiative for its members and the Kuala Lumpur Bar has launched its own guide for Malaysian lawyers.

The guide, which will be mailed out free of charge to all solicitors' practices in England & Wales over the next week, retains broadly the same format as last year's edition, including a useful - and frequently revealing - customer satisfaction feedback panel based on market research among current users of each supplier's software. To ease navigation through the guide, one innovation this year has been a simplification of the 'banding' to make it clearer for users to see which suppliers have systems suitable for their size of firm.

The fourteen suppliers in this year's guide, in alphabetical order, are: AIM Professional, Axxia Systems, DPS Software, Eclipse Legal Systems, Edgebyte Computers, JCS Computing Solutions, Laserform International, Mountain Software, MSS, Opsis, Pericom, Quill Computer Systems, Solicitors Own Software (SOS) and TFB. The market research gave Quill's PinPoint bureau service the highest overall customer satisfaction rating. Among the software suppliers, the five most highly rated were Edgebyte, SOS, JCS, Pericom and Opsis.

The only changes to the supplier listing in 2004 are: the return of TFB, after a two year gap taken voluntarily to complete the acquisition of two other suppliers, and the departure of Gavel & Gown and Videss, who both cited changes in marketing strategy as their reason for not reapplying for inclusion in the guide. Mountain is now the only supplier to have had a full listing in every edition of the guide since its launch in 1999. The guide can also be downloaded from www.it.lawsociety.org.uk

Move on and double your money

Recruitment consultants Graham Gill (020 7430 1711) have published their Winter 2003/2004 survey of salaries for legal IT staff within the UK's top 100 firms - and the results reveal some surprisingly big variations in a pay rates. For example, 2nd line support staff can earn from as little as £22k, to as much as £50k a year, while rates for database administrators range from £30k to £60k - figures suggesting that if you shop around, you can easily double your money just by moving from one firm to another.

Helpdesk analysts are the most poorly paid - as little as £16k at some firms - while salaries for heads of IT/IT directors range from £43k to £165k. It is also interesting to note that in many areas, top 10 firms do not pay the highest salaries. Copies of the report are available free of charge from Graham Gill.

NEWS IN BRIEF**■ SOS SWAP OUT OPSIS**

Hatcher Rogerson in Shropshire has ordered a new case and practice management system from Solicitors Own Software (01225 787700). The system will be rolled out across the firm's three offices and replace its current Opsis software.

■ NEW WINS FOR TFB'S P4W

Technology for Business (01489 609000) has announced six new orders for its Partner for Windows (P4W) integrated case and practice management software. The sites - all previously using non-TFB systems - are Rees Wood Terry in Cardiff, Mustoe Shorter in Dorset, Adams & Remers in East Sussex, Davey Son & Jones in Gloucestershire, Armstrong Foulkes in Middlesbrough and Cadmans in Yorkshire.

■ RENDEZVOUS WITH WRAGGE & CO

Wragge & Co has installed the Rendezvous meeting room bookings system from NFS Hospitality (01920 485725) at its London and Birmingham offices. Staff can make a request for a room via the firm's intranet and reception desk staff then use the system to handle all aspects of booking any one of the firm's 42 meeting rooms, from location and timings through to catering and even flowers. Wragge's reception manager Caroline Kennedy says that along with moving them out of the 'pencil and eraser' era, the installation of Rendezvous has resulted in a "dramatic cut" in the number of phone calls her staff need to make in connection with room bookings.

www.nfs-hospitality.com

■ QNIX GIVES WAY TO GALAXY

Civica (01709 786786) has announced four more upgrades from its legacy Qnix system to its newer Galaxy Legal product. Fanshaw Porter, a large criminal practice in Liverpool, is implementing a 40 user system that includes a new criminal billing module. Gadsby Wicks in Chelmsford, which has a specialist medical negligence practice, is also migrating to Galaxy, as is Guy Williams Layton in Liverpool, and Redditch Borough Council, which will be running Civica's local authority applications to assist its legal department in processing conveyancing, possession and debt recovery matters.

Coxall returns to DDS market with e-Dict service

Mike Coxall, for many years the face of digital dictation at Berrys of Holborn, has returned to the DDS market as sales & marketing director of a new company, called e-Dict Transcription Services (0870 744 6206), that is now offering a range of digital dictation products and services to law firms and others. Paul Lockyer, also previously with Berrys, has joined e-Dict as technical director.

Although e-Dict can supply WinScribe DDS software for firms to run inhouse, Coxall says the company's main focus is on providing solutions. These include support for mobile and telephone based dictation and the provision of a global network of transcriptionists, who can handle work on a 24/7 basis. e-Dict can work with most DDS file formats, as well as WinScribe, and offer a variety of service delivery options, including hosting a firm's digital dictation facilities on an ASP basis and renting facilities by secretary or author. The company is currently offering a 28 day free trial of its services at www.e-dict.co.uk

Thinking of moving? Then you'd better call your IT supplier

With more and more firms moving to new offices as they merge and expand, IT services company Ramesys (0800 052 4224) has developed a new 'Office Moves' managed service that looks after all aspects of dismantling, packaging, moving, reinstalling and reconfiguring IT systems and their related infrastructure.

Ed Hodgson of Ramesys says that as well as handling the logistics and project management of moving, the company can also offer temporary equipment installation, to ensure continued uptime between sites, and compliance with manufacturers' contractual small print to ensure that any equipment warranties are not inadvertently voided. One of Ramesys' most recent Office Moves projects was for Watson Burton in Newcastle.

InterAlia enhanced to include Meticulist DMS support

Integrated Office Solutions (020 8249 6530), who began life in 1997 as developers of macros and VBA scripts for law firm wordprocessing departments, have recently enhanced their InterAlia for Lawyers document creation and file management application. It now includes support for the Meticulist document management system, integration with client/matter and departmental address books, and a 'compliance folder' that can hold scanned copies of passports and other client identification materials stored for the purposes of compliance with the latest anti-money laundering regulations.

Although InterAlia is currently being implemented in a 500 user firm in the west of England, the system is highly scaleable, with a 3 user firm the smallest IOS installation. www.iosl.co.uk

Workshare 3 going into Manches in IT revamp

As part of a major IT infrastructure overhaul, Manches is to deploy the Workshare 3 document productivity system on a practice wide basis. According to the firm's IT director Derek Brookes, Workshare 3 will help staff manage "large volumes of document amendments from multiple authors, in multiple Microsoft Word formats, via email". Brookes says in an average week Manches edits and reviews 10,000 documents, as well as creates another 5000 from scratch. Some of these documents can contain between 600 and 800 pages and may be worked on by as many as 20 people, both internally and from outside the firm.

Along with managing the collaborative side of document creation and amendment, Workshare 3 can prevent documents from crashing during the review cycle, due to the different file formats in use, and will also protect against the inadvertent disclosure of any sensitive information hidden as metadata. Workshare (020 7426 0000) say they will be integrating their software with other systems being rolled out at Manches, including the Interwoven DMS and Microsoft Office 2003.

IT director goes in restructuring

As a result of a recent restructuring exercise, Morgan Cole has combined its IT, e-business and knowledge management teams under one manager. The new combined team is called Information & Technology and Jeff Wright, a solicitor and previously head of e-business, has been appointed Information & Technology Director. Richard Martin, the firm's erstwhile IT director, has stepped down with immediate effect.

Four new challengers vie for the Bar IT crown

Despite the market for chambers administration and barristers' fee notes systems having always been tiny, there has never been a shortage of contenders hoping to win some of this business. Although Meridian Law managed to do this spectacularly well, so much so that in 2002 they bought out the one time market leader ACE, other challengers, such as Wildings and Pimcroft, soon faded from the scene or were taken over by competitors.

Undaunted by these risks, the competition is currently once more hotting up, this time with four new entrants - Libra, Chamber Pot, Matrix Legal and, what looks like the strongest contender, InQuisita Law from Leicester-based e-business specialist Formation Software (www.formsoft.com), all hoping to take on Meridian. However Steve Kendrick, a director of Mountain Software (the parent company of Meridian Law) said he welcomed the competition "as it would keep us on our toes and provide an added incentive to ensure we continue to provide the Bar with the best systems and services".

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ JP COURT GOES PAPERLESS

Southampton City Council has expanded its Civica (01709 786786) Galaxy case management system with the addition of a magistrate's court module. Since upgrading to Galaxy for its debt recovery work, Southampton has seen a 50% increase in collection rates and now processes the majority of the authority's debts through the system on an entirely paperless basis.

■ LASERFORM'S NEXT GENERATION

Laserform (01925 750020) has begun introducing its next generation of electronic forms software. Known as LForms, their new features include: 'intelligent expansion' so boxes and columns will automatically expand where extra information needs to be included in a field, full calculating capabilities, closer integration with Microsoft products, and the ability to convert and email forms in a PDF file format. A free demo version of the new forms software is available on CD-Rom. www.laserform.co.uk

■ LINKLATERS TO SAVE £1 MILLION

As a result of implementing an IT asset management programme, which included an audit of over 4000 laptops, desktop PCs and servers and the software they were running, Linklaters estimates it will save £200,000 a year, for the next five years, on software licensing by eliminating duplications. The project was handled by FAST Consultancy Services (01628 760359), an offshoot of the Federation Against Software Theft.

■ TSO TO HANDLE LSC MANUALS

The Stationery Office has won the contract from the Legal Services Commission to publish its official manuals and updates for the CLS and CDS schemes in loose-leaf print, CD-Rom and online formats.

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Visualfiles on track for another record year

Visualfiles, the parent company of case management systems market leader Solicitec, is reporting a 19% increase in turnover to £4.17 million (£3.5m - 2002) for the half year to 31 December 2003. The same period also saw Solicitec Scotland double its turnover to £667k and make a £145k net profit.

Visualfiles' management accountant Steven Dobson says this growth has enabled the company to fund substantial investment in both R&D and new business ventures, including Visualfiles Australia, ASP services and the Synapse e-conveyancing portal.

With January 2004 alone seeing over £1.5m in new orders - including £300k for ASP services - Dobson predicts that Visualfiles "can confidently look forward to another year of 20% plus growth, with our turnover target of £9.5m well within reach." Visualfiles say the strongest area of growth "is the core Solicitec business as more firms invest in process based technology".

PEOPLE & PLACES

■ **PISCES APPOINTS FIRST D-G**
PISCES, the commercial property information EDI standards organisation, has appointed its first director-general - Roger de Boehmler - to "mark a new era in the evolution of PISCES and help steer it towards becoming a global standard for real estate transactions". De Boehmler is a chartered surveyor and founding director of GVA Software.

■ **BROOKE TO TAKE ON WHITE BOOK**
Sweet & Maxwell has announced the appointment of Lord Justice Brooke, the Vice President of the Court of Appeal and a long time champion of the use of IT in the courts, as the new general editor of *The White Book* guide to civil procedure. The 2004 edition of *The White Book* - the 150th edition - will be published this April.

■ **BATTERSBY NOW AT LAW SCHOOL**
Karen Battersby, previously the head of commercial know-how at Eversheds, is now the course director for Nottingham Law School's postgraduate diploma in knowledge management for legal practice.

Digital dictation the star of Legal IT show

Compared with a few years ago, when the only people actively promoting digital dictation technology at legal trade shows were BigHand and SRC, last week's Legal IT Exhibition had a total of 15 suppliers demonstrating dictation products and related services. Although these included many now familiar digital dictation specialists, as well as the hardware suppliers Dictaphone, Grundig and Philips - there were also two new launches from established legal software vendors.

DPS Software (020 8804 1022) was showing its new TeamTalk digital dictation system. This is based around .NET, offers some very smooth integration with the DPS case management application and is currently being piloted in two firms, including a 160 use practice that is scheduled to roll it out next month.

The other new face in DDS was OfficeDictate from Peapod Solutions (0870 380 1122). This is based on the Australian PSL product and claimed to be "the cheapest and simplest digital dictation system on the market today" with prices starting at £185 for software and hardware. PSL is also already in use in a number of, primarily small, firms.

Digital dictation news in brief

■ TURN YOUR PDA INTO A DIGITAL RECORDER

Digital dictation software house Aprobrum (0870 777 3336) has launched version 2.0 of its Lexacom Mobile system. This will allow anyone with Pocket PC PDA to use the device as a digital dictation recorder, with files either emailed directly for transcription or stored on the PDA until next synchronised with its parent network. Because the new system uses a standard WAV file format, it is compatible with Lexacom's own Talk & Type DDS and can also export work to other DDS systems for transcription. A free 28 day trial version of Lexacom Mobile can be downloaded from www.lexacom.co.uk

■ PINSENTS IN 800 USER BIGHAND ROLL OUT

Pinsents is to roll out the BigHand (020 7793 8200) TotalSpeech DDS to 800 staff in six offices over the next three months. The order follows a pilot which satisfied Pinsents that BigHand could provide the smoothest transition from analogue to digital, so lawyers would not need to change the way they dictated.

■ WINSCRIBE EXPORTER MAKES DDS OPEN

WinScribe Europe (0118 984 2133) has added an Exporter facility to its WinScribe digital dictation software. This will allow jobs recorded in WinScribe to be emailed or FTP-ed as standard WAV files for transcription on other DDS systems. WinScribe sales manager Ken Nolan says that when combined with the Importer facility, which was introduced last year, the combination makes WinScribe "a fully open system" that is compatible with older digital dictation platforms.

Legal IT exhibition review

Since the end of last year, it has been evident that law firms are once more allocating serious budgets to IT and are in the market looking for new systems. Which is a pity because last week's Legal IT Exhibition in London was not a vintage year in terms of product launches. For example, although there were a few suppliers showing Microsoft .NET modules, including **Videss**, **DPS** and **Solution 6**, there was only one complete, integrated .NET case and practice management system: **Osprey.TM** from **Pracctice**. Other new products that did catch our eye included:

■ HIGH ON A HILL STOOD A LONELY PIXEL

Glasgow based case management developer **Lonelypixel** (0870 241 8830) made its debut demonstrating its expertise in volume processing systems. Earlier this month **Lonelypixel's** flagship site **Golds**, in Glasgow, won the innovation & technology award at the Scottish Legal Awards for its use of IT to support its bulk transaction business. **Lonelypixel** director **Alex Ogilvie** says the company's market is law firms "who hunger for growth" and are serious about automation and the use of technologies such as integrated voice response (IVR). www.lonelypixel.com

■ VIRTUAL DEALROOMS BECOME AFFORDABLE

Back in 2000, when the first virtual dealrooms appeared, these systems were notorious for the huge development costs incurred by the firms that were running them. Or as one magic circle KM director gnomically put it "we have not spent £6 million but it is measured in millions". How times have changed as last week **Enjudica Online** (0117 962 6119) were showing their new hosted virtual dealroom system that has an entry level price of under £10,000. It is due to be rolled out by a Birmingham firm later this spring and uses PDF as its file format for templates and RFT for editable documents. **Enjudica** has also launched an online document assembly system. This costs from £4225 and is due to go live as part of the new www.geniuscontract.com service within the next few weeks. www.enjudica.co.uk

■ AMICUS ATTORNEY GENERATION X

Gavel & Gown (01780 480764) used Legal IT as a venue to launch the latest version of the popular **Amicus Attorney** contact, case, communications and just about everything else management system. The new version - **Amicus Attorney X** - contains a mass of enhancements (including support for the Blackberry, it will now run in a browser and can be opened up to clients through an extranet link) but the most significant development is support for Microsoft SQL Server, which should help make **Amicus** more attractive to larger firms. www.amicusattorney.co.uk

Finally, cost recovery system specialists **Copitrak** deserve a special mention for being the only exhibitor to do anything novel with their stand. In a sea of dull grey boxes offering the same mundane freebies or champagne prize draws, **Copitrak's** "I'm a celebrity, get me out of here" themed stand, complete with a bush-tucker trial, really stood out from the crowd.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ ADEO WINS TAXING ORDER

The London office of **Adeo Legal Technology** (020 7744 7884) has been awarded a contract to supply the Inland Revenue Solicitors Office with a new litigation support system to support the department's prosecution work. **Adeo** will be supplying a solution based around the Summation **iBlaze** software, which has been widely used in the United States in a number of high profile cases, including the Microsoft antitrust action. www.adeolegaltech.com

■ MAKING WEB SITES MORE VISIBLE

Southampton web site developer **WorksUnit** (023 8023 6323) is final beta testing two new applications designed to help partially sighted users view web browser pages. The 'Bobby test' approved **WorksView** system is a client-side application, while **WorksEye** is a server based product. Both allow users to magnify both the text and graphics elements on a web site. Free demo versions are available on the web. www.worksunit.com

■ CLARKS MOVE UPGRADE TO TFB

Reading-based **Clarks** is spending £100k on replacing its old **Avenue** software with **TFB's** **Partner for Windows** integrated case and practice management system. The 70 lawyer practice, which is a part of the international **TAGlaw** law firms network, will also be installing an online case tracking facility for its clients and **TFB's** **PartnerAlert** messaging system, with SMS texting, to keep partners and managers in touch with key events and business information as and when they occur.

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PKI not cheap - but not *that* expensive

Following our piece in the last Insider about the Scottish Law Society's Lawseal PKI project, the Society's director of IT Gordon Brewster has been in touch to say that although PKI based encryption is not cheap, particularly for firms administering their own schemes, it is not *that* expensive.

According to Brewster, the experience of those firms involved with the Society's now abandoned PKI project was that far from an annual cost of around £600 per user "it was anticipated that Lawseal certificates would cost no more than £100 per user annually" - and that if the service had become more widely used, costs would have fallen.

Brewster adds that "Whilst Lawseal would demand some administrative time," - he suggests about the same time as setting up a new email contact - "the product was designed to be compatible with standard desktop email applications, both to be effective and to minimise administration."

LEGAL IT EVENTS DIARY

- FEBRUARY 25, LONDON. S&G Training is holding free briefings on digital dictation and document assembly (qualifying for 2 hours CPD) at its Hatton Garden office. Call Hayley Smith on 01322 661141 or visit www.sandgtraining.co.uk
- FEBRUARY 27, LONDON. ResSoft is running a workshop on business process management at its Hatton Garden offices (9:00 am - 11:00am). The session will also provide an opportunity to see Metastorm e-Work in action. For details call 020 7421 4140 or visit www.ressoft.co.uk
- MARCH 1 & 2, AMSTERDAM. Lex Connect at the Amsterdam Hilton. The Ark Group is holding its second invitation-only strategy and solutions event for managing partners and IT directors from Europe's leading law firms. Email Caroline Searle at csearle@ark-group.com or visit <http://lexeurope.arkconnects.com>
- MARCH 12, LEEDS. VoicePower is holding a free seminar, including presentations on the latest digital recorders at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Leeds. There is another seminar at VoicePower's offices near Otley on 16 March. For details call Sonja de Wit Brown on 01943 468000.

Expenses - saving money by improving processing

The normal approach to managing expenses may be to cut back on the size of claims partners and other staff submit but CMS Cameron McKenna has taken a different tack by introducing automation to improve the way claims are processed.

Research suggests the average paper based expenses claim takes 14 days to process, from submission to reimbursement, compared with three days with an automated system. Even more frightening is the statistic that the average manual expenses report takes 35 minutes to complete, compared with 18 minutes with automation. Spurred on by this Cameron McKenna has recently deployed Concur Expense, a browser-based expense management system from Concur Technologies (01494 582025).

As the firm's financial controller Nick Lakhani points out: "If we have 600 lawyers each taking 30 minutes to file an expense report, when they could be spending some of that time on billable client work, this translates to a serious loss of revenue."

Along with speeding up and improving the accuracy (by automatically linking nominal ledger codes to expenses) of expense claim processing, McKennas are also finding that the data Concur generates makes it easier to analyse expenditure and identify where savings could be made by negotiating better rates with frequently used hotels and airlines. www.concur.com

Time for the Swiss Army phone

The Blackberry may have been making all the running in mobile communications in recent months but there are competitors out there, including a growing number of 'smart phones'. Among the latest is the Sony Ericsson P900 phone, which has been described as the 'Swiss Army Knife of mobile devices' because there so many things you can do with it.

These include running the OpenHand system as a way to access email messages, contacts and task lists. It uses GPRS wireless communications but unlike the Blackberry, OpenHand is not restricted to one device but will also run on PDA platforms such as Pocket PC and Palm. More importantly, it works in a thin client mode, so all information resides on a central server and is only pulled down to the PDA or phone as and when required. The net result is an ultra-secure system, for not only are communications protected by 128 bit encryption but in a worst case scenario, even if you lose the device, it contains no data that can fall into the wrong hands. www.openhand-mobile.com

ResSoft CRM project at M & R

ResSoft (020 7421 4140) has won the contract to implement the Interaction CRM at Mills & Reeve in East Anglia. Although Mills & Reeve use ResSoft's FirmWare practice management software, ResSoft say they faced "stiff competition" for this deal.

BCCI trial latest to put IT into the courts

Courtroom 73, at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, may be better known as the home of last summer's Hutton Inquiry but it is currently earning another place in the legal history books as the venue for the first high tech civil trial to take place in the Commercial Court. The case is being brought by the liquidators of BCCI against the Bank of England and with 150 lever arch files of evidence (about 250,000 pages) to manage, Lovells - the solicitors for the claimants - were keen from the outset to use court presentation technology during the trial.

The Bank of England opposed this move but in a pre-trial hearing last July, Mr Justice Tomlinson allowed the use of IT, ruling that it would be wrong "to deny to a party the opportunity to use modern information technology if that party asserts that (the technology) will enable its case to be presented in a more effective manner, and moreover, if it is suggested that the use of IT will lead to a significant saving in time and, therefore, cost in what is bound to be a very expensive action." One immediate consequence of this ruling was that the contents of the 150 lever arch files were scanned and distilled onto just 5 CD-Roms.

The court presentation system being deployed in the BCCI trial uses the same technology installed by the Court Service for Hutton, combining access (via 18 monitors plus 4 larger screens for the public) to the documents stored on CD with real time transcription, via LiveNote, of the testimony given by the witnesses during the course of the proceedings.

In terms of cost justifying the exercise, although the system costs approximately £500 a day to run, it has been estimated that in speeding up search procedures and access to documents, it will save up to half-an-hour in time each day. This may not sound very much until you realise there are 20 lawyers in court and that the trial is expected run for at least a year.

Bailiffs get online court link

County Durham Magistrates' Courts Committee has become one of only a handful of JP courts groups in the UK to have an online link to its bailiffs service. The new system - which provides an encrypted link across a virtual private network - means that when a bailiff calls on a defendant to collect fine arrears, their handheld computer displays the latest information on the debt taken directly from the records held centrally in the courts office.

The Durham courts' IT manager Ian Heslop said that before the system was introduced "a lot of time was wasted because bailiffs had to call back to the office to get an update, whereas now they have access to the information 24 hours a day". The courts group expects the new system to generate a 5% overall increase in the monies being recouped.

The IT side of the Durham project was handled by e-business and networking specialists Knowledge IT (0191 417 0099).

www.knowledgeit.co.uk

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

■ DICTATE VIA YOUR SMARTPHONE

DictaNet, the German digital dictation software developer, has launched DictaNet Mobile, a new application that will convert any mobile phone loaded with Microsoft's Smartphone system into a fully fledged dictation device. Motorola is now shipping a freeware version of the software with its new MPx 200 phone, with the central navigation button replicating the functions of a slide switch on a conventional dictation device and the phone's screen displaying all the relevant data. Up to four hours of dictation can be stored on one memory card and then sent for transcription via email, a USB link or a memory card reader. www.dictanet.com

■ NORWEGIANS SELECT PORTAL

Selmer Advokatfirma, one of the largest law firms in Norway, has selected Hummingbird to deliver a new matter-centric intranet. The solution is based around the firm's existing document management system, which is being extended to include Hummingbird's portal, KM and collaboration suites. The new system is being implemented by Norwegian systems house SaveIT AS and will also allow clients and lawyers to work together in virtual dealrooms, as well as access matter documents, emails, tasks, calendaring, contact and billing information from either a client or matter view. www.saveit.no

■ CUT PRICE PDF IN AUSTRALIA

Avalanche Media in Melbourne has been appointed the new Australian distributor for the pdf Factory range of products. These offer an inexpensive alternative to Adobe Acrobat for anyone wanting to create PDF files. Avalanche director Peter Cameron says the pricing (from A\$75) is low enough to put PDF writing software on every workstation. Trial versions of pdf Factory are available for download at www.avalanche.com.au

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MindServer aiming for 3rd generation KM slot

One of the more interesting debuts at this month's LegalTech New York event was the global launch of the MindServer Legal knowledge management system from Recomind Inc.

In terms of positioning the product, if you take the view that the 1st generation of KM systems were the 'big software' search engines, then the 2nd generation approach was to focus on 'grey matter' by using people to create the taxonomies and organise the KM information. On this basis, MindServer is a 3rd generation KM system in that it can index and categorise information and metadata - without the assistance of a team of support staff - and allows lawyers to conduct their own 'smart' searches based on contextual rather than keyword searches.

US firms to have already ordered MindServer include Wilson Sonsini and Cleary Gottlieb - the latter will roll it out to over 800 lawyers across 10 offices in nine countries. To support the system outside North America, Recomind has already opened a European office. www.recomind.com

Interest reviving in speech recognition technology

It may not be the greatest comeback we have seen but after several years of being overshadowed by digital dictation, there seems to be a revival of interest in speech recognition among lawyers. Henry Gallagher of G2 Speech (020 8989 7330) says G2's own experiences suggest that 20% of fee earners currently using digital dictation would actually prefer to have a full blown speech recognition capability. However Gallagher believes speech recognition still suffers from people's experiences in the early 1990s "when the technology was poor but over-hyped, whereas today the technology is good but poorly promoted".

G2's own LegalSpeech system learns to recognise a user's voice patterns in the background from digital dictation files and can then be switched over to speech recognition when required.

■ In a related development, Civica (01709 786786) has recently integrated speech recognition with its Galaxy Legal case management software at Denison Till in York, where fee earners are using it as a way to produce non-standard documentation.

Legal software resellers wanted

The UK authors of a new software package for law firms are looking for re-sellers in England and Wales. The package, which is already being used by a number of smaller firms, features accounting, time recording, billing, marketing, document and case management. The company is looking for re-sellers working on a commission only basis, with additional revenue coming from installation and training. Requests for further information should be emailed to info@cloudnine.co.uk

Visualfiles to supply Valid records

Visualfiles (Solicitec's parent company) and Valid Information Systems (now part of the Hummingbird group) have formed a strategic alliance that will see the companies collaborating on projects where there is the need for a combined case and EDRMS (document & records) management solution.

Visualfiles and Valid are already working together on the Treasury Solicitors PRACAMS case management project - the Valid R/KYV system is one of the few EDRMS products to have National Archives (formerly the Public Records Office) approval - and the two companies are now planning some joint marketing initiatives in the government computing sector.

TFB goes downunder

Following in the footsteps of Solicitec and Axxia, Technology for Business has become the latest UK legal IT vendor to focus on the Asia Pacific law firms market. TFB has formed a subsidiary company in New Zealand that will initially target the North and South Islands, from its Auckland offices. The operation is headed by Nicole Birsall, a New Zealander who until recently worked for TFB in its Leeds office.

Commenting on the move, Birsall said "Our product required only minimal modification to meet New Zealand Law Society regulations and those who have seen it have been impressed by the fact that it incorporates accounts and case management within a single system." www.tfbnz.co.nz

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