



TMA decide to call it a day for legal software

Thompson Moore Associates (TMA), one of the UK's dwindling band of niche accounts and practice management system suppliers, has decided to call it a day and will be wrapping up its operations in the legal IT market later this year.

Founded back in 1984, the company began life as a joint venture with a number of partners at Simmons & Simmons (and used to have an office at the firm's old Eldon Street premises) before launching their SiMS (solicitors integrated management) system. However following last year's merger of flagship site Gouldens with Elite users Jones Day and the decision by their second largest users, Mourant Du Feu & Jeune, to develop their own bespoke system, TMA decided it would no longer be economic for them to continue providing development and support services for the remaining SiMS sites. User sites - which include Tarlo Lyons and Viberts - were originally given six months' notice expiring on the 30th June this year however TMA's Peter Moore told the Insider that the users were currently negotiating a further six months support to allow them more time to select and migrate to replacement systems.

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For the latest legal IT news, jobs, events and information, visit the Insider web site, described by The Times newspaper as "the definitive online resource for legal technology news".

Outsourcing now firmly on the agenda

The outsourcing of some or all of their IT operations is one of those topics law firms have been talking about for years however the signs are the talking is finally over and that outsourcing is now firmly on the agenda for many practices.

For example at last week's Lawgroup annual conference, which took place in the Midlands, outsourcing was one of the hot topics debated in the IT breakout session. What concerned delegates was that even where smaller firms could afford to recruit and retain IT staff, the complexity of modern legal IT systems meant few individuals had all the relevant skills (including experience with legal applications, databases, networking, desktop systems, communications and email management) needed to provide adequate inhouse support.

Delegates indicated that in future they were likely to move away from inhouse staff or reliance on their main legal software suppliers (there was concern that suppliers may have too many vested interests to be impartial in their advice) and turn instead to third-party consultancies and IT service providers. JMC IT was one consultancy singled out for praise by delegates.

By coincidence, the Tikit Group's managing director David Lumsden echoed these same views in an interview coinciding with the publication of his company's latest financial results.

According to Lumsden, not only were more and more firms looking at outsourcing but there was realisation that the cost of providing 24/7 inhouse support was not a commercially viable proposition for almost any firm outside the top 10. Lumsden reckons that any IT activity that has peaks and troughs - such as database administration and training, where specialist inhouse staff are not fully utilised - is an ideal candidate for outsourcing.

No IT please, we're making enough money already !

What are the main business drivers when it comes to lawyers making IT purchasing decisions? At a roundtable forum for IT directors, hosted by ResSoft in London last week, the surprising conclusion was that the primary driver was fear rather than the desire to make more money.

There was some dispute as to whether lawyers were already making so much money that they didn't need any more, or whether they were simply reluctant to invest in case, workflow and business process management technologies because they did not appreciate the potentially huge increases in productivity and profitability that could be achieved. However delegates were unanimous that fear - ranging from the fear of losing clients through to the fear of going to jail, for running foul of the new anti-money laundering regulations - was a far more powerful driver and the motivation behind many current law firm IT projects, including the provision of client extranets and greater transparency on billing. www.ressoft.co.uk

NEWS IN BRIEF**■ NEW MONEY LAUNDERING SYSTEM**

Solicitors Case Management Systems (01747 855865) has launched version 3 of its risk management system for High Street firms. Available as a free upgrade to existing users, the new version includes anti-money laundering functions to comply with the latest regulations and Law Society guidance on this subject. www.scams-law.com

■ MICROSOFT AWARD FOR CIVICA

The Civica Group has won this year's 'Large Account Reseller Operational Excellence Award' at Microsoft's recent channel partner conference in Dublin. Civica is one of just 18 LARs operating in the British Isles and has a team specialising in the black art of helping law firms select the most appropriate Microsoft software licensing agreement.

■ VIDEO LINKS FOR SCOTTISH JAILS

The Scottish Court Service and the Scottish Prison Service have set up a video link between Barlinnie Prison and the Glasgow Sheriff Court, as an alternative to transporting prisoners to the court for routine committal proceedings. The project uses Polycom ViewStations technology which was installed by video conferencing specialists Video Meeting Company (0870 160 4466). www.polycom.com

■ DICKINSON DEES IN NLIS FIRST

Dickinson Dees is claiming a first in e-conveyancing with the introduction of a new link, based around the PISCES standard, that will allow the two-way exchange of search related information between the firm's case management system and the Searchflow NLIS channel.

■ INTERWOVEN TO BOOST PISCES

The PISCES XML standard for electronic transactions in the real estate sector has been given a boost by a new partnership between PISCES software consultancy Real Decisions (020 8346 7143) and DMS market leader Interwoven. Law firms already running both Interwoven WorkSite and Real Decisions software include Masons, Tarlo Lyons and Dickson Minto however the partnership is expected to yield the biggest benefits among estate agencies, who to date have been slow to adopt document management technology.

Linetime help kick-start new LCL legal venture

The LCL Group, which was set up by former Hammonds partner Philip Holden and includes the insolvency practice LCL Law plus the debt recovery business LCL Collections, has become one of the first customers for Linetime's (0113 250 0020) new MSP managed service offering.

With MSP, Linetime provides customers with all the systems, hardware and applications software (in the case of LCL - the Deptime SQL debt collection system plus client extranet links) as a fully managed service for a fixed cost, per user, per month.

Commenting on why the company had signed up for an initial three year period with Linetime's MSP service, LCL director Ian Longbottom said "As a new start-up we needed to set up quickly. But with any new business there is a lot of initial investment and we therefore also had to look at prioritising our needs. We wanted to take advantage of the latest technology but could not afford the expense of employing dedicated inhouse IT staff, nor did we want the responsibility of managing our own system. We decided opting for MSP was more effective and there is little doubt it has given us an advantage over our competitors and that this edge has allowed us to attract business."

Iken making inroads into local authorities market

Iken Business (0117 373 0790), one of the newer entrants into the local government case management and time recording systems market, has reported a 60% increase in turnover for its 2003 trading year. Over the past two years, 17 local authorities - the most recent signings were Canterbury City Council, plus Slough and Harrogate borough councils - have purchased Iken systems.

The company has also introduced a number of new modules and enhancements to its product range including: support for the latest Lexcel requirements relating to e-risks and e-government, and a new case management system for handling licensing applications. Later this summer Iken will also be launching a Freedom of Information Act module and support for document image processing, so hard copy documentation can be scanned into the case management system. www.iken.biz

Solution 6 joins LSSA

Solution 6 has become the latest company to join the Legal Software Suppliers Association (LSSA), whose membership now includes almost all the major vendors of practice and case management systems in the UK. Although LSSA, which in recent times has focussed its efforts on the development of technical standards such as XML, used to be perceived as a Brits-only body, the organisation in fact opened up its membership some years ago to include UK sole distributors of legal systems.

Go buy Tikit shares, as firms buy more legal IT

Spring may be a little late this year but it looks as if the great post-Y2K freeze is finally over and that law firms are once more back in the market buying legal IT systems and services. The Insider has been hearing anecdotal reports to this effect since the end of last year however the most solid evidence is to be found in the AIM-listed Tikit Group's annual results for the year ended 31 December 2003 - and the positive response they have received.

The figures show a 16% increase in turnover to £9.56 million (2002: £8.23m) and an 81% increase in profits before tax and goodwill to £1.18m (2002: £0.65m). This was enough to prompt stockbrokers Charles Stanley to publish an analysts' research note recommending Tikit shares as both a 12 month and long term 'buy' proposition. Charles Stanley have also raised their forecasts for Tikit over the next few years, with turnover and profits predicted to rise from £10.9m and £1.4m respectively next year, to £13 million and £1.8m in 2006.

The figures also show an interesting evolution in Tikit's business model and its move away from being primarily a distributor of third-party software products.

Whereas four years ago the bulk of Tikit's revenues came from software sales, last year nearly 60% came from consultancy and support (including outsourcing) services. Consultancy revenues increased by 21% to £2.92m, while supported services increased by 29% to £2.79m. Tikit's own products - including ReAction Server for CRM users and the Tikit KnowHow System - now account for an increasing proportion of software sales.

National Archives seeking input on XML standards for records

The National Archives in Kew (previously the Public Records Office) is seeking comments from IT suppliers on plans to develop a new XML standard for governmental electronic records management systems. The project is part of the wider e-Government Interoperability Framework (e-GIF) initiative to facilitate the exchange of electronic records from one department to another without compromising their integrity. The draft XML schemas will be available until 23 April at www.govtalk.gov.uk

Changes to criminal contract

The Legal Services Commission has announced changes to the General Criminal Contract, which need to be incorporated in any CDS support software by 17 May. The changes follow last year's consultation paper *Value for Money in the Criminal Defence Service* and include the abolition of some categories of stand alone advice and the effective reinstatement of parts of the 1989 legal aid regulations. Any questions should be directed to the CDS project manager Maryvonne Islip on 0121 665 4737.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ ELITE WINS IN WALES

Edwards Geldard, which has offices in Wales and the Midlands, has selected Thomson Elite to supply its new practice and financial management systems. The firm will also be implementing Elite's WebView browser based platform.

■ BILLBACK IN LOVELLS DEAL

The London office of Billback Systems (020 7246 9999) has won the contract to supply Lovells with its next generation of costs management and recovery systems. Billback will be replacing Lovells' incumbent suppliers Equitrac and Softlog. Insider sources say two factors that helped Billback secure the deal were the availability of touch screen terminals and the close integration between the Billback software and Lovells' Elite practice management system.

■ CAREY OLSEN SELECT PHOENIX

Phoenix Business Solutions (08707 351426) has been selected to implement an Interwoven WorkSite system at Carey Olsen, one of the largest law firms in the Channel Islands. The document management systems project is the firm's first major IT initiative since the recent merger between Olsens and Carey Langlois.

■ SCOTTISH LEGAL AID 170 WIN

The Scottish Legal Aid Board has awarded 170 Systems Inc (020 8323 8016) the contract to supply its new document and records management as part of the e-government initiative. The Board will be using 170's MarkView imaging technology and workflow software to store and retrieve case files. www.170systems.com

THE INSIDER JOBS BOARD www.legaltechnology.com

This week's top job: Eutopia Solutions (020 8387 4061) is acting on behalf of a Home Counties firm looking to recruit its first Head of IT.

Looking for legal IT staff, including positions in management, sales, development, support, KM, publishing, marketing, online services, accounts or training? The Insider Jobs Board has the best choice of legal IT jobs available in the UK and you can post your vacancies free of charge by emailing the details to jobs@legaltechnology.com

PEOPLE & PLACES

■ COPITRAK COMPLETES UK TEAM

Copitrak has completed its new UK team with the appointment of Gwen Curtis as sales executive. Curtis is also responsible for account management in the Republic of Ireland. The UK sales team now includes director of sales & marketing Mark Gower, who recently relocated back to Europe after setting up the Asia Pacific arm of Copitrak, plus Stewart Hadley, who has relocated from Australia and will now cover the UK as well as having responsibility for sales in the Channel Islands.

■ NICE PEOPLE TO WORK FOR

Leeds-based Visualfiles (the parent of case management market leaders Solicitec) and Manchester legal IT specialists JMC IT were both named in *The Sunday Times'* recent survey of the 50 best small companies (between 50 and 249 employees) to work for in the UK. Visualfiles secured 20th position overall but had the lowest staff turnover rate (4%) of any company. Factors contributing to Visualfiles' popularity included annual team building weekends in Spain and the weekly 'beer time' at 4:30pm on Fridays.

■ CONCORDANCE EXPERT AT LDM

Bruce Spain, the only certified Concordance trainer in Europe, has joined litigation support specialists LDM in the role of legal technology consultant.

■ GILES JOINS KLA

After six years at Copitrak, Christopher Giles has joined Hummingbird/Kramer Lee & Associates as a business manager within the professional practice group where he will be looking after various legal accounts.

■ EDGEBYTE MOVES HOME

Edgbyte Computers has moved to new offices at 267 Church Street, Blackpool FY1 3PB. The phone number is 01253 290300.

■ AWARDS FOR PSM

Scottish firm PSM Law Group (Peddie Smith Maloco) won the Best Designed Corporate Website award at the recent International Business Awards in New York. Closer to home, PSM's online conveyancing service won the E-Business title at the Fife Business Awards. www.transactdirect.com

BigHand claims prize in race for thin client DDS

BigHand (020 7793 8200) is claiming the prize for being the first developer of digital dictation systems to be able to deliver a viable thin client solution, capable of running on Citrix MetaFrame 1.8, XP and Microsoft Windows Terminal Server.

Until now many firms have been unable to take full advantage of the benefits of DDS workflow because of the inability of their thin client technology infrastructures (ironically, most widely used in multi-site firms where DDS can offer some of the greatest benefits) to effectively handle .WAV dictation sound files. Problems have included: no realtime recording or playback - because Citrix 'buffers' sound and loses up to 15 seconds of each file; lack of support for USB input devices, high bandwidth utilisation and inefficient codecs (file compression standards) that impinge on overall system performance.

BigHand say they have now cracked these problems through the use of new audio streams, designed to handle voice frequencies only, and a codec that incorporates compression, noise reduction and pitch control. The company is also keen to stress this is leading edge rather than bleeding edge technology as their thin client solution has now been successfully piloted in 10 firms, across 16 sites, for between nine months and a year.

Firms involved with the BigHand thin client pilot include 22 user Tinsdills in Staffordshire and London criminal defence specialists Dobson Hillman, who had their server MetaFrame XP located in Enfield but most of their DDS users in Orpington. According to the latter firm's managing partner Graham Dobson "Firms who use thin client environments have been promised a digital dictation solution by vendor after vendor in the past but BigHand have delivered. We have been up and running with BigHand on Citrix for nine months and it has proved to be both reliable and 100 percent functional."

DIGITAL DICTATION NEWS IN BRIEF

■ HEADSET AMPLIFIER REDUCES HARDWARE COSTS

nFlow Software (01245 463377) can now supply a low cost (£39.99 + VAT) headset amplifier, which means that most single earpiece headsets, on existing tape transcription machines, can now be used with new digital dictation systems. The system also overcomes another complaint that existing headsets frequently have cables that are too short to plug into the back of PCs.

■ LEVENES SIGN UP FOR DPS TEAM TALK DDS

Long time DPS user and top 150 firm Levenes has recently installed the DPS (020 8804 1022) TeamTalk digital dictation system in its six offices in North London. The system is fully integrated with DPS case management software and the firm is already reporting "a dramatic reduction" in its reliance on temps because the firm can now utilise any spare secretarial capacity around its branch offices. The firm has also started outsourcing some of its transcription work to India.

Omtool taking on eCopy in document workflow biz

With the legal world shifting towards electronic document creation and distribution, Omtool Europe (01932 334444) - which originally made its name in the UK with its Genifax network fax management system - is now moving increasingly into the field of document workflow and routing technology.

In particular, its new AccuRoute 'intelligent document delivery' software, when combined with MFD (multi-function device) scanners, offers firms the potential to simultaneously - and in a single step - fax, email, file to a document management system and print to a network printer, any paper document that needs distribution, printing, faxing, emailing or archiving. (Documents are archived as searchable PDF image + text files.)

Of course it has always been possible to do this but not without using different input devices and the time consuming process of manually performing all the separate procedures. AccuRoute, which is compatible with all major DMS platforms, including Hummingbird and Interwoven, is already widely used in the US - its flagship site is Latham & Watkins who are running the system in 15 offices - and today its only real competitor is the rival Canon/eCopy technology.

■ Omtool's web site has an online demo of AccuRoute, complete with a commentary by Angela Connor, the IT director of Bircham Dyson Bell, the first UK firm to roll out the system.

www.omtool.com/products/arPresentation.cfm

Walker Morris offering online case management for landlords

Leeds-based Walker Morris has launched an online case management system for residential landlords and managing agents that will allow them to commence and monitor the progress of possession and rent recovery proceedings against tenants. Called FreeHome, the system allows instructions to be given via an extranet link, with services offered on a step-by-step fixed fee basis, so clients can review the progress of their matters and the costs incurred on a real-time basis.

www.walkermorris.co.uk

Karen Fate sets up legal IT reseller business in the US

Karen Fate, best known in the UK for her role in introducing larger firms to the Carpe Diem time recording system, has launched her own business: the Dallas-based Fate Group, which will operate as an independent software reseller specialising in time tracking and workflow automation products for law firms. The Fate Group has already been appointed as an authorised reseller for Timetag time tracking system and nQueue's expense recovery software. For details email karen@thefategroup.com

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

■ **EMEA WINS FOR HUMMINGBIRD**
Trademark attorney's Duran Corretjer in Barcelona and Libra Consulting, a Kuwait integrated law firm and paralegal services company, are two of the latest organisations to order Hummingbird's DM document and workflow management systems.

■ **WENDY'S INVEST IN WORKSHARE**
The corporate legal department of Wendy's International, one of the world's largest fast food operating and franchising companies, has deployed the Workshare 3 document change management system. As with other corporate legal departments, one of the main reasons why Wendy's installed Workshare was the need to keep track of changes, maintain the formatting integrity and avoid the risk of files becoming corrupted when multiple authors are working on the drafting and amendment of long Word documents.

■ **CONVEYANCING WITH GHOSTFILL**
Korbitec, the South Africa-based developers of the GhostFill document assembly and automation system, is now publishing a conveyancing specific web site - called Ghost Digest - containing legal, professional and technical news. Although it inevitably has a strong South African flavour, there are also plenty of international items. Closer to home, we are expecting news of changes to the distribution and support arrangements for GhostFill in the UK within the next few weeks. www.ghostdigest.co.za

■ **BILLBACK SALES GOING UP**
Billback Systems, the Sydney-based costs management and recovery systems supplier, has finally broken away from its reputation of being big in Australia but nowhere else. The company has just released its sales figures for the second half of 2003, which for the first time also include the sales activities undertaken by Thomson Elite, which now markets Billback systems in North America.

In the six months to 31st December 2003, 23 Australian firms selected Billback for implementation at 37 sites. In the UK and continental Europe, 5 firms selected Billback for implementation at 14 sites, and in North America, 11 firms selected Billback, via Elite, for implementation at 48 sites.

www.billback.com

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ EVOLUTION AT CHAN NEIL

Niche insurance litigation practice Chan Neil, which only opened its doors for business in November, has selected AIM Professional's Evolution system to provide its accounts and time recording facilities. The firm has also used AIM to customise Microsoft Word and incorporate access to document templates and precedent libraries via the normal Word toolbars and menus.

■ SOFTLAW IN E-BENEFITS PROJECT

Australian-based SoftLaw, the developers of the STATUTE Expert expert system for legislative databases, last week began work, in conjunction with Microsoft, Northgate and BT, on the UK National Benefits Project. This is a pilot project, funded by the Office of Deputy Prime Minister, that aims "to revolutionize the customer experience around claiming social security". STATUTE Expert, which is already used by a number of local authorities in housing and council tax benefits systems, will automate the application of regulations across a number of benefits areas. www.softlaw.com.au + www.ebenefits.org.uk

LEGAL IT EVENTS DIARY

■ APRIL 8, LONDON. Tikit is running a seminar at Kingsway Hall Hotel on Interwoven's new WorkSite 8. DLA's IT director Daniel Pollick will be discussing the rationale behind his selection of WorkSite 8. For details contact Sally Bellwood on 020 7400 5960 or email sally.bellwood@tikit.com

■ APRIL 20 BRISTOL. Pilgrim Systems and Voicepath are holding a seminar on how the use of fee earner portals, case & matter management and digital dictation can be used to improve fee earner productivity and increase the overall productivity. The event takes place at the Hotel du Vin. For details contact Hilary Kenny on 0131 555 9700 or email hilaryk@pilgrimsystems.com

■ APRIL 21 LONDON. ResSoft is holding a workshop at its Hatton Garden offices for existing Interwoven users to look at the features of the new WorkSite 8, including enhanced email management and support operations across multiple sites. There is a seminar for non-Interwoven users on 28 April. For details call 020 7421 4140 or email marketing@ressoft.co.uk

LiST hope draft will lead to IT practice direction

LiST (the Litigation Support Technology group - the think tank set up last year to provide UK law firms and other interested parties with a forum in which to develop a uniform approach to the use of IT in litigation and dispute resolution) have published a draft practice direction on the use of technology in civil proceedings.

Drawing on the model established by a similar initiative in Australia, the draft covers such things as: the arrangements for pre-trial case management conferences, the exchange of documents and disclosure of data in an electronic format, the use of courtroom presentation systems and related trial technology, and the provisions for allocating costs.

LiST concede the draft still has a long way to go before it is formally considered by Lord Justice Dyson as a practice direction. However, following the positive reception the draft received last week during a series of presentations to the Law Society and other legal industry groups, LiST are hopeful it will be taken up by the judiciary as best practice before it works its way into *The White Book*.

A copy of the draft can be downloaded from the Insider web site as a Word file. Comments about the draft or LiST generally should be emailed to Jonathan.Maas@simmons-simmons.com

Web TV at Addleshaw Goddard

Addleshaw Goddard has launched The Employment Channel, a new service that allows subscribers access to employment news and training over the internet in the form of television-style webcasts delivered by the firm's own employment lawyers.

The news programmes, aimed primarily at HR managers and inhouse lawyers, are designed to keep subscribers up-to-date with the latest information as well as providing comment on employment news, case law and legislative developments. The training programmes, which cover all aspects of managing employment relations, are aimed at line managers and provide an alternative to training staff out of the workplace by delivering information directly to the employee's computer.

New programmes will be webcast on average twice a week, with subscribers receiving an email alert containing a hyperlink that connects them directly to the service for immediate viewing. All news alerts are saved for up to three months and training programmes are stored indefinitely, so users can choose when to access the information.

Webcasts are delivered by streaming media - the firm's IT director Damian Griffiths says the service contains a number of features specifically designed to avoid potential firewall problems - however users are recommended to have at least a dual-bonded ISDN connection, plus Internet Explorer 6 and Windows Media Player 9. Annual subscriptions start from £2500. For details email enquiries@employmentchannel.tv

Latest product launches

■ **KVS LAUNCHES VAULT VERSION 5.0 FOR EMAIL**
 KVS (0118 927 3868) this week launched Version 5.0 of its Enterprise Vault email archiving and content management software. In its latest iteration, Vault can now provide a platform for not only archiving email messages but also file system documents, instant messages and Microsoft SharePoint Portal Server documents. However recognising that different organisations have different storage requirements, KVS has now adopted a 'framework' approach so that, in the words of product director Andrew Barnes "organisations can pick and choose modules as required for their specific levels of business risk, storage optimisation and lifecycle management".

Other new features in Vault 5.0 include support for Microsoft Exchange 2003, Outlook 2003 and SharePoint Services 2003; improved scalability now capable of supporting over 100,000 users; new APIs for exploiting external storage capability; and the introduction of 'open storage layer' technology that will make it easier for users to migrate to future storage platforms while still supporting legacy content. www.kvsinc.com

■ **NEW EXTRANET SERVICE FROM SORCE**
 Newbury-based web service developers Sorce (01653 551777) - their flagship legal clients are Gateley Wareing and Mishcon de Reya - has launched a new extranet service called CoSpace. This gives customers a fully functioning extranet, including document publishing and management, bulletin boards and search functions for a flat monthly fee starting at £750 per month.

CoSpace is delivered as a hosted service, with no additional software, hardware or web server costs. Customers can also opt for the basic service or a fully managed service that also handles all the administrative aspects of running an extranet, including access control. www.sorcecospace.com

■ **ACTIVE NAVIGATION FOR DESKTOP RESEARCH**
 Active Navigation (0800 018 7678) has launched Cyberwize, a new product designed to work in conjunction with standard internet search engines or with files on private networks and intranets where users require desktop analysis and rapid location of specific information within large quantities on uncategorised data.

Active's business development director Gareth Davies describes Cyberwize as "the ultimate tool for business areas where having the right information and getting to it first is a mission critical function" as distinct from "budget search products where search is a question of getting a rough idea and being second doesn't really matter."

Instead of using key words and basic logic, Cyberwize employs "semantic theories and empirical analysis at the forefront of academic linguistic research" to extract information from documents and web pages "closer to the way it would be perceived by an informed, intelligent human reader". Current Active Navigation customers include Channel 4, Lloyds of London and the FSA. www.activenavigation.com

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InterAction 'really cool stuff' adds to core CRM

Interface Software, the developers of the market leading InterAction CRM (client relationship management) system, this week launched the first of a series of optional add-on modules designed to enhance the software's core functionality. The two modules with specific appeal to law firms are InterAction Matters and InterAction Opportunities.

The Matters module allows firms to track information relating to their handling of past matters - including which fee earners worked on a particular project - to build an experience and expertise knowledge base. The net result, in the words of Interface vice president Barry Solomon "is firms can then quickly determine the best team to respond to an RFP, staff a new client matter or determine the best expert to use in light of the facts of a particular case."

The Opportunities module is in effect a pitch management system designed to give, typically, a firm's marketing or business development team a clearer picture of the prospective engagements and deals they have in the pipeline. Apart from making it easier to predict future revenues, this greater 'visibility' also puts firms in a better position to take pre-emptive action when prospects are not matching expectations.

Commenting on the introduction of the modules at this time, Solomon said it had always been Interface's belief that law firms first needed to establish a sound methodical approach to CRM and only then move on towards more advanced functionality. "Had we offered them all the bells and whistles from day one, it would have done no good whereas now they are in a position to take advantage of the really cool stuff."

Solomon adds that one of the attractions of this approach is the modules give management access to valuable information but without requiring lawyers to do anything extra in terms of changes to their working routines. www.interfacesoftware.com

Now Lexis dips toes into legal software applications market

Although Thomson, the parent of the Westlaw and Sweet & Maxwell publishing businesses, has been increasingly active in the legal software applications market (particularly after last year's acquisition of Elite) arch-rival LexisNexis has until now been relatively quiet in this field. But is this about to change?

Last week LexisNexis US announced the acquisition of Data.TXT, the developers of the Time Matters case management and Billing Matters billing and time recording systems. Although little known outside of North America (although it has a growing user base in Australia and the Pacific Rim) Data.TXT's CEO Bob Butler claims that Time Matters is the most widely used case management system among smaller US firms and predicts the acquisition "will allow us to extend our reach to larger firms". www.timematters.com

Supermarket to launch at home legal service

Although the ink has scarcely dried on Sir David Clementi's consultation paper on the future of the regulation of legal services in England & Wales and the possible introduction of broader 'legal disciplinary practices' (LDPs - as distinct from MDP multi-disciplinary partnerships) the Insider has learned that one of the UK's major supermarket groups is already pressing ahead with plans to offer legal services directly to its customers.

The service - codenamed Project Frail Pool - will include an extensive range of commoditised virtual legal products that can be ordered or downloaded from the company's web site. However, recognising that not only are some types of legal work incapable of being effectively commoditised but also that many of their customers will never use an online service and would prefer to see a real live lawyer, the company is planning to have pools of legal advisers based within all its main stores.

An unusual feature of the proposed new offering is a home visits service for the benefit of frail and elderly customers who cannot always manage to travel to a store. To minimise transport costs, lawyers will be dropped off at and subsequently collected from customers' homes by the company's fleet of home delivery vehicles as they make their rounds. Customers using the legal services will also be eligible for bonus points on their store loyalty cards.

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