Now Laserform and Visualfiles change hands

The current trend for consolidation within the legal IT market – which began in April when the Computer Software Group (CS Group) bought AIM for £5.3 million – shows no signs of abating. The AIM deal was followed by FWBS buying Pericom’s legal division (see page 2) and Hummingbird announcing it was in talks with Symphony (see back page). Within the last month both Laserform International and case management systems market leader Visualfiles have changed hands – and there are persistent rumours that at least one more major legal systems supplier will be acquired within the next month. In addition, another venture capital group – which also has a consolidation strategy – is now in “advanced” talks with several suppliers whose founders/owners want to sell.

At the end of June Laserform International, which has over 2000 firms using its electronic forms, was acquired by the CS Group for £4.8 million – £4.3 million was in cash, the rest was in shares. The company’s most recent set of accounts – to 30th September 2005 – showed sales of £4.1 million and EBITA profits of £500k. The company’s founder and majority shareholder Barry Hawley-Green has now retired from the business however the company’s remaining executive directors will continue to be responsible for the day-to-day operations of Laserform.

Then, in early July, while everyone was wondering what the CS Group would do next, LexisNexis Butterworths announced it had bought Visualfiles. The purchase price has not been disclosed but industry gossip suggests it could be in the £12-£18 million bracket. LexisNexis already owns the legal CRM market leader Interface Software and there are reports that earlier this year the company was in negotiations to buy a PMS vendor. ...continued on page 7

Also with this month’s Insider

Included with this month’s Insider is the latest issue of Legal Technology Journal, which is edited by Charles Christian and is free to LTi subscribers.
News in brief

800th firm signs up for AlphaLaw Esprit
AlphaLaw (01252 371121) has signed up the 800th law firm user for its entry level AlphaLaw Esprit accounts, time recording and document production system. Managing director Simon Meehan said while its Uno and Vantage systems were targeted at larger firms “our commitment to start-ups, the sole practitioner and the smaller High Street firm is an integral part of our ongoing strategy”.

Brooke North invest in Seneca
Leeds solicitors Brooke North LLP has gone live with a Seneca CM system from EMIS IT (0845 1205206) to handle its case management, digital dictation, email and practice management requirements within one integrated system.

Avoiding the shifting sands with DPS
London criminal practice JD Spicer & Co, which has offices in Wood Green, Kilburn and the City, has installed an accounts, case management and Team Talk digital dictation system from DPS Software (020 8804 1022). Commenting on the project, which took place over six months and, including training, hardware and project management, cost just over £150k, senior partner Phillip Spicer said “any firm that does not have a solid IT infrastructure is building a business on shifting sand.”

TutorPro typo
Sorry, wrong number. The correct phone number for e-learning software solutions provider TutorPro is 01323 871870.

Quote, unquote
“They’re all at it! Why won’t someone buy me out?” ...the managing director of a software supplier on learning that Visualfiles had joined AIM and Laserform in the great legal IT consolidation stakes.

Tikit warning of WP equivalent of Y2K
Tikit co-founder and sales director Liam Flanagan is warning that law firms could face a Y2K-like meltdown in their document production operations when they migrate to the new Microsoft Office 2007/Word 12 application. According to Flanagan, the problem lies not in the application as such – which he describes as “more than just a WP” and says Tikit is fully committed to the Office 2007 technology – but in the impact Word 12’s new file format will have on existing documents, particularly precedent and template files.

Flanagan says the problem stems from the fact law firms habitually use and amend the same precedents without ever clearing out the underlying programming code. The result is firms are still using templates originally created using Wordperfect macros, converted into Word 6 Basic and later migrated to Word 97 VBA (which still underpins Office 2003). With all this legacy code lurking in the background, Flanagan says firms shouldn’t be surprised when sometimes documents become corrupted and crash, rather they should be amazed they ever work at all.

Videss join overnight brigade
Videss has become the latest legal systems supplier to switch from the one day user conference format to a two day event, complete with overnight accommodation and evening entertainments. The company said the conference, which took place at The Belfry at the end of last month, was its most successful user event to-date. Apart from avoiding the problem of delegates leaving early to miss the evening rush-hour traffic, in the words of the managing director of another legal IT company “you only really get to know your customers well when you stay up drinking with them in the bar until 4:00 am in the morning.”

Webber sticking with FWBS
Following last month’s announcement that FWBS had acquired the Pericom Legal business, Dave Webber – the developer of the Paragon and Indigo PMS products previously sold by Pericom – has welcomed the deal as “a very positive move”. He said the arrangement he had with Pericom has now been transferred to FWBS and “can only be of benefit to our existing and future users.”
Yes, legal IT does make you sick

For last month’s Insider online readers poll, we asked if working in legal IT was stressful and what impact this had on your health. A massive 74% of you said ‘yes’ a job in legal IT does make for a stressful career, with 50% saying you found your jobs stressful on a daily basis. But, you are also clearly a plucky bunch, as only 15% said the stress was so bad that it had forced them to take time off work.

So which factors contribute towards this build up of stress? The most frequent reason, mentioned by 62% of those taking part in the survey, was feeling undervalued by management. Next, with 52%, was the general workload, followed by, at 46%, lack of control over the working day. Having to deal with low levels of IT literacy among users (or, as one IT director put it: the thick lawyer factor) was mentioned by 40% of respondents. This was closely followed by the long hours, cited by 38% of you. Then, in joint last place with 30% each, were deadline pressures and – somewhat surprisingly as law firms and legal IT suppliers are not renowned for their largesse – low pay.

Meehan wants LSSA to be the legal IT industry’s voice

Simon Meehan, the incoming chairman of the Legal Software Suppliers Association (LSSA), says he hopes to focus the association’s energies upon becoming the legal IT industry’s collective “voice” in discussions with organisations whose regulatory decisions and policy initiatives frequently have significant IT consequences. “Our customers,” said Meehan, “are the people they are regulating, so if we can improve the dialogue with the likes of the Law Society, Land Registry and Legal Services Commission, we can provide a quicker, better service in terms of ensuring our products meet law firms’ needs.”

Meehan, the managing director of AlphaLaw, was voted LSSA chairman in a three horse race against Chris Rose of Videss and David England of the Computer Software Group (the new parent of AIM and Laserform).

News in brief

Colemans-CTTS upgrade with Eclipse
As part of its strategy to become one of the UK’s top 5 national claimant personal injury firms, Colemans-CTTS is upgrading its IT infrastructure in conjunction with Eclipse Legal Systems, InTechnology and Ramesys. The project includes expanding its Eclipse case management facility to 200 users, upgrading its WAN to 10Mb fibre and implementing Citrix in its Manchester, Kingston and Walsall offices.

Fairbairn Smith migrate to Windows 2003
North London lawyers Fairbairn Smith & Co have migrated to a Windows 2003 Small Business Server platform with the assistance of systems integrators SoftDesign Services (020 8293 3123).

Irish firms selects Hummingbird
Irish law firm O’Donnell Sweeney has selected Hummingbird Enterprise for Legal, including the LegalKey records management system, to provide its new document and content lifecycle management platform.

Positive response to WorkSite Assist
Phoenix Business Solutions (020 7680 4450) is reporting a positive response to its new WorkSite Assist suite of DMS utilities. The first two available are Email Assist, which helps users manage incoming and outgoing email around a matter file, and CD Bible, which allows users to export workspaces held within an Interwoven database to a file structure in preparation for placing on a CD or DVD. More Assist applications are under development.

Legal Inc first with iConectnxt
Legal Inc (08704 323027) has become the first UK litigation support bureau to be fully certified as an ASP for the iConectnxt e-discovery management system.
People & Places

All change for marketing in CS Group
Following the recent acquisition of AIM by the Computer Software Group (CS Group), Andrea Beer – who, without doubt, was the best marketing & PR manager AIM ever had – has left the company as she felt “it was time I moved on to look at other opportunities”. Catherine Bailey, who is based at the company’s West Bromwich offices, has taken over responsibility for marketing within the CS Group’s Professional Solutions Division, which now includes both AIM and Laserform.

North goes South
Justin North, in recent years the face of the Baker Robbins consultancy in the UK, has joined Thomson Elite as its new regional manager for Australasia. North, who started his legal IT career as an analyst at Mallesons, will be moving back to Sydney. Elite has also made Mark Gower its SE Asia business development manager. Gower will be based out of the company’s new Hong Kong offices.

Ex-KLAer joins headhunters
Simon Gudgeon, previously with Kramer Lee, has joined London-based legal IT recruitment specialists Law Support.

New finance director at Tikit
Following the retirement of Tikit Group finance director Tony Pearson, Paul Giuffredi has been appointed in his place with effect from 1st July 2006. Pearson, who has been with Tikit since 1996, will continue to work with Tikit on a part-time consultancy basis for the next six months.

New sales director at TM Property
After two years as sales manager, Nick Dyoss has joined the executive board of NLIS search provider TM Property Service as the company’s new sales director.

Digital dictation news

Wolferstans now live with Winscribe DDS
Plymouth-based Wolferstans is reporting cutbacks in document backlogs within weeks of going live with its new digital dictation workflow management system. The firm is using Winscribe software, supplied by SRC, running on Philips SpeechMike II Pro devices in the office and Olympus DS-4000s for users who want portable recorders.

New nFlow signings north and south of the border
Recent wins for DDS supplier nFlow include orders from Elisons, Birch Cullimore, Simcocks, Royds, Whateley Lane and, in Scotland, Gillespie Macandrew and Ross & Connell. The latter firm’s Mary Ritchie said nFlow provided an “excellent” service... “everything happened exactly when it was supposed to happen.

New Winscribe partner makes first sale
Winscribe’s latest UK sales partner LAN Support has secured its first legal market order for a DDS system. The order was placed by London law firm T Cryan & Co

Grundig unveils top-of-market Digta 415
Grundig Business Systems is now shipping its high end Digta 415 digital dictation recorder in the UK. Along with 64Mb of internal memory it can also accept removable memory cards. There is a docking station for file transfer and battery charging; a USB link allows the 415 to double as a PC microphone for use with speech recognition and there is a 4-digit PIN security option to protect files from unauthorised access – handy if you inadvertently mislay the device. Other options include barcode and RFID readers. Prices start at £310 + VAT. The view we’re hearing from DDS suppliers is that although the price is still a bit steep, Grundig are finally getting away from their germanic designs and producing more attractive devices.

Philips launch barcode option for SpeechMike
Philips has launched the SpeechMike Classic Barcode 5282, a digital recorder with integral barcode scanner that will allow users to append client information to their dictation. Philips has also unveiled a 14-day free trial for some of its most popular digital recorders, including the Pocket Memo 9400 and the SpeechMike. The scheme runs until December and you can apply online for a trial.
Fresh on the radar: URU

Since the introduction of the anti-money laundering regulations, new client identity verification has very much been on the agenda but just how effective are the third party systems many firms are using to help them verify identities? The latest solution is the URU identity verification service and its developers – GB Group plc – claim the large number of data sets it can utilise makes it more accurate than systems using primarily credit-based information. Until now the GB Group has been working primarily with online gaming companies to ensure people gambling on their sites are over the age of 18 however URU can be used for a range of checks, from know your client through to full anti-money laundering.

URU is available as a 24/7 hosted web service, charging on a ‘per click’ model with pricing based on usage rates and the number of data sets (including name, address, utility, DVLA driving licence, passport and credit card information) to verify against. GB’s sales manager Lincoln Hewett (01244 657333) is interested in talking to firms about developing tailored systems for the legal sector.

www.uru.co.uk

HIPs & e-conveyancing news

SearchFlow/TOL strategy announced
NLIS search providers Transaction Online (TOL) and SearchFlow – both now part of the MDA group – have released some details of their joint strategy for capitalising on the emerging HIPs market. CEO Mark Riddick said “speed to market is going to be a big issue for everyone involved in HIPs... our combination of a ‘can do’ approach and ‘added value’ choice puts us in an enviable, unbeatable position.” Among the HIP options SearchFlow/TOL will be offering are: search content for third party HIPs, off the shelf HIP solutions (such as the Law Society HIP) and an MDA white label product that can be personalised to create a fully branded HIP.

• Independent HIPs supplier The Partnership has selected SearchFlow as the sole content provider for its HIPs.

www.thepartnershiplimited.com

HIG sign up with Visualfiles
The Home Information Group, one of the largest providers of valuation and survey services in the UK, has selected LexisNexis Visualfiles to be its HIP technology supplier.

News in brief

Firm goes live with BPM in 12 weeks
Turcan Connell has deployed a FloSuite BPM system to manage its new client & matter inception processes and workflow in a total project timescale of just 12 weeks. This included business analysis, process implementation, user interface configuration and integration with the firm’s Pilgrim LawSoft practice management system. IT development manager Bronwen Jeans said the firm “ruled out embedding process rules directly within the PMS because of the quantity and complexity of the technical development required. Also this approach could not deliver the capabilities and level of flexibility we required.”

www.flosuitecom

Version 2 of Workshare competitor out
Software developer 3BView (01606 871110) has released version 2.0 of its 3BClean metadata cleaning tool. The company describes the system as a competitor of Workshare but differentiates it on the basis that 3BClean is purely server based, rather than runs on the desktop. According to 3BView “this also removes the headache of potential user error (such as lawyers forgetting to hit the right button) that IT departments have with desktop metadata cleaning tools”. Pricing is based on per user, per year and new features introduced with version 2.0 include native Word filtering engine and policy configuration, with practice wide rules applied to each email relationship.

www.3bview.com

EzGov wins Liverpool contract
EzGov has won a contract to develop an online system to help different agencies working with the Community Justice Centre in Liverpool track and manage ASBO related cases.

www.ezgoveurope.com
Online news brief

Linex Legal relaunch website
Linex Legal has relaunched its website with new features and improvements to usability and accessibility. Enhancements include: the ability to search over 30,000 articles and reviews published by law firms and government organisations; multilingual websites for French, German and Italian users and new coverage of employment and product liability law.
www.linexlegal.com

Justis in content deal with Blackwell
Legal electronic publisher Justis has signed an agreement with Blackwell to index a number of Blackwell’s UK and US journals, including Modern Law Review, on the JustCite legal reference citator service. The Blackwell data will be added in time for the release of JustCite 2.0 this September.
www.justcite.com

Irwin maintaining Veritas sites
Irwin Associates (0870 747 2514) is now maintaining the new Veritas Chambers (125 High Holborn) employment law updates website. Graham Irwin also maintain the barristers’ chambers main website.
www.veritaschambers.co.uk
www.employmentlawupdates.co.uk
www.compassion-in-business.co.uk

Buzzword corner: social media
No, this has nothing to do with the welfare state or social services. Instead ‘social media’ (or social software) refers to the new generation of collaborative internet tools – such as blogs, wikis and social bookmarking – that a growing number of firms are now experimenting with as a way to complement both their internal and client-facing knowledge management operations. You can find links to many of these products on Wikipedia.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/list_of_social_software

Product review: risk management training online
One of Legalease’s publications – The Practical Lawyer – has teamed up with professional indemnity insurers Zurich to produce a CPD accredited series of risk management training modules. As you’d expect with this pedigree, the content of these courses are excellent both in terms of coverage and depth, combining the law with real life examples. But what about the practicalities of using the system, which is often the killer for online training courses?

To my pleasant surprise, the system was totally intuitive and problem free to use, with no obscure error messages or browser freeze-ups. I also liked the fact the self-test questions at the end of each section were genuinely taxing. Regardless of your reply, the system automatically provides feedback and an explanation of the correct answer. Each course is accredited for 3 hours CPD and, to ensure nobody merely goes through the motions and clicks their way through the course, you cannot progress to a new section until the allotted time for the previous section has expired. You also don’t need to complete the course in one sitting but can save the results and return to it later. The series covers conveyancing, personal injury and family law, with prices starting at £99.00 + VAT per module.
www.legalease.co.uk/cpdonline

Equitrac and eCopy unveil next generation systems
This spring Equitrac and eCopy were busy announcing next generation systems including, appropriately enough, closer ties between their own products. Equitrac has launched its Professional 5 cost recovery and print management system for law firms. Available from September, it offers a raft of enhancements but probably key is the introduction of embedded software supporting a wide range of multifunction peripherals. This means you no longer need dedicated terminals or PCs controlling operations but instead can do it directly from an MFP, a development that should make cost recovery systems a more commercially viable option for mid-market firms.
eCopy’s new systems – Desktop 9.0 and ShareScan OP 4.0 – are also aimed at the MFP market, allowing users to scan documents into workflows on an MFP and subsequently manage and share PDFs. eCopy has also introduced an integration ‘connector’ for the Microsoft SharePoint platform and can now offer the embedded version of the Equitrac system in its ScanStation terminals.
www.equitrac.com
www.ecopy.com
Laserform and Visualfiles

...continued from front page In contrast to Laserform, Visualfiles founder Neil Ewin is staying with the company – now called LexisNexis Visualfiles and operating as a wholly owned subsidiary of LexisNexis Butterworths – as is managing director Mark Woodward. Both will join the board of LexisNexis in the UK and Ewin – who has the new title of Chief Software Architect (the only other person we know with that job title is Bill Gates of Microsoft) – will also report to the LexisNexis international board on a brief that includes taking Visualfiles into new markets.

Ewin said the deal, which coincided with the company’s 21st anniversary, would take the business forward in a way that would not have been possible if it had remained independent. Visualfiles will continue to supply case management software however Ewin said the benefits of the LexisNexis relationship would most strikingly be seen through integration with the M2 matter management, matter-centric system and its soon to be launched Manilla workflow and document assembly system, as they would deliver users the additional functionality of information portals and knowledge management.

Visualfiles’ long time accounts systems partner SOS said the relationship between the companies “will continue unchanged,” managing director Michael Platt adding he was confident customers would benefit “as our partnership evolves within this new framework.”

News in brief

KM software supplier embraces Microsoft
KM software specialist Solcara (0870 3332966) has embraced Microsoft in a big way, with the launch of version 2.0 of its SolSearch system, for searching multiple content sources with a single query, on .NET architecture, and its Client Partner portal product now available from within Microsoft SharePoint web pages. Solcara say SharePoint could halve the cost of deploying intranets.

New learning management system from TutorPro
TutorPro (01323 871870) has launched TutorEnterprise, a new learning management system that is available either inhouse or hosted (for small-to-mid-sized firms). It allows users to self-register for all types of training and track their progress and CPD credits.
Decision day looming for Hummingbird

The next few days will determine the future of the DMS supplier Hummingbird. A shareholders meeting is scheduled for 21st July to consider the $26.75 per share bid from Symphony Technology, followed a few days later by the board publishing its recommendations on an alternative and unsolicited bid, worth a dollar a share more, from rival DMS vendor OpenText. Although there is reportedly no love lost between the two companies, OpenText claims to already have the support of 40% of Hummingbird’s shareholders. Further developments will be reported on the Insider’s blog The Orange Rag.

Firms losing website plot?

Two recent studies suggest law firms may be losing the plot when it comes to websites. A study commissioned by the Law Society Gazette found that out of a sample of 17 top 100 law firms – including 12 top 25 firms – only one (Freshfields) passed the WCAG web content accessibility guidelines that have been around since 1999. In a similar vein, the latest Intendance (020 8871 1330) survey of 50 top 100 firm websites found that not only is there no apparent correlation between the quality of a site and the size of the firm (or size of its website development budget) but also there is a growing feeling that strategic objectives are not being met. For example two-thirds of the sample said ‘the full marketing and communications potential of the website is not being realised’ and nearly half said ‘we are not yet sufficiently focussed on the opportunities offered by the internet to streamline business processes’.

www.intendance.com

Climb every mountain

At the end of June, 11 members of the Bond Pearce IT team successfully completed the 3 Peaks challenge of climbing the highest peaks in Scotland, England and Wales (respectively Ben Nevis, Scafell and Snowdon) within 24 hours including travelling between the three mountains. Despite facing snow, fog, rain and occasional sun, they completed the hike with an hour to spare – and raised over £4000 for cancer research and mountain rescue charities. The firm’s IT director David Coates would like to thank all their sponsors, including legal IT suppliers Aderant, Interwoven, nFlow, Tikit and Workshare.

10 years ago today...

With all eyes – OK, a few eyes – currently focussed on the future of Hummingbird and who will acquire the company, it’s with a sense of déjà vu we note that ten years ago the previous owners of the DMS business – the PC Docs Group – were poised to acquire their UK distributors Quintec International. At that time PC Docs also owned the CMS Open (now part of Aderant) practice management systems business and had just secured the first sale of a CMS system to a UK firm, namely Reynolds Porter Chamberlain. Still in the realms of ‘firsts,’ Keystone Systems (also now part of Aderant) were talking about why Ashurst Morris Crisp had placed a £1 million + order for their PMS software – this deal was to later end in tears. The incoming president of the English Law Society, Tony Girling, stuck his neck out and claimed the Society’s High Street Starter Kit accounts & PMS system would be installed “in at least 500 firms in the first year” – in fact it managed just a handful of pilot sites before being dropped. And, AIM Professional and Linetime became the first legal IT suppliers to commence projects for dealing with the so-called Y2K millennium bug.

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