LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

Have Lexis and IRIS got their IT acts together ?

This month saw the two big consolidators in the UK legal IT market – LexisNexis and IRIS Legal – hold user conferences at which they unveiled new products and strategies that actually made sense.

First off the mark was LexisNexis announcing the launch of its new Streamline case/business process management, plus workflow and document assembly systems. This is the long delayed Visualfiles Manilla product however it has now been completely rewritten on SQL Server to avoid the earlier Progress-embedded-in-SQL kludge. Mishcon de Reya is already rolling out Streamline and we understand LexisNexis is currently in negotiations with two other top 100 firms.

Then it was the turn of IRIS Legal who took users (who were privately expecting this to be a case of 'another day, another strategy') by surprise with a rationalisation of the IRIS Law Enterprise (Videss) or IRIS Law Business (Mountain) strategy. After spending the summer resolving issues with both product lines, ILE now becomes the Progress platform, while ILB has enjoyed improvements to its architecture and scalability to make it the group's SQL Server platform for firms far larger than Mountain originally envisaged, which should make AIM users happier.

By way of icing on the cake, IRIS has also extended the support period for existing Videss ⇨

⇨ and AIM users to allow them more time to recover from the recession before opting for either ILE or ILB. Plus, it has launched IRIS Law Analytics, the first of a series of new modules that will run on both the ILE/Progress and ILB/SQL platforms. Analytics, as the name implies, is a management information/KPI reporting system.

October's big deals

Morisons drop Elite for Pilgrim
After six years of running Elite Enterprise, Morisons LLP has chosen Pilgrim Lawsoft for its next generation PMS. The firm says it felt they were 'in a cul-de-sac' with Enterprise and had 'some serious concerns about Elite 3E generally but data conversion in particular'.
• Bournemouth law firm Aldridge Brownlee is to replace its IRIS Mountain PMS with Pilgrim Lawsoft. The Neil Cameron Consulting Group advised on the selection process.

Cardiff firm pick TFB to replace IRIS Videss
Morgans Solicitors, one of the largest legal aid firms in Wales, has swapped out its IRIS Videss PMS in favour of Partner for Windows from Tikit TFB. The firm said a key factor was the extensive LSC case management and billing functionality provided by Partner for Windows.

FWBS to swap-out Visualfiles at TSoL
The Treasury Solicitor's Department has selected the FWBS Matter Centre product for its new case management system. In 2003, TSol entered into a £2.5 million, 5 year contract (*see Insider #143*) for a Visualfiles system that – apparently – never went live. Being a government deal, facts and figures are in short supply, but this looks to be one of the biggest case management orders this year, worth in excess of £1.5 million, with a rollout to 750 users by the end of next year and a potential total rollout to 1200 users. *More new wins on page 3...*

Ascertus asserting itself in law firms sector

We caught up with Roy Russell, managing director of Ascertus, earlier this month to hear how the company is moving beyond its traditional inhouse legal/corporate counsel market and into the broader law firms/professional services sector. Along with a growing volume of Autonomy iManage implementation work, include handling a recent migration from Documentum to Worksite, the company has also partnered with two US vendors of DMS add-on products.

The first of these is KwikTag from DocSolid. This is a document imaging application that allows users to scan and load documents into a Worksite repository. Although this sounds like just an another alternative to eCopy, Ascertus say the attraction is users profile a paper document directly into Worksite's standard screens, then tag the document with a bar-coded label. Bar code numbering is managed automatically by the software and links each document to the related Worksite profile. When convenient, users take a stack of pre-tagged documents to any digital copier or scanner for processing and the KwikTag server creates an OCR-ed PDF which is filed in the DMS repository. To-date, the biggest KwikTag site in the UK is at top 10 accountants PKF, where Ascertus has just completed an Autonomy iManage integration and roll-out to 1500 users.

The other new product is DocMinder, a document/task reminder system from WordTech, that allows users to circulate documents containing prompts. DocMinder has out-of-the-box integration with iManage, OpenText, SharePoint and Windows File Explorer. For more details, check out the online demo.
www.docsolid.com
www.wordtech.com/demo/docminder5overview.htm
• Jon Wainwright, previously with Visualfiles ⇨

⇨ and Interwoven, has joined Ascertus as business development manager.
www.ascertus.com

Eclipse has record year

Eclipse Legal Systems has reported a record turnover for its latest trading year to 30 June 2009, with turnover up 10% to £5.5 million. Highlights of the last 12 months include 84 new customer wins (not including existing user upgrades) amounting to 1500 new end-user licence sales. Key wins included DLA Piper, Hill Dickinson, Moore Blatch Resolve, Lees Solicitors and an as-yet unannounced local authority.

More firms offering online services

Two more law firms have launched online service offerings. Canter Levin & Berg, in the North-West, has launched LawOptions.co.uk. This is a 24/7 consumer and private client free advice service backed up by 'a catalogue of fixed cost products at competitive pricing' offered from 8:00am to 8:00pm six days a week. Partner Ian Fitzpatrick says the firm is building the brand to "establish a clear positioning in the consumer marketplace ahead of increasing competition following the Legal Services Act. Clients will be able to track their cases online, via Sky TV or Virgin Media using a password protected area to review progress on their cases. **www.lawoptions.co.uk**

The second firm is debt recovery specialist Lovetts which has added web messaging to its existing Case Manager client extranet portal. Web messaging is a browser-based instant messaging facility that also allows clients to transfer documents to Lovetts.

October's new wins

Cameron McKenna and Bedell take Templates
CMS Cameron McKenna and Jersey-based Bedell Group are the latest organisations to order the new Legal Templates Plus document production system from Microsystems. Bedell has also licensed Knowledge Partnership from Microsystems.

More new business for Linetime
Linetime is now working with North-East law firm Gordon Brown Associates on an IT infrastructure refresh, including upgrades to the latest versions of Windows, Exchange Server and SQL Server. And, a firm that prefers to stay anonymous – but it operates in the mortgage repossession market – is implementing Linetime's Liberate Signature Edition (SE) case management software.

Macfarlanes selects Recommind for search
Macfarlanes LLP has selected Recommind's MindServer Search system to enhance the firm's knowledge management infrastructure. The platform will be integrated with the firm's existing data repositories, including its Solcara KM system and Autonomy iManage DMS.

ClearPeople complete Salans web upgrade
ClearPeople has completed a full design and functionality upgrade of Salans' website, which includes a predictive people search directory and will eventually support six languages.
www.salans.com
• ClearPeople is hosting a 9:00am till lunch seminar on business productivity with Sharepoint at Microsoft's London offices on 6 November. To register email marketing@clearpeople.com

DPS Software branches into new niches
Three new wins by DPS Software – Nottingham Trent University, Jackson Parton Shipping and Davies & Davies Associates – have required the company to develop a series of bespoke applications, including special log-in rights for HR departments, matter management with digital dictation, and a combined accounts and case management system to handle alternative dispute resolution (ADR) work in the construction ⇨

⇨ industry. Other DPS new business includes Clark Willis Law, Levenes and Tucker Turner Kingsley Wood – the latter two implementing the new DPS KPI reports scheduler application.

Opes' VAT validation goes into two firms
Opes Consulting's VAT validation package has now been installed at Clyde & Co and Field Fisher Waterhouse. The system tightly integrates Elite Enterprise with the EU VAT Number database.
www.opesconsulting.co.uk

Clarke Willmott to pilot outsourcing
Clarke Willmott is piloting the outsourcing of typing work to South Africa with Exigent.

Real success in the virtual world
Personal injury lawyers Balinda & Co have signed up with managed service provider e-know.net for Microsoft Office 2007, Exchange, Blackberry Enterprise Server plus SOS case and practice management delivered on a fully hosted basis.

Small firms not spending enough on IT to function?

The Neil Cameron Consulting Group (NCCG) has published the results of its first survey into the size and shape of UK law firm IT departments.

Inevitably the key financial ratio is IT expenditure as a proportion of turnover. According to NCCG, in the 80's-to-90's this was around 3.5%-to-4%, thereafter there was a slow but steady rise to 5%-to-6% in medium and large firms, with a high-water mark of 13% in one very large firm. However the latest survey shows IT spend is now back down to 4.2% of turnover.

The survey also reveals that while the results for the top three peer groups (Top 50, 51-100, 101-150) are similar, alarmingly firms below the top 250 are spending only 1.8% of turnover on IT. NCCG question whether a "functional and reliable IT infrastructure" can be obtained for that level of investment.

The overall ratio of IT staff to total number of users is 1:32, although this varied across the peer groups with a ratio of 1:29 at the top end and 1:46 at the lower end. The ratio of specifically Help Desk staff to total users is 1:101, which is a fairly consistent ratio across the peer groups. Another staffing ratio highlighted in the survey is the number of professional support lawyers (PSLs) to fee earners. The survey results give an overall ratio of 1:60. This is down on NCCG's earlier information from several years ago when the ratio was typically in the range of 1:30-to-50 for larger firms. The results suggest that of all the job types covered in the survey, the positions of PSL and training staff are the first to be cut back in a recession.

Another issue of perennial interest to law firm IT directors is the structure of IT departments. Best ⇨

⇨ practice shows the IT departments need to provide: departmental management, IT strategy, project management, operations, business analysis, development, user support and training. The results show the largest staffing category in the IT department is help desk/user support with about one-third of all IT personnel in these roles, thereafter 15%-to-25% are in operations, 7%-to-10% in training, 14%-to-18% in development, and smaller ratios in both business analysis and project management. Results show contract staff make up 10% of department staffing in larger firms, and 3%-to-5% in smaller firms. Staff turnover ranges from 4% to 8%.

Commenting on the results, Neil Cameron said "Firms are going to look at these figures and, if they are in the area of the norm, think that they are engaged in best practice. If they have a smaller IT department than the average will pride themselves that they are more efficient. And, if they have a larger than the norm, hope they are delivering a higher level of service. But one thing is certain, it is easier to work out and to justify the level of IT resources required by a firm if it has a clear and articulate exposition of its IT objectives and a documented set of measurable IT service levels. This is by no means true for all law firms."
• A full analysis of the results is available on the NCCG website at **www.neilcameronconsulting.com**

Lewis Silkin live on 3E

Lewis Silkin has rolled out its new Elite 3E PMS. The firm selected 3E to replace a LexisNexis Axxia Arista legacy system, which was described as "no longer supporting the firm's strategic direction or providing essential management information". Director of finance & administration Edward Gordon-Hall said "We invested in 3E because it will enable us to drive efficiency throughout the firm, improve client management and ultimately increase profitability."

Digital dictation news

Muckle switch from Dictaphone to Bighand

Newcastle-upon-Tyne law firm Muckle LLP has replaced its stand-alone Dictaphone digital dictation system for Bighand's DDS workflow technology. The system has been rolled out to 100 fee earners and secretaries/PAs.

Criminal law firm goes with speech recognition

Criminal law specialist Powell Spencer & Partners in north-west London has deployed speech recognition. The system was delivered by SRC and is based on Nuance Dragon 10 software. Practice manager Diana Du Bruyn said that while the firm saw the benefits of digital dictation, cuts in legal aid funding meant they could no longer afford teams of secretarial staff, with the result that fee earners were having to do an increasing amount of self-typing. The implementation followed a pilot that showed users spent 'considerably less time' creating documents and emails using speech recognition, freeing up more time for fee earning work. Like many other practices, the firm first looked at – and rejected – speech recognition some years ago but returned to it after seeing a demonstration of the latest version of Dragon.

Cloud-based dictation implemented in 24 hours

London litigation practice Devereaux Solicitors has gone live with nFlowLive.com, the cloud-based Dictation-as-a-Service (DaaS) solution from nFlow. Previously users of analogue tape, the firm trialled two systems before selecting nFlow. Implementation was carried in conjunction with Devereaux's ASP/cloud specialists Accesspoint Technologies and includes support for offline working and connection to a South African-based outsourced transcription service. Senior partner John Ioannou described the speed and ease of implementation as "staggering... from the time we confirmed our order to nFlow, the solution was up and running in under 24 hours." The firm is now looking to deploy nFlow's Blackberry solution.

Delegates signing up for Bighand conference

Bighand's EMEA user conference, scheduled to take place at Vinopolis in London on 5th November, now has over 270 delegates signed up for the event – this is already 45% up on last year. With two new product launches to announce (a back-end speech recognition module and an extension of the workflow to handle documents) the conference's start time has now been pushed back to 10:00am.

Will new Blackberry create a Storm?

Last week RIM and Vodafone announced the launch of the new Blackberry Storm 2 device in the UK/EMEA market. This is RIM's second attempt to challenge the iPhone in the touch-screen sector but will it generate a better response than the original Storm 9500? Despite a number of DDS software vendors, including Bighand and nFlow, having developed neat touch-screen interactive record and playback interfaces for the device, it has hardly set the world on fire. One DDS vendor said that over the past three months, they had not found a single law firm that even had one, let alone wanted to use it as a digital recorder.

Scanning for costs

Copitrak's inaugural user conference in London earlier this month produced some interesting results from a survey on law firm cost recovery trends and future plans. Scanning emerged as the hot topic and while very few firms are currently recharging for scanning, two-thirds of the firms present were keen to introduce it. The survey also revealed a concerted movement towards tracking mobile phone costs – both for recharging and to clamp down on private calls. And, there was growing interest in the adoption of secure printing/document release, with the savings in paper and toner bringing both 'green' and financial benefits.

New product launches

Olswang roll out new records management

Olswang has become the latest law firm (there are also two other top 100 firms we are not allowed to mention) to roll out iCompli Records Management from UK systems developer Intandem Software Solutions. All sales, implementation and support is handled exclusively in the legal and professional services sectors by risk and compliance specialists Legal RM. iCompli's selling point is that its processes were designed from the outset to work in a digital world on web browsers, whereas many of its competitors began life as systems to computerise existing physical records management operations. However Chris Giles of Legal RM says the combination of iCompli's SaaS billing model, with no minimum term offering, condensed project timescales and demonstrable ROIs make it a no brainer. For example, despite having to integrate data from seven legacy systems, Olswang was able to go-live in less than a month and say iCompli has already reduced file handling time by 70%. Another firm estimates the saving in staff time equates to £50,000 a month, while another user site reports that since rolling out iCompli, it has regained use of five meeting rooms that were previously used for file storage.
www.legal-rm.com/index.php/white-papers

New document assembly system launched

O2Smart has launched a new document assembly product called XpressDox. According to director Chris Pearson, formerly with GhostFill, "It's taken a long time but document assembly is gaining acceptance as law firms realise knowledge re-use in the form of templates has a payback period of a couple of months." XpressDox is XML-based and installs as an add-in to Word 2003 however Pearson says a major advantage is XpressDox caters for users of all skill levels, so even basic Microsoft Word users "can be up and running in a matter of minutes". Live working copies of the ⇨

⇨ software are available in a trial basis.
www.xpressdox.com

Pay as you go for €1 a day

Another new software company, this time County Dublin-based eXpd8 Ltd, which has launched a case, time and billing management system for solicitors. The software can be purchased outright however it is also available on a pay-as-you-use basis for €uro1 per user, per day (including support) billed monthly, so smaller firms and start-ups can avoid the big capital outlays associated with traditional software procurement.
www.expd8.com + **www.1euroaday.com**

TFB partner with eCopy

TFB and eCopy have developed a connector to scan paperwork and then directly import and attach the documents to the appropriate files within the TFB Partner for Windows case management system. National licensing law practice John Gaunt & Partners is the first firm to go live with the eCopy TFB Connector software.

FloSuite 6 launched

FloSuite has launched version 6 of its eponymous BPM/case/matter management software. New features include enhanced Microsoft Outlook integration, support for 64-bit operating and the latest versions of Windows and SQL, plus additional SharePoint Web parts. FloSuite is running launch events in early November.
www.flosuite.com/seminar

People & Places

Eglinton becomes Iron Mountain senior V-P

Iton Mountain has appointed Peter Eglinton as its new senior vice-president for its UK, Ireland and Norway operations. Eglinton was previously managing director of Christian Salvesen's transport division and spent 17 years at Exel.

E-conveyancing news

NLIS channel licence latest

Land Data, the NLIS (National Land Information Service) regulator, has renewed SearchFlow's licence to provide electronic property searches for a further 10 years – SearchFlow provides over 80 separate due diligence searches. And, Thames Water, which runs the Property Insight search business, has been awarded a 10 year licence to provide Con29R drainage and water search data.

Meanwhile TM says there is a choice

Meanwhile TM Search Choice says it will break the NLIS search monopoly by providing a low cost alternative electronic service of official searches direct from all the local authorities in England & Wales. According to John Carolan, managing director of TM Search Choice "The annual cost of an NLIS licence plus a £20.60 per search charge has been cost-prohibitive and has delayed the Government's vision of national e-conveyancing. It is the consumer who has been suffering from a lack of a cost-effective service to date."
www.tmsearchchoice.co.uk

Redbrick to launch case management in 2010

Redbrick Solutions, the company behind the ConveyanceLink service, plans to launch a new practice wide case management system in early 2010. It is described as being "a slim line version of their ConveyanceLink conveyancing case management" application and will have modules for handling personal injury, wills, probate, litigation and matrimonial work.
www.redbricksolutions.co.uk

LSSA lobbying HMLR

The Legal Software Suppliers Association says it is lobbying the Land Registry for the introduction of 'per transaction' charging for access to the HMLR Business Gateway as it believes this will encourage a wider take-up within the industry.

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The Backpage

Putting your technology where your mouth is

Our friends in the North (well Bradford) at Eclipse Legal Systems have thrown down a challenge. Namely how many legal software vendors use their own systems internally? Departmental-wise, Eclipse use their Proclaim case management software in sales for CRM, in support for call logging and resolution, in project management for, er, project management, in training for booking and scheduling, and in accounts for client data. Can anyone beat this?

A blast from the past

A recent trawl through LinkedIn reveals that Denis Corr of DocMan Productivity Systems has re-emerged again on the legal IT scene. We last encountered Corr in the mid-1990s, back in the days when Wordperfect still ruled the world, with his DACS document automation and file management system. In fact it was Corr who was responsible for Insider editor Charles Christian's hair turning white, when he was given a lift in Corr's vintage Aston Martin from the old Avenue Legal Systems offices in Fareham along the M27 to the Eastleigh railway station. "Time was tight," says Christian "so Corr put his foot down, with the needle on the speedometer seldom falling below 120mph. Probably – there again I had my eyes tightly shut most of the way. I caught my train and by Basingstoke I was breathing normally again."

It was 10 years ago today...

October 1999 saw the first ever Legal IT Forum, or *GlenLegal* as it was then known, at Gleneagles in Scotland. Highlights, along with the near inhuman volumes of alcohol consumed, were Richard Susskind debuting his *legal IT continuum*, aka *the Susskind Grid*, and his comment that large City firms "still don't get it" when it comes to the internet; plus Davis Polk & Wardwell saying Six Sigma was the future for law firm management. Other news stories included growing concern over the potential impact of Y2K – by then just 70 days away, plus the news that Williams Lea was finalising the acquisition of Elliott Slone, which in those days was the largest remaining independent litigation support services company in the UK.

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Next issue...

The next Insider (No. 225) is published on 19 November 2009 (editorial deadline 13 November). In the meantime keep up with the latest legal IT news from around the world by visiting our blog at www.theorangerag.com