
CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO WHAT'S HOT (AND WHAT'S NOT) IN LAW OFFICE SYSTEMS

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NO ROOM FOR COMPLACENCY SAYS LSSA

Commenting on the completion of the first major survey of law firm customers carried out by the Legal Software Suppliers Association, LSSA chairman John Wilde said that while the results were good, there was "no room for complacency",

LSSA sent out survey forms to 1400 firms and received responses from 426, employing in total over 10,000 partners and fee earners. Suppliers and their services were rated from one to five in each category (5 = very good, 4 = good, 3 = satisfactory, 2 = poor, 1 = very poor).

Asked about the software they were sold, 67% of firms awarded a "4" or "5" in terms of whether it fulfilled their expectations. 61% of firms also rated the quality of telephone support provided by suppliers as either "good" or "very good". However, when it came to training, only 41% felt it was worth a "4" or "5", with the majority plumping for "satisfactory".

According to John Wilde: "The aim of the survey was not to pat ourselves on the back but to provide a benchmark of customer satisfaction against which we could measure future improvements... Although there is no room for complacency, we were gratified that the results do not bear out past criticism, notably by the Robson Rhodes survey, of the levels of service provided by legal software suppliers."

The survey results also revealed that only 45% of firms had made any assessment of the impact of Year 2000 computer "double digit" date problems ➔

➔ on their practices. Although as according to the DTI some 85% of UK businesses in general are still unaware of this problem, Wilde felt that while it may be "worrying" this finding was "not unexpected".

☞ **Comment...** Explaining the poorer rating for training, John Wilde said "a change in culture" was needed among law firms "to stop corner cutting on training when budgets are tight."
...continued on page 2 ➔

HSSK LIVES TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY

The long running saga of the English Law Society's High Street Starter Kit (HSSK) low cost legal system project looks set to continue, at least for another month.

After deciding to put the project on hold at its December council meeting, so a more detailed report on the HSSK's technical and commercial prospects could be considered at the January council meeting last Thursday (23rd), the Law Society discovered it had such a crowded agenda that the HSSK item has had to be put back until the next council meeting on Thursday 6th March.

A Law Society spokesman told **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** that the January meeting, which lasted nearly double the normal length of time, had a number of major contentious issues on its agenda including changes to advocacy qualifications and the rules governing the selling of property by solicitors, as well as a report on pending claims against the Solicitors Indemnity Fund, leaving no room for a discussion on the fate of the HSSK. □

Technology news

☞ Digital

Equipment has cut prices on its server and workstation products based around the high performance Alpha processor chip by between 12 and 47%. The biggest cuts are on the higher end servers, amounting in some cases to a saving of around £16,000.

☞ Olivetti has now completed the sale of its PC arm to Piedmont International.

This is a private company formed specially for the deal by Edward Gottesman, a London-based lawyer associated with the European venture capital group Centenary.

☞ Dataware Technologies (☎ 01895 827200)

has launched Visual Basic for BRS/Search for organisations who want to customise Windows-based information retrieval and publishing applications.

LOOSEMORES TAKE NEW AVENUE WISDOM SYSTEM

Loosemores of Cardiff, who were the first firm in South Wales to win BS 5750 quality standards accreditation, are continuing their pioneering ways by now becoming one of the first firms in the UK to install the new Wisdom integrated practice management system, which was launched earlier this year by Avenue Legal Systems.

Loosemores had previously been using the old Kienzle Kisol Gold system for accounts, running alongside Avenue's DACS (Document Assembly & Control System) for case management.

With this legacy it was perhaps not surprising that according to the firm's financial controller Stephen Parry-Langdon, the choice of a new system "quickly became a two horse race" between Arista (Axxia's successor to the Kisol system) and Avenue.

In the event, the factor tipping the scales in favour of Avenue was that Wisdom could offer full integration with the DACS software (which is widely used throughout Loosemores in a number of applications, including conveyancing, litigation, criminal and personal injury work) whereas Arista could not.

The accounts software is already installed and, with Loosemores' staff now undergoing final training, is scheduled to go "live" by mid February. The other Wisdom modules will be rolled out at the firm over the next four months. ☐

LSSA SURVEY RESULTS

☞ *continued from front page...* It was also, said Wilde, a "false economy" that results in a less productive use of computer systems and more time wasted making telephone calls to suppliers' support services.

In fact this is an old, frequently cited excuse and does contain an element of truth. Law firms are notorious for ➡

☞ scrimping on training budgets or only sending a minimum number of staff and then expecting them to train the rest of the office under the "sitting next to Nellie" principle.

However, this must be offset against the lawyers' complaint that too often IT suppliers' trainers come across as bored, uninspired and lacklustre in their performance and presentations. Indeed it is noticeable that a growing number of firms now seem to be opting to recruit their own inhouse trainers rather than rely on external suppliers.

Perhaps LSSA members should be doing more to ensure their trainers are fully motivated and not suffering from repetitive refrain syndrome? ☐

VAT ON LAND ON DISK

Chartered accountants Francis Clark (☎ 01626 206206) have produced a new version of their on-disk guide to VAT on land and property transactions.

The guide uses a yes/no approach to take the user through a series of questions to determine the VAT liability of the supply. Francis Clark say the disk should be of assistance in the majority of transactions property lawyers encounter, including dealing with the concept of self-supply in respect of construction services and building land.

The guide is supplied on a single DOS format disk and retails for £116.33 (inc VAT). ☐

PCW CLUB CALLS IT A DAY

The Lawyers PCW Club, which has been supporting users of the old Amstrad PCW and its CP/M Locoscript software for almost ten years, has decided to close.

With Locoscript-based PCWs no longer in production and conventional PCs now so economically priced, secretary Keith Simons said the need for the Club had disappeared. Surplus club funds will be donated to the Solicitors Benevolent Association. ☐

USE OF INTRANETS SET TO SOAR

A new study by the technology research consultancy Ovum estimates that the use of intranets will expand rapidly over the next five years, with browser software installed on 64% of European desktops by the year 2002.

The study also predicts the use of intranets will evolve from the position today – where most intranets are only used to *publish* static information, such as inhouse telephone directories – to one in which they are used to support workflow and group working activities.

Ovum does not however see intranets emerging as “groupware killers” that will eliminate established messaging and collaborative products such as Lotus Notes. Lotus itself believes its new Domino Web application, running in conjunction with Notes, will continue to give it an edge over rival systems from Microsoft and Netscape in terms of both price and functionality.

☞ **Related Developments...** Lotus is now shipping version 4.5 of Domino but as there have been reports of a possible security flaw which might allow an unauthorised Web browser to access Notes data via Domino, the company has produced a security patch Domino 4.5a which is available from the Lotus Web site at <http://www.Lotus.com>

☞ Novell UK (☎ 01344 724000) has launched a new version of its IntranetWare product for smaller organisations wanting a secure platform to support up to 25 networked users at a single site. Code-named Kayak, Novell say the system offers easy installation and simplified management.

☞ Systems house Linkhand Image (☎ 0171 357 6005) is now acting as the UK distributor for Open Text Corporation’s Livelink “web-enabled” document management and workflow system. ➔

➔ Linkhand’s Chris Monro says the closest competitor is Lotus Notes and suggests that because it allows full text search and produces an audit trail, Live-link is a viable product for firms wanting a secure platform to support distribution of information and collaboration between staff across an intranet in a “virtual project environment”.

☞ **Comment...** In December we reported on Jeffrey Green Russell’s new intranet and reports suggest a number of other firms are in the throes of developing their own intranets. There is also growing interest in the technology among legal IT suppliers. For example, at its user conference in the autumn, Elite Information Systems previewed its new “lawyers desktop” which is based around an intranet/Web browser/hypertext links combination rather than the more conventional Windows interface.

If 1996 was the year of the Internet then 1997 looks as if it will be the year of the intranet. The US research group Forrester echoes the views of Ovum that the trend towards intranets (or private Web sites) is “unstoppable” and it seems only a matter of time before they take off in a big way in the legal sector. ☐

LOTIES LATEST

Votes for the 1997 Law Office Technology Awards – the LOTIES – have been arriving in a steady stream since we published the short-listed nominations in the last edition (see p.4 of Issue No 30).

After just over a fortnight Axxia, Elite, Hexar and Carpe Diem are currently leading in their respective categories, with London media lawyers Olswang the front-runners for the Best Legal Web site.

In Brief magazine will also be carrying a copy of the nominations and voting form in its February edition. However, there is still plenty of time left to submit your votes as the closing date is 10th April 1997. The winners will be formally announced in June. ☐

SOS expand

Legal systems supplier Solicitors Own Software has taken on two additional staff for its sales team: Elaine Bessell and Nicola Strawbridge. It has also recruited two new software trainers: Maria Coombs, who previously worked as an IT trainer in a large law firm, and Paula McRobie, whose accounts management experience includes working with the Legal Aid Board.

New number

As a result of a change in the US area codes system, the phone number for ProSoft (of Carpe Diem fame) has changed to ☎ +1-972 386 7769. The new fax number is +1-972 386 4491.

The road to Hong Kong Solicitors Own Software (☎ 01225 448664) has won its first major international order for its Windows based accounts and time recording system. Intellectual property specialists Rouse & Co originally installed the SOS system in their London head office and then chose it for their Beijing and Hong Kong branches. The 15 user system in Hong Kong is scheduled to go "live" later this spring and Rouse & Co now also plan to install SOS in their new Dubai and Jakarta offices.

LWD chose RightFax Lovell White Durrant has chosen RightFax from Kommunicate as the basis for its new fax room operations. Kommunicate won the order in a head to head competition with Hexar's rival FaxSwitch system.

MICROSOFT UP THE ANTE WITH OFFICE '97

The race to dominate the personal computing world took another turn earlier this month with the launch of Microsoft's new Office '97 suite. But should lawyers be getting excited ?

The four core applications that have been with Office from the outset – Word wordprocessing, the Excel spreadsheet, PowerPoint for presentations and the Access database (only available in the Professional Edition) – are once again present although all are claimed to now be even easier to operate thanks to new automation features and help facilities called *wizards*. For example, with Excel 97 you can use plain English (ie “= fees Jan + disbursements Feb”) to create formulas instead of cell references.

In addition, the old Schedule+ diary/organiser and Windows 95 Exchange In-box have been combined to create a new program called Outlook, that provides diary, address book, to-do lists, group scheduling and email all within one application.

The thinking is that in the real world people perform *tasks* rather than arbitrarily defined software applications. For instance, if you wanted to circulate a draft budget to a partnership committee, a computer would traditionally have you jumping between separate address book, spreadsheet, wordprocessing, to-do lists and electronic mail applications.

By contrast Outlook aims to integrate all these functions. There is also a novel *Message Recall* feature that allows you to halt and delete an outgoing email message to, for example, your managing partner should you have second thoughts and decide to rephrase it a little more tactfully.

As might be expected, the new suite comes complete with a World Wide Web browser for Internet access – in this case Microsoft's Internet Explorer 3.0. What makes the Office '97 approach ▶

interesting is the browser becomes an integral part of the desktop, whereas previously browser and office automation were treated as separate applications between which you had to import and export data.

What this therefore means is you can create a document on your PC, convert it into a format that can be read on the Web (as an HTML file) and then *publish* it either on the public Internet or across an internal practice-wide intranet.

With Internet/intranet technology now seen as the way a growing number of organisations will in future communicate information between offices, clients and staff (see also story on p.3) the degree of Net-friendly integration and intranet-readiness Office '97 seemingly offers makes it an ideal tool for the next generation of office automation projects designed to implement the so-called digital communications revolution.

Microsoft Office '97 is available now and has a UK street price of around £330 for the Standard Edition and £430 for the Professional Edition (which also includes Access). Upgrades from earlier versions of Microsoft Office or competitive products are between £170 and £280. The software will run on Windows 95 and Windows NT 4.0 Workstation platforms.

☞ **The competition...** Netscape and Corel are collaborating on a product called WordPerfect Suite 8. Scheduled for an April launch and intended as a direct competitor to Office '97, this will combine Corel's office automation software with the new Netscape Communicator system, which includes the Navigator browser plus email and groupware facilities.

The Lotus offering is SmartSuite 97. Now in final beta testing pending an April launch, it too will run on Windows 95/NT 4.0 hardware and promises close integration with Lotus Notes. All six elements are being upgraded to 32-bit applications and if the current Lotus range is anything to go by, SmartSuite 97 may well be competitively priced. □

Need help or information ?

If you need a phone number, product name, contact point or any other elusive item of information concerning legal technology - including being put in contact with potential partners or new recruits - just call the Insider Info line on ☎ 01379 687518.

👉 Diary dates

If you have an exhibition, seminar or user group meeting you would like including in our Diary Dates section please contact the editorial office.

VDU SUPPLIER WARNED OVER SALES LITERATURE

Wyse Technology, one of the largest suppliers of VDU terminals in the UK, has been warned by the Health & Safety Executive to stop distributing sales literature that contains "misleading information" about display screen regulations.

The literature in question is headed "Important Manufacturer's Notice. Do you have any of the following terminals (VDUs) on your site? Then immediate action is required". It goes on to say "As a responsible manufacturer, Wyse has been advising customers of its conformance to the EC Directive on Display Screen Equipment 90/270/EEC, specifically ISO 9241 parts 3 and 4 which deal with the ergonomic attributes of VDUs and keyboards respectively. This notification is to advise you that the deadline for conformance to this directive is 31st December 1996."

However, in a letter dated 20th December 1996, Nigel Watson of the HSE wrote to Wyse's European marketing director John Cummins to express his "concern" at some of the document's claims. In particular, Mr Watson pointed out there are no "1996 Display Screen Regulations", no "Ergonomic Directive" and "no legal requirement to comply with ISO 9241".

The HSE letter also says the Government is anxious that employers are not "misled" by hardware suppliers and ends with Mr Watson asking Wyse "to ensure that the errors I have pointed out are not repeated in any material you send out from now on."

👉 **Comment...** The relevant rules are the *Health & Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992* which have been in force since January 1993. The HSE (☎ 01787 881165) also publishes a useful *Display screen equipment work: Guidance on Regulations*. booklet, price £5. ☐

DIARY DATES

☎ **4 February** - **How to run a profitable legal aid practice** with speaker from T V Edwards. **6 February** - **How to get more conveyancing business**. The seminars are organised by DPS and take place at IBM Southbank in London. Admission is free and there are sessions at 10.00am and 2.00pm on both days. Call DPS on ☎ 0181 882 8811 for details.

☎ **10 & 11 February** - **ACUA Conference** The AIM user group event this year focusses on "the future of law", speakers include the new Law Society secretary general Jane Betts. Call Roger Hancock on ☎ 01789 296096 for details.

☎ **25 & 26 February** - **Information Systems for Lawyers** The annual Lawyer conference and exhibition, at the London Marriott, has twin themes this year: exploiting existing technologies and planning for the future. Admission £697 (+ VAT), call Centaur Conferences on ☎ 0171 287 5000 for details.

☎ **26 February** - **1997 Law Office IT Awareness Day** The ILCA conference and exhibition at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. The event is sponsored by **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** and the theme is the digital communications revolution. Admission from £95, call ILCA on ☎ 0181 294 2887 for details.

☎ **5 & 6 March** - **Software for Solicitors** Technology exhibition featuring major legal systems suppliers, at the Bristol Marriott Hotel. Admission free, call Truemist on ☎ 0181 742 3399 for details.

☎ **13 & 14 March** - **Communications & Law '97** The Society for Computers & Law's annual conference. Day one looks at intranet technology, email and legal business opportunities on the Web. The second day focuses on Internet law and regulation, including forum shopping. At Great George Street, London. Call the SCL on ☎ 0117 923 7393 for details. ☐

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COMMUNIC@TIONS FUTURES

Web operators are welcome to create links to the **LTi** site at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/cloudnine/> **LTi** is a member of the HTML Writers Guild and supports the Electronic Frontier Foundation campaign for free speech on the Internet.

NEW REGULATORY BODY TO BASE SERVICES ON WEB

The newly formed Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) is to use a Web site as its principal mechanism for supplying the latest information about its licensing scheme and registered activity centres.

The AALA is a statutory body that was established in April 1996, by the Department for Education & Employment in the wake of the Lyme Bay canoeing tragedy, to improve safety and regulate the providers of "activity" holidays.

According to AALA chief executive John Walsh-Heron "Having considered several options, AALA chose the Internet as the most efficient way of providing consistently up-to-date information, quickly and cost-effectively to interested individuals and organisations."

The AALA site is at <http://www.aala.org> and was developed by Imagnet at <http://www.imagnet.co.uk> □

DOMAIN NAME REGISTRATIONS RISING

Over 15,000 Internet sites with a ".co.uk" domain name have been registered in the UK since the beginning of August. October saw a record 3816 registrations but in even December there were in excess of 3000.

☞ **Comment...** With a growing number of law firms now somewhat belatedly recognising the opportunity of offering domain name registration services, it must be consoling to know that this is ➡

➡ still an expanding market. Following the *Harrods* decision (see p.7 of Issue 29 for first report) the legal position has also become more clearly defined.

We are also now starting to see more legal textbooks on the subject. Ten months after Graham Smith of Bird & Bird went into print with *Internet Law Regulation* (FT Law & Tax, price £85), Clive Gringras of Nabarro Nathanson has published *The Laws of the Internet* (Butterworths, price £85). Call ☎ 0171 400 2973 to take advantage of a 30 days free trial offer. □

YOUR TRAINS TONIGHT

Back in the days of the old Prestel viewdata service, one of the more useful facilities on the system was the comprehensive listing of British Rail timetables. BR's successor Railtrack has now launched a comparable service on the Web at <http://www.railtrack.co.uk/travel/>

The new site is interactive – along with full passenger service timetables, you can input the desired arrival time and receive a list of trains that will meet the deadline. It also contains additional travel information – such as why leaves on the track really can delay journeys.

Initially the site will be updated twice weekly but Railtrack intend to carry real-time information so, for example, you can check the site before leaving the office to see if the train you were hoping to catch is still running on time. □

PHONING WITH NORWEB

Blackburn solicitors Forbes & Partners has chosen Norweb Communications to supply telecoms services to its offices.

Norweb (☎ 0161 875 7547), a subsidiary of United Utilities, operates a public fibre optic network in the North-West that allows subscribers to take advantage of a lower cost regional tariff and so reduce their phone bills. Manchester firm Kristina Harrison has also recently moved to Norweb. □

Hot tip 1

According to Nick Holmes of legal publishing consultants Information for Lawyers, the key to successful Web site design is "stylish restraint" with full use made of simple HTML coding and colour "without relying unduly on large images".

Hot tip 2

Solicitor Ravi Shankar says don't waste your time with Internet phones. He has tried both I-Phone and FreeTel but doesn't use them anymore because "it's just too frustrating getting cut off all the time or having to wait 5 seconds before the person you are talking to hears what you say".

☞ His advice is rather than mess about with the Internet, if you want cheap overseas phone calls, shop around for one of the telecoms or cable companies offering an alternative to the BT service.

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Coming soon...
More developments in speech recognition plus we talk to the winners and runners-up in this year's SCL award. All in the next issue No 32 out: 10 February.

Alexis Byter's COMPUTER LORE

The cost of selling

The story in the last edition about the increasing "cost of selling" IT systems to law firms has prompted two readers to add their own comments.

One salesman, who prefers to remain anonymous, admits his company now "qualifies" all incoming sales leads to see whether it is commercially worthwhile to follow them up.

Adopting the view that it takes just as long and costs just as much (in terms of preparing quotes, visiting offices, giving presentations etc) to sell a £30,000 system to a 5 partner firm, as it does a £300,000 system to a 50 partner firm, the company is now concentrating its resources on the bigger end of the market.

Apparently one of the biggest problems is the growing trend for firms - particularly those using the services of consultants - to require prospective suppliers to complete huge invitation to tender (ITTs) documents.

But just how big are they? David Thorpe, who heads the UK operations for Elite, says his "ITT from hell" was a tender he dealt with in the autumn. According to the monitoring facilities on his PC, the completed document ran to just over 200 pages, contained 49,000 words and took a total of 102 hours to prepare! ➔

Yesterday's technology?

A chance remark by a reader who thought it sad the High Court had recently issued a practice direction that draft orders for injunctions should be submitted on disk in WordPerfect 5.1 for DOS format, recently prompted a furious debate on LINK between the supporters and opponents of yesterday's technology.

According to Laurie West-Knights, who as well as being a barrister is also a vice-chairman of Society for Computers & Law, the advantage of 5.1 for DOS is that it is the lowest common denominator everyone can convert to and from. In effect "ASCII with formatting".

Solicitor and legal author Nigel Morris-Cotterill took a rather different view describing the old DOS version of WordPerfect as "hard to use, hard to train on, alien to most people trained on any program in the past five years and out-moded in almost every way".

He also suggests the Lord Chancellor's Department shot itself in the foot over the *Judith* IT for judges project by supplying them with expensive Windows-compatible laptops when all they actually needed were cheap low spec PCs on which to run DOS programs. "It seems the LCD has been locked into a time warp from which escape will be difficult" says Morris-Cotterill.

Nigel, it could have been worse, the LCD could have opted for CP/M. ☐

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