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ALL CHANGE AT THE BARBICAN

When the UK’s leading legal technology event – the Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition – kicks off at London’s Barbican Centre in June, the show will witness one of the biggest shake-ups in its 14 year history.

Within the last few weeks Quill Computer Systems, MSS Management Support Systems, Timeslice and Videss Computer Systems have all confirmed they will not be attending the 1997 event. This is in addition to AIM Professional and Access Legal Systems, who announced they were pulling out last year, and major suppliers such as Miles 33 and Norwel who ceased attending in recent years.

However David Warren, of the event’s organisers Truemist Professional, is unfazed by this, pointing out that the cancellations have merely made room for the record number of companies queuing up for a space at the show.

These include major names, such as British Telecom, Reuters and Xerox, as well as a growing number of overseas companies, such as World Software and Corprasoft (see separate story on page 7) from the USA, and Falcon Software (no relation to the old barristers system - see page 2) from Belgium.

Other new faces include TikIt, Trace Solutions, ITC, Michael Software and Waterlows. The American PC Docs group, which last year took over UK distributor Quintec, is also promising to have a major presence at the event to promote its CMS Open system.

Warren believes the new exhibitors will create an interesting change of emphasis at the show, with a shift towards the increasingly vital topic of digital communications, including the Internet and intranets.

Truemist are also introducing a number of other innovations this year, including improved facilities for exhibitors and a conference area where seminars and workshop sessions can be held. Changes are also being introduced to the regional Software for Solicitors show, with the autumn Midlands and Northern events being combined in a two day exhibition at the Manchester G-Mex Centre in October.

Comment... So why are the likes of Quill, AIM, MSS and Norwel no longer going to the Barbican?

One reason is clearly cost. John Wilde of AIM makes no secret of the fact he believes the money spent on a presence at the Barbican could be put to better use in other forms of marketing activity, such as the regional seminar programme the company has been running since the autumn.

According to Wilde, it cost AIM £463 for every new business lead generated at the Barbican in 1996 whereas with the seminars “the cost is about one tenth of that”.

There is also a growing belief that with an increasingly sophisticated market – many law firms are now on their third or fourth generation of IT systems – and increasingly complex products, the mass marketing approach of exhibitions is no longer appropriate and needs to give way to more selective and even one-to-one methods.        ...continued on page 4
Laserform joins “open” group
Laserform Law is to adopt the Integration Partner software standard for its Kestrel Accounts system. The standard, originally developed by Solicitec and Solicitors Own Software, provides an “open” or common interface for developers of legal accounts and case management software.

Double top for Dart
John Howell & Co in Sheffield and David Gray & Co in Newcastle are to install the DART practice management system as part of their migration to a new Windows NT and Microsoft Office ‘97 computing environment.

AMERICAN LEGAL SUPPLIERS GROUP FACING COLLAPSE
The ten year old National Association of Legal Vendors (NALV) in the USA is facing collapse in the wake of falling membership and a financially disastrous joint initiative with the law practice management section of the American Bar Association (ABA).

At the peak of its success in the early 1990s, NALV had more than 225 members but by last year this had fallen to less than 100, with the result that its 1996 operating budget was down over 55% on what it had been in better years and the three conferences scheduled for this year have been “postponed”.

According to NALV’s former secretary/treasurer David Goldstein, the president of ProSoft Corporation – best known in the UK for the Carpe Diem system – the association’s heavy reliance on membership dues has always been a problem. With hindsight this makes him wonder whether the US legal supplier community is large enough to support an organisation of this kind, as at its height its membership only comprised about 20% of the companies in the market.

The problems really escalated however when the NALV became involved in the TAP² (The Automated Practice/The Automated Professional) initiative with the Association of Legal Administrators and the ABA.

This was a portable “law office of the future” display occupying 2400 square feet of space that was designed to be taken to US legal trade shows and conferences, including LegalTech and the annual ABA meeting. Unfortunately the cost of operating TAP² – one source claims it was as high as $100,000 a show – far exceeded the funding available.

The TAP² project also prompted disputes over sponsorship and is thought to have generally soured relations between suppliers and the NALV, as well as adding further strains on finances.

NALV’s current chairman is now looking for suppliers “willing to volunteer their time in addition to their money” to help reorganise the association.

David Goldstein’s verdict is that “NALV was a great organisation and it did a lot of good, especially for startups like ourselves. Its motives were pure. And,” he adds “Hopefully LSSA (the Legal Software Suppliers Association, the UK equivalent of NALV) can learn from some of our mistakes and try to avoid them.”

Comment... LSSA must be doing something right as the latest edition of the ILCA’s Legal Software Suppliers Pocket Guide contains entries from four companies who incorrectly claim to be LSSA members.

The four are Select Legal Systems, DPS, Perfect Software and Solace Legal Systems. LSSA secretary Roger Hancock says Perfect and DPS should be given the benefit of the doubt as there may have been a genuine misunderstanding. Never the less all four have now been sent LSSA membership application forms.

ACE BAGS FALCON SITES
In the last issue, LTI reported that some of the users of the Falcon barristers accounts system were unhappy about sale of the company to rival Bar software supplier Meridian Law and complained they had been “left in the lurch”.

Since then Applied Computer Expertise, the largest player in the Bar market, has announced that two former Falcon sets - Jeremy Gibbons’ chambers in Southampton and those of Steven Hadley in Paper Buildings in the Temple – have declined to move from Falcon to Meridian and instead ordered the new Windows version of ACE’s Infinity system.

ACE managing director Rod Voyce believes most Falcon users are still considering their options and that others will switch to the new ACE client/server Windows product in preference to the Meridian system.
ELITE IN BANKING LINK UP

Elite Information Systems and the Royal Bank of Scotland last week announced a joint initiative to bring integrated electronic banking into the legal market.

Under the deal, Royal's existing Roylink system is being integrated with Elite's financial management software so that all incoming and outgoing CHAPS payments can in future transfer funds directly to and from client accounts.

Elite sales manager David Thorpe says the advantage of this method over the conventional approach of a cashiers department using a stand alone CHAPS terminal, is that it avoids the duplication of data entry that occurs when CHAPS transactions have to be rekeyed into the client account ledgers.

The Roylink/Elite integration will also allow users to conduct direct online bank reconciliations.

MSS TO STOP SUPPORT FOR UNIX PLATFORM

In one of the first Year 2000 shake-outs, MSS Management Support Systems is advising its users that it will stop supporting systems running on Unix and AlphaMicro hardware platforms at the end of 1998.

MSS director John Meehan says a combination of factors are responsible for the decision, including potential millennium computing problems and a desire to rationalise the company's software development operations.

"We are currently completing a major rewrite of all our software to move it into a 32-bit Microsoft Windows 95/NT environment. In these circumstances it no longer makes sense to support multiple platforms," said Meehan.

Comment... MSS is continuing to support users of the DOS versions of its AlphaLaw applications. MSS is also a member of the Legal Software Suppliers Association, which requires its members to have advised all users of proposals for dealing with the Year 2000 problem by the end of this month.

COMPUTER CONSULTANTS... THE DEBATE CONTINUES

Responses to the LTi survey on legal IT consultants are continuing to roll in, as are general comments from readers.

Independent consultant Graham Irwin had this to say: "You quote one supplier who says he groans every time he learns of another failed salesman or IT manager becoming a consultant. As a consultant I cannot take part in your survey, but I hope I may make one or two observations – I'm sure all professional consultants would agree with them.

"Those who work or have worked for the big consultancy practices have usually been trained in consulting skills, such as understanding the client's needs, report writing, impartiality, and setting the scope of the job.

"What makes me cringe is when I hear of a failed solicitor who sets up as a computer consultant. As if a couple of months or years experience using a computer give him an understanding of what happens under the bonnet. It's like a motorist setting up as a car mechanic!

"I believe IT-minded lawyers and consultants can make effective teams if they were to work together, as they have complementary experiences and skills".

An alternative view is expressed by a partner with a firm in Cardiff, who suggests that if the Law Society is serious about IT, perhaps it could retain the services of "approved" consultants, who could then be used by members of the profession at reduced rates.

Comment... In fact the Law Society of Scotland already operates a similar scheme with the Computer Advisory Service it runs in conjunction with the Law Practice Management consultancy.

Award for Goddards

Theodore Goddard has won a commendation in this year's Investors in People Awards for the firm's Tomorrow's Office project.

This was a series of training workshops designed to reappraise the way in which lawyers use information technology to work with support staff and was launched at the end of 1995 to coincide with the installation of the firm's new IT infrastructure.

New accounts rules on way?

The English Law Society is currently conducting a consultation exercise over proposed changes to the Solicitors Accounts Rules. These are understood to include a clarification on the regulations relating to holding client deposits but are not expected to come into force until 1998.
Solicitec wins 100th deal
Case management specialists Solicitec last week signed the 100th order for their SolCase Windows case management system.

The £100,000 order was placed by Cheltenham firm Bretherton Price Elgoods and comprises fully integrated case management, accounts, time recording and fax software running across a Microsoft NT network.

The accounts software will be supplied via SOS and the initial case management installation will be in the firm’s conveyancing and personal injury departments.

FLURRY OF ACTIVITY IN VOICE TECH MARKET

The last month has seen a number of initiatives within the increasingly closely linked markets for digital dictation and speech recognition technology.

Sanyo Information Systems have launched a new product called Flashback Mobile Office, comprising three elements which can be purchased either separately or for an all-in price of £399 + VAT.

The Flashback is a portable digital recorder (ie no tape) that uses solid state reusable flash memory cartridges (called SoundClips) that can each store up to 36 minutes of voice recording.

The third element is the VoiceLink PC adapter, which allows a SoundClip cartridge to be inserted into a PCMCIA/PC Card slot so that voice files can be downloaded onto the computer’s hard disk for playback, transcription or even transferring to another location by email.

Flashback is available now through selected Sanyo details. More information is available on Freephone 0500 368080.

Philips also have something to say

Philips Speech Processing and the Dictaphone Corporation last week signed an agreement whereby Dictaphone will incorporate Philips’ speech recognition technology into Dictaphone’s upcoming line of voice and data management systems. Philips has also confirmed that a new 32-bit Windows 95/NT compatible version of its SpeechMagic continuous speech recognition software will be launched in the second quarter of this year.

But IBM is silent

Finally, in Issue No 32 we reported on the new cut-price DragonDictate Singles Edition speech recognition software. IBM has now responded with Simply Speaking, a cut down version of its VoiceType Dictation software.

This is now retailing for £89 and the only drawback seems to be that you have to dictate into (and then cut and paste from) a dictation window rather than directly into the application.

Curiously, despite repeated requests IBM UK has refused to supply LTI with any further information about this product. According to a spokesman this is because it is unsuitable for lawyers, who should instead buy the full VoiceType 3.0 system for £555!

ALL CHANGE AT BARBICAN

continued from front page... This view is echoed by Tony Landes of Quill, one of the biggest users of advertising in the UK legal market. According to Landes: “As the selling of systems becomes more complex and integrated office systems become crucial to the operation of practices, we are no longer selling on the basis of demonstrations at exhibitions.

“We feel reasonably confident that we have reached a stage where firms will ask us to quote because of our track record in the market sector with which we are associated. The Barbican is not cost effective in terms of getting names which are unknown to us.”

AXXIA REVIEWING PR

Axxia Legal Systems is reviewing its PR strategy and has invited a number of specialist high tech consultancies to present proposals for new press and publicity campaigns.

Comment... Although it is common practice for organisations to periodically review their PR arrangements, Axxia do seem to have an image problem. While widely recognised as the market leader among traditional legal IT suppliers, such as TFB, AIM and Avenue, they have not made the impact that might be expected on larger City firms and are instead losing orders to relative newcomers, such as Elite, CMS Open and Keystone.
REMOTE SYSTEMS TAKE OFF IN THE HIGH STREET

MSS Management Support Systems is now distributing a major upgrade to the company’s AlphaLAW case management software, that is designed to help lawyers who need to work at home or away from the office.

Called “Remote”, the system allows users to not only access information held on a firm’s central computer when they are out of the office but also to actually work on the files, including creating new documents and updating records.

Before leaving the office, the user can download the relevant information, including accounts and diary details, onto a laptop computer – the system also includes an automatic time recording facility.

For the duration of the time these files are on the laptop, the corresponding matter records on the office system are temporarily locked, so they cannot be inadvertently changed so as to create two different versions of the same file. (Although there is an emergency facility to override locked files.)

When the user returns to the office, the files can be transferred back onto the main system and the records automatically updated and synchronised.

MSS director John Meehan said a number of users had requested a feature of this type and after investigating the alternatives MSS opted for the present file transfer/locking approach.

Meehan added that MSS ruled out an ISDN telecommunications link because although it could provide users with very fast access via the equivalent of a remote terminal, it was inherently inflexible as it required the installation of an ISDN line and was restricted to one location. In contrast, the laptop method allows users to work in court and at the offices of clients, as well as from home or while commuting between them.

The Dickson Haslam experience

Although many of the larger firms in the UK now equip partners and qualified staff with laptops and remote access software as a matter of course, it is interesting to see the benefits are now being recognised by smaller High Street practices.

Dickson Haslam in Lancashire is a good example for although the firm has had computerised accounts and word-processing for secretaries since the early 1980s, it has only been within the last couple of years that IT has spread to the desktops of fee earners.

The event prompting the change was the departure of partner Andrew Greensmith’s secretary and his decision to move her PC onto his desk. The benefits were quickly recognised and all the other partners soon followed suit. Greensmith himself subsequently became the High Street practice representative on one of the Woolf sub-committees.

Now, one of the most enthusiastic users is managing partner Raymond Green, who also sits as a deputy district judge in a county court. Despite spending two-thirds of his time away from his desk, thanks to a laptop computer and modem link, he is still able to work on files and exchange messages with the office.

Technical Notes...

The Dickson Haslam installation was carried out by Management Interface Ltd (MIL). The firm uses electronic forms software, Word Perfect for Windows 6.1, with email and network diary facilities across the firm’s two offices provided by Novell GroupWise.

A number of fee earners are also using the VoiceWriter speech recognition system. This is not, as Greensmith notes, intended to replace secretaries but is used as a way of speeding up the drafting of urgent instructions, which secretaries then edit to final presentation standard.

In another example of remote computing, MSS now distributes AlphaLAW software updates by email to users who are on the Internet. The files are transferred as document attachments.
BUTTERWORTHS TECHNOLOGY WINS DTI AWARD
The ActiveTEXT document revision control software system, which was originally developed for Butterworths' electronic publishing division, is one of the winners of the 1997 Information Society Creativity Awards.

ActiveTEXT was developed for Butterworths by Abbey Information Systems (01306 745600) to make it easier for legal editors to review the state of the law at any one point in time, to ensure changes and amendments were incorporated in the latest editions of books and current awareness publications.

Abbey, whose other current projects include building a trademarks Web service for Waterlow Information Services, will be using the £50,000 prize money to help fund further development and marketing of the ActiveTEXT system.

The awards are one of the few positive aspects of the Department of Trade & Industry's lacklustre Information Society Initiative to raise awareness in the UK of the benefits of the Internet and multimedia technologies.

LEGAL IT DIARY DATES

March 25 – AIM Evolution Spring Seminar Programme This week in Manchester. The programme continues until the end of May. Admission free, with a choice of morning or afternoon sessions. Call Jo Hunter on 01482 326971 for details.

April 2 – Options for Electronic Publishing Half day (am) conference organised by Dataware Technologies on the use of electronic publishing, CD-Rom and the Internet. Speakers include Law Society publisher Carl Upsall. Admission free. Location No 1 Great George Street, London. Call Helen Wicks at Dataware on 01895 827222 for details.

April 9 – Financial & Marketing Management for the Bar Start of a series of weekly courses running until June looking at the way IT can help barristers and chambers manage their practices. The course has been developed by Central Law Training in conjunction with Applied Computer Expertise. Call CLT on 0121 362 7712 for details.

April 16 – Excel Spreadsheets at Intermediate Level A one day advanced training course organised by Institute of Legal Cashiers & Administrators. At the ILCA offices in South-East London, fee from £200, call ILCA on 0181 294 2887 for details.

April 16 – Unified Messaging Choice of three seminar sessions on the integration of voice, fax and email systems. Organised by Kommunicate Ltd at the Institute of Directors, Pall Mall, London. Admission free, call Sandra Smith on 01252 815514 for details.

April 24 – IT for Lawyers Exhibition & Workshops One day of seminars and supporting exhibition organised by the Society for Computers & Law in association with the Yorkshire & North East region law societies. Speakers include Steven Vincent of Go Interactive on the Internet, Law Society council member Philip Hamer on IT for High Street practitioners, plus contributions by Neil Cameron, John Irving and Richard Susskind. Admission from £15, the location is the highly rated Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds. Call the SCL on 0117 923 7393 for details.

May 12 – Support Services in Law Firms One day conference on human resources, technology, support staff motivation and outsourcing with speakers from Taylor Joynson Garrett, S J Berwin and Reynolds Porter Chamberlain. At Radisson Marlborough Hotel, London. Call Centaur Conferences on 0171 434 3711 for details.
COMMUNICATIONS FUTURES

Direct hyperlinks to all the organisations mentioned on this page can be found at http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/hotlinks/

Details about Web Master/FM, the new outsourcing service for web site updating and maintenance can be found at http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/fm/

INTRANET FOR INHOUSE LAWYERS ON WAY TO UK?
The Dallas-based legal software house Corprasoft Inc has announced that the corporate legal department of the J C Penney Company, one of America’s largest department store chains and mail order catalogue retailers, has begun the beta testing of what is believed to be the first intranet database application for inhouse lawyers.

Called Chief Legal Office Inet, the system is a matter management database that gives users the ability to access information relating to litigation through a standard browser, such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Internet Explorer. The system can be extended via a gateway or extranet to also allow third parties, such as outside counsel, to share access to information on the database.

Corprasoft president Carl Sutherland says the benefit of the system is “The only workstation software needed to run the application is a Web browser, resulting in lower deployment and support costs, combined with a faster roll out time. This is a positive paradigm shift for organisations. You get all the advantages of the Internet plus the security and features common to traditional client/server applications.”

NEW LEGAL WEB SITES

Three more legal Web sites have been launched within the last few weeks...

Davis & Co at http://members.aol.com/davislawuk/ have a site which includes an article on the use of teleworking within law firms – the article was originally prepared for the BILETA annual conference which is taking place in Durham this week.

Davis & Co, who reckon they are one of the few City of London firms to be incorporated, have also published an article on due diligence on their site. This is a based on a presentation the firm recently gave at a conference in Moscow.

Also new on the Web is the site belonging to Tessa Shepperson, a solicitor who recently set up as a sole practitioner in Norwich, undertaking commercial and general litigation, plus housing/residential landlord and tenant work. This can be found at http://www.paston.co.uk/tjshepp

Finally, and at the opposite end of the spectrum, construction and IT law specialists Masons have finally launched their Web site at http://masons.com

It may have been a long time in coming but IT director Martin Telfer says the firm opted to develop a site that could deliver real business benefits rather than following the traditional brochureware marketing model for legal sites.

Capacity crowd
CapaCity Software (01489 795095) have recently sold an 850 user licence installation for their NetCon network management software to Denton Hall. The system will be used to monitor hardware and software use across the firm’s wide area PC network at sites in London and Milton Keynes. For more details visit http://www.capacity.co.uk

Scottish site
Scottish legal software supplier CB Business Systems now has a Web site providing information about its Signet 2000 product at http://www.cbbs.demon.co.uk
Alexis Byter’s

COMPUTER LORE

Back from the dead

The legal magazine The Eagle, last heard of just under a year ago when its publishers Stratton Publications called in the receivers, has come back from the dead with new owners and a new editor.

The new owners are The Legal Communications Society Ltd of Erith, in Kent, whose main business is publishing what are called Quill Product Cards. These are reader response cards that are either included with magazines or distributed by direct mail. For the record, this business has no connection with the long established legal IT supplier Quill Computer Systems.

The new editor is Richard Clayton, whose track record includes work with the Solicitors Journal, Legal Times and In Brief – although he is probably best known for his time as a columnist with The Lawyer when he ruffled feathers in Chancery Lane by Christening the English Law Society the “Tufty Club”.

What about the EMU?

In this issue, as in other recent editions, we carry a story about the computer problems associated with the Year 2000 date change. But what about European Monetary Union (EMU) and the single currency, which most software houses reckon is going to present similar headaches for users of accounts and financial management systems?

The short answer seems to be “What EMU problem?” with even some of the larger UK law firms with international practices apparently content to ignore the issue.

In fact according to one IT supplier I spoke to last week, whose products are specifically targeted at the big “City” firms, he has yet to even receive an invitation to tender (ITT) that mentions monetary union. Clearly a case of not having a position on EMU but preferring instead the ostrich position.

No Millennium for Falcon

A couple of days ago the reissue of the Star Wars movie opened to packed cinema audiences throughout the UK. Elsewhere in this issue we report on the problems that have dogged the old Pimcroft Falcon software package for barristers.

Congratulations are therefore in order to Rod Voyce of Applied Computer Expertise (Falcon was meant to challenge the predominance of ACE software in the Bar market) for successfully combining the two stories in one press release headline: “Bar Wars Saga - No Millennium for Falcon”. And if you don’t recognise the Millennium Falcon allusion, you had better go to see the movie.

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

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