GOOD NEWS FOR ADMIRAL USERS

After nearly five months of uncertainty, Admiral’s legal systems division has been acquired by the publicly quoted Sanderson group, currently best known in the legal market for its QNIX range of accounts and case management software. Sanderson Systems managing director Brian Dewis says the company will sell the Admiral LegalMind practice management system alongside QNIX and promises to “continue to develop and enhance” both products. Mr Dewis also says he expects “this very fragmented market to continue to consolidate” and believes the acquisition will help ensure Sanderson remains a major player.

Comment... Although there is concern among larger Admiral users as to whether Sanderson is geared up to meet their needs (recent QNIX sales have been to smaller firms such as Grindeys, Cooper Whiteman and the Lewington Partnership), Sanderson has sufficiently deep pockets (a turnover of £70 million last year) that it can afford to invest in support and R&D for LegalMind. No doubt Admiral users will also take heart from the fact that in QNIX there is now a case management option to accompany their practice management software.

MORE BAD NEWS FOR ACE USERS

In the latest blow to users of ACE Infinity software, Applied Computer Expertise has told some firms they will be charged £3000 if they require help in migrating to an alternative system – a development which has prompted the senior partner of one ACE user on the south coast to say he was “considering suing them to hell and back.”...continued on page 2

BETTER NEWS FOR WORDPERFECT FANS

Following criticism of its Y2K policy in Legal Technology Insider (see Issue 57), Corel, the company behind WordPerfect, has announced it is now testing the Year 2000 compliancy of its earlier Version 5.1 and 6.1 products.

Although Corel originally refused to guarantee the compliancy of products prior to Version 7.0, the company told LTI that: “Corel recognises WordPerfect 5.1 has a loyal following within the legal community.” A company spokeswoman also said they realised many lawyers wanted to continue using their existing systems pending their eventual migration to Windows, rather than being bounced into making immediate decisions to avoid potential Year 2000 file problems.

To this end Corel wants users to know “it is dedicated to facilitating as easy and seamless a transition as possible to newer versions of WordPerfect for those currently using WordPerfect 5.1.” Along with the ability of newer versions to “seamlessly read documents created in 5.1, maintain reveal codes and provide the option of using 5.1 shortcuts and keystrokes, Corel has, optimistically, included a feature in WordPerfect Suite 8 to convert Microsoft Word 97 and Excel 97 documents into WordPerfect format.

For more information contact Kylee Mackay at Corel’s head office in Canada on email: kyleem@corel.ca or phone 001 613 728 0826 x1826.

PLUS: Reader survey on ROI and the benefits of IT. See separate insert.

http://www.cloudnine.co.uk
Clifford Chance to stay inhouse?

Latest reports suggest legal giant Clifford Chance will decide against using CMS Open as the basis for its new financial management system. Instead, the firm is expected to redevelop and enhance its existing bespoke system, possibly using Carpe Diem as the desktop interface.

Birkenhead firm takes Norwel

Birkenhead law firm Lees & Partners has gone “live” with a Norwel practice management system. The firm plans to introduce Norwel’s fee earner desktop product later this year.

DAC orders Egami-Legal

Davies Arnold Cooper has just ordered DPA’s Egami-Legal litigation support system for its insurance litigation department.

PILGRIM IN WEB CONVEYANCING INITIATIVE

As a complement to its existing telephone based operation, Glasgow law firm Conveyancing Direct has begun selling its low cost conveyancing service (the fee is £150 for a standard sale, purchase or remortgage transaction, regardless of house price or value) over the internet.

The firm already uses Pilgrim Systems’ LawSoft case management software to process instructions and the system has now been adapted so client details and transactions captured on the Conveyancing Direct web site (http://www.conveyancingdirect.co.uk) can also be fed directly into the LawSoft application.

According to managing partner Graeme McCormick: “The use of IT underpins the whole operation. Ninety-five percent of all conveyancing is straightforward. This lends itself very well to a streamlined computer system that allows, at the outset, rapid entry of standard data. It gives consumers a quick, efficient and professional service without losing the personal touch.

“A number of solicitors’ services lend themselves very well to the direct selling approach. And the internet is an outstanding medium to lower transaction costs and improve client service.”

Launched just over a year ago, Conveyancing Direct is open five days a week from 8.00 am to 7.00 pm and currently handles over 50 new sets of instructions per week.

ENTENTE NOT SO CORDIALE

The mystery of where cut price copies of DOCS Open document management software have been coming from (see last issue of LTi for first report) has been solved. According to PC Docs, a French reseller was active in the UK selling the software at an unauthorised discount price.

This has now been stopped and, depending upon the volume of licences purchased, DOCS Open now retails from between £350 and £200 per user.

Still on the subject of document management software, Boodle Hatfield and Linnells in Oxford have recently purchased the rival Worldox system while Eversheds is poised to make a choice between DOCS and FileNET’s Saros. LTi also understands there is a lot of interest in the new DOCS Esq product. This is a stripped down version of DOCS Open that is expected to sell for about £150 per user once it becomes available in the UK.

MORE BAD NEWS FROM ACE

This continues from front page… Leaving aside the fact the only reason users are having to migrate to other systems is because ACE decided to pull out of the solicitors’ IT market, the move has also raised eyebrows among IT suppliers who say it is almost unheard of for companies to collaborate on system replacement. Indeed it is so rare most suppliers now offer electronic data conversion and transfer services as part of the standard installation process.

Although suppliers usually charge for such services, Avenue Legal Systems (01489 609010) has said that subject to the size of the order and verification of file formats, Avenue will carry out the transfer free of charge for firms migrating from Infinity to Avenue’s Wisdom system.

Meanwhile the drift from ACE continues with Solicitors Own Software (SOS) announcing it has just won its third Infinity site: 40-user Schilling & Lom in London. The order is worth £40,000 for software and training only and was won in a straight fight against Axxia Arista.

According to the Legal Software Suppliers Association code of conduct, suppliers must assist in data transfer and conversion when a customer moves from one LSSA member to another but ACE was not an LSSA member.
HEMPSONS BEGINS MEGA PROJECT

Healthcare and charity law specialist Hempsons has appointed Axxia Systems as its main supplier for a major £1.3 million IT project that will see it completely replace and re-equip all its offices with new case and practice management systems.

Over the next 18 months Hempsons will be installing Axxia’s Arista accounts, fee earner desktop and case management product – the latter tailored specifically for the purpose of managing medical negligence actions – in its Manchester, Harrogate and two London offices. All the offices will be linked by a 300 user wide area network (WAN) utilising kilostream technology.

Comment... The scale of the project is explained by the fact that in 1996 Hempsons underwent rapid expansion following the acquisition of two NHS litigation units in Manchester and Harrogate. Faced with what the firm describes as “a diverse and antiquated IT legacy,” including five different computer systems and three accounting packages, their integration and rationalisation has necessarily been given a high priority.

Scottish law firm Morton Fraser has just won the 1998 TSB Business of Law Award. The firm says the award vindicates its decision to “radically re-engineer” its handling of volume business litigation in a project which included installing a new Axxia case management system.

RESTRUCTURING AT LASERFORM

Two-time SCL Award winner Laserform International has announced a corporate restructuring that divides the company into three product focussed divisions. These are: Laserform Publishing, which looks after the company’s original electronic forms and precedents business. The division is headed by Paul Crouch and its next major product release, scheduled for later this summer, will be the launch of the company’s 32-bit forms series.

The Practice Management Systems division, which incorporates the Kestrel accounts package for small firms as well as the new 32-bit SQL Server-based system for larger (30 to 60 fee earner) sized practices. The new SQL system will make its public debut at this year’s Barbican exhibition.

The Case Control division, headed by Peter Stock, handles the company’s portfolio of case management applications. The next three months will see the launch of new trust & probate and personal injuries products.

Barry Hawley-Green remains the managing director and Mike Boynes has been appointed group sales & marketing director. Laserform is currently looking for a director to head the PMS division.

Legal stationers Stat Plus is now selling a “badged” version of Laserform’s electronic forms series and is going to be selling some of the Case Control products in a shrink-wrapped format.

GROWING TREND FOR BRANCH WANs

Case management specialist Solicitec reports it is seeing a growing demand for practice-wide systems that can offer users in branch offices access to applications across a wide area network (WAN).

Recent Solicitec orders have included a six office WAN for Nalders in Truro, a five office WAN for Churchers in Southampton and a four office WAN for Wilson Brown in Northamptonshire.

Churchers also opted for a thin client solution, thereby extending the life of otherwise obsolete low specification 486 PCs by using the Citrix Winframe system to run modern Windows accounts and case management software.

Bird Semple orders Pilgrim

Bird Semple is to install a 150 user LawSoft practice management system from Pilgrim Systems. As part of the project the firm will run a mixed networking environment using NT and Novell. Bird Semple will link its Glasgow and Edinburgh offices by high speed frame relay and leased line. Managing partner Gordon Hollerin said the system “will help us maintain our reputation with clients for being at the forefront of the use of technology in the supply of legal services”.

IGL gets J FS

Scanning specialist IGL Legal Imaging has received J FS Litigator’s Notebook accreditation. IGL say this means in future it will be able to transfer data directly to law firms with J FS litigation support systems. IGL already supports R/KYV, Egami-Legal, Apollo and Concordance.
REED ELSEVIER GOES ON A BENDER
International publishing group Reed Elsevier (the parent of Butterworths) has just spent $1.65 billion buying the Matthew Bender and Shepard’s legal publishing businesses from the Times Mirror group in the United States.

Although the move is primarily seen as an attempt by Reed to expand its operations in the world’s biggest legal market – there are over 900,000 lawyers in the US and approximately 40,000 more qualify each year – the analytical material produced by Bender’s authors and the Shepard’s legal citation business can only help enhance the quality and depth of coverage of Reed’s own digital and online services, such as Lexis.

Comment… It is widely rumoured that Reed out-bid the rival Wolters Kluwer legal publishing group to make these acquisitions. However, what is not so widely known is that Matthew Bender is the parent company of Capsoft Development, the creators of the HotDocs document assembly software. Maybe this will mean Butterworths in the UK will now make greater use of HotDocs?

Incidentally, Edinburgh-based Capsoft UK, the UK and European distributor of HotDocs, is an independent company untouched by the Bender deal.

A TOUCH OF CLASS
Independent legal publisher Class Publishing (0171 371 2119), best known for its Child’s Pay software plus textbook guide to the Child Support Act 1991, has launched two more products for family law practitioners.

Already available is Quantum Hop (price £199.95 +VAT) which allows users to calculate, complete and print copies of a Form E financial statement in support of an application for ancillary relief directly from a PC. The second program is Capitalise, which has been designed to calculate the capital sum required in all clean break divorce settlements in accordance with the Duxbury rules.

The authors of Capitalise are Mr Justice Singer and Nicholas Mostyn QC and the software is available until 1st September for a pre-publication discount price of £449.95 (+VAT). There is also an update service, as well as a free demonstration package. Both products run on Windows 3.1/95.

BIG NAMES MAKE STRONG SHOWING IN 1998 LOTIES
The 1998 LOTIES (Law Office Technology Innovation Awards) are now underway with products from many of the UK’s better known legal systems suppliers – including AIM, Axxia, Norwel, Solicitec, MSS and SOS – nominated in one or more of the award’s 10 categories.

Fee earner desktop systems (from Norwel and Axxia) feature strongly in the Best Legal Front Office Product category, while electronic forms (HotDocs, Oyez and Peapod) predominate in the Best Law Office Automation Product section.

The Newcomer award sees Solicitec’s latest case management system going head-to-head with AIM’s new Evolution Client/Server Windows NT accounts software. Interestingly, one of the nominations for the Law Office Technology Product of the Year is AIM’s older Unix-based Evolution Classic product. The other nominations are: Egami Legal from DPA-Egami, CMS Open and Capsoft’s HotDocs.

THE YORKSHIRE STAYS WITH VIDESS

The legal department of the Yorkshire Building Society has announced it is staying with Videss as the supplier of its law office automation systems and is currently upgrading from Unix to a new Windows-based Videss Legal Office suite.

“The Yorkshire”, the fourth largest mutual building society in the UK, has been using Videss since 1991 (the first system ran on C-DOS) and along with accounts and time recording, the 15 fee-earner department also makes extensive use of case management software to handle possessions, re-mortgages, sales, litigation and the management of its solicitors’ panel.

Chief solicitor John Faulkner says the department has similar requirements to law firms in private practice, including the need to cut “clerical costs”, and one of the main reasons for the upgrade is to allow the introduction of more advanced workflow management techniques.

New products and services

SIX-IN-ONE SYSTEM

Sharp Electronics has just launched what it describes as a “six-in-one” multifunction fax machine for the SOHO (small office, home office) market. Called the FO-1660M, it retails for £349 (+VAT) and includes a standalone fax, scanner with OCR software, PC fax, telephone, printer and copier in one compact unit that occupies a little over one square foot of desk space. Faxing is via an inbuilt 14.4 kbps modem, the standard model has a 30 page memory and the system can even print incoming faxes on both sides of a sheet of paper.

NEW SPEECH BUNDLE

Independent computer distributor Northamber is bundling a 30 day trial version of Dragon Systems’ Naturally Speaking continuous speech recognition software with the Philips SpeechMike for an all-in price of £49.99 (inc VAT).

Northamber say the SpeechMike (which combines microphone, recording controls and mouse in one unit) will prove an attractive option for computer users who do not want to wear the headsets normally supplied with speech recognition systems.

EQUITRAC ENHANCEMENT

EQUITrac has announced a new version of its Alpha cost recovery terminal for copier, fax and miscellaneous data entry.

New features include: enhanced keyboard, special function keys, larger hard drive for storage of client codes and transaction records, additional memory and serial ports and optional embedded network card for LAN communications. The Alpha is fully compatible with Equitrac System 3 and System 4 servers.

TRAINING FOR IT SKILLS

In Tuition Computer Training (0171 403 7259) has launched a new service, called the Partner Programme, designed to support inhouse training departments who need additional resources to handle the surge in demand for training created by software upgrades and the rolling out of new systems.

In Tuition has recently completed a practice-wide email training project with Allen & Overy and has also worked with other firms, including Penningtons and Denton Hall, on wordprocessing, spreadsheet and document management software training. For more information visit http://www.intuition.co.uk

People and places

◆ Recruitment consultancy Longbridge International has moved to new offices at 85 Gracechurch Street, London EC3V 0AA (0171 208 5858). The AIM listed company has also reported a 90% increase in turnover for its trading year to 31 December 1997.

◆ Nationwide Exhibitions, who ran the recent Solicitors show at the NEC, can now be reached on 0117 907 1000.

◆ James Dawson has joined the AIM group with responsibility for running its Scottish operations. Based in Edinburgh, he will help develop AIM’s commercial and legal business.

◆ Jim Sloane, who was responsible for setting up Robson Rhodes’ legal IT and management consultancy division, has now left the firm.
**NEW WEB-BASED DELIVERY FOR LEGAL SERVICES**

In another example of law firms trying to find a commercial use for the internet and adopt the concept of the “productisation” of legal services (as first advocated by Richard Susskind in *The Future of Law*), north London solicitors Landau & Cohen has set up an IT company called Epoch Software (☎ 0181 952 2286) to market what it calls the “Rapidocs” service.

Along with various web site development and promotional services, Epoch’s main product is the DirectLaw (http://www.directlaw.com) site. This is intended to hold an archive of different law firms’ legal document precedents and templates for their clients to download.

Because the documents are interactive, clients can actually complete and use them immediately, rather than have to retype them. And, because the DirectLaw site has an e-commerce facility (real time credit card transactions) the documents can only be downloaded if the client first pays for them.

**Comment...** Well at least that is the theory. In practice there seem to be some potentially serious stumbling blocks. The first is price.

Along with developing a web site – Epoch suggest this will cost in the region of £1000 (add VAT to all prices) – there is also the £1295 cost of joining the DirectLaw scheme plus a £129 per month management fee (you are tied in to a three year contract) and the various licence fees (prices start at £399 but fall with volume) for using the Rapidocs document origination and assembly software. After that there is only a 20 percent download fee to pay on every document purchased by a client!

On the practical side it is worth noting that to be able to use one of these interactive templates, the client has to have a copy of the Rapidocs Assembler application. Although this has a free run time licence, the client must first download a copy from the internet.

Epoch also claim the software is to be “widely distributed free on millions of magazine cover CDs”.

Leaving aside the fact the software only runs on a 32-bit Windows NT/95 platform, so hard luck on any clients still using Windows 3.1 or non-Windows systems, Epoch face an uphill struggle if they expect law firms and their clients to adopt Rapidocs as the standard for document assembly software. Not least because the rival HotDocs system is now used by an increasing number of legal publishers and, thanks to an initiative by the English Law Society, is also widely distributed among solicitors practices.

Finally, it is worth noting the differences between DirectLaw and the NKT interactive internet system developed by Michael Kaye, another north London solicitor. DirectLaw is essentially an automatic document assembly system that offers little or no room for the lawyer to offer the client added value legal services. This is in contrast to the NKT approach, which is primarily a mechanism for receiving new instructions but with the work still undertaken by a solicitor. NKT is also more open as it can be used by anyone as long as they have access to a web browser.
A second survey, conducted by CM Corporate magazine in Belgium, found that out of a total of 3,230 Lotus Domino based web sites in Europe, 840 (including the Open University, IBM, an Irish Bank and the Dutch police) were open to attack by hackers. The problem is although Domino has a good security system, it must be correctly implemented. Unfortunately most web administrators do not set up the access control lists (ACLS) properly, thereby allowing outsiders to gain access via unguarded “names.nsf” or “catalog.nsf” files.

**LINK OFFERING FREE MACRO DOWNLOAD SERVICE**

The LINK online legal service has now established a section within the Technology discussion area that will allow users to download WordPerfect, Word and Excel macros free of charge. Readers with macros they are prepared to offer to other users should email the details to LINK business manager Nigel Armitage (nigel_armitage@link.org).

**WEB SITE REVIEW... ANY COLOUR YOU LIKE, AS LONG AS IT IS GREEN**

Two long awaited legal web sites have gone “live” within the last week: the Smith Bernal Casebase free public access archive of Court of Appeal judgments at http://www.smithbernal.com and the English Law Society’s new DTi-funded web site at http://www.lawsociety.org.uk

The two sites share a lot in common. Both have less than obvious navigation aids. Both sites are cluttered with irrelevant design features – the triumph of style over content. And both, bizarrely, use a bilious shade of green as the background to some of their pages.

To be fair to the Law Society, most web sites redesigns never get it right from the outset (this is actually the Law Soc’s third attempt) and once you get past the confusing home page (and its amusing game of “spot the link to the index on the image map”) the content is quite good. Nevertheless, if less time had been devoted to JAVA animations of the ticker-tape message variety that the real world tired of playing with 18 months ago, perhaps the designers would have been able to get the site’s many links into a proper alphabetical order. (The letter “I” comes before “L” by the way.)

Incidentally, a more serious consequence of the widespread, and totally unnecessary, use of JAVA is that the site is rendered unusable by the 30 to 40 percent of lawyers still using older non-JAVA compatible web browsers.

Turning to the Smith Bernal site, the surrounding publicity blurb talks about this representing “a significant step forward” in making the law more accessible to the general public. Is this meant to be an attempt at humour?

The lack of decent explanatory material on the home page means that unless you happen to remember the free law reports material is to be found in the Casebase section, you could easily end up lost on the way to one of Smith Bernal’s commercial services, such as Casetrack or the law reporting section.

Once you stumble across the Casebase section, progress is blocked by an enormous and typically lawyerly worded terms and conditions of use/exclusion of liability clause. And, unless you press the “I accept” button, you will not get any further. Just the thing to make Joe Public feel the law is no longer so inaccessible!

As to Casebase itself, judgments dating back to April 1996 can be freely accessed – providing you know the case’s correct name, date, case number or court division. No problem, the man on the Clapham omnibus talks of nothing else.

Design-wise, the site uses “frames” to no apparent benefit (the same effects could be achieved with “tables”) and download times are stretched by the excessive use of large, purely decorative graphics and logos.

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**News in brief**

- BT has cut the price of an ISDN2e connection in the UK from £199 to £99, its lowest ever price - 18 months ago the price was £400. This price relates to its Start Up tariff (the connection charge for other tariffs have also been reduced by £100) and is only available for a limited period until 30th June.

- Novell has launched NetWare for Small Business 4.11, an enhanced version of its easy to use network server platform for small businesses. The system is Year 2000 compliant and the entry level licence package.

- Signum Technologies (01242 580555) has launched a new digital “fingerprint” system called SureSign which it claims will help protect digital images against copyright infringement.

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LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

LATEST NEWS COMMENT & ANALYSIS

LEGAL IT DIARY DATES

♦ May 19, Kaye Tesler Seminar, Holiday Inn, Brent Cross, London. Mixture of video conferencing open day, private lecture (attracting CPD points) by solicitor Michael Kaye on the use of the internet by lawyers plus workshops on internet and video conference systems. Starts 9.30 am with the CPD lecture running from 2.00 to 4.00 pm. The event will also feature a live video link to law offices. For details call Kaye Tesler on 0181 809 6756.

♦ May 20, Internet Workshops, Manchester Conference Centre. A full day (starts 10.00 am, ends 5.00 pm) of seminars and workshops on the legal and practical aspects of the internet, jointly organised by Manchester Law Society and the Society for Computers & Law. Speakers include solicitors Michael Kaye and Nigel Miller and consultants Neil Cameron and Delia Venables. For details call the SCL on 01179 237393 or email: ruth.baker@scl.org

♦ June 2 to 4, Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition, Barbican Exhibition Centre, London. Now in its 15th year, this is still the major UK legal IT event and this year the exhibition stands, with over 100 exhibitors including most of the major suppliers, are being complemented by a programme of seminars and workshop sessions. Admission is free, doors open at 9.30 am and Wednesday has late night opening until 7.30 pm. For details call Truemist on 0181 742 3399. Plus see pre-registration ticket included with this issue of LTi.

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• 50 x Wyse 120 terminals/keyboards
• 30 x Rubbermaid Screen Supports
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• 1 pair Gandalf Bridges with manual
• 1 pair Spiderbridges with manual
• 2 x Spiderport-16 port with manuals
• 5 x Spiderport-10 port with manuals
• 6 x Planet Ethernet 10BaseT Transceivers
• 1 Wyse Pentium Server
  (Series 6000i, Model 665)

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LATEST NEWS

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Info Line
If you need a phone number, product name, contact point or any other elusive item of information concerning legal IT, call the free Insider Info Line on 01379 687518.

Next issue...
Issue 60 of the Insider will be published on Monday 18th May.

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