

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

iNSIDER

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

In association with



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LAW SOCIETY AND ICL SERVE UP A MIXED BAG

The English Law Society and ICL have now published their *SolicIT* mail order catalogue of IT products and services.

The catalogue is intended to deliver "a range of solutions specially tailored for solicitors firms", offer "competitive prices" and, by way of an additional reassurance for lawyers, the overall scheme will be "monitored" by the Law Society "to ensure high quality".

Sounds great but what do you get? The answer, like the curate's egg, is that the catalogue is good in parts.

SolicIT offers a large range of training, support and installation services which will no doubt appeal to those firms who have not enjoyed the take-it-or-leave-it attitude of some mail order PC suppliers.

On the otherhand, bearing in mind ICL has not been actively involved in the legal systems market since the early 1990s, the consultancy advice on offer is likely to be more generalist than legal applications specific.

Indeed anyone wanting legal software is going to be sadly disappointed as there are only two products on offer: Amicus Attorney and HotDocs. As reported in **LTi 62** ICL only has itself to blame for trying to impose unacceptable terms on suppliers.

The software element is also a disappointment as many of the prices are substantially more expensive than those quoted in comparable catalogues, such as Misco and Inmac. ICL prices Microsoft Office 97 at £353 compared with £320 elsewhere. Windows 98 is £120, compared with £105 or less elsewhere. And the Lotus Intranet Starter Pack is a massive £1175 compared with £789 elsewhere. ➤

➤ It would also help if ICL could quote upgrade prices on some of these products as, for example, many Office 97 users will be upgrading from WordPerfect or Office 95.

The good news is there are genuine bargains to be had on consumables, such as £10 savings off the price of some popular laser printer replacement toner cartridges.

As to hardware, this is an oddity for whereas most of the printers can be bought elsewhere for marginally cheaper prices, there are £100-£200 savings to be made by buying some of the PCs from ICL.

● **Comment...** Perhaps the correct approach is to treat this catalogue with a degree of caution. It does contain many competitive prices but if you shop around you will still find there are some better deals to be had elsewhere.

● One sole practitioner has been in touch to ask: "Can someone reassure me that the Law Society has extracted an appropriately large fee from ICL in return for allowing them to use the Law Society's logo and giving them access to the members' database in order to market their over-priced products?"

Let's hope so. The Law Society crest is displayed in 39 places in the 40 page catalogue, which also contains such phrases as "forming an alliance with ICL" and "a scheme backed by the Law Society". This will certainly be read by many solicitors as implying official endorsement by Chancery Lane and is of inestimable value to ICL. Taking into account the sums IT suppliers pay for sponsorship opportunities in the real world, by rights ICL should be paying the Law Society many thousands of pounds.

● The launch of the Law Society's "Son of HSSK" initiative to provide smaller firms with an approved list of practice management software suppliers will now take place in the autumn.

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LATEST NEWS COMMENT & ANALYSIS

Harford move
Speech recognition and dictation technology specialist Harford Dictation Systems has moved to new offices at 17 Clarendon Street, Earlsdon, Coventry CV4 6EW. The ☎ 01203 678016 phone number remains unchanged.

Laptop health risk ?
The Health & Safety Executive is planning to study the use of laptop PCs following a growing number of complaints about their potential health risks.

● The public service union Unison recently surveyed their use and concluded that laptops are “more of a pain than a perk” at work.

Unison says back pain, neck pain, pain in the hands and arms and eye strain were the most frequently cited complaints. Almost half of Unison laptop users were also worried about the risk of being mugged.

CLIENTS PUSHING FOR ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

A new survey carried out by chartered accountants James & Cowper, in association with the LawNet group of independent solicitors practices, has found that there is “clear client pressure” for lawyers to get online and start communicating electronically via email and related technologies.

Already 73 percent of LawNet members, who as a group are probably more IT literate than the average law firm, are exchanging information electronically with clients, over 50 percent with the Bar, 44 percent with other solicitors and 19 percent are using it to communicate with expert witnesses.

The survey’s authors go on to predict the next three years will see increasing client demand for law firms to provide “gateways to limited access into inhouse information systems” and suggests practices that embrace these systems will gain a competitive advantage in the delivery of client services. The survey also anticipates web-enabled systems, including intranets and extranets, will play a growing role in the delivery of legal services.

Turning to some of the other findings, while all the firms in the sample had computerised accounts systems, the survey says that “surprisingly” there has not been a significant increase in the use of computers by legal staff since the last LawNet survey in 1995. The usage figures are 33 percent of partners have PCs on their desks, rising to 36 percent for assistant solicitors and paralegals.

The survey concludes the reason for this low usage rate is “the reluctance of many practices to embrace computerised case management systems” despite the fact IT suppliers have been offering these systems for nearly 20 years.

Conveyancing is still the most widely used case management application but the survey notes the general reluctance➔

➔ to use case management systems persists even in practices that provide screens on all fee earner desks.

With only 44 percent of firms using electronic legal forms, none scanning incoming post, just 26 percent using desktop faxing and only 28 percent running document management systems, the reports concludes that the true electronic legal office “is still far away”.

MARKETING SYSTEMS - BEST YET?

Following earlier reports about the dearth of good legal marketing software, a number of firms have suggested that the InterAction “contact and relationship management” system from Interface Software deserves serious consideration by any law firm marketing department.

This is a Windows application that was developed in the USA, is compatible with standard databases (including SQL Server and Oracle) and can be integrated with desktop applications such as Microsoft Word and Outlook. The latest version is web-enabled, so information published to internet or intranet sites can be accessed by a web browser.

Firms who have compared the two say InterAction has the edge on the rival Market Ease system from Cole Valley.

● InterAction is available in the UK via TiKiT. For details call ☎ 0171 717 1580 or visit <http://www.tikit.co.uk> and <http://www.interfacesoftware.com>

UNIX - DEAD BUT IT WON'T LIE DOWN

In the wake of NatWest’s problems with its cash machines, which are being blamed on bugs in the Windows NT system, and the response we have received to the recent Unix versus NT stories, in the next issue **LTi** will be considering claims that for some firms a move to NT may be a step too far.

AMICUS MAKES MORE FRIENDS

Gavel & Gown's Amicus Attorney case and contact management system is now in use in over 110 firms in the UK. Among the latest signings are: Yaffe Jackson Ostrin in Liverpool, Turner MacFarlane Green in Glasgow, Hansell Stevenson in Norwich, Venters in London and Emsleys in Yorkshire.

The company has also extended the number of third-party accounts systems that can now be integrated with Amicus. The full range now includes: Elite, Solace, Kestrel, Timeslice, Cognito, TimeSlips and SOS. Gavel & Gown can be contacted on ☎ 01242 243344.

- The last few days have also seen the release of Amicus Attorney III. The new upgrade is a full 32-bit application for Windows 95/98/NT. Features include: internet integration so any web site URLs stored in the contacts section become hypertext links, support for long file names and Palm Pilot synchronisation.

WORDPERFECT - DOUBTS PERSIST

While reader response to the story in **LTi 63**, which recommended that WordPerfect users should upgrade to WordPerfect 8.0 rather than migrate to Microsoft Word, has been universally favourable, two potential causes for concern have been highlighted.

The first centres on parent company Corel's commitment to the WordPerfect product. The recent announcement of large cuts in the total number of software development staff and the apparent winding down of Java and NC (network computing) related projects has, in the words of one senior partner, "done little to instil confidence".

It seems that before law firms stake their future on WordPerfect, they would appreciate a clear statement from Corel on how it views WordPerfect's future. ➔

➔ The second problem area stems from the Microsoft-with-everything approach now being adopted by many legal systems suppliers, to the extent that some of the latest case and practice management software is only capable of being run in conjunction with MS Word.

Not surprisingly WordPerfect users, who in some instances are running earlier versions of these suppliers' systems, are far from happy to be faced with a "migrate to Word or shove off" ultimatum.

NEW COSTS DRAFTING SYSTEM

Landcroft, a small Peterborough-based software company, has just launched a new legal costs drafting program.

Called the Landcroft Drafting System, this is a DOS-based application primarily intended to handle the arithmetical side of preparing bills of costs – apparently 10 percent of all bills being taxed contain mathematical errors.

Landcroft developed the program in conjunction with costs draftsman Terry Wisdom and say they have "ambitious plans" for the future, including a facility to handle legal aid schedules.

Pricing starts at £800 for a single user licence and for more details call Landcroft on ☎ 01733 703782.

- **Comment...** A new application written in DOS in 1998? While it is no doubt true that, because costs draftsman practice such an arcane art, there is never going to be a large demand for this type of software, suppliers such as Landcroft are only creating problems for themselves by continuing to write DOS products.

LTi spoke to one firm which recently evaluated Landcroft and its two main competitors MicroCosts and Wordwright Cost Plus – also DOS products. The firm's verdict was all three were "primitive" and inflexible. Rather than buy a product that only handles part of the job, the firm has instead opted to develop its own system based on an Excel spreadsheet.

DOCS selling by the thousand

PC Docs reports that over the past six weeks it has sold a total of 6000 user licences for its DOCS Open document management software. Most of the licences were bought by just six firms, with Lovell White Durrant and SJ Berwin taking 2300 copies between them.

- **PC Docs is now shipping the DOCS Esquire system. This is an "out of the box" document management product designed for "smaller firms" (defined as having less than 100 staff) that do not need the functionality of DOCS Open.**

DOCS Esquire retails for £200 per user (compared with £349 per user for DOCS Open). Both products also require SQL Server to be installed. For more details call Daniel Brown of PC Docs on ☎ 01923 814700.

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New know-how head for A&O

The head of Allen & Overy's banking department Philip Wood has been given the added responsibility of running the firm's "knowledge management" and legal education activities.

Wood, who is also a visiting professor at The College of Law, anticipates making know-how information available to all fee earners via a practice wide intranet.

● A&O has also appointed former McKinsey & Co management consultant Nick Taylor-Delahoy as its new IT director.

He will have special responsibility for strategy and takes over from senior managers Steve Roberts and Duncan Scott, who had been jointly running IT operations since the departure of the firm's previous IT director John Rogers, who moved to Herbert Smith last year.

CONTEXT SET TO CHANGE HANDS ?

Following the recent sales of New Law Publishing, Matthew Bender and FT Law & Tax, L*Ti* has learned that electronic publishing specialist Context is now involved in takeover negotiations.

Sources suggest Sweet & Maxwell, which has in the past worked with Context on a number of CD-Rom titles and has also publicly stated it does not believe CD to be an "interim technology", is currently the favourite to buy Context.

TWO MORE CD-ROM TITLES ON FOLIO

The English Law Society has announced that the next edition of its *Conveyancing, Forms & Procedures* guide for practitioners will also be available on CD-Rom. The CD has a Folio Views interface and will use a series of onscreen "intelligent forms" to provide users with a step-by-step approach to the conveyancing process.

The Folio Views system (which is available in the UK via distributors Catalyst ☎ 01993 708700) is also used by Sweet & Maxwell in the CD-Rom version of its new *Data Protection Laws of the World* guide to data protection legislation in 35 jurisdictions. (These include the Faroe Islands and San Marino, the postage stamps capital of the world!)

The UK prices are £220 for the looseleaf service, £350 (+VAT) for the CD version and £495 (+VAT) for the CD and looseleaf service. Both the CD and looseleaf services will be updated at least twice a year.

● **Comment...** In the accompanying publicity blurb Sweet & Maxwell once again attempts to justify the higher price of the CD on the grounds that it provides an "added value" service.

Unfortunately this view is not shared by many lawyers who still regard CD-Rom as a less convenient medium than paper. Based on the principle of YCRACDITL ➡

➡ (you cannot read a CD in the loo), their view is that CDs should be sold at either a substantially cheaper price than paper or bundled in as part of the overall looseleaf service.

NEW MEDICO-LEGAL MULTIMEDIA CD AN IMMEDIATE HIT

MedicoLegal Publications, a new venture set up by a consortium of hospital consultants, doctors, and barristers could have a winner on its hands with its first publication: a multimedia CD-Rom on the subject of personal injuries and criminal trauma.

The CD, which contains an extensive medical text illustrated by anatomical diagrams, medical photographs and x-rays, is designed for what are described as "PI professionals" – everyone from High Street solicitors to the police and insurance companies who encounter personal injuries in the course of civil litigation and criminal case work.

Reflecting this broad audience, the CD allows users to access information from several different angles. For example, a medical expert could go directly to "monteggia fracture dislocations" whereas an insurance claims handler might prefer to use the drill-down feature that allows you to click on different parts of the human body until you locate the relevant area. There is also a "features" section which groups together certain types of injuries and conditions under plain English headings, such as "Seat belts" and "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder".

All injuries are broken down into a series of sub-topics (linked injuries, diagnostic difficulties etc). There is a glossary of over 6,700 medical terms including sound files containing the correct pronunciation of difficult words. And, there is a video library showing clips demonstrating all "normal" movements, such as forearm pronation and supination. ➡

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➔ MedicoLegal describe the CD as a “neutral” product that will appeal to both defendant and plaintiff PI lawyers. They are also keen to stress that it is not intended to be a rival to *Kemp & Kemp* but is instead a complementary product that can act as a front end to third-party suppliers’ quantum of damages. (The quantum on the first release of the CD comes from *The Judicial Studies Board Guidelines for the Assessment of General Damages in Personal Injury Cases* published by the Blackstone Press.)

MedicoLegal Solutions Volume 1: Personal Injury & Criminal Trauma retails for £295 (+VAT) and is available now. The price includes the first update CD (due in early 1999) and there are plans to supplement the service with newsletters and material that can be downloaded from the <http://www.mlpublications.co.uk> web site. For details call ☎ 0121 355 5193.

Subsequent update CDs, which are expected to include revised quantum figures and feature articles on other areas of personal injuries practice, will retail for £99 (+VAT). Volume 2 will cover paediatric work.

● **Comment...** This is a useful product you can dip into to locate complex items of information far quicker than you could using conventional materials, such as medical reference books. It is also very competitively priced but will there be any demand for it?

The answer would appear to be “yes” as Direct Line Insurance placed an order for the CD on the strength of what they saw at one promotional demonstration.

● The IT side of the project was handled by JCS Computing Solutions, who are probably better known in the legal market as the developers of the Legal Ledger solicitors accounts system.

Would-be copyright infringers should note the disk’s contents are protected by a security device called a “dongle”. However, there are discounts available for orders of more than five disks and large 20+ user sites can buy it on the basis of a concurrent user licence.

CLARK OUT AT DPA-EGAMI

Thirty years after starting the OFEX-listed company, Ted Clark has been ousted as the chairman and chief executive of document imaging and litigation support specialists DPA-Egami plc. The new chairman is Allan Harle and Keith Negal has been appointed chief executive.

Although the official statement talks about Mr Clark handing over to a younger management team and still retaining an interest in the business as a consultant and major shareholder, sources confirm there was a “boardroom clash and he lost” and that his departure follows a decision to “take the company forward in a different direction”.

The new management has still to signpost this new direction but L*Ti* understands DPA intends to move away from trying to develop a complete inhouse solution and instead will collaborate with other specialist suppliers to deliver integrated “best of breed” solutions.

DPA recently sponsored a seminar on electronic document management at Lincoln’s Inn in conjunction with IGL.

ABRAMSON BACK AT LTL

After taking a couple of years’ sabbatical to pursue academic and family interests, Lisa Abramson, one of the original team in the UK offices of litigation support specialists Legal Technologies Ltd (LTL), is returning to the company at the end of July in a new marketing and project consultancy role.

Abramson began her career as a database administrator with Barlow Lyde & Gilbert, where she worked on litigation support projects and the creation of a marketing database. Subsequently she joined LTL and helped establish the use of the Trial Pro courtroom presentation system in a number of major fraud cases, including the first Maxwell trial.

LDM opens in Manchester

London-based litigation support bureau LDM (the company recently changed its name from Law Copy) has opened a new office at St Peter’s Square in Manchester. The office will be offering scanning, coding and related DIP services on a 24 hours a day, seven days a week basis. For details call ☎ 0161 228 0170.

To code as you go

Elliott Slone is now shipping Version 3.0 of the DocuLex utility software for imaging and document management systems. A key enhancement in the new version is the ability to automatically read user generated coding forms and create a coded database while the system is in the process of imaging documents. Elliott Slone is the sole UK distributor of DocuLex, for details call ☎ 0171 729 2088.

Sweets say FT integration complete

Sweet & Maxwell says it has now completed the integration of its customer services operations following the recent acquisition of legal publishers FT Law & Tax.

From this month onwards customers will have a single point of contact for all orders and customer services enquiries. The number to call is 0171 449 1111.

In a dig at Butterworths, whose introduction of a centralised facility at Halsbury House initially prompted complaints by some law librarians, Sweets say they have "sought to avoid the mistakes made by our competitors in past years".

Sweets claims that 99.3 percent of all customer requests are now met on time.

LONGBRIDGE IN EURO INITIATIVE

To help law firms prepare for the new Euro currency, Longbridge International this week launches its Euro Consulting Group. Along with training sessions and briefings, Longbridge will also be offering advice and assistance on tackling both business and IT issues.

According to Longbridge consultant Craig Coverman one of the objectives of the new service is to overcome the many "misconceptions" surrounding the Euro.

- **It does not affect us** – It is wrong to assume the Euro will have no impact because the UK will not be in the first wave of Euro countries. "If you trade with or have clients in Europe, if you have suppliers based in Europe, if you have offices or satellites in Europe or even if your clients are based in the UK but do business in Europe, then you will be affected in some way," says Coverman.

- **It does not affect us yet** – The next popular misconception is these changes will only affect us when the UK joins or the Euro currency is issued in July 2002. Forget the coins, as the date when the Euro commences trading legally is 1st January 1999, Coverman believes firms will actually encounter their first Euro transactions in less than six months.

- **The Euro is an another IT problem like Y2K** – Wrong, says Coverman, it is a business problem and a number of major firms have already recognised that their ability to handle the Euro will give them a competitive edge in Europe over both other UK firms and US law firms who are still trading in dollars. (One international firm told **LTi** that if they were not ready by January 1999, they risked severe cash flow problems within three months.)

Coverman suggests a key difference is whereas with Y2K projects most of the resources are taken up by the IT function at the back end of the project (project management, coding etc). With the Euro, there first has to be a major commitment by the partnership, senior managers →

→ and accounts departments on strategy before IT issues can even be considered.

- **The Euro will not be a big problem** – Wrong again, says Coverman. According to some studies there can be as much as three times more work involved on Euro projects than on Y2K compatibility. "One firm Longbridge spoke to last week," adds Coverman, "reckons it will need to increase its IT staff headcount by 200 percent to complete its Euro project."

It is also worth noting that Euro compliancy involves a lot more than just adding the Euro to an existing multi currency accounting system. The legally defined method of manipulating the Euro currency involves such obscure arts as "triangulation" and the "rounding rules".

Longbridge admit the rules and regulations governing the Euro seem to be changing weekly but suggest this is a topic law firms that export their services or have substantial commercial practices can ignore at their peril.

Or, as IBM puts it: "the Euro can be likened to scaling a mountain. Although the weather reports are uncertain, that is no excuse for staying at home."

In addition to a programme of advisory briefings, Longbridge plans to help firms locate staff with suitable management consultancy and business analysis skills as well as conventional IT personnel. For more details call ☎ 0171 208 5858 or email euro@longbridge.com

CALLING ALL PARTICIPANTS

Robson Rhodes has extended the closing date for returning questionnaires for its influential survey on the usage of IT by law firms until the end of July.

If firms have not yet returned their completed forms could they do so now. If they want to participate and have not yet received a questionnaire, can they call Richard Blasdale on ☎ 0121 697-6000 or send an email to julia_simms@rsmi.co.uk or richard_blasdale@rsmi.co.uk

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TEXT EXTENDS PUSH TECHNOLOGY TRIAL

Legal systems integrator Text Systems has extended the scope of its new Text Daily information service by making access to the IT resources facility free of charge to all individual subscribers. **LTi** has recently been testing the service, which has three main elements:

- Firstly the subscriber sets the profiles for the areas of news and topics they are interested in. (The service covers all subjects but only the IT section is free.)
- Then, every night the service employs a search engine to scan the web for sites that have been changed or updated.
- Finally, the "push" element each morning sends subscribers an email containing the URLs of all the sites fitting their profiles that have changed over the past 24 hours. (If you have web-enabled email, the URL acts as a hyperlink to take you directly to those sites.)

For more information call Gary Levy of Text on ☎ 0171 403 4033 or to register visit <http://www.textdaily.com>

INTERNET NEWS BRIEFS

- **Case Technology** has launched what it describes as an "intelligent broadband gateway" which is claimed could cut the cost of access to wide area network and internet services by as much as 80 percent.

The product, called Grapevine, replaces the traditional "dumb multiplexer" single carrier interface sitting between a firm's internal network and the outside world and maximises available bandwidth by using compression technologies to carry email, voice and data connections over a single line.

Chase say one of the attractions of the product is that it does not replace a firm's existing comms and network structures but instead complements them by providing an integrated interface. ➔

➔ Prices start from £1995 and for further information call Simon Streat on ☎ 01923 259000 or visit <http://www.case.co.uk>

- **Easynet**, the internet service provider (ISP), has announced it has cut the cost of both ISDN and leased line services. Dial subscribers can now use ISDN2 to access the internet for the same price as standard PSTN. A single channel 64K ISDN connection will cost £11.99 per month or £129.99 pa including VAT.

Easynet is offering a fully supported range of low-cost terminal adapters (the ISDN equivalent of a modem) to enable customers to get the most from ISDN. Easynet has also announced a large reduction in the cost of 64K leased line access. Customers will now be able to have a fixed 64K leased line IP service for less than £3000 per annum. For details visit <http://www.easynet.net>

- **Peapod Solutions** is now shipping a new software package that can be used to electronically sign and authenticate legal documents. Called PrivaSeal, the program was developed by Aliroo, who also wrote the PrivaSuite email encryption system.

Documents are "signed" by "dragging and dropping" a digital copy of a person's hand-written signature, via a Windows icon, onto a document. The signature is protected by a password to prevent unauthorised use and once the digital signature has been incorporated, the document is "sealed" so that any subsequent changes will invalidate the signature and a visual notification to this effect displayed within the signature area.

PrivaSeal is compatible with "public key" encryption systems and can also support multiple signatures within a single document. Prices start at £99 per user and for further details call John Bendal on ☎ 0181 574 8288.

- **Baker & McKenzie** has selected Infonet Services to provide a worldwide dedicated frame relay network, commencing with an initial rollout in Europe and Asia-Pacific. The ultimate goal is to connect 7,400 users in 59 offices and within 34 countries. ➔

➔ The network will support email, time and billing systems, word processing and collaborative computing tools.

Baker & McKenzie say the goal is to "enable employees to work successfully in a decentralised structure that combines the advantages of being a large firm with the energy and personal commitment achieved by smaller firms."

Infonet can be found at <http://www.infonet.com>

- **Nuggets** The 1998 series of Nuggets briefing papers is now being published by Delia Venables. Twelve papers are available now, with new topics including obtaining computer skills and a comparison of legal forms and case management software. Nuggets cost £5 each or £60 for a full year's series of 18. Call ☎ 01273 472424 for details.

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Next issue
Issue 65 of the Insider will be published on Monday 27th July.

IT IS OVER HERE AND OVER HYPED - DO YOU NEED WINDOWS 98 ?

The good news is Windows 98 lives up to the hype in that it really does launch applications faster than Windows 95 and with some programs even runs faster. The "plug and play" support for hardware devices is an improvement, as are the new system configuration utility and the diagnostic features that make it easier to fix problems when the system "hangs" or crashes. Indeed the whole product seems much stabler than the original version of Windows 95, as well as simpler to install.

But, is that a good enough reason to make the upgrade?

If you are only going to run standard legal applications (accounts, case management, wordprocessing etc), have no great need to handle large graphics files and can live without the even closer integration offered between the operating system and the web browser element, then the answer is probably "no".

- **Windows 95** - If you already run 95 and have one of the later versions or the OSR2 bug fix, then there is very little functionality to be gained by an upgrade.
- **Windows 3.1** - If you are still happy to live in 16-bit computing land (and a lot of legal systems fall into this category) and saw no reason to upgrade to ➡

➡ Windows 95, then there is also no reason to move to 98. (This does assume lawyers or, where they have them, law firm IT departments are too busy with other projects and/or strapped for cash to enjoy the luxury of upgrading just for its own sake.)

- **32-bit applications** - Inevitably older 16-bit applications will be replaced by 32-bit products, which will require a move to a 32-bit operating system. But Windows 98 is not the only option. PC makers Dell and Compaq both say the Windows NT platform (NT4 today, NT5 from mid 1999) is the more sensible choice for business users. There is also the "thin client" Hydra/Winframe option to consider as an alternative to conventional PCs.

- **Windows 98** - Along with the obvious caution that you should always wait for the first bug fix or service patch to be released before buying a new system (let someone else be the guinea pig) it should also be borne in mind that Windows 98 itself contains some nasty surprises.

It is a RAM-hungry system - to get the best out of it you probably need a Pentium 133 with 64Mb of RAM. The FAT32 facility, which improves hard disk performance, does not work on disks smaller than 512Mb or laptops with a "sleep" mode. And, you need to check the compatibility of any 16-bit Windows or DOS applications you still rely on, as it is possible they will not run on Windows 98.

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