

CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

THE SOURCE FOR INDEPENDENT LEGAL TECHNOLOGY NEWS, COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

TIME RUNNING OUT ON ELITE AND CMS DEAL ?

Despite a further agreement by Solution 6, the Australian financial and accounting software group, and the Elite Information Group to extend the expiration date of their merger until 5:00pm New York City time today (Wednesday 10th May) it looks increasingly as if the pending deal, originally announced in late December, is heading for the regulatory rocks.

The latest extension was prompted by the US Federal Trade Commission bureau of competition's announcement that it intended to recommend the FTC challenge the merger on the grounds it would be uncompetitive to have two of the largest players in the US legal systems market - Elite and Solution 6 subsidiary CMS Data - controlled by the same group. Elite and Solution 6 continue to argue that the merger will be "pro-competitive and in the interest of customers and shareholders".

■ No such problems however for Keystone Software. At a special meeting last Friday (5th May), the main rival to both CMS and Elite on the global PMS stage received the approval of shareholders in BISPoint Technologies, the developer of the LegalHouse EIS system, to acquire the US company's software division and so "jump start" Keystone's move into the US legal IT market.

EVER DEBT EVER READY

Eversheds has launched a new online debt recovery service. Called Everdebt, the system allows clients to place new instructions via the web and monitor their progress of on a real time basis via a secure extranet. The back office systems supporting the service are entirely paperless, while the browser interface is one of the clearest and easy-to-use the Insider has ever encountered. The Insider understands the system is based on Solicitec's SolCase Online software

www.everdebt.com

More legal e-business news on pages 3, 6 & 8

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY ONLINE



Visit the Legal Technology Insider web site for regularly updated news, a diary of legal IT events, web bookmarks, hoax and virus reports plus a searchable archive of the Insider in PDF file format.

NEW ONLINE LEGAL IT NEWS SERVICE

Legal Technology Insider's online news service has a new look, a new location on the web - LegalTechnologyNews.com - and has expanded its scope to include more special reports and international news to cater for its growing US and Australia/Pacific readership.

The service continues to be available free of charge on the web - both through the main LegalTechnologyNews.com site and on the network of affiliate sites that take the service as a news feed - but in addition it is now also available in a free, plain text, e-mail format. A WAP version is also under development.

LegalTechnologyNews.com provides a regular round-up of the latest legal IT news, including internet-related topics, twice a week, supplemented by special features, conference reports and breaking news stories as and when they happen. To be added to the distribution list e-mail:

info@legaltechnology.org

STOP PRESS

■ **DESKTOP LAWYER TO OPEN IN US**
Within the next few days Epoch Software, developers of the Desktop Lawyer service, will open a similar service in the USA.

www.mylawyer.com

■ **VIRUSES - NO LOVE LOST HERE**
Two UK legal systems suppliers were among the many businesses and organisations hit by the I LOVE YOU virus last week. This uses a VBS macro to replicate itself and then send a copy of the message - and the virus - to every address listed in a recipient's Outlook address book. If you receive the message, bin it immediately without opening the e-mail or the attached file. Full advice and links to a bug fix can be found at the Insider virus advice service on the web.

www.legaltechnology.org/bugalert.htm

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ PHILIPS SPEECH PROCESSING and STAT PLUS have announced a partnership deal whereby Stat Plus will incorporate Philip's SpeechMagic server based continuous speech recognition software within its new PartnerNet speech recognition system for lawyers.

www.statplus.co.uk

■ Upon hearing he has won a Compaq Aero 2100 handheld computer in a prize draw organised by AIM PROFESSIONAL, SIMON HARDWICK, the managing partner at HARDWICK STALLARDS, kindly donated the unit to the IMPERIAL CANCER RESEARCH charity.

■ REYNOLDS PORTER CHAMBERLAIN has become the second law firm to begin deployment of the new EIP (Enterprise Information Portal) from HUMMINGBIRD. RPC's IT director JULIE BERRY said the EIP system would be used to develop an internal intranet, as well as an extranet providing clients with the ability to access documents and database information.

Hummingbird has also announced a number of additions and enhancements to its product range, including a "host rejuvenation" toolkit that allows developers to upgrade "green screen" legacy systems to support e-business and browser-based applications.

www.hummingbird.com

■ INTERFACE SOFTWARE, the developer of the InterAction system, has appointed ALEC WILSON as its new vice president of worldwide sales and MARK CROSBIE, who grew up on Tyneside before moving to the United States, as its vice president of software development. The appointments follow the company's rapid growth in recent months, which has seen it expand from 20 staff in 1997 to over 80 today.

There is now also an InterAction UK User Group coordinated by TANIA COLLETTE at LOVELLS.

■ As part of its expansion plans PILGRIM SYSTEMS has appointed AUGUST.ONE COMMUNICATIONS as its new PR agency. The agency's client list includes MICROSOFT UK.

BLOCK PAYMENTS VAT CONFUSION

The English Law Society and the Legal Services Commission (formerly the Legal Aid Board) have found themselves in a muddle - one legal accountant describes it as a "total mess up" - over the correct treatment of VAT on the new monthly block payments scheme.

At present HM Customs & Excise is treating them as taxable payments into the client account however some legal bookkeepers and accountants are arguing the current rules are incorrect and that such payments ought to go into the office account, where they should be treated as non-VATable payments on account of costs.

■ There is a joint Law Society/LSC working party currently reviewing these rules but in the meantime legal aid practices in London and the South-East can attend a one day workshop organised by the Institute of Legal Cashiers & Administrators on Wednesday 17th May. The event kicks off at 9:30am at the Charlton Athletic Football Club. Call 020 8294 2887, price £150 (ILCA members £120).

AXXIA IN EXPANSION MOVES

As part of its expansion plans Axxia Systems has appointed Cheshire-based Newbury Data as the master dealer for the recently launched CaseBrief "shrink wrapped" case management system. Under the agreement Newbury will be involved in the training and support of a soon-to-be-announced nationwide network of local CaseBrief dealers.

■ In a related move, Axxia is currently offering some of the best salaries in the market, including £85,000 (+ package) for two regional sales manager posts, to candidates for new sales development and client relationship staff.

LIR FOUNDERS MOVE INTO XML AND KNOW-HOW

The two founders of Legal Information Resources - Derek Sturdy and Christine Miskin - have left the company, which is now part of Sweet & Maxwell, to form a new business focussing on content development for know-how systems.

Called Granite & Comfrey (01422 881390), the company includes a number of XML and database specialists, who will be involved in the "grunt work" of converting archive and current material into neutral formats for intranet and extranet publication, as well as the tagging, structuring and XML conversion of documents. Sturdy anticipates G&C working in conjunction with suppliers of knowledge management systems by offering complementary services.

■ Miskin was responsible for the development of the *Legal Thesaurus* in 1986, while Sturdy was Sweet & Maxwell's development director. Having built the database and content management infrastructure for Westlaw UK, the two say they felt it was time to leave LIR for new challenges.

AMICUS IN INDEMNITY INSURANCE DEAL

Recent reports suggest that as many as one-in-ten of the 9000 law firms in England & Wales could face difficulty locating affordable professional indemnity cover when the current SIF scheme is wound up on 31st August. In fact according to a *Financial Times* story some small firms may "find it difficult to get cover at any price" and others could be charged as much as a quarter of their gross fee income.

With appropriate timing Gavel & Gown, the UK distributor of the Amicus Attorney case management system, has just announced a new deal with insurance brokers QPI (0845 6021719) that will entitle Amicus users to discounts of up to ten percent off a firm's basic indemnity premium under the post-SIF regime.

Explaining the move, QPI solicitor Richard Grayson said that while gross fees and claims experience do play a part in underwriting, a firm's systems of operation and risk management procedures also have impact. "The majority of claims in the recent past have arisen as a direct result of administrative and not substantive failings. Two systems providing a firewall to prevent such administratively based claims are the diary and conflict of interest avoidance systems, both of which are comprehensively provided for by Amicus Attorney."

BLUE FLAG TO SPIN OFF

Linklaters has announced plans to spin off its "Blue Flag" Internet-based legal services division as a separate company. Called Blueflag.com the business will initially expand and market the firm's family of web-based legal products but longer term it plans to develop commoditised products to help other organisations, including law firms, take advantage of the web and e-commerce.

Launched in 1996, Blue Flag was the first online commoditised legal service developed by a major City practice and the firm estimates that "within the next few years" about 50 percent of its services will be capable of enhancement through web delivery.

Blueflag.com, which will be operational by 30th June, is initially backed by some £5 million in funding but the company has not ruled out additional external investment and even a stock market flotation. Linklaters is launching a web-based transaction management and "virtual deal room" system later this spring.

SURVEY FORMS RETURNED ?

Within the last couple of weeks legal IT suppliers should have received a copy of the latest Insider Quarterly Legal IT Market Survey form for the period January-to-March 2000. Please note that the closing date for returning forms is 22nd May. If you have misplaced or not yet received a survey form, please contact the Insider office.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ As part of a larger project to allow clients direct access to document files and legal materials via a new extranet, LAWRENCE GRAHAM is replacing its current document management system with iMANAGE software. The new system, which will be integrated with Microsoft Outlook so it can also handle e-mail, is being implemented by KRAMER LEE ASSOCIATES. KLA will also develop a version of its KnowledgeBase precedent management software, which currently only runs in conjunction with DOCS Open, for the iManage platform.

■ Following the recent merger of LAWRENCE TUCKETTS and TRUMPS to form Bristol's third largest law firm (TRUMPS LAWRENCE TUCKETTS), the new firm has signed contracts to install SOS practice management software throughout the firm. The SOS software will replace the AIM system in use within Lawrence Tucketts before the merger.

■ London-based DATAMARK, which makes watermarking software used to protect copyright material on the web, has received first round financing from the venture capital groups CVP and DURLACHER. Niche City practice ROSENBLATT acted for Datamark.

■ Legal systems supplier QUILL has been awarded the IIP (Investors in People) quality standard for both its software division and its PIN POINT legal accounts bureau operation.

■ KOMMUNICATE has appointed CHRIS THOMPSON as its new managing director. He takes over from GEOFF ROWETT, who remains as chairman and a director of Kommunicate's parent BVRP.

■ UK software disaster recovery company GUARDIAN IT has launched TeleVault IT, a new service that backs up data automatically to two secure offsite locations via a telecoms link. The service is intended to provide an electronic alternative to the time consuming and sometimes error-prone approach of backing up data to tapes and physically transporting them to a secure location.

LITIGATION NEWS IN BRIEF

■ UK speech recognition systems developer ALLVOICE COMPUTING is suing DRAGON SYSTEMS in a US court for an alleged patent infringement. The move follows another David and Goliath legal action commenced by AllVoice in 1997, when it accused IBM of “dirty tricks” in breach of European Community rules. In the latest dispute AllVoice is currently waiting for the US court to deliver a ruling on whether it will grant a preliminary injunction against Dragon.

■ The ongoing litigation between LEXIS and US legal publisher JURISLINE has taken a new twist with a federal court in New York ordering that the Lexis breach of contract and fraud claims against Jurisline be returned to state court. The ruling, which makes a lot more sense if you understand the way the different US courts systems relate to each other, strips Jurisline of its main defence, namely that it was free to copy and distribute copies of Lexis case reports because court judgments are in the “public domain” and therefore could not be validly copyrighted by Lexis.

■ The manufacturing company PEGLER which, as reported in the last issue of the Insider, was awarded £9 million in damages plus an estimated £5 million interests and costs after successfully suing WANG UK for breach of contract over a failed computerisation project, is unlikely to recover the full amount following the decision by Wang UK’s parent to put the company into voluntary liquidation.

BUZZWORD CORNER

■ DOT-BAMS (*noun*)

What you get when a traditional “bricks and mortar” business starts combining its existing strengths with new Internet technologies and equally new dot-com business opportunities. The Linklaters’ Blue Flag venture is a good example of how law firms can successfully reinvent themselves as a dot-bams.

KLUWER SEEKING INTERNET ALLIANCES

Wolters Kluwer, the Amsterdam-based legal publishing group, has denied reports that it is engaged in merger talks with the Thomson Corporation of Canada, the parent of both Westlaw and Sweet & Maxwell. But, interestingly, Kluwer has admitted that it is “seeking Internet alliances”.

These latest developments come just over two years after Wolters Kluwer, which is probably best known in the UK for its Croner and CCH.New Law businesses, broke off merger talks with the other giant of the legal publishing world Reed Elsevier, the parent of Butterworths and Lexis.

PUBLISHING NEWS IN BRIEF

■ JUDGES PREFER DEAD TREES

As part of the research leading up to this week’s launch of *The White Book Service 2000*, Sweet & Maxwell conducted some market research among High Court and county court judges to determine which format - print, CD or online - they preferred to use. In a strong vote in favour of dead trees, just 15 percent of the sample said they used the Internet for researching the Civil Procedure Rules, while 91 percent said they still favoured the paper volume.

■ HUMAN RIGHTS AND IRISH LAW

This month sees Context add two new titles to its JUSTIS range. In partnership with the Incorporated Council of Law Reporting for Ireland, Context is publishing the *Electronic Irish Reports & Digests* on CD-Rom. The service will cover both the Republic and Northern Ireland and includes a summary of every case reported from 1919. The other development, in the lead up to the implementation of the Human Rights Act 1998 in October, is the introduction of a human rights law database, on the JUSTIS.com Internet service. This will include reports of all cases from the European Court of Human Rights dating back to 1960.

■ FAMILY PROCEDURE ON CD

Information for Lawyers (020 8878 3033) has launched *infolaw Family Procedure* on CD-ROM. The title includes the Family Proceedings Rules, the Family Proceedings Fees Order and the new Ancillary Relief Rules that become effective on 5th June 2000. It is published with the current quarterly issue of the *infolaw Civil Procedure* service, which is available on CD, with web updates, for a £75 annual subscription. The CD, which includes over 200 court forms in reusable PDF format, is available on a 30-day free trial.

■ PENSIONS PORTAL

Pendragon (020 7608 9000) has released version 3 of its *Perspective* pensions information service. This new 32-bit version offers data integration with other applications and what is described as a “pensions portal” to the web.

EVENTS - LEGAL TECH LONDON PREVIEW

It may still only be early May but next week's LegalTech London exhibition and conference - that's the rebranded and refocussed SOLEX event at the Barbican - is actually the last major legal IT show in the UK until February 2001.

With a strong contingent of familiar supplier faces present, including AIM, Elite, Keystone, Laserform, Tikit, Pilgrim, LawTech, SOS and InterAction, plus most of the UK's litigation support service providers (G3, IGL, Elliott Slone and LDM) this would probably be reason enough to visit the event. But this year, along with some good conference sessions, undoubtedly one of the biggest draws will be the chance to view a range of US legal market products normally never seen outside of North America.

Leaving aside the likes of Worldox, Doculex, PMTI and Summation, which have dipped their toes in UK waters in the past, the US exhibitors fall into two broad categories. The first of these are suppliers of systems for creating macros and templates for Microsoft Word documents and managing the migration to Word from legacy platforms such as WordPerfect. These include Legal MacPac, Microsystems and SoftWise with its MacroSuite product.

www.legalmacpac.com

www.microsystems.com

www.softwise.net

The second, and arguably the more interesting group, are suppliers of products offering varying permutations of the browser-fronted, web enabled/ASP (application service provider) approach to sharing and collaborating on documents, litigation support projects, case management records and trial deposition transcripts over the Internet. Suppliers to watch out for include Mitratesh, InterNetEx, Cascentral.com, realLegal.com, DocumentForum.com and ProLaw Software. Incidentally, the latest version of the ProLaw system is compatible with "wireless" handheld devices, such as the Palm VII and the Blackberry.

www.mitratesh.com

www.legalnetex.com

www.casecentral.com

www.reallegal.com

www.documentforum.com

www.prolaw.com

For the record, although most of the "home grown" systems suppliers are better known for "conventional" back office software, at LegalTech London they too will be focussing primarily on web-enabled intranet/extranet products.

Keystone will also be providing UK visitors with their first opportunity to see the LegalHouse suite of executive information and business intelligence applications the company recent acquired from US legal systems developer BISPoint Technologies.

■ Admission to the exhibition (open 10:30am to 5:00pm) is free of charge. Legal Technology Insider will be reporting on the conference sessions in a subsequent edition.

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY DIARY DATES

■ MAY 17 & 18, LONDON - LegalTech London. This is the new look, rebranded and refocussed SOLEX show which now has two distinct elements - a free to visit exhibition (doors open at 10:30am) and a pay to attend conference programme organised by PricewaterhouseCoopers that runs from 9:30am to 5:00pm each day. Conference fees start at £149.00 (+VAT) for a half-day session, with substantial discounts. Speakers include Richard Susskind, consultant Neil Cameron, magic circle IT directors Brian Collins of Clifford Chance and Simon Thompson of Linklaters, plus Elizabeth Broderick of Blake Dawson Waldron. For details call Imark on 07000 763 896.

www.legaltechshow.com/london

■ MAY 18, WARRINGTON - LAFQAS Compliance Roadshow. Organised by Mountain Software's Northern distributor JM Computing. Admission free, the event starts at 8:30am and includes breakfast. To book a place call Philip Thompson on 0161 925 7777.

■ JUNE 10, BIRMINGHAM - Legal IT Forum. One day event organised by the English Law Society's Law Management section at the Hilton Metropole Hotel in Birmingham. Starts 9:30am and closes at 4:40pm. The theme is profitable e-commerce for law firms, including web site design and online case management. Speakers include Nottingham Law School tutor/IT consultant Julian Boardman-Weston, Carol Byrne, the IT director of Jacksons, Grahame and Richard Cohen of Epoch Software, who are always good value as speakers, and Neil Davidson of the Virtual Solicitors Chambers group. The full delegate fee £280 (+VAT) with substantial discounts available for LMS members. The event qualifies for 5 CPD hours. Call Central Law Training on 0121 355 0900.

■ JUNE 27, WAKEFIELD - E-Commerce 2000. Sanderson Systems' final roadshow takes place at the Cedar Court Hotel on 27th June. Admission free, call Lisa Quinn on 0121 359 4861.

SITES TO BOOKMARK

■ ONLINE PROPERTY SHOPS

With England & Wales trudging slowly towards online conveyancing, from this month Teramedia, one of the consortia bidding for a National Land Information Service (NLIS) licence, has begun recruiting law firms to become partners in its new Territorium online property shop service. The service faces online competition from the Solicitors Property Shop (SPS), which already has 55 bricks and mortar branches in the North-East and London Solicitors Property Services, which began recruiting members firms for its new web services at the end of April.

www.territorium.co.uk

www.sps.net

www.lsp.co.uk

■ ONLINE REFERRAL DIRECTORIES

Once again it has been a bumper month for online legal service referral directories with another four joining or revising their offerings in an already crowded market. The latest arrivals include: Barristers-at-Law, technically a relaunch after the original service hit web server problems; Law On The Web (no relation to the US dot-com site of the same name) which has been revamped to include a free legal advice service called AskNoQuestions; and AccidentCompensation.com, which now has a companion online expert witnesses service.

www.barristers-at-law.com

www.judgeonline.co.uk

www.lawontheweb.co.uk

www.accidentcompensation.com

www.accidentexpertwitnesses.co.uk

■ The Irish law firm A & L GOODBODY was rated one of the best legal web sites at the recent ABA Techshow in Chicago.

www.algoodbody.ie

■ ONLINE RECRUITMENT

Three new recruitment-oriented web sites have opened their pages to browsers, including a joint venture between Jobsin and Central Law Training, as well as what is claimed to be the world's first online temps agency.

www.jobsinlaw.com

www.tempz.com

www.cavendish-boyle.com

MASONS HOPE OUTLAW WILL CLEAN UP

Masons, one of the pioneers of IT and communications law practice, has launched a new web-based legal service designed to meet the needs of new media and e-commerce businesses.

Called OUT-LAW.COM, the service is pitched at younger Internet start-up ventures whose founders and managers come from more creative backgrounds than the traditional, buttoned-down technology industry clients the firm normally deals with.

To this end, the site is distinguished by a far more laid-back, off the wall approach and attitude than usually found with law firm web sites. And it also employs user-friendly language, for example using the phrase "brands and ideas" rather than the legalistic "intellectual property".

Although this is not a legal e-business site - the firm has also eschewed the "incubator" approach adopted by some other new media law firms - it is also more than a mere brochureware site. In particular, the free services on offer - a weekly e-mail newsletter and downloadable document precedents, such as non-disclosure agreements - are just the marketing hooks needed to start developing longer term relationships with prospective clients.

■ The onscreen computer game - win points zapping lawyers, accountants and venture capitalists trying to get their hands on your money - is a nice finishing touch

www.out-law.com

GONE CYBER-SLACKING

A new report, from Internet security specialists GFI, reveals that out of a sample of 1000 Internet users in the USA, 64 percent admitted to being "cyber-slackers" in that they use the Internet for personal purposes during working hours. Of these, 26 percent said they spent less than one hour a day cyber-slacking, 22 percent admitted to spending 1-to-2 hours and a frightening eight percent spend more than 5 hours cyber-slacking.

The most popular activities were visiting news and sports information sites, dealing with private e-mail traffic - typically via HotMail-style web-based accounts - and shopping. Leaving aside the waste of company time, the survey also found that 19 percent of respondents had during these activities encountered "dangerous files" containing viruses and bugs.

LEGAL WEB SITE AUDIT

Legal Technology Insider is currently compiling the results of the first monthly top 10 of the UK's busiest legal web sites and portals. The April traffic report will be published in the 24th May issue of the Insider. If you think your site could qualify and you need a survey form, please e-mail:

info@legaltechnology.org

HARD TIMES AHEAD FOR LEGAL ISPS ?

A new report, commissioned by the Home Office to assess the potential impact of UK government plans to require Internet service providers (ISPs) to be able to intercept e-mail traffic, under the new Regulation of Investigatory Powers Bill, estimates the annual cost of compliance will range from £9400 for small ISPs to as much as £236,000 for large ISPs. The one crumb of comfort is the report also recommends that the initial capital outlay required to set-up the monitoring and interception systems - estimated to be between £200,000 and £500,000 - should be paid by the government rather than the ISP industry.

BT HITS TWO SPEED-BUMPS ALONG THE DIGITAL HIGHWAY

Easter is the time for eggs and, with appropriate timing, poor old British Telecommunications found itself with Internet egg on its face on two separate occasions over the holiday period.

- The first incident involved BT having to admit that its Ignition PRO ISDN modem/terminal adapter, which is sold as standard equipment to smaller businesses installing ISDN lines, is currently not compatible with Microsoft Windows 2000. Ignition Pro is compatible with Windows 98 and NT 4.0 and BT hopes to have Windows 2000 drivers available "in the next couple of months".

- BT ran into another speed bump on the information superhighway last week over the launch of the company's much hyped BTopenworld "broadband" Internet service, which is due to begin operating later this summer using high speed ADSL technology.

Web-users, including one legal systems developer in the North-East, signing up for the service to take advantage of the pre-launch £150 price discount, were appalled to receive an apology from general manager Robert Salvoni admitting there had been a security flaw in the sign-up software that left customers' personal and business details accessible by third parties.

"For a short period a hidden area of the BTopenworld site holding the details that you registered was accessed by a limited number of unauthorised persons. I am writing to apologise to you for this breach in security." said Salvoni. "We are writing to those people identified as having accessed this hidden area to get written confirmation that they have not copied, used or passed your details to any other person and will delete or destroy all copies of this information."

BTopenworld said that as soon as the problem was identified, immediate steps were taken to secure the site and confirmed that the company was "undertaking a full and thorough investigation to ensure that breaches of this nature do not happen again."

READER SERVICES

■ WATCHING BRIEF ONLINE

Watching Brief Online is a digital newsletter providing a summary of recent local government law cases. It is available free of charge on the web and in a plain text e-mail format. To subscribe send an e-mail, headed "Watching Brief" and containing your e-mail address, to:

info@legaltechnology.org
www.watchingbrief.com

■ LTI-NET DIGITAL NEWSLETTER

LTi-NET, the digital version of Legal Technology Insider, is available in both PDF and HTML file formats and can be accessed via a subscriber-only web site or delivered as an e-mail attachment direct to the desktop. Subscription rates start at £135 for a single user licence, rising to £270 for an unlimited site licence. For a free trial copy e-mail:

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www.legaltechnology.org

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CONTACT DETAILS

Legal Technology Insider, Ferndale House, Harling Road, North Lopham, Diss, Norfolk IP22 2NQ, United Kingdom.
■ Publisher & Editor: Charles Christian
Tel: 01379 687518 - Fax: 01379 687704
E-mail: info@legaltechnology.org

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THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of Legal Technology Insider - No. 101 - will be published on Wednesday 24th May, 2000.

CASTROL NOW RUNNING ON FIRSTLAW

Burmah Castrol has become the latest major commercial client to sign up with the FirstLAW online legal services exchange. Alan Pryor, Castrol's group environmental advisor, said that within 48 hours of posting a brief to the FirstLAW site, he had received three bids for the project.

Pryor believes FirstLAW can help solve a common problem for multinational companies, namely finding a specialist lawyer in a country outside the UK, whereas "in the past we have relied on word of mouth referrals but this can be hit or miss with projected costs unknown."

■ Since its launch in February FirstLAW, which is regulated as a solicitors practice by the English Law Society, has formed referral and fee sharing relationships with over 80 law firms, including Linklaters and Allen & Overy from the "magic circle". FirstLAW has also forged links with other business-to-business exchanges including Doctors.net.uk and the Bar exchange BookCounsel.com.

To-date, FirstLAW has met little competition from rival online legal service operations. In the UK the value added referral directory is currently the more popular legal e-business model however a number of US organisations are planning to launch similar legal services auction sites later this spring. These include eLawForum.com and Altman Weil's "lawyer brokering" service iBidLaw.com.

www.elawforum.com
www.ibidlaw.com

■ One UK variation on the FirstLAW approach is a new service called FirstLegalDirect. Because this is not a law firm, the 1990 Solicitors Introduction & Referral Code precludes it from entering into fee sharing arrangements. Instead the service gets around the problem of how to charge the lawyers, rather than the clients, by treating the introductory commission (of between 2-to-5 percent) as a disbursement that is recovered by the instructed firm, on behalf of FirstLegalDirect, for a nominal £5 fee.

www.firstlegaldirect.com

LEGAL DOMAINS FOR SALE BUT AT A PRICE

Hugh Hambro, a lawyer based in the north of Scotland, has assembled a portfolio of legal-oriented web site domain names suitable for law firms wanting URLs that are more generic and search engine-friendly than the usual www.ourfirmname.com style of name. The domains are available for sale - but at a substantial cost. The price tag for www.SueForDamages.com is a modest US\$400,000 while www.SueForLibel.com will go to the highest bidder.

www.lawnames.com

■ Sweet & Maxwell has just launched Domain Names: Global Practice & Procedure, a one volume looseleaf service providing the first English language guide to this topic.