Nabarro Nathanson in TotalSpeech pilot

Nabarro Nathanson has begun piloting the BigHand (020 7793 8200) TotalSpeech digital dictation and workflow software in an initiative it hopes will allow the firm to switch work from busy secretaries to those with more capacity and make it possible to transfer dictation between the firm's offices.

Approximately 50 staff across the property and charities groups will receive TotalSpeech during the pilot. Solicitors based in Reading will also be able to send dictation back to secretarial support when in London on business. The firm expects TotalSpeech to encourage more effective use of secretarial resources and to improve the flow of work within the pilot group. If the initiative is successful the firm expects to roll out the software on a wider basis later this year.

Commenting on the project IT director Richard Elson said: "The fact that when a lawyer returns to the office he or she has to pass their secretary a pile of tapes, while a PC sits idle on the desk beside them, strikes me as both outmoded and wholly inefficient. Digital dictation offers the opportunity to utilise all our computer equipment while providing workflow benefits. It has to be the logical way forward."

The Insider web site

For the top legal technology news, jobs, links and information resources - visit the award winning Legal Technology Insider web site.

www.legaltechnology.com

IT - still not providing the expected ROI

In its third annual *Process & Technology Survey* into the way the 700 largest law firms in the USA apply IT to their practices, the Hildebrandt TechGroup consultancy, reports that despite the fact they are spending on average between 4-6% of their annual revenues on technology, many of them are still not getting a meaningful return (or ROI) on their IT investments.

TechGroup managing director Curt Canfield says many firms are "growing increasingly concerned about what they perceive as a growing disparity between their IT investments and the return on that investment." Unfortunately, the Hildebrandt findings just go to confirm these concerns, revealing that "manual, paper-based processes remain prevalent despite major expenditure on networks, desktop PCs and state-of-the-art financial management and accounting systems."

The Hildebrandt report suggests that although technologies, such as electronic workflow systems, have the potential to deliver strategic advantages by helping firms "to reallocate headcount from clerical paper pushers to higher level support positions... It appears that many firms are still deploying IT on a tactical level without a strategic commitment to positively affect either the revenue or expense side of the ledger."

Canfield adds that "spending 6% of your gross revenue without some noticeable - and positive - effect often compounds economic, operational and cultural problems within the firm. Our recommendation is to take a fraction of this spending and devote it to strategic planning in your firm that will make the kind of difference that you want and need."

Another key finding was the growing technology gap, with large firms not only spending two-and-a-half times as much (as a percentage of turnover) on IT as small firms but also having nearly double the ratio of IT support staff to end users.

Copies of the *2002 Law Firm Process & Technology Survey* cost $250. An executive summary is also available, to obtain a copy email Jan Reddington at *jereddington@hildebrandt.com*

Leeds Law Soc backs IT show

The Leeds Law Society is the latest organisation to announce its official backing for the Legal IT 2002 exhibition which takes place at the Royal Armouries on 9 & 10 October 2002.

www.legalitshow.com

New faces line up to enter market

The Insider has lost track of the number of times we have been told there are too many suppliers fighting for a slice of the legal technology market and that a shakeout is needed. Perhaps it is but clearly nobody has told the rest of the IT industry and in this issue we report on six new faces either making their debut or poised to enter the UK legal IT market. - *see pages 3 and 5*.

News in brief

■ **IS THIS THE FASTEST DEAL OF 2002 ?**
DPS Software (020 8804 1022) believes it now holds the UK record for the fastest legal IT deal this year, taking just four days to clinch an order, from initial contact through to final contractual negotiations. What started with a favourable recommendation by an another DPS user, followed by a number of phone calls between Cheshire firm Cohen Filipinni and DPS on Monday morning, ended on Thursday with the firm getting ready to implement a DPS conveyancing case management system on a five user network. The firm, which was so enthusiastic about the deal that it even posted off a cheque to pay for the software on the Wednesday afternoon, plans to increase the number of users later this year.

■ **BOND PEARCE GOES WITH KLA**
Against what is described as "strong competition" Kramer Lee & Associates (01268 494508) and iManage have won a tender to supply Bond Pearce with a new DMS and content management system. Bond Pearce selected the iManage WorkSite suite of applications to provide content and document management, collaboration, workflow, knowledge management and portal functionality across the entire firm of 650 staff. KLA will project manage the implementation.

■ **SYNERGY 2.3 OUT NOW**
Workshare Technology (020 7481 6100) has released version 2.3 of its Synergy document content collaboration application. The new features include closer and automatic integration between Word documents, the local DMS and Synergy and the ability to print a reduced redline containing only the pages in which changes have taken place.
www.workshare.com

Keep up with the news

Keep up with the latest news between issues of the Insider by subscribing to our free ezine *Legal Technology Insider News*. It is delivered directly to your desktop as a plain text email and to be added to the distribution list just send a note of your email address, including the word 'News' in the header, to
news@legaltechnology.com

Libraries - smaller does not always mean cheaper

The latest (June 2002) edition of American Lawyer Media's *AmLaw Tech* magazine casts an interesting perspective on the way some US law firm libraries are developing, as more and more publications become available in a digital format.

A survey conducted earlier this year found that 55% of the firms in the sample had less shelf space dedicated to books than they did five years ago and that of those firms where the main library had been redesigned or relocated during the last five years, 78% were now housed in smaller premises.

Given that 68% of firms reported cutting back on their purchases of law books and 75% had cancelled subscriptions to print law report series during the past two years, this shrinkage in size is easily explained. But, while libraries may be getting physically smaller, they are also getting more expensive to run, with 57% of firms reporting that their 2002 budgets were larger than those for 2001.

Two factors contribute to this increase. The first is because the digital editions of most legal titles are sold on some form of per user licence basis, they are almost inevitably more expensive than their print counterparts. Secondly, the growing demand for specialist research and knowledge management services means many libraries are not only recruiting more librarians but also looking for more highly skilled staff who command higher salaries. Incidentally, according to the survey, over 36% of US law library directors now earn more that $100,000 per year.

Shining a little light on the e-conveyancing revolution

Michael Kaye of Kaye Tesler & Co, one of the UK pioneers of online legal services for small firms, has published a new set of training CDs containing a practitioner's guide to e-conveyancing including: changes in the law and Land Registry practice, the role of the National Land Information Service and the NLIS channel providers, and digital signatures and identities.

Kaye, an experienced lecturer, has produced the guide as an extensive lecture on two CDs and practitioners who complete the supporting material will qualify 3 CPD points. The CD set costs £49.99 + VAT and can be ordered on 020 8809 6756.

■ **Comment:** Kaye, whose firm handles conveyancing work, says he was prompted to produce the guide because he was conscious that solicitors were being bombarded with information about e-conveyancing from all directions from different suppliers and agencies but with no-one providing a comprehensive picture of the overall position as it is today.

We don't have to be so tactful as Kaye and suggest that practitioners are confused not only by the piecemeal nature of the information they are being fed but also by its often opaque content. It would be ironic if this communications revolution stalled because of the inability of those involved to communicate the benefits of the changes they are advocating. *See also page 7.*

New face hopes to revive jaded consultancy market

With a handful of honourable exceptions, the most noticeable trend among legal IT consultancies in the UK in recent years has been their tendency to close down.

One consultancy hoping to buck this trend is the JADe Group (01635 45544), which has been operating in the media, charity, NHS and legal markets since 1999. The consultancy's legal track record includes work for Lovells and Elite-related projects. JADe is now reporting growing interest in Linux as an alternative to the Microsoft platform and has also launched a bulletin board for legal IT staff which can be found on its web site.

www.jadegroup.co.uk

Two new entries to the US market

One of the unwritten rules of legal technology seems to be that whenever a new product starts making inroads into the US market, sooner or later someone (often Tikit) starts distributing it in the UK. On that basis two names that could soon be heading for these shores are viDesktop (**www.videsktop.com**) and Nylon Technology (**www.nylontechnology.com**).

viDesktop produce a range of human resources and staff evaluation applications that are delivered entirely to the desktop via a web browser. There is also a thin client case management system but that is currently only applicable to Ontario-based law firms. Nylon's offering is the Herrmann TechSuite, which has been developed in conjunction with a New York advertising agency to provide law firms with the tools to manage web site content, including CRM materials. New deal management and proposal generation applications will be launched later this year.

Axxia signs up for Tower records

Axxia Systems (0118 960 2602) is to offer a new integrated electronic document & records management system following a tie-up with Tower Software, whose EDRMS product TRIM is widely used within the public sector. As part of the deal, the TRIM software will be used to combine workflow, image management, document management, web publishing, email management and records management, with Axxia's case management system via a single off-the-shelf application.

■ **Comment:** A question we are frequently asked on the Insider is can we suggest any suppliers of EDRMS products that can meet the needs of small-to-mid-sized solicitors practices. Such firms typically fall between two stools, as the volumes of documents they have exceed the capacity of a 'lets buy a scanner and CD burner and do it ourselves' approach yet fall short of the workloads seen as necessary to justify using the services of the big litigation support bureaux. For these firms the ideal solution is an add-on to their existing case or practice management system. Well done Axxia for spotting this gap in the market.

News in brief

■ **INTERNET IN A BOX FOR LAW FIRM**
Grimsby-based Bridge McFarland has become the first law firm in the UK to tackle its internet access needs with the ExoServer 'one-box' system from Open Computing (0113 251 3000). ExoServer provides web access, cache, virus scanning, firewall and email management facilities within one unit. The system can support up to 500 users although the firm currently only has 150 staff on its IT network. The ExoServer was specified and installed by the firm's IT supplier Select Legal Systems.

www.open-computing.com

■ **MARTINEAU JOHNSON'S E-WORK**
Martineau Johnson is implementing the Metastorm (020 8971 1500) e-Work system to provide the firm with a workflow management platform that would "automate the people-intensive and paper-based processes that divert fee earners from their higher-value activities." IT director, Ken Agnew said that along with streamlining internal administrative processes, so lawyers did not have to spend so long manually completing forms for tasks like cheque requisitions, the e-Work system would also be used to implement more structured business rules, such as automatically conducting conflict of interest searches before accepting new instructions.

www.metastorm.com

Looking for IT staff ?

If you are a law firm or legal systems vendor looking for IT staff, including positions in sales, development, web services, know-how, library services, support, management and training, you can post your vacancies free of charge to the Jobs Board on the Insider web site. Email to **jobs@legaltechnology.com**

■ **This week's top jobs: Solution 6** is advertising for a London-based client service manager to look after its CMS Open and Keystone product ranges and an account manager for its southern region. And **LexisNexis Butterworths Tolley** is looking for a publishing systems developer. For more details of these and other vacancies visit the Insider Jobs Board at

www.legaltechnology.com

News in brief

■ **PORTAL EDITION FROM RINGTAIL**
Ringtail Solutions has released Version 6 of Ringtail CaseBook, its browser-based litigation support and KMS application. Key enhancements include improved transcript management, an advanced search facility that supports fuzzy logic and CasePortal - a top level window into the application that gives a view of all events and tasks related to any of the cases the user is working on. One of Ringtail's highest profile sites in the UK is Allen & Overy where CaseBook is integrated within the firm's own Caseroom 2 case management/litigation support system.

www.ringtailsolutions.com

■ **24/7 SUPPORT FROM WORKSHARE**
Workshare Technology has announced plans to establish a 24-hour a day global customer support centre to service its international user base of law firms running its Synergy and Deltaview products. The new centre will be located in London and is due to open in December.

■ **EQUIINET UPGRADES NETPILOT**
In anticipation of a growing demand for access to online services by law firms, as the UK heads towards an e-conveyancing environment, the comms equipment developer Equiinet (01793 603701) has introduced NetPilot Plus, an enhanced version of its internet server-in-a-box appliance. Along with improved security firewall, anti virus scanning and web access control facilities, the new version of NetPilot now automatically archives all incoming and outgoing email, either within the appliance or on a server, so a firm no longer has to rely on individual users to archive messages.

www.equiinet.com

Rod Craise dies

Rod Craise, who was the IT manager at Bird Semple prior to its merger with DLA, died suddenly at the end of June. DLA's IT director Daniel Pollick told the Insider that since the merger Craise had taken a key role in the integration and latterly on financial systems projects within DLA. "He was a well known figure in the Scottish legal IT world and we are all very shocked and saddened to have lost him."

Interface launches InterAction v.5 CRM

Interface Software this week launched Version 5 of its legal market leading InterAction CRM (client relationship management) system. Interface vice president Rick Klau says the new version, which is scheduled to start shipping in Q3 this year, is the most significant upgrade to the product since the launch of IRIS in 2000 and will give users access to functionality that even mainstream CRM products cannot compete with.

Klau says the new release focuses on three key themes. These are improvements to the 'user experience' - in other words to make the system fit in better with the way lawyers like to work. Probably the most noticeable change here is the introduction of a privacy element that allows lawyers to decide just which pieces of information they have on a client or contact are shared across the firm and which remain private.

The second theme is a new 'project' oriented architecture, so instead of just looking at the relationship between people, including clients, lawyers and other contacts, it can also link them to deals, matters and projects. Finally (and echoing a recent Gartner Group report which said that one of the biggest problems with CRM projects is about 30% of all data goes 'bad' every year) Interface has placed new emphasis on data quality and 'change management' so as to make it easier to manage CRM records while avoiding duplication and errors.

Other changes in version 5 include full support for Lotus Notes platforms and a web browser interface that, according to Klau, still gives users Windows style functionality. Interestingly, the web interface is based entirely on dynamic HTML and does not require any interactive elements, such as Java applets, to be downloaded into the system.   **www.interfacesoftware.com**

TFB client facing initiative

Following the first phase of TFB's 'CFI' client facing initiative, which over the past 10 months has seen TFB directors and senior management meet and discuss issues with representatives of over 300 user firms at meetings and client workshops across the UK, the company is preparing for the second phase of its CFI.

According to customer care director Len Hall (to our knowledge TFB is still the only legal IT supplier with a main board director dedicated to this task) the next phase of the initiative will focus on customer support. "Our new customer care portal, which has been in beta test for the last three months, will be rolled out shortly to improve client communications and keep customers constantly updated on the status of support calls. We have adopted a proactive approach to call log analysis, by identifying issues or problems that arise more frequently than others and addressing these specific problems directly to limit their occurrence."

■ **Comment:** And about time too. It has always been a source of amazement to us that suppliers spend so much time trying to win new sales yet ignore the needs of their existing users.

More new faces queue up to enter the legal market

■ **DOHERTY ASSOCIATES - OUTLOOK ANYWHERE**

After carrying out projects for several law firms, including Rooks Rider and Lovells, west-London based Doherty Associates (020 8742 3338) is now making a concerted push into the legal market with its Outlook Anywhere system. As the name implies, this is a mobile utility that allows users to carry out all their normal Outlook activities, including dealing with email and checking contact details, remotely via a wireless enabled PDA. Doherty's preferred device is the Compaq iPAQ however any PocketPC 2002 PDA with the capability of communicating with a mobile phone that supports GSM or GPRS is acceptable.

According to Terry Doherty, a key feature of Outlook Anywhere is it provides secure, server-level synchronisation between PDAs and a firm's back office systems rather than just mirroring data, where there is always the risk of information being duplicated or falling out of sync. Because the system can also handle Microsoft Office file attachments Doherty says that with a suitable PDA, lawyers who just need to access email need no longer carry a laptop with them on out of the office trips.

www.doherty.co.uk

■ **REMUS TECHNOLOGIES - TEMPUS**

Still in the realms of PDAs, Remus Technologies (01825 873444) has launched Tempus, a time recording and note-taking application that allows lawyers to keep track of information and billing while out of the office. Donaldson Dunstall in Bexhill were one of the pilot sites for the project.   **www.remus.com**

■ **CODE-X ENCRYPTION - CODE-X**

Finally, what we have all been waiting for - another secure email system. This time the product is from Code-X Encryption (020 7488 2996) a subsidiary of Route 4 plc, who developed a secure email application for the consumer market called Cryptomail. Code-X is the industrial strength version of the product and contains some useful legal market friendly features including integral archiving and billing - the latter intended to make it easier to record encrypted email messages as disbursements.

Interestingly - and by way of adding extra security - each encrypted message has its own dedicated, one time key. Code-X is a managed service and can either be run by the supplier on an ASP basis - with pricing based along the lines of £1000 for 1000 keys - or else installed inhouse on a law firm's own servers.

Unfortunately there are a couple of drawbacks with the system. The first is that the system is currently only available for the Microsoft Exchange/Outlook platform and cannot support Lotus or GroupWise. Secondly, and rather more crucially, the Code-X system requires the authorised recipient (typically the client) to install a decryption utility on their PC before they can read an encrypted message. This utility can either be distributed in advance by the sender firm or else the client must download it from the Code-X web site - options which have in the past been non-starters for most law firms.   **www.code-xcrypto.com**

Legal technology events diary

■ JULY 16, MANCHESTER. The latest in a series of Videss 1-to-1 legal software briefing workshops. The event takes place at the Lancs County Cricket Club ground at Old Trafford. For details call David Phillips on 01274 851577.

■ JULY 24 & 25, LONDON. Law Firm Technology: making your firm more profitable - at the Harrington Hall, SW7. Two day conference (+ pre-conference workshop on 23 July) on how to ensure your firm has a clear business vision to strategically direct its IT investment. The event is sponsored by Legal Technology Insider and the speaker panel includes John Hokkanen of Latham & Watkins, Andrew Levison, Kevin Doolan of Eversheds, Simon Kosminsky of SJ Berwin and Insider editor Charles Christian. Prices from £995 + VAT and the event qualifies for up to 16 CPD hours. For details call the Ark Group on +44 (0)20 8785 2700. To register or to download a pdf brochure visit
www.ark-group.com/328lti.html

■ AUGUST 12 - 16, CAMBRIDGE. IBC's 5th Annual IT Law Summer School at Downing College. Extensive programme, including parallel session streams, featuring most of the UK IT law world's great and good. The full course, including bed and board, is £1999 + VAT with discounts if you book online.
www.ibc-ilegal.com/itlaw

■ AUGUST 19-21, BOCA RATON, FLORIDA. LawNet 2002 - the organisation's 25th annual educational and networking conference for US law firm IT managers.

■ AUGUST 28 & 29, SAN FRANCISCO. LegalTech San Francisco, Hyatt Regency.

■ SEPTEMBER 19 & 20, NEW YORK. LegalTech September/NY, Hilton.
www.legaltechshow.com

■ SEPTEMBER 27 & 28, MANCHESTER. The (English) Law Society annual conference at the International Convention Centre. The theme is Changing the Legal Landscape.

■ SEPTEMBER 28, LONDON. The Bar Annual Conference at the Royal Lancaster.

News in brief

■ **TIKIT SHIPS PLUS SUITE UPGRADE**
Tikit (020 7400 3737) has begun shipping a new version of its Plus Suite for InterAction utility. This provides additional functionality for users of the popular law firm CRM application including improved integration with the iManage DMS.

■ **DRAGON VERSION 6 OUT NOW**
ScanSoft, the new owners of the Dragon speech recognition software business, is now shipping the latest version of its Dragon NaturallySpeaking system - v6 - through its major UK retail and distribution channels. Version 6 is available in three levels of functionality - Preferred, Standard and Essentials - with prices ranging from £149.99 to £39.99. One of the major enhancements in Version 6 is the 'Nothing But Speech' facility that automatically filters out the "um's" and "aah's" that naturally occur in dictation. Version 6 is primarily aimed at the home and small business/single user market. Dragon also produce a professional edition for more complex speech recognition applications.

■ **KROLL ACQUIRES ONTRACK**
Kroll, the risk consulting and private investigations group, has acquired Ontrack Data International, a US supplier of data recovery, electronic discovery and computer forensics services which has just begun making inroads into the UK. The new business, called Kroll Ontrack, will operate as Kroll's Technology Services Group.
www.krollontrack.com

■ **JOINT ACCREDITATION FOR LDM**
The document management services company LDM, which has bureaux in London and Manchester (020 7613 1160 + 0161 228 0170) has been awarded accreditation for both the ISO 9001 quality standard and the BS7799 standard for management information security.

■ **TRANSLATORS GET SECURITY**
Universal Translations, which has been providing foreign language services to City of London law firms for the past 40 years, is now using the iLangua TransMC system to offer their customers secure email delivery and online job tracking facilities.
https://jobs.universaltranslations.net
www.ilangua.com

Online marketing referral sites get thumbs down

New research conducted by the well known internet commentator Delia Venables suggests that UK law firms have been left singularly unimpressed by the services offered by the large number of online marketing referral web sites currently targeting the legal profession.

The premise behind all these sites is broadly the same: if a law firm pays the fees and signs up to join a panel, it will benefit from a far greater marketing budget to promote the site than it could ever afford if left to its own devices. This means more visitors will be attracted to the site and should in turn result in a larger number of prospective clients being referred on to the panel members.

However with these sites charging anything from £150 to £1250 a year per postcode for panel membership, Venables wanted to know just how effective they were. The results of her survey suggests "not very". A total of 800 firms were canvassed but according to Venables "the responses I received were overwhelmingly sceptical, saying either that they had not tried these sites or had tried them and found them of very little use."

Giving the referral sites the benefit of the doubt, she then contacted the operators of all these sites (twice) and "invited them to encourage their happy users to contact me." But apparently happy users were also in short supply as the only responses Venables received were from three firms who had all found the Law-on-the-Web service useful.

In the light of this dire response, Venables advises all firms considering going down this route to (i) ask for validated figures relating to these sites' web traffic, (ii) find out how many other firms are on a panel, (iii) find out how many referrals are passed on in the course of a month and (iv) find out how many of these referrals actually turn into real fee generating clients.

Venables says firms should also remember that they all qualify for a free listing on the Law Society's own very popular **www.solicitors-online.com** site. Here on the Insider, we would suggest other pertinent questions include: what are these organisations doing to promote their sites, how big are their marketing budgets and what are they spending the money on? Full details of the survey can be found on the web.
www.venables.co.uk/n0207bry.htm

New guide to email for small firms

The legal management consultancy Practical Solutions has just published *Email & Internet Access Solutions for Smaller Firms.* This guide contains useful checklists to help simplify the selection of the most appropriate system for a particular firm, along with a clear explanation of all the jargon and practical advice, including a template for a practice email and internet usage policy. Copies of the guide cost £25 (including p&p) and can be ordered via the Practical Solutions web site at **www.inpractice.co.uk** or by phoning Kayleigh O'Neill on 0161 929 8355.

E-Conveyancing round-up

■ **SCL SET UP PROPERTY & E-CONVEYANCING GROUP**
The Society for Computers & Law (SCL) has formed a new IT in Property group for practitioners interested in keeping up with developments in e-conveyancing and related issues. The group needs the support of people with relevant experience, so if you feel you can help and are interested in joining the committee please contact Maitland Kalton, of Kaltons Solicitors, indicating your particular interests, what contribution you can make and if you can host meetings at your offices.

The group's first meeting takes place in London next week (Tuesday 16 July at 6:30pm) when the main topic will be the SCL response to the Land Registry's e-conveyancing consultation document. To attend email **maitland@kaltons.co.uk**

■ **SITECHECK NOW ON THE WEB**
Sitecheck, the environmental search report service, has been re-launched and is now available via the internet. An entire report, including maps, is produced in an A4 format and can be supplied via email (as a PDF file) within 24 hours of being ordered. Landmark say the report is an essential tool for conveyancers because it assists with the process of environmental due diligence by providing an indicative risk assessment and information on 'source-pathway-receptor' linkages to potential contamination areas within 500m of a subject site's boundary. Sitecheck costs £149 for sites up to 15 hectares and is also available in a hard copy format.

www.landmarkinfo.co.uk/orders

■ **DPS SIGNS UP FOR NLIS SEARCHFLOW**
DPS Software (020 8804 1022) is the latest IT supplier to join forces with NLIS Searchflow to provide its users of the DPS conveyancing case management system with access to the Searchflow service for ordering searches online.

■ **CON 29 NOW AVAILABLE FOR ELECTRONIC USE**
One of the most widely used of all legal forms - CON 29 Enquiries of Local Authority - is now available in a new format that is compatible with electronic search procedures. Since the beginning of July, electronic versions of the form have been available through all three NLIS channels - Transaction Online, TM and Searchflow.

One of the main changes is the new forms ask for a National Land & Property Gazetteer Unique Property Reference Number (NLPG UPRN). This should enable faster searches and greater certainty with results. According to Jan Boothroyd, a member of the working party that developed the form: "The new CON 29 is designed to be more user friendly and easier to read, which is particularly helpful if a lawyer is working online. Since NLIS channels can also supply the location plan now needed with Part 1, practitioners can leave this to NLIS, which should save time."

NLIS is currently processing over 2000 searches electronically each week and estimates that by the end of July over 10% of all local authority searches will be made through NLIS channels.

www.nlis.org.uk

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Microsoft's new licence deal - who cares ?

According to some of the stories appearing in the mainstream IT press, the new licensing regime for Microsoft products, which comes into effect on 1st August, is just about the worst thing to happen in the IT world since Y2K. But according to the legal IT suppliers and consultants the Insider has spoken to, the issue has raised barely a ripple of interest among most law firms. Or as Doug McLachlan of Axxia summed it up "I thought this would be a big issue this year but it looks like turning into a damp squib. Most of our users are just letting the deadline slip by them and are doing nothing."

So just what is happening with Microsoft licensing? Under the old regime, the company operated various upgrade schemes for existing users of Microsoft products, including Windows and applications such as Microsoft Office. These meant instead of paying the full list price, you could upgrade for about 60% of the product price. In May 2001 Microsoft announced the introduction of a new arrangement whereby unless you subscribe to Upgrade Advantage (UA) or purchase a new Software Assurance (SA) you will in future have to pay the full purchase price next time you want to upgrade to a new version of a Microsoft product.

There is also an key transitional period. If you currently run an old Microsoft product - such as Windows 98 - you have until 31 July to register for UA, which will give you a 35-40% discount on the cost of an upgrade. After 1 August the only way to obtain discounts on subsequent future upgrades is to buy SA when you next upgrade - but unfortunately that first initial upgrade will have to be at the full list price.

Confused? In fact the scheme is even more complex than this sounds. For example, because Software Assurance costs between 25-29% of a full licence but only lasts for three years, if you have recently upgraded and do not plan another upgrade until 2005/2006, it may actually be cheaper not to join the scheme.

Essentially Microsoft is saying that if you want to run the latest software, the only way to do so without paying the full price for each upgrade is to subscribe to UA/SA before 31 July. But, Tikit's software assets manager Matt Breen, who has worked with a number of larger firms on this issue, says firms need to balance the immediate cost of UA/SA with the likely future savings and the status of their current systems. For example, if you currently run older Microsoft products and are planning an upgrade during the next three years, then you stand to save between 37-42% by enrolling for UA/SA before 31 July.

Breen adds that external factors may also influence decisions on future upgrade timetables. For example, how long will Microsoft continue to support legacy versions of its products - it has already said it will cease support for Windows NT4 Server in July 2003. And, what about any third-party systems you run that are integrated with Microsoft products. If the authors of those products standardise on the latest versions of Microsoft products, you may be forced to upgrade to continue using them.

Clearly there is no one size fits all solution but with the deadline set to expire in just three weeks - do the maths now.

Gonzalez quits rival to join Baker Robbins

Sally Gonzalez has quit the US legal IT consultancy Hildebrandt International to join the arch-rival Baker Robbins & Co. Gonzalez, who has previously served as the CIO and chief knowledge officer of an AmLaw 100 firm, will be working on law firm knowledge management projects both in the United States and in the UK. Andrew Levison, who heads Baker Robbins' operations in the UK, said Gonzalez was already lined up for at least two KM projects in London this year.

Scots web domain row reveals email chaos

The latest revelation in the dispute between the Law Society of Scotland and Tommy Butler's Local Websites service, over the rights to the lawscot.co.uk domain name, centers on the fact that for a period during early 2000, the Society mistakenly published the co.uk domain as its main email address, when at the time it had only registered the lawscot.org.uk domain and co.uk still belonged to Butler. The result was Butler's business received over 760 incorrectly addressed email messages from solicitors and other people attempting to contact the Society. Butler, who is now asking whether the Society contravened the provisions of the Data Protection Act, says some of these emails were of a sensitive - and in the case of those addressed to an apparent media mole at the Society - highly embarrassing nature.