



Halliwell Landau goes digital with Berrys

Berrys Digital Solutions (01206 845131), an offshoot of the Berrys of Holborn office equipment business, has gone public with details of the first law firm site to sign up for its digital dictation offerings. The firm is Halliwell Landau, which after an eight week pilot in its litigation department, has now contracted to roll out digital dictation and workflow management systems on a practice wide basis, starting with the London office and following subsequently with its Sheffield and Manchester head office sites.

Currently the firm has no plans to expand the project to include speech recognition however along with digital dictation and workflow systems based on WinScribe and Philips technology, the firm has also purchased a software developers kit to facilitate the integration of digital dictation with its Axxia back office systems.

Berrys Digital Solutions head Paul Lockyer said although the company had kept a low profile since its launch last October, this was because of a deliberate policy to only announce confirmed orders rather than hype-up every pilot project that came along.

For more speech technology news see page 4

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

Cameron returns to consultancy field

After two years with Keystone Solutions as product strategy director, Neil Cameron is leaving the recently created Solution 6/Keystone group to return to the world of legal IT consultancy, a field he dominated in the UK and Europe during the 1990's.

Explaining the move, Cameron said "I have had two exciting and interesting years with Keystone Solutions and Solution 6 but I feel a need to get back to 'the knitting' and in my case that is advising law firms on strategic business IT issues. The completion of the merger between Solution 6 and Keystone Solutions was a convenient 'line in the sand' for me and marked a sensible time to go back to consultancy."

David England, the managing director of Solution 6 Europe, added "having Neil working with Keystone, and now Solution 6, has been stimulating and invaluable but I fully understand his desire to get back to law firm consulting. The legacy he leaves us will become apparent in the next generations of Keystone and CMS software." Cameron had been working on planning the next generation of Keystone Professional software and the areas where common development can be made with other Solution 6 products such as CMS Open. He has also been working closely with Clifford Chance on their Keystone/Oracle-based Global Practice Management System project.

Cameron leaves Solution 6 at the end of August. For information about Neil Cameron Consulting call 07973 165130 or email ncameron@neilcameron.co.uk

Law Society to start selection process for 2003 Solutions guide

The Law Society is about to start the selection process for supplier entries for next year's edition of its *Software Solutions Guide*. The 2003 Guide will follow broadly the same lines as this year's edition, both in terms of selection criteria and content, with the key emphasis once again on practice management systems however suppliers will in addition be asked to provide details of any other products they can supply, including case management software, archiving and online access services.

The Law Society hopes to start contacting suppliers over the next fortnight and plans to launch the Guide at the Legal IT Exhibition in London in February 2003. For further information contact Sue Cummings at the Law Society on 020 7320 5804.

The Long Vacation beckons...

This is the last issue of the Insider this side of the Long Vacation, so enjoy the summer and we will be back on Wednesday 4 September. As for those of you who cannot get enough legal IT news - don't panic. We will be publishing our companion ezine *Legal Technology Insider News* and posting the latest news stories and legal IT job vacancies on the Insider web site during August.

Broadley takes over the top spot at AIM

AIM Professional Systems has appointed Steve Broadley to takeover the vacant post of managing director. Broadley, who began his career at AIM as a software programmer in 1978, held a variety of roles within the company prior to his appointment as sales & marketing director in 1999. Commenting on the move, AIM's recently appointed CEO Richard Bearpark said he believed Broadley's appointment would strengthen AIM's management team in preparation for implementing strategies for growth and expanding the business further.

News in brief

■ IRISH FIRM MIGRATES TO TFB

G J Moloney, an Irish law firm with offices in Cork and Dublin, has been using an Avenue Legal Systems Solomon character-based accounts system since 1987. Following last year's acquisition of Avenue by TFB, the firm has now upgraded to TFB's Partners for Windows system. The firm uses Citrix to link the two offices and the implementation was carried out by TFB's Irish distribution partner Legal IT.

■ PDA MAKES LITTLE GO LONG WAY

Doherty Associates (020 8742 3338 - the developers of the Outlook Anywhere system for PDAs) say along with providing lawyers with a way to remotely access email without lugging around a laptop, devices like the Compaq iPAQ could soon have a role in presentations. Because Outlook Anywhere supports PowerPoint .ppt file attachments, a speaker can now attend a conference or presentation armed only with an iPAQ and a Compaq projector. The speaker notes are displayed on the iPAQ while the presentation can be run using cable free Bluetooth technology, thus further reducing the need to carry bulky equipment.

■ TRAVEL EXPENSE MONITOR SHIPS

Elite Information Systems is now shipping a travel expense manager module based on the Extensity 6 system. This was developed in the US to help law firms track, capture, manage and recharge business travel expenses incurred on behalf of clients.

Two more wins for new Solicitec Visualfiles

Solicitec's new Visualfiles case and knowledge management system has clocked up two more wins. The OSSE (Office of the Solicitor to The Scottish Executive) has contracted Solicitec (0113 226 2000) to supply, implement and support a 75 user pilot. Solicitec, who over an eight month period beat off 36 rivals to win the contract, will also be supplying scanning facilities so Visualfiles can provide the basis for a centralised electronic filing and records management system.

The second new order comes from Cardiff-based Hugh James Solicitors. The firm, which already runs Solicitec's SolCase software, will be using Visualfiles to support client care services including providing clients with extranet access to their case and matter files on a 24/7 basis.

Clifford Chance go with Copittrak

Clifford Chance has signed up to use a range of cost recovery and expense management systems from Copittrak Systems to manage its print and copying costs. The firm is also planning to implement other Copittrak modules to manage landline phones, mobile phones, fax, taxis and courier costs in the near future. The systems will initially be going into Clifford Chance's London and German offices.

Although one of the pioneers of cost recovery systems in the mid-1980s, for a long time Copittrak was eclipsed by arch-rival Equitrac. However since Keith Child took over the reins in the UK and Europe in the mid-1990s, Copittrak Systems (020 7234 3000) has been going from strength to strength and now provides five 'magic circle' firms (another recent signing is the Freshfields Paris office) and 44 of the world's Top 100 law firms with their cost recovery and expense management systems.

Solution 6 acquire Singleview

Solution 6 UK has acquired the assets of Singleview, a provider of document management and scanning systems for use by time based professionals. North London based Singleview was set up by Jeremy Hyman, as a spin-off from a project developed by accountants Berg Kaprow Lewis, and first appeared on the UK legal technology scene with its browser-based corporate intranet in a box about three years ago. Before rebranding the product under the Singleview name, it was sold by Laserform as the LFM LegalNet system. Browne Jacobson in Nottingham was one of the first law firms to install the system although it was also sold into the accountancy market under the Prism brand name.

Solution 6, who have been working with Singleview for a couple of years, say the product will now be offered as an integrated document management system for firms wanting to create a paperless office that can scan and store inbound correspondence as well as outgoing files.

First Stop lay down DMS in a box challenge

The First Stop Computer Group has become the latest organisation to try to tackle the challenge of delivering an affordable and easy to implement document management solution for smaller law firms. The system is called dmsconnect and aimed at firms with up to 100 users - Paul Hoffbrand of First Stop suggests 10 users is probably the low end cut-off point.

Although based around the iManage Primera entry-level DMS product, First Stop have taken the dmsconnect system one stage further by bundling the software in with all necessary server hardware, full onsite implementation and training plus three years maintenance and support to provide what Hoffbrand describes as a "complete out of the box, end to end document management solution for the smaller yet progressive law firm". Hoffbrand says First Stop intends to market dmsconnect "Like a car. You buy a car for the overall package on offer - you don't care where the tyres come from."

Pricing starts at £1395 over a three year period however, conscious that this is a cost sensitive market, First Stop's pricing structure is fairly generous. For example a 70 user firm could expect to pay around £2000 a month, which actually comes in at less than £1 per user per day. Leasing deals can also be arranged via IBM Global Finance.

For more information call Paul Hoffbrand on 01923 247707 or email dmsconnect@firststop.co.uk

Loties voting now underway

The second round in the selection process for the winners of the 2002 Loties - the UK's Legal Office Technology Innovation Awards - is now underway. Nominations have closed and you have until 1st October to vote for your favourites among the six shortlisted entries in each of the 15 award categories.

These have been extended this year to include 'merit categories' for law firms, law firm IT teams and law firm IT directors - Daniel Pollick of DLA, John Rogers of Herbert Smith, Simon Kosminsky of S J Berwin, Jan Durant of Lewis Silkin, Janet Day of Berwin Leighton Paisner and Tim Hyman of Harbottle & Lewis are in contention.

There is even a 'vendor personality of the year' category with Chris Dale of Oxford Law & Computing, Michael Ballard of Solution 6, Anne Mansfield of AIM, Gordon McAlpine of BigHand, Michael Belas of TFB and Doug McLachlan of Axxia all vying for a pat on the back for services to customers above and beyond the call of duty.

The award winners will be announced at a gala dinner at the Café Royal in London on 14 November. The comedian - and *Star Wars* enthusiast - Phil Jupitus will provide the cabaret.

The Loties are organised by *In Brief* and sponsored by Legal Technology Insider. You can vote online at www.inbrief.co.uk There is a full list of entries on the Insider web site at

www.legaltechnology.com/TheLotiesShortlist2002.pdf

News in brief

■ SOS SAYS BUSINESS BOOMING

Legal system supplier SOS (01225 787700) has reported record results for the first quarter of 2002, with business up 40% compared to the same period last year. SOS has won some significant contracts recently, both in its own right and with case management software partner Solicitec. These include £500,000 deals with Home Counties-based Taylor Walton and Scott Rees in Lancashire. SOS is an official sponsor of the Law Society annual conference.

■ BRYAN CAVE ROLLING OUT ELITE

International law firm Bryan Cave has gone live with a new multi-currency accounting system from Elite at its London office. The Elite system will subsequently be rolled out worldwide over the next twelve months. The firm says the growth of the London office was a significant factor in getting Elite installed. According to Bryan Cave's US billing & information systems manager Sarah Carnes: "When we installed the old system in 1992, the London office was small so we didn't worry about the currency factor. However, the office has grown significantly over the last ten years and we need to ensure our fee earners have the necessary technological back-up to perform." Charles Attlee, the lead partner in the London office, added: "The switch had virtually no impact on client affairs or fee earner time - which bodes well for the firm-wide rollout."

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: Penningtons** is advertising for an IT technician to work on various projects within the firm's four offices in the South-East. And, Bradford-based **Eclipse Legal Systems** is looking for a case management design and implementation consultant. For more details of these and other vacancies visit the Insider Jobs Board at www.legaltechnology.com

News in brief

■ VALE OF GLAMORGAN AIM DEAL

The Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council legal department has awarded AIM Professional (01482 326971) a contract to implement a new case management and time recording system based on AIM's Evolution software. AIM reports growing interest from local authorities wanting to use the software to not only manage the progress of cases but also ensure compliance with service level agreements and the Lexcel quality standard.

■ LOW COST SOFTWARE VERSION 2

Sole practitioner Neil Jopson (01280 824969) has released the second generation of his low cost (prices start at £395) Computer Solutions for Solicitors software. Applications available include accounts, budget management, time recording, civil litigation and conveyancing case management systems. The range is based on Microsoft Office and Access.

People & Places

Chris Poole, the chairman & CEO of **Elite Information Systems**, has won this year's **Ernst & Young Greater Los Angeles Entrepreneur of the Year Award** in the software category. Poole now goes through to the national finals, which take place in Palm Springs in November.

After ten years of working at **Shepherd+ Wedderburn**, most recently as IT director, **Angus Mackenzie** next month moves to a similar role at **Maclay Murray & Spens**.

John Butler has joined **ResSoft** as the company's new sales manager (where he will report to business development director **Neil Renfrew**). The arrival of Butler, who was most recently with **Smartlogik** and **Corechange**, brings ResSoft's sales & marketing team up to eleven staff.

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Speech technology news round up

■ MASONS START DIGITAL DICTATION PILOT

Masons has awarded nFlow Software (01245 463377) the order to run a digital dictation pilot that will use the DictaFlow system and span the firm's London, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dublin offices. Masons IT director Kevin Connell said "The aim of the pilot is to identify potential improvements in client service and increase the flexibility of fee earners working off-site. We are also aiming for improved team working between secretaries and the distribution of work together with improved support for offices with limited secretarial support."

■ MAJOR SCOTTISH FIRM GOES DIGITAL

Shepherd+ Wedderburn, the fourth largest firm in Scotland, has installed a WinScribe digital dictation and associated workflow management system throughout the practice's Edinburgh, Glasgow and London Offices. With over 430 staff having access to the system, the firm believes this is the biggest WinScribe system installed in a UK law firm to-date. The deal was handled by WinScribe distributor Voice Technologies in Paisley. Secure Socket Layer (SSL) encryption is used to protect the system when transcription workloads are moved between different offices.

■ LAND REGISTRY GOES FOR SPEECH RECOGNITION

HM Land Registry lawyers and 95 judiciary in the Immigrations Appellate Authority (IAA) have adopted a customised desktop speech recognition solutions system by the Speech Recognition Company (020 7471 0100) to help improve operational efficiency. The SRC system, based on Dragon NaturallySpeaking Preferred Version 5, will allow Land Registry lawyers to create documents, such as letters, case notes, and emails by dictating directly into their PCs via a microphone headset.

■ DIGITAL DICTATION IS MORE 'FAMILY FRIENDLY'

One of Oxfordshire's largest firms, Linnells, has rolled out the BigHand (020 7793 8264) TotalSpeech digital dictation package to 90 of its staff after a pilot study showed the system offered significant advantages over conventional analogue tape. The Linnells pilot revealed that digital dictation not only enables solicitors or secretaries to work from home more easily but also reduces firm-wide overheads such as temporary secretarial costs. Linnells partner John Deech said the system also facilitates a more 'family friendly' working style, so the firm can now make more use of part-time secretaries, who often have young families or for other reasons are unable to come into the office for a full day but are still able to work at home.

■ STAT PLUS SEMINAR

StatPlus Speech Processing Solutions, now part of the Oyez group, is holding a seminar on digital solutions at the New Connaught Rooms, Covent Garden, London on 18 September. For details call StatPlus on 020 8254 5112 or visit

www.speechprocessingsolutions.co.uk

Partners confused by IT return on investment

The *Legal Business* annual survey (the results are published in the current July/August issue) into the opinions of partners in top 100 law firms has thrown up some apparently contradictory results when it comes to technology, with several firms reporting that while IT may have produced productivity and profitability gains, it still does not represent good value for money.

Firms falling into this category include Bond Pearce, Burges Salmon, Hammond Suddards Edge and Allen & Overy. Other firms, where partners also expressed doubts about the ROI from technology, were Penningtons, Field Fisher Waterhouse, Norton Rose, Holman Fenwick & Willan, Howard Kennedy, Maclay Murray & Spens and Morgan Cole. It may only be a coincidence but as a number of these firms have recently changed their IT directors, it could be that their partners' reservations relate to legacy rather than current issues.

On a more positive note, firms where partners are currently singing the praises of IT include Wragge & Co, SJ Berwin, Charles Russell, Gouldens, Harbottle & Lewis, Russell Jones & Walker, Richards Butler, Bircham Dyson Bell, Cripps Harries Hall, Addleshaw Booth & Co, Keoghs, Hewitson Becke + Shaw, Mills & Reeve, Speechly Bircham, DWF and Irwin Mitchell. According to the survey, Pannone & Partners are the happiest chappies when it comes to technology, with all respondents reporting that they not only thought they were getting value for money but also agreed with the firm's overall IT strategy.

As *Legal Business* point out in their editorial, some of the views being expressed by partners about IT simply "do not compute" as any system that helps firms become more efficient and profitable must surely be producing a satisfactory ROI?

Perhaps there is a PR problem here, with firms inadequately 'selling' the benefits of IT to their partners. Alternatively, it may be there are still a lot of partners out there who don't realise just how much money it now costs to equip and support a modern law firm's IT infrastructure. Either way *Legal Business* hopes to supply the answers later this year when it publishes the results of a law firm IT survey it is now conducting in association with Insider editor Charles Christian.

LMS Legal IT forum success

The LMS Legal IT Forum conference and exhibition, held by the Law Society's Law Management Section in London earlier this month, looks to have been one of the most successful events on this summer's IT calendar, attracting over 150 paying delegates plus 17 exhibitors and sponsors. According to one of the speakers, Andrew Levison of the Baker Robbins consultancy, what made the event particularly valuable was the willingness of delegates to participate during the interactive sessions.

■ LMS is running a special offer of a free transcription of all the keynote sessions when a copy of the delegate notes is purchased for just £49. For detail call Paul Seymour on 020 7316 5572.

Legal technology events diary

■ 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 20, LIVINGSTON. Business Process Management versus Workflow in the .NET Age. The event takes place at the Infographics Development Centre, Livingston, West Lothian, Scotland.

Audience: IT decision-makers, Business Unit Directors & Partners. Contact: Lorna Tilsley at Infographics for more information or to book a place phone 01592 750677 or email info@infographics.co.uk The full agenda can be found on the web at www.flosuite.com

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

■ 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.

■ OCTOBER 9 & 10, LEEDS. Legal IT 2002 at the Royal Armouries in Leeds. Free exhibition plus free educational seminar programme organised by the Insider. For more details call Cordial Events on 01491 575522 or register for tickets online at www.legalitshow.com

■ OCTOBER 16-18, GLENEAGLES. Legal Week's networking beano for law firm IT directors - the Legal IT Forum. The delegate rate is £975 + VAT, including travel, accommodation and a full entertainments programme. For details call 020 7566 5612.

News in brief

■ HOMEPAGES GET MOVER FRIENDLY

Martindale-Hubbell has teamed up with ihavemoved.com to offer a quick address change service for home purchasers and vendors. Users can access the service by clicking on the www.ihavemoved.com button and then following the onscreen prompts. A home mover can in about 15 minutes change billing details with major utilities and register their new address with over 700 organisations including the DVLA, Passport Agency and Inland Revenue.

In addition, firms contracting Martindale Hubbell to build and host their web sites on the LawyerLocator service can also add this feature to their conveyancing pages or lists of useful links. Firms to have already done so include Oglethorpe Sturton & Gillibrand at www.osg.co.uk and Surrey-based Brett-Holt at www.brettholtsolicitors.co.uk

■ CODE-X LOOKING AT PLATFORMS

Code-X Encryption (020 7488 2996) the company behind the Code-X secure email system - *see last issue for first report* - say versions for the product for GroupWise and Lotus platforms are now under development. A company spokesman added that two other features of the system attracting interest are: the fact a sender can cancel an encryption key - and thus render a message unreadable - where an email has inadvertently been sent to the wrong recipient. And, the pay-as-you-go pricing model which means the system can effectively be installed free of charge and you are only billed after it has been used.

Web site of the month

One of the reasons we stopped reviewing law firm web sites on a regular basis is the majority of them are just dull, boring and puffed. So hooray for Powers Phillips, based in Denver, Colorado, who have produced a site so off-the-wall that it is hard to believe it is a genuine law firm site and not a spoof. For example, the home page not only explains why lawyers are held in such low esteem by the public - their words not ours - but goes on to explain that because the firm is run by "uppity women" they decided to call their regular client newsletter *The Bitches from Hell Reporter*. Check it out.

www.ppbfh.com

Epoch changes name and direction pending Rule 4

Epoch Software, the company best known for its Desktop Lawyer online legal service and Rapidocs document assembly system, has changed its name to the Epoq Group. Joint CEO Richard Cohen said the name change reflected the company's move into a broader consultative business in anticipation of changes to Rule 4 of the Solicitors Practice Rules.

Currently Rule 4 prevents companies such as Tesco, Virgin or Abbey National from offering legal services directly to its customers. The proposed reforms could however open up the market, giving consumers access to straightforward branded legal services at fixed prices. Or, as Cohen suggests: "You could have a new will prepared while on a weekly shopping trip to your local supermarket."

"Our re-branding as Epoq," says Cohen, "will ensure our clients understand our skill set is broad yet focuses on providing know-how and consulting for the delivery of low cost legal services through the use of digital technology platforms."

Epoq, whose digital legal systems already form an intrinsic part of the recently launched Royal & SunAlliance More Than family legal protection service, has also announced an alliance with PricewaterhouseCoopers intended to provide clients "with not only the best technology but also the best advice and implementation available in the market today." Cohen adds that the alliance will help Epoq expand its reach into major corporates and government departments.

www.epoq.co.uk

First portal of call for G-wiz

Midlands firm Gateley Wareing has rolled out a 200 user intranet - called the Gateley Wareing Information Zone or G-WIZ - based on the SORCE product from intranet vendors Definitive Applications. The system runs on a Windows NT 4 platform and provides staff in the firm's Birmingham, Nottingham and Leicester offices with access to practice management, case management, CRM and document management information.

Gateley Wareing say they opted for SORCE because along with offering rapid deployment and a configuration flexibility that would allow it to be structured around the needs of departments, it offered a 'low maintenance' solution that did not require extensive user training and could be updated by content administrators who would not need special programming skills.

Another key factor is that SORCE also met the firm's criteria for security and access functionality. In particular the firm wanted fee earners and staff to only be able to access information according to their position and department, with access privileges governing viewing and contributing information, right down to the user, document or database field. These access controls will also be needed when the firm opens up extranet facilities for clients in the future.

www.definitive.co.uk

LCD spends £230 million and then rethinks strategy

British Government attempts to implement major IT projects seem forever doomed to disaster and the latest to suffer a reversal of fortune is the Libra scheme to provide a new IT infrastructure for 400 magistrates courts in England & Wales.

The project was controversial from the outset, not least because two of the three groups tendering for the 10 year contract pulled out of the bidding at an early stage, with the result that in 1998 Fujitsu Services (then still known as ICL) was able to pick up the £183 million deal unchallenged. Two years later, in 2000, the first signs of trouble began to emerge when Fujitsu renegotiated the contract, extending its duration to 2013 and the price tag to £319 million.

But, this was not the end of the matter and at the end of last week the Lord Chancellor's Department issued a lengthy statement confirming rumours that "despite intensive negotiation it has not proved possible to reach an agreement on an acceptable price, which will deliver value for money for the taxpayer" and that Fujitsu would be phased out of the deal early after only completing half of the project.

The problems can be traced back to the fact there were two distinct parts in the original contract. The first phase was to provide the courts with a "modern IT infrastructure and network" - in other words new PCs and printers supporting Microsoft Office applications. This phase of the project has already been rolled out to 8500 staff, about 75% of the total complement, and should be complete by the middle of next year.

It was the second phase of Project Libra that magistrates courts were most looking forward to seeing and this was the introduction of new "application services and special software" to 'support case management and the tracking, collection and accounting of fines and provide information exchange with other criminal justice agencies' - and at the same time replace legacy systems dating back in some courts to the 1970s.

Unfortunately it is this part of the project that has just been abandoned, prompting the general secretary of the Association of Magisterial Officers to comment "It's a bit of an all-round disaster, we're back to square one."

According to LCD junior minister Yvette Cooper "there are lessons to be learned for all parties from the project." And there are also some questions for taxpayers to ask - such as why has this Government in effect spent nearly seven years (from the start of the procurement process in 1996 until the completion of rollout next year) and £232 million, at current estimates, merely to provide 11,000 court staff with new copies of Word and Excel?

So what happens next? Rather optimistically - given its track record to-date - the LCD believes "robust, tried and tested software is now available in the marketplace which could meet requirements (for the specialist case and court administration systems) at a lower cost than that on offer from Fujitsu" and that this package software can be up and running by the end of 2004, which will be only nine months later than envisaged in the original 1998 contract!

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Records management now live at Clifford Chance

The London records department of Clifford Chance has now gone live with a new automated records management system based on LegalKEY Technologies software and implemented by LegalKEY's UK distributor Kramer Lee & Associates (01268 494500). Once Clifford Chance moves to Canary Wharf in 2003, the firm plans to roll out a desktop version of LegalKEY to all lawyers, so they can search and retrieve records via a browser or Outlook interface.

Given that records management has traditionally been seen as the boring part of law office automation, with trainees and paralegals spending more time than they would care to in dusty basements sorting through deed boxes and filing cabinets, it may seem strange to give this story such a high profile.

However here on the Insider we are hearing growing reports that records management (which deals with the filing, scanning and long term archiving of incoming paper-based documents, as distinct from outgoing electronically generated WP files, which is primarily the role of document management systems like PC Docs and iManage) may be one of the next areas of technology firms focus on in their drives to increase productivity.

With the records manager of one 'magic circle' firm recently estimating that every fee earner within his firm spend an average of an hour a day just looking for paper-based files, Earnie Kramer of KLA reckons this is one area of office automation where the introduction of technology can still bring an almost overnight 400% increase in productivity because it cuts down the amount of time lawyers spend faffing about with bits of paper.

"Projects we have carried out with clients in the insurance industry," says Kramer, "show that it can take as long as two days to locate and retrieve an archived paper file - that is assuming it was properly indexed in the first place. With records management systems, the time can be slashed to a few seconds."

KLA expects to start shipping the new LegalKEY Version 4 later this year. Enhancements include better integration with the iManage DMS and a single 'client file view' facility.

Digital underclass or just living in a parallel universe ?

Finally, we often hear warnings of a digital divide opening up between IT literate lawyers and their less technologically switched-on colleagues but Steve Ness, sales director of Select Legal Systems, wonders if there is an alternative explanation.

According to an article he read in another legal IT magazine, one of the things you can now do with the latest in handheld PDAs is remotely collect your email messages from work. But, says Ness, most of the law firms he deals with still don't have email in the office and even in those that have, the last thing any partner wants to do is access it - remotely or otherwise. "I am beginning to think," says Ness, "that gadget using lawyers and the average High Street law firm must live in parallel universes."

Chinese walls to avoid conflicts of interest ?

Speaking at a recent seminar on accountants' liability in the wake of the Enron scandal, Reynolds Porter Chamberlain indemnity partner Stephen Reilly told delegates that the trend for increasing consolidation and globalisation within professional services meant that both law firms and accountants might one day have to consider the introduction of a system of 'Chinese walls' that "would allow for the separation of staff into separate buildings and the use of separate IT systems to maintain the confidentiality of the information at risk."

Government spending review - court IT boost

In the UK Government's recent spending review, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown announced that he was giving the Home Office an additional £650 million, over the next three years, to develop an integrated case and court management system for the criminal justice system. This contrasts with the mere £181 million in extra funding that will be added to the legal aid budget over the next four years. The plans prompted complaints from the English Law Society that the criminal justice system would become "conviction driven" and that the "disappointing" increase in legal aid funding "will do nothing to tackle the real problems of access to justice or to enable solicitors to continue with legal aid work".

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