LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

Quill expands bureau through acquisition

In a move intended to consolidate its position in the legal accounts bureau sector, Quill Computer Systems (0161 236 2910) has acquired the Liverpool-based bureau AM Services. With a combined client base of over 120 solicitors practices, Quill believes this now makes it by far the largest bureau outsourcing company servicing the legal profession in the UK.

The move also means Quill, previously best known for its legal client base, now also has a non-legal payroll client list of over 170 companies. More importantly, the newly expanded business is a registered BACC's provider, so it will also be able to offer a full payroll service, including organising the actual payment of staff, to law firms.

The acquisition takes the number of offices Quill has to four, with the new Liverpool office now networking with the existing bases in Manchester, Redcar and Colchester. Quill managing director Tony Landes said the acquisition would help "promote a new range of services to be announced in the very near future."

The Insider web site

For news, jobs, events and information visit what The Times newspaper describes as the "definitive online resource for the latest news about legal technology"...

www.legaltechnology.com

Events - one wedding and a funeral

The UK's legal IT events market took another knock last month, with the success of the Gleneagles Legal IT Forum (GlenLegal) tempered by the poor turn out for the Legal IT Leeds exhibition.

The almost unanimous view of delegates and sponsors was this year's GlenLegal was the best to-date, in terms of content, entertainments and the smooth running of the event. It is also daunting to realise that over 170 delegates were prepared to pay the best part of £1000 to attend the event, when elsewhere in the market free events are being cancelled because they cannot attract sufficient numbers.

What is the secret of GlenLegal's success? Leaving aside the obvious fact that it generates a captive audience cut off from the pressures of work and an opportunity to network in convivial surroundings from breakfast until late into the night, the format of the formal conference sessions is undoubtedly a key factor. Instead of a series of indistinguishable grey men in grey suits inflicting death by PowerPoint, almost all the GlenLegal sessions took the form of multi-speaker panels that built up a genuine interactive rapport with their audiences.

But if it was all smiles at Gleneagles, then it was scowling faces at the Royal Armouries in Leeds, where the Legal IT exhibition was taking place. Exhibitor numbers were down and, more importantly, visitor numbers, even on the organisers' own figures were almost 40% down at 482, compared with 781 last year. Some indication of just how quiet the event was can be gleaned from the fact that staff on one case management supplier's stand were so bored by midday on the first day that they were using the presentation system on their stand to display their holiday snaps. *Continued on page 7.*

Thomson set to make more acquisitions in legal IT sector ?

Speaking at a dinner at the recent Gleneagles Legal IT Forum, Sweet & Maxwell's managing director Peter Lake told the audience they could expect to see the Thomson/Westlaw group making further acquisitions within the legal IT sector, along the lines of the recent purchase of Elite, "within the next 12 months."

DDS prices hit bottom - now free

The ever tumbling price of digital dictation software has finally hit rock bottom with one supplier - EMIS IT (0845 120 5206) - now giving it away free of charge with their Seneca CM case and file management system. The product was developed inhouse and is fully integrated with the Seneca software. Along with the usual workflow facilities, the EMIS DDS also offers management reporting and there is currently a special promotion offering free Philips SpeechMike hardware. *For more DDS news see page 2.*

DDS news in brief

■ **INTEGRATION FOR DICTAFLOW**
nFlow Software (01245 463377) has won a contract to roll out its DictaFlow digital dictation workflow management software on a firm-wide basis at Lee Crowder in Birmingham. One of the interesting features of this deal is that the DictaFlow DDS will be integrated with the firm's Elite PMS and Solicitec VisualFiles infrastructure. Commenting on the deal, the firm's head of IT Nigel Williams said he chose DictaFlow because "Quite simply they offered the best functionality for price and understood the requirement for integration with other best of breed products - something that I believe they will deliver."

■ **DENTONS BEGIN DDS ROLL OUT**
Denton Wilde Sapte has started what is believed to be the largest rollout of digital dictation workflow software in the UK legal sector. Some 1000 users in three offices, including the whole of the firm's Chancery Lane HQ, are due to receive the BigHand (020 7793 8200) TotalSpeech DDS software by the end of the year. As well as becoming one of the few law firms to have scaled DDS above 500 users, the firm is also testing a number of remote devices and the dial-in transfer of dictation to support fee earners working from home, abroad, out of the office and even on the move.

■ **HILL DICKINSON GO WITH SRC**
Hill Dickinson has chosen the WinScribe DDS from SRC (020 7471 0100) for a 300 user, firm-wide rollout at the practice's London, Manchester, Chester and three Liverpool offices. The order was placed after 20 users in two departments spent the last 12 months trialing WinScribe and a rival product in a competitive evaluation. This is noteworthy in itself given the number of DDS contracts currently being awarded without going out to tender.

■ **WINSCRIBE 3.3 LAUNCHED**
WinScribe Europe (0118 984 2133) has just launched version 3.3 of its DDS software. New enhancements include the introduction of a browser based systems manager and improvements to the ability to import and read voice files from 3rd party dictation systems into WinScribe for transcription.

Harrison Clark aim for key performance views

Worcester based Harrison Clark has become one of the first firms to order AIM Professional's new Performance View PKI (key performance indicators) system to monitor internal efficiency, productivity and profitability targets. The system will allow fee earners and heads of department to view live data on variables including WIP, time billed and aged debt via a desktop browser.

Along with Performance View, Harrison Clark has ordered the full AIM Evolution suite to support the firm's billing, time recording and financial management requirements, as well as document creation, plus file and case management.

TFB make key appointments in Scotland

TFB has appointed Gordon Malcolm to the position of general manager for Scotland. Hailing from Inverness but most recently TFB's southern region sales manager, Malcolm will be based in the company's Glasgow Bellshill offices and be responsible for expanding TFB's presence in the Scottish legal IT market.

In a related development Sandy Hill, the leader of the TFB accounts support team, has also relocated to Bellshill, which is now the national support centre for users in England, Wales and Scotland running TFB's Signet, Solomon and Partner for Windows legal accounts software.

SAP project a success say Links

Linklaters report that after two years and, depending upon which reports you believe, spending between £28 million and £40 million on the system and rollout, the firm has successfully implemented a SAP ERP (enterprise resource planning) system across its 30 offices worldwide. Components include mySAP Business Warehouse, mySAP HR, mySAP Financials and mySAP CRM. The firm says that by having all lawyers, finance, HR and marketing staff on the same worldwide system, the integrated system equips the firm to improve its service to clients.

Although the situation at Linklaters was unusual in that the firm previously had over 15 separate databases handling the information now combined within the single SAP environment, the real interest now centres on whether other firms will follow suit with either SAP or any of the other ERP system vendors?

Reports suggest that both PeopleSoft and JD Edwards are currently sniffing around top 10 law firms in the UK - but as the IT director of one of these firms recently told the Insider "law firms currently have more important IT priorities than spending millions of pounds on a system that will only benefit 20 accounts staff in the back office." For its part, SAP believes this is a too narrow definition of ERP and is beginning a campaign - *see lead story* - to promote its products to a wider range of firms.

The race is on to deliver an email killer app

One of the more interesting aspects of attending conferences and exhibitions is you get to hear what users really want - as distinct from what IT suppliers think they want. For example, the message coming out of both the recent Leeds and GlenLegal events is that the number one item on almost everyone's wish list is an all-encompassing solution to their email management problems. And by 'all-encompassing' they mean something that provides a complete solution, from dealing with spam and viruses at the front end, through to encryption, compliance policies, file management, archiving and Exchange Server backup at the back end.

While there are products already available to tackle some aspects of this problem, a total solution currently involves investing in several separate systems and then integrating them, putting the solution out of the reach of all but the larger firms. But could this be about to change?

Although we have heard reports of some suppliers looking into the viability of developing scalable solutions, including one apparently based on a Linux 'appliance,' probably the most hopeful developments at the moment are the initiatives taking place in the 'managed' solutions or one-supplier-provides-all approaches.

For example ResSoft (020 7421 4140) has just entered into a partnership with KVS, the developers of the Vault archiving system, and already clocked up one sale "to a top 60 firm" (an NDA means they cannot disclose the name at this stage) and also has a KVS + iManage implementation project underway.

Meanwhile ITNET (0121 459 1155) is currently involved with a pilot project at a "top 50 firm" to test the viability and resilience of a proposed new managed email service that will handle everything from spam, viruses and encryption through to archiving. ***For more email related stories see page 5.***

LITIG e-billing consultation

A sub-group of LITIG (the Legal IT Innovators Group) has issued a consultation paper to agree an e-billing standard. The group comprises Andrew Dey, Projects & Operations Manager of Barclays Bank Legal Function and Derek Southall, Partner and Head of Strategic Development of Wragge & Co, with advice and support from Peter Owen, IT Director of Eversheds. Commenting on the project, Andrew Dey said "this project is absolutely vital to major corporates. Without it we run the risk of a proliferation of different formats that we will never be able to stop." The team has been working on e-billing for over six months and LITIG has now approved the release of its research paper for consultation with comments required by 15 December 2003. For further information and a copy of the consultation paper visit **www.litig.org** All comments should be submitted electronically to ***ebilling@litig.org***

News in brief

■ **ARCHERS TARGET PILGRIM**
Archers of Stockton on Tees has selected the Pilgrim (0131 555 9700) LawSoft PMS software to replace its legacy Microtrial accounts system. Managing partner David Collier said he felt LawSoft provided the best approach for a firm that still wanted to retain 'the personal touch' for private clients, while at the same providing the service delivery its corporate clients now expected. The new PMS is expected to go live next month.

Pilgrim has also implemented two case management applications - debt recovery and mortgage repossession - at Glasgow based Anderson Fyfe. The firm said the main benefits were the functionality of the systems, combined with Pilgrim's ability to implement them within very tight deadlines.

■ **BLACKBERRY IN 72 HOURS SERVICE**
Isis Telecommunications (0870 163 5000), whose client list includes Clifford Chance, has launched a new service for firms wanting to use the BlackBerry remote email service. The new package offers the installation of the enterprise server version of the BlackBerry (BES) and a choice of the latest handsets within 72 hours (compared with an industry average of three to four weeks) - and on a one month's free trial basis.

Latest research into the use of Blackberrys in the United States suggests the average number of hours of laptop usage declines by 45% when BlackBerry is introduced - with 20% of people ditching laptops altogether - and that the typical BlackBerry user recovers 53 minutes of otherwise wasted time a day by being able to handle emails on the move.

Looking for IT staff ?

Looking for legal IT staff, including positions in sales, development, support and training? Then post your vacancies free of charge to the jobs board by emailing the details to ***jobs@legaltechnology.com***

For details of the latest postings, which include vacancies for legal accounts software trainers in southern England, iManage developers in London, Java and Delphi programmers in Hull and Visual Basic developers in Edinburgh, visit the Insider Jobs board at **www.legaltechnology.com**

People & Places

■   **NEW V-P FOR SOLUTION 6 EUROPE**
Solution 6 has appointed Bryan Roberts as vice president for legal & enterprise sales within Europe, with responsibility for the CMS, Keystone, Net Results and Novient products. Roberts joins Solution 6 from Systar, where he was responsible for taking sales from zero to £2 million in two years. Prior to that he was the UK sales director for the ERP vendor Lawson Software. Solution 6 has also announced that its next global user conference - Momentum 2004 - will take place in Las Vegas in March.

■   **NEW IT HEAD AT LESTER ALDRIDGE**
Neil Prevett has been promoted to the post of Director of IT & Communications at south coast law firm Lester Aldridge (LA). Prevett originally joined LA in 2001 as IT Manager and the firm's managing partner Roger Woolley said the promotion was "in recognition of what he has achieved so far but also because IT and communications will continue to develop hand in hand with the business as it moves forward."

■   **LINETIME HITS 20th ANNIVERSARY**
Congratulations to John Burrill and all his team at Linetime which this month celebrates 20 years in the legal IT business. The anniversary party will take the form of a 'mediaeval weekend' at Lumley Castle.

■   **NEW APPOINTMENT AT PILGRIM**
Pilgrim Systems has recruited Keith Hardell as a new senior account manager. Based out of the company's London office, Hardell - who has previously worked with ResSoft, EDS and the Quintec/PC Docs group - will be responsible for sales of Pilgrim's LawSoft PMS and Analytics business intelligence products to larger firms in the South-East.

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Document accounting or what Equitrac did next...

For over a decade, from the mid 1980s through until the late 1990s, the UK costs recovery systems market was dominated by Equitrac. But then, somewhere along the way, the company's technology started to look dated and arch rivals Copitrak began to erode the Equitrac user base.

Fortunately, the new management team that has been appointed by Mike Rich, since he took over as CEO last year, is determined to turn the business around and over the last few months has launched a number of commercial and product initiatives. These include the acquisition of ICG Research in Canada to create a new R&D facility (as a consequence ICG's own products will no longer be distributed in the UK by Tikit), the launch of two new Equitrac Professional systems earlier this summer and the introduction last month of an aggressively priced sales promotion for competitive trade-ins and upgrades.

But what about the bigger picture? With the legal world rapidly switching over to digital documents, what does the future hold for a company still largely synonymous with photocopier monitoring systems? Recently the Insider visited Equitrac's US management team in Coral Gables, Florida, to find out about their longer term plans.

According to Rich, there has been a seismic shift in the way document production takes place in law firms. Traditionally the cost was incurred by the producer and was captured at the copier, whereas today - with documents increasingly distributed as Word or PDF files - it is the recipients who incur the cost when they print out a hard copy of a digital file. The net result is lawyers are seeing their central copier bills going down, while simultaneously their local desktop printing costs are going up.

Equitrac suggest the way to deal with this situation - what Rich calls the digital document paradox - is to broaden the business model from cost recovery to 'document accounting' which also embraces a greater degree of cost management. In fact Equitrac are already a long way down this route with their current range of office systems for the wider commercial market and they now plan to introduce more comprehensive reporting facilities into their products for the legal sector.

"With law firms focussing far more on return on investment," says Rich, "document accounting solutions need to provide a far stronger value proposition than they did in the past. Lawyers now want systems that can help them measure, monitor and manage their costs, rather than simply recover some of them."

For example, Rich argues that local desktop printing "is the last bastion of unrestricted cost" and suggests that by identifying and reducing areas of waste - such as the number of printers with colour toner being used for monochrome printing, despite the fact it is 25 to 100 times more expensive than black & white toner, could result in huge savings on consumables alone.

The sales contact for Equitrac in the UK is Julie O'Donnell on 020 7831 7818. Details of Equitrac's current sales promotion campaign can be found at **www.equitrac.com/promo/**

Email solution from £20 per month from Solution 1

Solution 1 (0870 906 1111), an offshoot of the Siemens Communications group, this week launches a bundled email management service for smaller businesses, with prices starting from as little as £20 per user, per month. The new service, which is offered on a modular ASP basis via Solution 1's own secure data centres, provides a range of facilities addressing law firm security, connectivity and productivity.

These include linking branch offices and home offices into a broader VPN (virtual private network) without the need to install kilostream links or leased lines; email content filtering for spam and offensive materials; web access and content filtering; automatic anti-virus checking for both incoming and outgoing mail; and support for mobile devices, such as Blackberrys.

It is worth noting that the new service only involves a 30-day forward commitment, so if you don't like the deal, you can cut your losses within a month. This is in contrast to some other ASP services out there where the minimum contract period can be as long as three years.

Also, although the service is being offered to 'SMEs' - defined as anyone from sole practitioners to firms with up to 1000 users - Solution 1 are particularly keen to target firms with up to 25 users. Firms of this size typically have no inhouse IT resource and partners therefore have the opportunity to outsource all their email requirements without ever having to get involved with the technical issues.

Solution 1 have been working with a number of law firms, ranging in size from Stamford-based start-up PJH Law to Rawsthorns in Preston, on email related projects over the last couple of years. **www.solution1.co.uk**

Clifford Chance integrate paper into digital workflow

Clifford Chance has selected a document distribution system from Canon and eCopy (visit **www.ecopy.com**) to integrate paper documents into its electronic workflow.

After finding that its existing fleet of copiers, faxes and scanners were unable to integrate scanned documents seamlessly into its business processes and document management system, the firm decided to move over to Canon multifunction devices (MDFs) running in conjunction with the eCopy document integration and distribution software.

With the new Canon/eCopy infrastructure, client matter data can be captured at the copier/MDF for exporting into a billing application; scanned documents can be text-indexed for later searching and retrieval via a DMS; and scanned files can subsequently be converted into Word or Excel via an OCR function. Clifford Chance say another attraction of the Canon/eCopy solution was its ease of integration with existing applications including Exchange, Hummingbird and Copitrak.

FWBS put Office 2003 into Franklins

Northampton-based Franklins has become one of the first - if not the first - firms in the UK to roll out Microsoft Office 2003 to its entire staff. The firm is running Office 2003 in conjunction with its FWBS (01327 322900) OMS Framework file management and document automation software. By using Microsoft technologies, including Smart Tags and the Research Pane, Franklins' managing partner Michael Franklin is anticipating "an increase in user productivity and enhanced work product accuracy."

Email news in brief

■ **VIRTUAL THINKING ON EMAIL**
Thinking Virtual (01428 661255) has launched an email archiving system called e-MARC that will "eliminate completely the perennial 'I accidentally deleted it' email problem." The system copies all emails and attachments sent or received within an organisation, into a secure and tamperproof repository. Both emails and attachments are indexed as they are stored, making authorised search and retrieval easy and efficient. e-MARC can also track the chain of communication for an email and provide storage management benefits by reducing the cost of storage by up to 50%. For more information visit **www.thinkingvirtual.com**

■ **FIRST STOP FOR DUALITY**
Receiving email directly to your PDA or smart phone may be a great benefit but what happens if you lose the device or have it stolen? Will it expose your firm to a security risk? First Stop Computers believe they have a solution in the new Duality Always-On Mail system they are now selling in the UK.

Like other instant email systems, Duality lets you deal with emails on the move, you can also download and edit attachments in Microsoft Word and Excel, and you can access diary information from Microsoft Outlook. Where however Duality distances itself from the rest of the market is the whole process is protected by 128 bit encryption.

To apply for a trial of the Duality system, call Paul Hoffbrand on 01923 247707.
www.firstop.co.uk

Legal technology events diary

■ NOVEMBER 5, SHEFFIELD. Norwel is running a series of one-to-one workshops on case management, the web and where the legal IT world is going. Each session is free, private, for one hour and by appointment. The event takes place at the Sheffield Wednesday ground and is followed by a similar event at Bolton Wanderers FC on 10 December. For details phone David Phillips on 0161 945 3511 or email *david.phillips@norwel.co.uk*

■ NOVEMBER 5, LEEDS. Laserform is running a series of half day (morning) product presentations on case management and digital dictation. The Leeds event takes place at the Crowne Plaza and is followed by sessions in Newcastle (12 November) and Bristol (20 November). Admission is free and the events qualify for 4 CPD hours. For details email *jennet.ingram@laserform.co.uk*

■ NOVEMBER 6, LONDON. Neil Cameron, in conjunction with Microsoft, Hammonds and ActiveLawyer, is taking part in a free forum on content management for law firm intranets & extranets. The venue is the Westbury Hotel, Bond Street, 9:00am to 12:00pm. For details visit **www.microsoft.com/uk/events**

■ 10-to-12 NOVEMBER, AMSTERDAM. KM Europe. Now in its fourth year, this has become the world's largest knowledge management conference & exhibition. The event, which is run by the Ark Group, this year features sessions on intranets & portals, content management, and search & retrieval. ResSoft are among the legal vendors present. For details visit **www.kmeurope.com**

■ 12 & 13 NOVEMBER, LONDON. Maximising document production in Word 2003 - Perfect Access Speer is running three half-day seminars on this topic for heads of IT, support staff and IT trainers who want a briefing on Word 2003's new capabilities and the benefits it can offer law firms. The events will also be showcasing a new Word utilities product suite from Esquire Innovations. For details email Jo Viscusi at *jviscusi@paspeer.com*

Legal IT Leeds review

There were not many delegates at the Legal IT Leeds exhibition earlier this month but this was a shame as there were some interesting products on display.

Carydan Legal Solutions (08701 696696), in conjunction with T-Mobile, were showing a new integration featuring our favourite gadget of the moment - a RIM Blackberry - being used to provide remote access, via a wireless network link, to email, office diaries, documents, client data, WIP and time recording.

In a similar vein **Bailey Telecom** (0800 282229), who recently made their public debut in the legal market when they won the contract for a telecoms project at Berwin Leighton Paisner, were demonstrating a number of communications oriented personal productivity tools that are either already available or scheduled for a launch early next year. These included videoconferencing and PDA phone that will allow you to turn any phone terminal into your personal call centre for direct dial calls and voice mail.

According to Bailey's head of marketing & technology Graham Iliff, the driving force behind all these developments is the need to turn gadgets and new telecoms channels, such as WiFi, into business solutions that can deliver real productivity and efficiency benefits by providing access to information.

Over on the **Videss** (01274 851577) stand, the company was previewing the latest enhancements to its Legal Office suite. These include a new Microsoft .NET reporting tool called Visual Office that will provide users and law firm managers with a one stop overview of key performance data - such as WIP versus target billings. Videss say the attraction of this "digital dashboard" approach (there is also the alternative of an Outlook interface) is it allows users to pull out the information they need, when they want it, rather than having to rely on predefined reports.

Over the next 12 months Videss plans to .NET enable the whole of Legal Office although it will only be available to firms running on either Microsoft 2000 or XP platforms.

Other products worth noting included: a new cheque printing facility from **Norwel** (0161 945 3511) which allows users to print cheques on standard laser printers rather than special tractor feed printers - the system was piloted by the London firm Anthony Gold. And **Civica** (0121 359 4861) was talking about its growing range of 'managed' services, including the hot topic of email management plus asset and software licence management.

Linetime (0113 250 0020) was showing its new web-based interactive enquiry modules for its Liberate system, which can provide clients with secure extranet access to matter progress reports and data. Although there is now nothing new about 'web-enabled' case management, Linetime believe their system has the edge on some of the competition because the online information Liberate provides is updated on a realtime basis.

Finally, and still on the subject of case management, **JCS Computing** (0121 543 6996) were showing their growing portfolio of case management applications. The company's Roger Jackson said the applications reflected the growing interest now being shown in case management by even smaller firms.

Events - one wedding & a funeral

Continued from front page... As well as being quiet, we also heard complaints that the quality of delegates was poor this year. In fact according to one supplier it was "appalling," while another said they spent a more productive time at last May's Solicitors event in Birmingham. That said, we also spoke to some suppliers who felt the experience was "not a total waste of time." And it is also worth noting that according to lease finance specialists Syscap, last year's uncertainties over the future of capital allowances did have an adverse impact on the market with many firms bringing forward IT orders that otherwise would have been placed during the current financial year.

Although Cordial Events, the organisers of Legal IT, had a provisional date for a trade show in Manchester next year (6 & 7 October at the New Century Hall), managing director David Colin told the Insider that in the light of "the current state of the market, we have no firm plans at this stage to run the event."

By contrast Simon Dieppe of Informa, the organisers of GlenLegal, had no hesitation in promising that the Legal IT Forum would be back, even bigger and better next year. (The dates 13 to 15 October.) Dieppe is also planning a 'LITF Club' to provide delegates with a series of networking opportunities between now and next year's event.

Coming so close on the heels of the cancellation of LegalTech Europe, as well as a series of conference and seminar flops earlier this summer, it is now being suggested that the UK may only have room for two events each year: the Legal IT London exhibition in February and the GlenLegal conference in October. But, there are two wild cards in the pack (or three if the By Legal, for Legal event is repeated next year) that could have a further impact on the dynamics of the market.

The first is a plan by the Legal Software Suppliers Association to organise and run their own trade show next autumn. LSSA members are being admirably tight lipped about their plans but the Insider understands they will be making a decision on whether or not to go ahead with the project within the next few weeks. Not surprisingly they too are still trying to decide whether the poor attendances recorded at some events is due to the organisation of those particular events or a general slump in the market - or the fact that the traditional IT trade show format may have had its day and be past its sell by date.

The second development is the Ark Group's LEX Connect UK event, scheduled to take place in London on 19 & 20 January. This aims to replicate the success of this year's LEX Connect Europe in Amsterdam by breaking away from the usual exhibition or conference format to offer law firm partners and IT directors a combination of interactive workshops and consultative one-to-one meetings with solution providers.

Within the last few days SAP has confirmed that it has signed up as the lead sponsor, while Canon, eCopy, Nortel and e1Business are also aboard for the event. Commenting on the move, SAP sales manager Rob Harrison said "We are delighted to be sponsoring LEX Connect UK. SAP's solution for the legal industry is designed to help firms of all sizes improve their critical processes in a simple, secure and cost effective manner."

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AIM makes its second acquisition in three weeks

Reflecting a growing feeling that in the current economic climate it is no use waiting for organic growth, the AIM Group has just made its third acquisition in three weeks (see last issue of Insider for Teamflo story).

The latest purchase is SharpOWL Software International and its SharpOWL and its professional services automation (PSA) software suite. No details of the purchase transaction have been given however AIM has acquired all aspects of the business including staff, IP rights and premises, with SharpOWL becoming a semi-autonomous part of the group. As well as adding a third leg to the AIM business - the other parts are AIM Professional in the legal sector and AIM Commercial in the retail and credit management sector - the SharpOWL acquisition will increase the AIM Group's business by about 25 percent.

Although SharpOWL's main customer base will continue to be in the IT consultancy, PR/media, pharmaceutical/clinical research, management consulting, engineering consultancy and central government agencies fields, there are felt to be some useful cross-selling opportunities to exploit. In the case of AIM, it is selling debt recovery and case management systems to SharpOWL customers. Coming from the other direction, AIM Professional managing director Steve Broadley believes a number of SharpOWL's PSA products, including its project management system, will fill a useful niche in the legal market.

GlenLegal highs and lows

Well that is the Gleneagles Legal IT Forum over for another year - and with just enough time left for delegates' livers to recover before the Christmas onslaught begins. Once again we were impressed by the awesome devotion to duty (and expense accounts) of legal tech vendors, particularly those who were still vertical in the bar buying rounds of drink at 5:30 in the morning.

There was much amusement at the sight of representatives from arch rivals Hummingbird and iManage, clad in inflatable sumo wrestler suits, trying to 'basho' the stuffing out of each other. Hummingbird, who also had the most sought after freebie of the event - a 'light up so you can see what you are writing in the dark' torch pen - won the bout.

The best intentional stunt was Copitrak's prize draw to promote their Diamonde system, where the prize was a real diamond. And the prize for the most talked about but unintentional stunt went to the unfortunate salesman from another publication who, while trying to slide down the hotel's baronial staircase, slipped over the bannisters to fall 20 feet to the ground, breaking his jaw in the process.

The award for the best joke of the event goes to keynote speaker and author of *The Naked Leader* David Taylor for the following quip: "If IT people had been in charge of the Titanic, the ship would have missed the iceberg. By two years."

Outsourcing overseas - not all plain sailing

In the wake of Allen & Overy's decision to outsource a slice of its document production work to a bureau in southern India, more and more lawyers are now openly talking about making redundancies in the UK while simultaneously taking advantage of the low wages levels paid in the Third World. True, the rest of British industry has been doing this for years, but is outsourcing overseas really as straightforward as it seems?

Apart from the obvious qualification that most legal secretaries only spend part of their time handling dictation and document production - and so are by no means as expendable as some lawyers might think, we have heard complaints that the cost benefit of sending work abroad may not be as great as originally envisaged, particularly if any IT infrastructures have to be implemented.

The biggest concern however, particularly for firms who lack the clout of an A&O, relates to the quality of the work. One niche City practice told us they could not understand why the work carried out during a pilot was of a uniformly high standard yet the quality plummeted soon after they signed up for a longer term contract. That was until they discovered all the work they had forwarded to India, as part of the pilot, was actually sent straight back to the UK to be processed by legal secretaries in this country, so the bureau the firm was using could ensure quality standards were met.