



Buying trends - inertia rules OK !

The Insider has completed its latest informal survey of legal IT buying trends. This confirms that the UK market is enjoying one of its busiest periods since the late 1990s but there were some anomalous findings...

For example, our research found that although a significant number of firms expressed dissatisfaction with their current IT suppliers - particularly with new projects where either systems were not matching expectations or implementations were taking longer than envisaged - there was no inclination for anyone to cut their losses and replace these unsatisfactory systems.

According to one IT manager "partners would rather throw good money after bad than admit to making mistakes," while another added that "suggesting a change of strategy half way through a project is not a career enhancing move".

The second surprise was how little research High Street and smaller commercial firms carry out when selecting systems, with many drawing up shortlists solely on the basis of what other firms in their area use. Axxia, AIM, Videss and TFB were the most frequently named suppliers that firms had heard of and would consider shortlisting.

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Europe - the next legal IT frontier

Some UK legal IT suppliers are talking about breaking into the United States. Others are taking a crack at the Asia-Pacific market but if last week's Lex Connect Europe event in Amsterdam was anything to go by, Continental Europe is the most promising marketplace of all. This view is echoed by Derk Kropholler, the vice president of sales at Solution 6 Europe, who predicts that the greatest growth in legal IT sales over the next couple of years will be in Continental Europe.

Three factors are currently driving the European market. The first is the pending expansion of the EU, with law firms from the new accession states wanting to gear up so they can compete on an international basis. The second factor is a European-wide drift away from local legacy systems vendors, to the big international suppliers - such as Elite and Solution 6 - who are perceived as the only ones who can provide the latest technologies.

The third factor is the growing number of mid-sized European commercial practices who believe they can carve a niche because the large UK and US-based multinational firms, who dominate the top end of the market, do not really understand the region or the legal culture and are failing to provide the services European businesses want. Or as one German senior partner put it "they are like slow-witted dinosaurs, whereas we are much nimbler."

■ They also do things differently in Europe. We are all familiar with the usual freebies given away at exhibitions but at Lex Connect, the German digital dictation supplier DictaNet really upped the ante by giving away mobile phones. And not just any phone - these were top of the range smartphones, complete with Windows Mobile 2003, a video camera and loaded with the mobile phone version of DictaNet's digital dictation system.

DictaNet's sales director Florian Schwiecker said it might seem extravagant but when balanced against what other suppliers spend on magazine advertising and exhibition stands, it was actually a far more constructive use of a marketing budget as it did leave the prospective customer with something they would always remember and could always use.

Banking - not our strong point !

We have reported in the past that credit control is not a skill at which law firms excel. Far too many allow bills to remain unpaid for too long. And even when they do get their hands on some money, we hear of unbanked cheques sitting on partners' desks, along with the rest of their post, until they return from holiday. But the ultimate horror story doing the rounds at Lex Connect Europe concerned a firm that recently received a payment into its bank of several million € uros. A partner instructed the bank to convert this into £Sterling and then, 24 hours later, changed his mind and asked for the funds to be switched back into € uros. Thanks to bank charges and fluctuations in the currency markets, this little exercise in indecision cost the firm a mere £75,000.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ MEMERY CRYSTAL REVAMP DR

To coincide with a move to new offices this month, Memery Crystal is revamping its disaster recovery provisions with the implementation of a remote backup facility based on the Teksys (01923 247707) Totalflex service. The firm's IT manager Elizabeth Grist said the Teksys service, which is aimed primarily at mid-to-smaller sized firms, was not only the most cost effective solution but also the most flexible as it allows Memery Crystal to make ad-hoc backups.

■ HUMMINGBIRD eCOPY ALLIANCE

Following a similar deal some months ago with iManage, now Interwoven, document integration specialist eCopy has announced a connector utility for the Hummingbird DM document management system. Using the new eCopy connector, Hummingbird users will now be able to scan paper documents directly into their document management systems. The connector will be available from Q2 this year. www.ecopy.com/europe

■ ICON GEARING UP FOR LAUNCH

ICON, the 'intelligent conveyancing' system offshoot of Cheltenham based solicitors BPE, is gearing up for a formal launch later this spring. ICON say initial reactions to the beta version of the system has been so positive that they are now recruiting for a sales manager and an additional sales executive. For details contact Clive McCafferty on 0845 230 4266 or email clive.mccafferty@intelligent-conveyancing.com

■ SILKINS TO AUTOMATE UPDATES

Lewis Silkin has chosen Datashare Solutions (020 8337 2700) to design and deploy a new system to improve the management of its PC environment, including desktops, software, inventory, patch management and security updates. The Datashare solution is based on its Altiris client management and recovery suites, run in conjunction with Microsoft's SUS software update service, and will be rolled out across 250 workstations and servers. The firm's head of IT Jan Durant said Altiris would automate labour intensive processes, such as updating pattern files and patches, and create what is effectively a 'self healing' remedy for applications that had been corrupted or accidentally deleted.

Capital allowances? Don't panic !

With Budget Day taking place next Wednesday (17 March), the question of what will happen to those 100% capital allowances for IT projects is once more on the agenda. Last year the prospect of the allowances being abolished on 31 March 2003 undoubtedly contributed to a mini boom in IT sales, with firms rushing to get their orders in before the deadline. And then the Chancellor of the Exchequer spoiled everyone's fun by extending the concession for another 12 months!

Leaving aside the obvious qualification that tax concessions should never be the main consideration when buying IT, even if the 100% allowance does come to an end this month, there is still the traditional diminishing balance relief available for HP and cash purchases.

However because this spreads tax relief over a period of years (40% in year one, 25% in subsequent years) Chris Weera of finance specialists Syscap PFL (01606 338000) suggests partners do then need to carefully consider broader financial management issues, including any pending retirements, when deciding whether to opt for hire purchase or a lease rental scheme. For example, on a £40,000 purchase although both schemes will deliver exactly the same total tax saving over three years, with HP there is 40% relief in year one (about £17,000) but a considerably smaller amount (only £1000) in subsequent years, whereas with leasing there is a £6300 saving each and every year.

BLP uses Civica for software licensing efficiency

Berwin Leighton Paisner has awarded Civica the contract to manage its software licensing activities. The contract's scope includes not only legal compliance but also ensuring the firm selects the most beneficial agreement option with Microsoft, taking into account BLP's current 980+ user licences and its future expansion and upgrade plans.

BLP's systems support manager Julie Jakings said that with plans to upgrade to Windows Server 2003 and Office 2003, as well as needing to renew its existing Microsoft enterprise agreement, the firm wanted to "future proof" their licensing investment, knowing they would be rebuilding servers and desktops in the near future. For example, with Berwin Leighton Paisner, Civica were able to identify two variations of Microsoft's enterprise agreement and three versions of its 'buy as you go' select agreement to choose between.

Civica, which has had a specialist team working on corporate software licensing projects for a number of years, won the BLP contract in competition with two other software resellers, including the firm's incumbent supplier. Civica (01709 786786) can also help firms source non-Microsoft software products.

■ Last week Civica was floated on the AIM alternative investment market with an initial valuation of £79.2 million.

Emis finding growing interest in hosted services

Hosted and ASP (application service provider) services were one of the benefits of the dotcom boom we were meant to enjoy about three years ago. Nothing happened then but over the past 12 months the technologies and business models have been refined, so interest is once more growing in the ASP concept.

Emis IT (0870 112 3279), the legal systems division of Egton Medical Information Systems (who provide hosted IT services for about 55% of all GP practices in England & Wales) has recently become involved with two ASP projects based around its Seneca CM contact, file and activity management system.

The first - VIP (Virtual Inhouse Practice) - is a scheme designed by two ex-inhouse lawyers for companies who want to outsource legal work but still retain a relationship - albeit a virtual one - with their legal advisors. Emis host Seneca on their servers and end users require merely the Seneca client software and web access for a secure connection.

The second project - Law Abroad, whose founders include conditional fees expert Kerry Underwood - involves the bolder concept of UK firms outsourcing routine aspects of legal work to overseas lawyers, instead of delegating it inhouse to their own unqualified staff. On this project, the hosted Seneca system also handles workflow, so as soon as new instructions and files are scanned into it by a UK lawyer, they are automatically sent to an overseas lawyer to review and action. www.emisit.com

MSS update AlphaLaw but some users take a little longer

MSS (01252 371121) has introduced a series of enhancements to its flagship AlphaLAW-Vantage software, with an emphasis on providing a risk management environment, as well as more business information. Other new features include Crown Court billing, historical matter balance reports, a telephony interface which automatically records time for client phone calls, and 'ePost' - a document imaging and workflow delivery system for attaching scanned copies of incoming post to client files.

MSS has also launched Version 3 of its AlphaLAW-esprit entry level system for sole practitioners and smaller firms. New features include a 'user-friendlier' screen interface, limitation dates and automatic client and matter conflict checking.

But, while MSS may be committed to continually looking to upgrade and improve the functionality of its software, the same cannot be said for some of its users. MSS managing director Simon Meehan told the Insider that the company recently upgraded two firms that had been running one of the older versions of AlphaLAW for over 18 years. Now that really is getting the maximum return on your IT investment although Meehan admits it was a little chastening to realise that when these firms originally bought the software, the company's current office junior hadn't even been born!

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ **NEW IT GOES IN TO BACK MERGER**
Cobbetts in Manchester has completed the first phase of what will eventually be a £400k upgrade to its IT infrastructure, to support its pending merger with Birmingham law firm Lee Crowder, which takes place on 1st May this year. The upgrade involved extending the firm's existing Citrix 'thin client' infrastructure, which already links Cobbetts' Leeds and Manchester offices, so that from May it also encompasses the new Birmingham offices.

The project, which was handled by legal systems supplier JMC.IT (0161 925 7777) who also worked on the firm's original Citrix network, also saw the rebuilding of all the firm's servers and routers to cope with the anticipated increase in network traffic, plus upgrading disaster recovery provision and installing a new IP based phone system.

■ **WELSH AGENCY BUYS AXXIA**
The Land Development & Legal Services Department of the Welsh Development Agency has awarded Axxia (0118 9602602) a contract to supply it with a case and practice management system, including e-business facilities, to support its growing volume of legal and commercial property work.

■ **DPS ONE OFFICE IN CIVICA DEAL**
Stanley Tee in Essex has become one of the first firms to implement DPS Software's (020 8804 1022) new 'One Office' approach to systems integration. Based around Microsoft .NET, One Office allows firms to run case and practice management software from different suppliers but on the same shared SQL Server 2000 database. Stanley Tee has implemented One Office to link its Civica PMS with DPS case management and DPS is now working on similar projects with Axxia, TFB and Elite accounts systems.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

■ JOHN PICKERING GO WITH SOS

John Pickering & Partners has become the second firm this year to replace an old Solace accounts system with new SOS (01225 787700) practice management software. The firm, which has four offices in the northwest, will be using the system to integrate, email, file and document management, including scanning, with accounts and time recording.

■ DEALBUILDER IN MICROSOFT DEAL

Following a three month pilot in its Law & Corporate Affairs department in Redmond, Microsoft will now be using the DealBuilder document automation system from Business Integrity (0207 814 6900) to produce software licence agreements in over 30 languages.

■ McGRIGORS CHOOSE DEBT SYSTEM

Pilgrim Systems (0131 555 9700) has won the contract to supply McGrigors in Scotland with a new debt recovery case management system, based around Pilgrim's new IntelliCentre product. McGrigors said it "was Pilgrim's off the shelf workflows that placed them ahead of the competition".

PEOPLE & PLACES

■ LEVENE JOINS BAKER ROBBINS

Simon Levene has joined the London office of the Baker Robbins legal IT consultancy, where he will primarily be involved with knowledge management projects. Levene, who was previously the chief knowledge officer for Baker & McKenzie, qualified as an accountant with PricewaterhouseCoopers and is the co-author of *Knowledge Management - a guide to good practice*, (British Standards Institution, 2001).

■ FREESTONE MOVES TO ULTIMA

Helen Freestone, previously with Hummingbird, has joined Ultima Business Solutions as an account director and will be focusing on the legal sector. Ultima is a provider of infrastructure solutions, including IT security, managed services, thin client, storage and backup technologies, and can also assist with software licensing issues, helpdesk support, maintenance and hardware fulfilment requirements. Freestone can be contacted on 0118 902 7208.

www.ultimabusiness.com

Speech recognition meets telephony at Duthies

Edwards Duthie, which now has over 240 staff working out of eight offices in east London, has become one of the latest firms to install a voice activated telephone directory system from Datapulse (0118 972 8505). The firm found that after its 2001 merger (between Edwards Son & Noice and Duthie Hart & Duthie) the five switchboard operators were struggling to cope with call volumes of 40,000 calls a month, mainly because 30% of these calls were internal and the operators were having to spend time looking up internal extension numbers.

Datapulse's solution was a voice activated directory that uses speech recognition. Callers now just need to speak the name of the individual or department they want to reach and the system automatically puts them through without operator intervention. The system can also be used by clients and will link calls to voice mail and mobile phones - again without operator assistance or using menu-based call routing. www.datapulse.com

DIGITAL DICTATION NEWS IN BRIEF

■ MILLS & REEVE ROLL OUT DICTAFLOW

Following a 90 user pilot project, Mills & Reeve is rolling out the nFlow DictaFlow digital dictation workflow system to 370 users. The implementation is being handled by Tikit (020 7400 3764) who will be integrating the DDS with the firm's practice and Interwoven document management systems.

■ VOICEPATH IN WINSCRIBE LINK

Following the recent launch of the WinScribe Exporter facility, Voicepath (01926 821904) is now able to offer its digital dictation transcription outsourcing service through WinScribe's UK and international network of resellers. This will allow WinScribe users to choose, either at the point of dictation or later, whether to send specific jobs for transcription internally or to outsource it to Voicepath. We think this will prove particularly popular for firms who currently use temps and 'twilights' to supplement their inhouse secretarial facilities.

■ WINSCRIBE LAUNCHES CHINESE WALLS

WinScribe has launched a Chinese Walls facility for its digital dictation system. This will allow discrete WinScribe systems to be hosted on a single server - but with extra security and total segregation of voice storage - to maintain confidentiality between different departments. Called WinScribe Multiple, because the new system has involved a redesign of the database structure, it is only available for users of WinScribe v 3.4 and above.

■ NEW WHITE PAPER ON RETURN ON INVESTMENT

SRC has published a new white paper looking at the way Irwin Mitchell measured the return on investment on its WinScribe digital dictation system. Copies can be downloaded in PDF format from the Insider web site at www.legaltechnology.com

Law firm files patent on cost management system

In what we believe is a legal world first, Birmingham-based Wragge & Co has successfully filed a US patent application for a quotation and transaction management system.

Called Midas, it was developed by financial controller Glyn Morris and head of strategic development Derek Southall to allow the firm to scientifically cost and manage any transaction or case using historical data. According to Morris "Midas meets client demands for fixed and lower fees, so there are no surprises at the point of billing, while ensuring we don't get caught out by uncontrolled costs and changes in the scope of a job."

Midas, which has been used by the firm's 550 fee earners on a regular basis since it was launched internally last year after a nine month pilot, has three distinct functions: quoting, scoping and management.

Quoting allows the fee earner to obtain critical information on all the key financial drivers based on historical matters - this has already proved useful in litigation where multiple outcomes can be predicted. By using the scoping function, Midas will automatically structure the team, while the management module allows the transaction, including work in progress, to be regularly and scientifically measured against budget to ensure that clients have absolute certainty in fee quotes.

Southall says a number of third parties have already expressed interest in the patent. www.wragge.com

Hummingbird launches latest Enterprise for legal market

At its recent annual user conference in Florida, Hummingbird took the opportunity to announce details of a number of new product launches and initiatives. These include Enterprise 2004 for Legal, which features a series of revisions to the suite's document management and collaboration tools but with a particular emphasis upon the needs of the legal vertical market and its need to provide client and matter-centric views of information. The 2004 Legal system is available now.

Also new from Hummingbird is Docs Open 4. This has been designed primarily for users in the government and public sectors who want enhancements to the old two-tier Docs Open 3 document management system but without moving up to the newer three-tier architecture of DM 5. New features include support for Microsoft Office 2003 and email management.

Finally, Hummingbird and LexisNexis have launched a new contract management system that combines the HotDocs document assembly system with Hummingbird's content management and virtual dealroom software to provide what is described as "full document lifecycle support" from contract creation and negotiation through to maintenance and archiving.

■ Hummingbird expects to announce details of its support for Java/J2EE and .NET/Windows platforms later this year.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ TWO MORE WINS FOR WORKSHARE

Ashurst and niche commercial practice Shadbolt & Co have become the latest firms to announce plans to roll out the Workshare 3 document comparison and security system from Workshare (020 7426 0000). Ashurst will be rolling out the system across 1500 desktops where it will be used for redlining, automatically removing metadata from WP documents and managing file formats to prevent system crashes, when multiple authors are editing very long documents. Ashurst IT director Chris White said that with the firm regularly working on over a thousand 200 + page documents in the course of a week "issues such as document corruption and the management of changes have a direct impact on the productivity."

■ LUPTON FAWCETT ORDER ECLIPSE

Leeds-based Lupton Fawcett has ordered the ProClaim case management system from Eclipse Legal Systems (01274 704100). The firm will use the software in its residential property department. Other recent Eclipse wins include Hilary Meredith Solicitors - the firm was set up by former Donns managing partner and personal injury lawyer Hilary Meredith, Goldsmith Williams in Liverpool and Clarkes in Shropshire.

■ FLINT BISHOP SELECT ELITE

Derby law firm Flint Bishop & Barnett has embarked on a major upgrade of its IT systems and will replace its current Cognito accounts software with new products from Thomson Elite (020 7369 7379). The top 200 firm - which is spending "in excess" of £250k on the project, including consultancy, over the next 12 months - will also be installing Elite's WebView browser interface and the APEX CRM and marketing system.

■ NOTTS CITY AIMS FOR BEST VALUE

The Legal Services Division of Nottingham City Council is to use the Evolution system from AIM Professional (01482 326971) to handle its time recording, database and case management requirements. Along with streamlining its existing business processes, the 50 fee earners and 20 support staff will also be using the AIM system to support 'best value' and its moves towards achieving Lexcel accreditation.

US LegalTech to focus on just two IT shows

American Lawyer Media, the company behind the LegalTech trade shows in the United States, has radically revised the scheduling of the event for the coming year. Instead of one big exhibition and conference in New York and a series of smaller shows around the country, there will now just be two events: LegalTech New York and LegalTech West in Los Angeles.

The LA show is scheduled for 8 & 9 June this year and the next New York LegalTech will take place during 31 January to 2 February 2005. The New York 'fall' show in September has been replaced by a new, broader, legal business oriented event called Law Firm inc. www.legaltechshow.com

LEGAL IT EVENTS DIARY

■ MARCH 16, SURREY. E-Conveyancing & digital dictation seminar at Pennyhill Park Hotel in Bagshot. For details call Francesca Bongiorno of DPS Software on 020 8804 1022.

■ MARCH 17, GLASGOW. Pilgrim Systems is holding two seminars (9:30am and 2:00pm) at the Malmaison Hotel on the ways IT systems can keep partners & finance directors better informed on management information. For details call Hilary Kenny on 0131 555 9700.

■ MARCH 24, LONDON. S&G Training is holding free briefings on digital dictation and document assembly (qualifying for 2 hours CPD) at its Hatton Garden office. Call Hayley Smith on 01322 661141 or visit www.sandgtraining.co.uk

■ MARCH 24, LONDON. CRM Culture Masterclass - free morning seminar with legal marketing guru Kim Tasso on the 'soft' issues of attitude and motivation that need to be tackled to achieve a successful CRM system. For details email michelle.whitehead@e1business.com

■ MARCH 24 & 25, LONDON. The Ark Group's 5th annual knowledge management conference at the Chesterfield Mayfair Hotel. The programme, which qualifies for 18 CPD points and features speakers from UK and European firms, is followed on Friday 26th by a one day seminar on the role of professional support lawyers. The fee is from £1095 + VAT. www.ark-group.com

Costs - moving on from recovery to management

Thomson Elite recently reported that sales of the Billback costs recovery system it distributes in North America were starting to take off, with 10 new contracts secured in the last three months of 2003. Closer to home, Billback may have only gone into a few firms since it first became available in the UK in 2001 but these do include Linklaters and Norton Rose. We are also hearing that more and more costs recovery contracts are becoming three-way fights between Equitrac, Billback and the market leader Copittrak.

Eldean Ward, who heads Billback's London (020 7246 9999) operations, told the Insider that while the company never expected an overnight repetition of its success in Australia (where it has an 80% market share) he is pleased the system is now firmly on the radar of both UK and US law firms.

Although technology has had a key role to play in Billback's growing international acceptance - the flagship iBillback product is browser based and available on Windows Server 2003 - Ward believes Billback is also benefiting from a change of emphasis in the market where "capturing, allocating and understanding costs are now just as important as revenue recovery".

While the provision of management information has always been a strong point - the system runs on SQL Server with Crystal Reports - iBillback uses a 'publish & subscribe' approach to automatically generate and deliver reports direct to the desktops of managers and finance directors who would never use a report generator. "With all law firms struggling to cope with changes in expense patterns, such as declining photocopier volumes and increased laser printing, priorities are shifting," says Ward, "from cost recovery to cost management." www.billback.com

Exchange rates hit Solution 6

A combination of the strength of Australian dollar and the R&D costs of developing its new CMS .NET system hit Solution 6's half year results for its legal & professional solutions division to 31 December 2003. Turnover was down from A\$36.9 million to A\$25.6m, while profits were down from A\$2.0m to A\$900k. However the division currently has a A\$16m backlog of orders which will be filtering through over the coming months.

The LITF Club is going to the Zoo

Despite polar weather conditions, over 70 delegates turned out for the inaugural meeting of the LITF (Legal IT Forum) Club earlier this month. The agenda included presentations by Richard Susskind on artificial intelligence followed by some energetic drinking and networking, interspersed - because the venue was the Magic Circle Club - by live magic acts. The LITF Club next meets on 10th of June at London Zoo. For details on how to join the LITF Club email louisa.cook@informa.com

Latest product launches

■ ELIMINATE THOSE EMAIL FALSE POSITIVES

We all know that dealing with spam is now a major headache but most email filters only exacerbate the situation. The problem is that as tighter filtering rules are introduced to eliminate junk mail, so the number of 'false positives' increase as legitimate messages are incorrectly blocked as spam. The result is a growing number of IT directors on the receiving end of late night calls from angry partners complaining that emails from clients had been bounced by anti-spam filters.

One company that believes it has a solution is US-based Secluda Technologies which has just launched the AP Intelligent Mail Switch. This allows firms to fine tune their existing filters to avoid false positives yet still maintain security. The system is compatible with Exchange, Groupwise, Lotus Domino, Linux and Windows, with pricing running from US\$195 to \$3995 for an unlimited server licence. A free evaluation copy of AP Intelligent Mail Switch can be downloaded from www.secluda.com

■ NEW DIGITAL WATERMARKER FOR ARCHIVING

MediaSec Technologies has launched MediaSign Digital, a new system that offers reliable verification for the authenticity and integrity of records stored in a digital format through a combination of electronic signatures and digital watermarks. The system makes it easier to detect if and where a document or image has been manipulated. In particular, relevant information such as copyright, source, creation date and other metadata travel with the document and can still be read even after a file has been manipulated or modified. www.mediasec.com

■ AXXIA LAUNCHES ITS KPI SUITE

Axxia Systems (0118 9602602) has now launched KPIs (key performance indicators) the final part of its four tier reporting infrastructure. KPIs, which is aimed at fee earners, team leaders and business managers, can provide detailed synopses of chargeable time, fees, profitability, cash collections, lock-up, work in progress and outstanding debt but with the ability to drill down from a practice level right down to the individual fee earner. Data can be supplied in a graphic or tabular format to a browser page and can be integrated with end user desktops via either an intranet or the Axxia PKC personal knowledge centre.

■ WEB ENABLEMENT WITH APPLICATION SLICING

Cetus Solutions (0161 848 4315) is introducing an approach they call 'application slicing' (based on the AppSwing AppServer system) as a way of web-enabling Windows 32-bit applications but without having to rewrite the original source code. Cetus head of legal & professional services Paul O'Sullivan says the system, which uses Windows Terminal Server, effectively allows IT teams to deliver real-time information as web pages (or 'slices' or 'Appshots' to mobile devices (including Blackberrys, GSM and GPRS smart phones) and portals in a non-bandwidth intensive way but without having to invest in new technologies such as .NET. www.cetus-solutions.com

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

■ ELITE APAC RECORDS TWO WINS

Following the launch of a regional subsidiary last year and the appointment of former Keystone director Kaye Sycamore as regional director, Thomson Elite has announced two major sales in the Asia Pacific region. These are Drew & Napier in Singapore and Ebsworth & Ebsworth in Australia, which becomes the first top 20 Australian firm to buy an Elite practice management system. Elite Asia Pacific has also beefed up its Sydney-based support team in recent months with new appointments in training, technical consultancy and project management.

■ WILLIAM FRY TO DEPLOY KM

William Fry, one of Ireland's top 5 firms, is to deploy the Solcara (+44 (0)7810 631377) Client-Partner system as part of an ongoing programme to improve knowledge sharing and access to information within the firm. The Solcara system, which will initially be deployed to 200 end users, has a browser front end providing access to internal and over 30 online information sources but with each home page personalised to the specific needs of different practice areas. The Solcara system will also be integrated with a Konduct library management system from Bailey Solutions and Tikit's Granite & Comfrey know-how database.

■ SPEEDLEGAL AUTOMATES PERKINS

Perkins Coie, the largest law firm in the US Pacific Northwest, is to use SpeedLegal's XML and browser-based SmartPrecedent system to automate document production. The system will initially be used in the Estate & Personal Planning group. By coincidence, one of the Italian firm's attending last week's Lex Connect Europe reported that they were now using SmartPrecedent as the core of their knowledge management infrastructure.

www.speedlegal.com

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Arrogant, ignorant - and they still don't get IT !

As part of a recent survey into legal IT employment trends, the organisers of Gleneagles Legal IT Forum asked law firm IT managers and directors what were the worst aspects of working with lawyers. Some of the answers were predictable, for example there were a lot of complaints that the very nature of law firms and their partnership culture meant decision making was frequently a slow and drawn out process because everyone had a different opinion and needed to be consulted.

Similarly, there was concern that the legalistic mindset of lawyers - or as one IT director put it "they are trained arguers and nitpickers" - often resulted in them approaching everything as if it was a contract or a deal they were negotiating. Along with the inertia arising from this tendency to examine issues and projects in minute detail, it was felt they were often "overly pedantic and did not get the bigger picture".

However tying for first place as the biggest source of grievances about lawyers was their general ignorance - of all matters technical and managerial, and their 'arrogant, egotistical attitude'. In response after response, concern was expressed that lawyers had poor management skills, lacked vision and commercial awareness, and wanted results from IT but were not prepared to spend any time trying to understand IT or even get a grip on the simplest technical details.

This no doubt explains why when asked where they would like to be in five years' time, over 12% of managers said they would still like to be working in IT "but well away from anything to do with lawyers" and 22% "hoped to be out of the rat race altogether and sitting in the sun with a cocktail".

Who are these IT people? The survey found that 60% had held positions in IT management in other areas of the business world before joining the legal market and nearly 15% had been in practice as lawyers. Reflecting the fact that professionally managed inhouse IT departments are still a relatively new development, nearly one third (32.6%) of IT directors and managers in the survey had worked in legal IT for three years or less, and a further 26.5% had only been in the sector for between three and five years. However there were over 20% who had been in this field for between five and ten years, and a further 20% of veterans with over 10 years' experience under their belts.

Salans expand volume business

As part of a four year strategy to become the market leader in the high volume processing of re-mortgage, conveyancing and debt recovery work, the UK arm of the international law firm Salans is spending £220,000 to implement new case and practice management software. The firm says it considered at total of 13 products before selecting an integrated Solicitec SolCase 8 case management and SOS practice management system to replace its existing Legis and Miles 33 software.

Telephony project - law firm partner wanted

Telephonetics, the UK's leading provider of integrated telephony and speech recognition systems - you will have probably used one of their systems if you have ever booked tickets for a multiplex cinema, has a number of regional firms using its ContactPortal 'intelligent, speech driven call routing system'. This works as a virtual operator and enables staff to receive, make and transfer calls, just by saying the name of the person they wish to contact, from any location.

Telephonetics has now launched Enterprise ContactPortal, a new version of the system aimed at larger organisations, and would like to work in partnership with a Top 100 City firm to demonstrate the benefits to the legal sector. Telephonetics is happy to provide such a firm with a free system in return for their feedback and help in the promotion of the system in this market. For details contact Paul Welham on 01442 242242 or email paulw@telephonetics.co.uk

Bureau looking for ally

An SME bureau, located in the heart of London's legal district, specialising in short run repro, copying, scanning and litigation support services, is looking to tie up with another supplier for deeper penetration of a blue chip customer base, which includes law firms and the Bar. Requests for information should be emailed to info@cloudnine.co.uk

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