



What a difference four years can make

London Bridge Software, the financial services to case management systems company built by Gordon Crawford after his earlier involvement in the legal IT market with Charterhouse, is to be bought by Fair Isaac, one of its US rivals. The sale is due to be finalised next month for an agreed price of £166 million or 95p a share. This sounds a lot until you remember that at the height of the dotcom boom, London Bridge shares were selling for over £15 each and the company was valued at £2.4 billion. Crawford, whose salary was £478,000 last year, is expected to make £70 million on the sale of his shares although four years ago they would have sold for over £1 billion.

.NET authors anyone ?

Interest may be growing in Microsoft's new .NET Framework but locating information about them is not so easy. When the director of one legal IT supplier recently ran a search on an online IT bookshop, he found just six books listed on MS SharePoint Portal Server. Unfortunately two of them were out of print and the other four had still to be published.

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Is legal IT heading for a seismic change ?

By the end of this year Windows NT, which is still the most widely used server platform in law firms today, will no longer be officially supported by Microsoft - in fact it was formally end of life in February this year. Although NT systems will continue to function more or less indefinitely, this change of status does mean there will be no more free bug fixes or security patches forthcoming from Microsoft, so users will increasingly be left to their own devices to deal with virus attacks and to integrate the platform with newer systems and applications.

For law firms, the real significance of this is where do they go from here? For example, if you are responsible for IT in one of the many firms now looking to replace systems last upgraded in the run-up to Y2K, you need to be certain your prospective IT supplier either already has a next generation system or at least has a clear roadmap and timescale for its development projects.

But does your supplier have a clear strategy - or are they just going to try to pour old Windows into new .NET bottles? To say some have been slow in recognising the changing environment is an understatement. And what are the cost implications of buying their legacy system today on the understanding there will be a successor product along tomorrow? If you are buying a new product, which you are going to want to run for at least five-to-seven years, you do not want to be basing your firm's IT future on already obsolete technology. ***Does the future have Microsoft .NET written all the way through it? See page 5.***

Microsoft's new CRM system comes out fighting

Despite earlier predictions that Microsoft's recently launched customer relationship system - Microsoft CRM - would appeal primarily to sales-oriented organisations rather than professional client services practices such as law firms, the Insider has learned that two large UK firms have already shortlisted the system.

Microsoft's secret weapon has been to link up with a sales partner - in this case Erudite Systems (01908 487514) - that had the expertise to extend the system and provide a more law firm friendly interface. Erudite, who are also a Siebel CRM partner, are not disclosing the identity of the two firms they pitched to, other than to say they are "significant practices" and are now into the second and third rounds of negotiations.

Erudite's sales director Sam Nixon told the Insider that both his company and Microsoft were serious about the UK legal market and while not underestimating the strength of the market leader InterAction, felt the Microsoft approach - of providing a platform based around an already familiar Microsoft interface, so CRM "was part of the glue" holding a firm's IT infrastructure together - would appeal both to existing CRM users, as well as the many firms that currently still had no discrete CRM system. ***For news of how other CRM suppliers are coping, turn to page 8.***

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ TIKIT REBRANDS ITS DIVISIONS

The Tikit Group has begun a rebranding exercise that will see the names of its Aurra consultancy and Granite & Comfrey KM divisions gradually phased out although there will be no changes to the services they offer. Aurra will now become Tikit Professional Services and focus on primarily back office consultancy and implementation, while Granite & Comfrey becomes Tikit Knowledge Services, focusing on KM projects and know-how software products.

■ SCAMS NEW PRACTICE MANAGER

Solicitors Case Management Systems (01747 855865) have launched a new practice management system - called Reports - to complement their existing low cost case and risk management software. Reports' features include a comprehensive record of key dates and undertakings, an automatic credit control facility and the automatic generation of the CLS and CDS monthly reports.

www.scams-law.com

■ GENIFAX 3.3 OUT NOW

Omtool Europe (01932 334444) is now shipping version 3.3 of its Genifax enterprise fax system. New features include: delivering inbound faxes to the desktop in G4 TIF, PDF or Searchable PDF (image + text) file formats; the ability to operate within a Citrix MetaFrame or Windows Terminal Services environment; and support for operators to profile and archive inbound faxes within the resident document management system, including Hummingbird and Interwoven.

■ QUAESTOR AHEAD ON MIGRATION

Professional Technology UK (01634 815517) reports that it has nearly completed the migration of users of its older Quaestor and Seriatim systems to the company's new Quaestor for Windows software. Along with all the usual features of a modern legal accounts and back office system, Quaestor for Windows also includes workflow software to support the production of Rule 15 client care letters and the maintenance of a wills and deeds register. Quaestor for Windows also follows Professional Technology's long standing business model with pricing based on the number of active matters or cases a user firm is handling.

Are you fiddling with your PMS while HR burns ?

At a recent meeting with Alby Smith of personnel systems specialists Augment (01460 239289), Smith made the point that while larger law firms were spending hundreds of thousands of pounds - and in some case millions - on practice and document management systems, their HR departments were frequently under-resourced, having to make do with inadequate IT systems and, as a result, haemorrhaging money in all directions.

For example, support staff turnover in many City firms is in the region of 20% per annum, which means that with 300 staff, the recruitment fees alone for replacing 60 of them is going to be in the region of £250,000 a year. And then on top of this there would be the internal costs for induction and training. Similarly, the manual processing of CPD administration and absence information is a laborious, paper-intensive task that can easily fully occupy one person's time within the HR department.

Smith argues that if a firm invested in a modern HR system that has the workflows to automate some of these tasks, it would free up the HR department to take a more proactive approach towards other issues. For example, a 3% reduction in staff turnover would reduce recruitment fees alone by £65,000 pa.

Obviously Smith has a vested interest as Augment sell an intranet-based personnel and CPD administration system called HRnet (there are at least two other suppliers looking to break into the HR systems for law firms market) but it is an interesting concept that if a firm with a total headcount of 600 spent £30,000 on the cost of HRnet, it could benefit from a potential saving on HR administration of as much as £750,000 a year!

There is a copy of a spreadsheet containing a sample HR costs recovery calculator available on the Insider web site's downloads and white paper's section. www.legaltechnology.com

TFB targets commercial firms with Workshare partnership

TFB (01489 609000) has become the first UK case management systems supplier to become a technology partner of Workshare. As a result TFB will soon be offering Workshare's DeltaView redliner document comparison tool as an integral part of its Partner for Windows case and practice management system.

Commenting on the move, TFB's product & development manager Adrian Jones said "It has been our experience that many commercial practices perceive case management systems to be inappropriate for their firms, largely due to the ad hoc nature of their work. Workshare DeltaView on the other hand is extremely popular with commercial firms, as it can save them valuable time and money when working on lengthy legal documentation. By integrating DeltaView with our software, we believe that we are adding a powerful document management functionality into our product that will entice commercial firms to consider the advantages of our case management solution."

Bringing e-conveyancing home to smaller firms

The downside of case management has always been the assumption that unless you handle high volumes of work, there is no real benefit to investing in the software, with the result that smaller firms always missed out. One company trying to redress this balance is EasyConvey (01483 419025), which over the last couple of years has been winning an increasing number of users among sole practitioners and smaller High Street firms.

But, while the average number of users at any one site is just four, it would be wrong to see this as a bargain basement system whose functionality has been sacrificed for economy. For example, in addition to the core CASA case management software, there are also facilities to: place instructions online; carry out searches via any of the NLIS channels; communicate with clients directly via SMS texting; and use a £5 a time pay-as-you-go online case tracking system called Track-A-Matter.

EasyConvey founder Dominic Cullis says that as well as supplying workflows and document precedents for a wide range on conveyancing and property-related transactions, the company has made the system as intuitive as possible to minimise any support and training issues for smaller firms. For example, CASA can be operated equally by two-finger typists and non-mouse users, while training takes on average just over two hours per user. www.easyconvey.com

Dealrooms - get into the groove

The virtual dealroom is an area of legal IT that has gone from costing squillions to far more reasonable prices within a very short space of time. For firms wanting a basic collaborative workspace to share with colleagues, clients or third-parties, one system we are hearing favourable reports about is the Groove Workspace (currently Version 2.5) from Groove Networks.

It is available in a number of configurations, from a hosted version for small workgroups through to an enterprise system, and is fully compatible with a wide range of Microsoft products including SharePoint, Outlook and Office 2003, thereby permitting the realtime sharing and editing of Microsoft Word documents without having to email file attachments to and fro, as well as support for online and offline working.

Prices start from US\$69 and there is a free 60 day evaluation version available for downloading off the web. www.groove.net

All change at LSSA

Next month's LSSA (Legal Software Suppliers Association) AGM will see Alan Richardson, of Norwel, standing down after serving as the organisation's chairman for the past three years. Among the names being mentioned as a possible successor are Steve Broadley of AIM and Barry Hawley-Green of Laserform.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ ECLIPSE USERS UPGRADE

Two of Eclipse Legal Systems (01274 704100) long standing customers have placed orders for major upgrades to their case management software. Southport-based Barnettts has ordered an additional 85 licences, bringing the total up to over 250, for its Eclipse ProClaim conveyancing and remortgaging systems. And McKeowns in Hertfordshire is upgrading to a ProClaim personal injury claims software, having previously run an earlier Eclipse system.

■ THREE MORE WINS FOR TIMESLICE

Timeslice (020 7231 0073), currently enjoying one of its most successful trading years since the company was taken over by the City Computers Group in the mid-1990s, has secured three more orders for its Lawman integrated case and practice management system. The three - all in the London area - are sports, media and marketing specialists Couchman Harrington Associates, niche commercial practice Starr Legal LLP and new start-up firm PDG.

■ WORKSHARE RELEASE 3.5 OUT

Workshare (020 7426 0000) has released version 3.5 of its document content and change management software. The new features are intended to make it easier for Microsoft Word authors to interactively view and incorporate changes from many people, audit those changes, prevent document corruption and integrate with document management systems, all from within Word.

■ TIKIT & INTECHNOLOGY LINK

Tikit and managed services specialists InTechnology are holding a seminar in London on 25 May to explain their new strategic alliance and the benefits it can offer law firms. For details call 020 7400 5960.

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Looking for legal IT staff, including positions in management, sales, development, support, KM, publishing, marketing, online services, accounts or training? The Insider Jobs Board has the best choice of legal IT jobs available in the UK and you can post your vacancies free of charge by emailing the details to jobs@legaltechnology.com

PEOPLE & PLACES

■ NEW FACES AT DPS

Sean Town, previously with PC Law and prior to that Solace Legal Systems, has joined DPS Software as a sales & business adviser. DPS has also recruited Thaddeus De Vries, who will be focussing on the company's TeamTalk digital dictation range.

■ AVANQUEST CALLING

Kommunicate (01962 835000), the Winchester based software distributor, is changing its name to Avanquest UK. The move follows a decision by its French parent company BVRP Software to rebrand all its subsidiaries under the Avanquest banner.

■ PITMAN LEAVES LEGAL SECTOR

John Pitman, most recently the publishing director at Semple Piggot Rochez and before that the online publishing manager at Butterworths, is leaving the legal sector to take up a new post as the online product manager for Reed Business Information's construction & engineering division.

■ SUTCLIFFE JOINS ECLIPSE

Elaine Sutcliffe has joined Eclipse Legal Systems as an accounts support consultant. She has over 15 years' experience of legal accounts software having previously worked for both Axxia and TFB.

■ NEW CEO FOR WORKSHARE

Workshare has recruited Joe Fantuzzi as its new CEO. Fantuzzi, who has held senior posts at a number of major software houses including Autodesk and Macromedia, will work out of both the company's London and San Francisco offices. Workshare co-founder and chief technology officer Barrie Hadfield said Fantuzzi brought with him expertise of the high volume software business that would be instrumental in helping Workshare expand beyond its niche legal sector and into the wider professional services market.

■ OLYMPIC VP FOR ACCUTRAC

Records management software specialist Accutrac has appointed Paul Prioleau as its new vice president for client services. On a topical Olympic note, Prioleau represented the United States as a member of the 1980 Olympic rowing team.

Stephens & Scown set to roll out DigiScribe DDS

Following a successful pilot in the property department at the firm's Exeter office, top 200 firm Stephens & Scown is now set to roll out the Crescendo DigiScribe digital dictation workflow system to over 200 users in all four of its offices in the South-West. The firm is also planning to integrate DigiScribe with its AIM Evolution case management software.

Although DigiScribe belongs very much to the second wave of DDS products, entering the UK legal market much later than now well established rival products from BigHand, WinScribe and nFlow/Tikit, Crescendo is starting to build itself a solid user base, with other recent signings including Laytons and Taylor Vinters. The Insider has also seen an internal memo from a large firm regretting the fact they opted for a DDS system from one of the big three market leaders before properly considering the Crescendo product. The message here seems to be: if you are looking for a digital dictation workflow system, make sure that at least BigHand, WinScribe, nFlow/Tikit and Crescendo are now on your short list.

■ The UK office of Crescendo Systems has moved to new premises at Unit 5, Sunbury Business Centre, Brooklands Close, Windmill Road, Sunbury-on-Thames TW16 7DX. The 0870 770 1717 phone number is unchanged. www.crescendo.com

DIGITAL DICTATION NEWS IN BRIEF

■ HOWARD COHEN SELECT VOICEFLO

Leeds-based solicitors Howard Cohen & Co have selected the VoiceFLO digital dictation and workflow management system from iDOiNK Technologies (01473 408230) to replace their existing analogue dictation system. www.idoink.com

■ RICKSONS' SECRETARIES TO HAVE DDS AT HOME

As part of the firm's plan to roll out the WinScribe digital dictation workflow system across its Preston, Manchester and Leeds offices, Ricksons will be supplying some of its secretaries with PCs, WinScribe and broadband connections so they can work from home. The firm's managing partner Anthony Hughes said that along with providing secretaries with greater working flexibility and a reduction in their personal travel costs, it was also a way of helping make better use of the firm's offices where space was at a premium. Hughes says he has "been delighted by the reaction of our staff, which has seen secretaries queuing up to work from home."

WinScribe will eventually be rolled out to 150 staff at three offices, starting with an initial phase of 22 staff in the Leeds personal injury department. The DDS system will run across the firm's Citrix thin client environment, which is now supported by the latest version of WinScribe, and will be integrated with its Axxia case management software, so as to further reduce the reliance on paper files. The sales and implementation of the Ricksons project is being handled by SRC (020 7471 0100).

Does the future have .NET all the way through it ?

The American journalist Lincoln Steffens once wrote that he had "seen the future, and it works". Here on the Insider, we are coming to the conclusion that we have seen the future of legal IT and it will be like a stick of seaside rock with Microsoft .NET running all the way through it.

It wasn't always going to be this way, in fact less than a couple of years ago - when even Microsoft appeared to be uncertain what .NET was meant to be - there was a distinct possibility that Java/J2EE would emerge as the development platform of the future. But that was before Microsoft got its act together and the contenders lost the impetus. Recent US research into development strategies has found that the number of projects begun in Java fell by nearly a third in 2003 so last year 58% were based on .NET, compared with just 40% for Java.

One reason is that as .NET becomes more stable, it also becomes more efficient. For example BT's experience with .NET suggests development projects cost 30% less than Java and require fewer staff and less time. Here in the UK, Microsoft cite Freshfields as one of their legal market .NET pioneers, the firm having completed a new litigation support system from start to finish in under three months.

But just what exactly is .NET? Microsoft are keen to stress it is no one single product but rather a .NET Framework of technologies that "connect people, information, systems and devices through web services". It is in other words the engine room to deliver many of the things law firms are looking for today - including matter centricity and 24/7 global access to information from anywhere via any device. As we report in our winners & losers column, the .NET Framework ultimately has the potential to deliver from within the operating system many of the features, such as document management, that firms currently can only get from proprietary third-party applications.

As to the components of this Framework, they include Microsoft Office 2003, SQL Server 2000, Exchange Server 2003, SharePoint Portal Server 2003, Windows XP and, at the heart where the .NET Framework lives, Windows Server 2003. (If your firm has to manage instant messaging you should also check out Microsoft Live Communications Server 2003.) Ultimately .NET offers a simpler architecture to Microsoft's current desktop and server offerings but it remains to be seen how it will coexist with the 4GL systems, such as Progress, that currently provide the backbone for many of today's legal IT systems.

■ NOT A LOT OF PEOPLE KNOW THIS

There is always speculation as to where Microsoft dreams up the names (Longhorn, Blackcomb etc) for its upgrade projects. The best explanation we have heard is they come from the names of ski runs - and apres-ski bars - used by Microsoft staff in the Seattle region. There also seems to be a little confusion over Microsoft's ASP.NET system. In this instance ASP is an acronym for Active Server Pages and not Applications Services Provider.

Microsoft .NET - the winners and the losers

If the Microsoft .NET platform does become the standard for future legal IT systems, where does that leave current suppliers?

As reported on our front page, some seem woefully unprepared and either lack a clear strategy or are unlikely to have a viable .NET solution for at least two years. As there are even suppliers whose current client/server technology is already having difficulty coping with newer Microsoft technologies such as XP, it is possible we could see a similar shakeout to that following the shift from proprietary operating systems to Unix in the late 1980s and Windows in the mid 1990s. Anyone remember Wang?

It is also worth noting that as more functionality is added to Microsoft's core systems and applications software, tasks currently handled by third-party products could soon become just another part of the standard infrastructure plumbing. For example Microsoft Yukon, which is the next major update to the SQL Server database scheduled for release in 2005, will introduce a single file store capable of handling structured and unstructured data. For many firms this could obviate the need to invest in a separate document management system.

The following year is scheduled to see the release of Office 12/Longhorn, which will introduce document assembly, version control and comparison functionality within Microsoft Word, as well as better handling of large documents, which could hurt both document assembly suppliers and systems such as Workshare. And, in 2008/9 along comes Blackcomb incorporating speech recognition and 'serious' document management within the operating system.

On the other hand there will be winners whose early adoption of .NET will give them the edge in the immediate years to come. Companies already being mentioned in this light include ResSoft (www.ressoft.co.uk), FWBS (www.omsmattercentre.net), Lynx Technology (www.lynxtec.com) who have worked with Pinsents and Irwin Mitchell, Erudite (www.eruditesystems.co.uk) with Microsoft CRM, Trinity Expert Systems (www.tesl.com) with portals, and Pygmalion (www.pygmalion.com) who have carried out projects for Denton Wilde Sapte.

WEB NEWS IN BRIEF**■ NEW LEGAL JOBS BOARD LAUNCH**

This month saw the launch of Simply Law Jobs, a new recruitment web site for legal vacancies within law firms and inhouse legal departments. Rates run from as little as £3 per job posting. For further details call Michelle Jones (01428 04013) or visit www.simplylawjobs.com

■ LAWRENCE GRAHAM RELAUNCH

Lawrence Graham has relaunched its web site following a redevelopment project to improve its design, navigation and functionality. Changes include the introduction of a new search facility and a new SmartSite content management system that makes it easier for non-technical staff to update the site. The site was built and designed by the Tamar (020 8996 8704) interactive media agency, who also supplied the content management system. www.lawgram.com + www.tamar.com

■ CASE REPORT ORIGINALS ONLINE

Electronic legal publisher Context (020 7267 8989) has launched a new service that allows subscribers to its Justis.com online law reports service to view a facsimile of the original printed versions of case reports. The facsimiles are produced in a PDF file format and are currently available for *The Weekly Law Reports*, *The Law Reports* and the *Industrial Case Reports*. Context developed the service for lawyers and judges who prefer to work with case reports in their original format rather than a printout of the online version. www.context.co.uk

LEGAL IT EVENTS DIARY

■ MAY 19, LONDON. Tikit seminar at the Kingsway Hotel on the latest developments in CRM, following the release of InterAction v 5.1. For details call Sally Bellwood on 020 7400 5960.

■ MAY 26 & 27, LONDON. Ark Group annual IT conference at the SAS Radison Portman Square. The event focuses on security and profitability. Fees are from £1095 + VAT. www.ark-group.com

■ MAY 27, LONDON. Copitrak is holding a roundtable conference at its London office to introduce cost recovery on a budget scheme. To reserve a place call 020 7234 3000.

Web sites - are law firms missing the plot ?

The latest annual report - *Solicitors Web Sites in 2004 - who is winning and why?* - by the web design consultancy Intendance reveals there is still no link between the size of a firm and the quality of its web site, with smaller firms - usually on much smaller budgets - consistently proving they can compete online with their larger competitors. As James Tuke of Intendance comments "it is not how much money you spend on your web site, it is how well you spend it that determines your success," illustrating that on the Internet size really does not matter.

Intendance audited a sample of 100 sites, judging them on three criteria: content (what information is offered) design and usability (how easy is it to find that information). The average overall score was 58% but content, the area considered most important by Intendance, proved the biggest weakness with a score of 50% - one low point was the firm whose news page had not been updated since 2001! Conversely design, rated the least important element, had the highest average score of 65%, proving to Tuke that "solicitors are still not getting their web site priorities right".

For the second year running Collyer-Bristow came out on top with an overall score of 91%, followed by Alexander Harris and Hodge Jones & Allen, both on 84%. Copies of the report, which also contains a checklist of recommendations for creating an effective web site, are available free of charge from Intendance on 020 8871 1330 or email reports@intendance.com

SECURITY & ENCRYPTION NEWS IN BRIEF**■ IRWIN MITCHELL & TLT SELECT DESPATCH BOX**

Irwin Mitchell and TLT Solicitors have become the latest firms to purchase the DDX email encryption system from DespatchBox (0207 520 9310). Both firms have ordered the newly released version 5.0 which, along with protecting emails sent externally, also allows internal email traffic to be encrypted, so confidential memos can be circulated by partners without the risk of them being read by support staff. As with previous versions of the system, there are no user certificates to manage with DDX 5.0 nor special software to be installed on the recipient's desktop. Irwin Mitchell cited this - as they put it "we were not prepared to accept the high administration costs and complexity associated with PKI" - as one of the main reasons for selecting DDX. A total of 11 firms in the UK now run DDX. www.despatchbox.com

■ NEW VERIFICATION SYSTEM TO LAUNCH

The legal support services company Your Solicitor (0871 2240813), which was set up by practising solicitor Alan Benstock, is planning a new signature verification service that will operate through sub-post offices around the UK. Called Veri-ly, the service aims to provide a cheap £5 way for consumers to have their signatures verified when signing a legal document, rather than spending £25 plus having it authenticated by a law firm.

LATEST PRODUCT LAUNCHES

■ IS THIS THE BEST YET MONEY LAUNDERING GUIDE ?

The introduction of the new anti-money laundering regulations has stimulated the development of a mixture of IT solutions, ranging from workflow procedures to online financial vetting services however there still remains the problem of ensuring fee earners are fully familiar with the regulations.

Along with conventional training, one approach a number of organisations are offering is the online training course. Of the ones we have seen to-date, the best by far is the *Practical Lawyer Online Guide to Money Laundering*, published by Legalease (020 7396 9292), the people behind The Legal 500.

The course takes you through every aspect of money laundering, including not just the 2003 Regulations but also solicitors' obligations, professional privilege issues, record keeping and reporting procedures, plus a series of case studies showing where money laundering may be encountered in various aspects of legal practice including litigation, personal injury, property, matrimonial, tax, employment and breach of copyright work.

The mechanics of the course are also interesting as it has been accredited for CPD purposes. For example, each section of the course ends with a number of interactive questions and answers but you cannot move on from one section to another until you have first completed the questions and studied the prior section for a predetermined period of time - typically 15 minutes - so this is not a course you can cheat with just to get the CPD hours.

The course is hosted by Legalease, so subscribers can access it online but are unable to download the course or run it locally. As a subscriber, you have password protected access to the site and can view 'your' copy of the course, including the correct answers to the questions, at any time and on any number of occasions for up to one year - so you can go back through the course to swot up on some items of information. However, once you have completed the interactive questions, the answers become 'locked' so no-one else in your firm can re-do the course or qualify for the CPD accreditation. The course costs £59.00 + VAT. For more details visit www.legalease.co.uk

■ GET YOUR COMMS ON INTERROUTE i-21

We tend to avoid stories about networking and communications because most of them are far too techie for either the majority of our audience or our ourselves - in fact until recently if someone mentioned the phrase 'dark fibre' we at first thought they were talking about the novels of Philip Pullman. We are however making an exception for Interoute Communications who over the last two years have been putting together their i-21 pan-European comms network.

Based on eight metropolitan area networks (London, Madrid, Paris, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Vienna, Milan & Zurich) it offers a full range of datacom services - including dark fibre, i-Band, VPN, voice and wireless - to organisations in 47 European cities. For more information contact Philip Mountford of Interoute Communications on 020 7035 9000/9389. www.interoute.net

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CRM - the wannabes start to fight back

Although Interface Software, the company behind the market leading InterAction client relationship management system, may be moving ahead on all fronts with the recent acquisition of Scout Solutions and launch of its add-on modules, it does look as if some of its wannabe competitors are starting to fight back.

e1 Business (01962 831496), which has now added marketing campaign and event management functionality to its Metis CRM software (itself based on Sage's SalesLogix system) has secured another top 200 customer: Bristol-based Veale Wasbrough. Other Metis sites include Irwin Mitchell and Pinsents.

And Pivotal (01582 406652 - flagship site CMS Cameron McKenna) is directly targeting Interface users with the launch of an 'InterAction swap out' campaign. Pivotal's proposition is that products like InterAction only offer 'contact management relationship intelligence' and, as such, are just the first step towards a full CRM solution. Pivotal even suggest InterAction should be viewed as a "short-to-mid term strategy to affect the cultural change within a firm to get people used to the concept of CRM" before moving over to Pivotal's own CRM system.

According to Pivotal, the logical migration point is when firms are considering upgrading from InterAction Version 4 to InterAction Version 5 and it is these firms Pivotal will target with its swap out campaign. This is an interesting argument but it does suffer from two potentially fatal flaws.

Firstly, it is already a struggle getting firms to understand the difference between plain vanilla marketing and the concept of CRM, so attempting to draw a further distinction between contact management relationship intelligence and true client relationship management - whatever that may be - is likely to involve a level of hair-splitting few lawyers have the time or inclination to appreciate. Secondly, there is the practical consideration that recommending such a major shift in CRM technology strategy is unlikely to be a career-enhancing move for the IT or marketing director who suggests that change.

Meanwhile InterAction continues to go from strength to strength. Browne Jacobson in Nottingham has just announced that after running an extensive pilot with 60 users, it has now purchased a further 250 InterAction user licences. The sale and implementation is being handled by ResSoft (020 7421 4140).

Legacy technology rules - OK ?

While testing out some new search engine technology, Select Legal Systems recently ran a search on the Insider Jobs Board to see which were the most widely used platforms that law firms were recruiting staff to support. No prizes for guessing that Microsoft technologies enjoyed almost a clean sweep but it was surprising to see that, when it came to server platforms, nobody was looking for Windows 2003 Server skills and Windows NT still had a far more significant presence than Windows 2000.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ **DRUMMOND MILLER HEAD SOUTH**
Scottish law firm Drummond Miller has selected the Case Manager software from Axxia Systems (0118 960 2602) to support its recently opened York office. The office, which will operate as an independent part of a branch network, will be using the Axxia system to support its personal injury and conveyancing practices. Axxia sales director Bill Kirby says that since the company began promoting the Case Manager as a stand alone product, there has been a surge in interest in the system from smaller firms, start-ups, breakaways and semi-autonomous branches, such as Drummond Miller in York.

■ **PSR GO WITH SRC FOR DDS**
Southampton based Paris Smith & Randall has selected a WinScribe digital dictation workflow system from SRC (020 7471 0100) to replace its current analogue tape dictation operations. The new DDS will initially be piloted by 40 staff before being rolled out to a further 95 employees. The firm anticipates one of the benefits of the system being an increase in team working.

■ **GROUNDSURE SEARCHES ONLINE**
The NLIS channel and online information provider Searchflow has added the GroundSure range of property reports to the services it offers. Searchflow say GroundSure reports, which cover such things as planning and environmental audits, are essential for conveyances making environmental due diligence enquiries. www.searchflow.co.uk

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