



Could HR be fastest seller of 2005 ?

Laserform is predicting that its recently acquired HRnet employment and HR management system “will become the fastest selling piece of legal software in 2005”.

Laserform sales director Mike Boynes said that after previewing the software at various events over the past couple of months, he was “staggered by the demand” and anticipates finalising a number of new contracts over the next few weeks. Boynes suggests it is a ‘cobbler’s children’ situation, with law firms too busy dispensing advice on employment law to clients to get their own HR administration in order.

While it is undoubtedly true that most law firms have only rudimentary HR systems, with many still using manual methods, the Insider’s own soundings suggest that even those firms that do already have HR software could also be in the market for a suitable alternative product. This is because most of the systems currently in use were developed for businesses in industry and commerce and therefore cannot accommodate law firm-specific requirements, such as CPD records administration for fee earners. Kendall Freeman was the first firm to order the Laserform HR system, installing it to replace their existing PWA software.

Morgan Cole launch proactive service

In a move that takes it into the field of proactive client services, Morgan Cole has launched an employment law e-learning ‘training on demand’ tool for business managers.

Called employment@once, the system has been developed by the firm’s employment, pensions and benefits department, working in conjunction with e-learning systems designers and developers Synergy Multimedia, and will be sold through MC Consulting, a company wholly owned by Morgan Cole partners to allow profit sharing with non-solicitors.

The employment@once system, which was developed after consultations with the firm’s existing clients to determine those areas of employment law where mistakes most commonly arise, covers six topics: investigating and disciplining for misconduct, dealing with employee grievances, handling poor performance, absence management, issues raised in recruitment, and getting redundancy right.

Each topic covers policies, procedure and guidance, legislation including the Employment Act 2002, the contract of employment and employment rights through a series of video tutorials and case studies. There are also flowcharts, to guide users step-by-step through taking the appropriate action, checklists and letters available in a printable format, a flagging mechanism to warn users to check with their HR departments when dealing with high risk areas and a self-testing facility.

Commenting on the initiative, Kevin Greer, who is a solicitor and team manager of Morgan Cole’s legal innovation group, said the software “is intended to fulfil the role of the ‘fence at the top of the cliff’ and therefore represents an alternative to the usual ‘distress purchase’ of legal services.” He added that for Morgan Cole “employment@once represents a new business model for the sale of the firm’s services and directly converts the firm’s knowledge capital into revenue... We will be looking at ways to improve the product further by adding other topics and diversifying into different areas of legal advice.”

The system can be deployed on a server, intranet or CD, as well as hosted externally in the internet (although its use of multimedia means you do need broadband) and will run on any modern Windows PC loaded with Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.5 and Windows Media Player 6.4 – there is also a text only version available. There is a support and maintenance package that includes updates to the legal content and organisations running a learning management system (LMS) might like to note that employment@once is a SCORM compliant product. For further information, including a copy of a demo CD, call 0845 303 2348 or visit www.once.pro



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NEWS IN BRIEF

► MERGED FIRMS SELECTS DPS

Following the recent merger of two North London/Home Counties firms – Gordon Young & Co and Alistair Meldrum & Co – to create Meldrum Young, the combined firm will be standardising on accounts and case management software from DPS. Gordon Young were already DPS users and the firm is now about to rollout the DPS One Office system. Meldrum Young, which is now one of the UK's largest providers of legally aided criminal defence work, is also taking the DPS CDS and crown court billing modules, and will be working with DPS on the development of a system to support the new 'prison law' department the firm has opened in Manchester.

► INTERFACE WIDEN INTEGRATION

LexisNexis Interface Software has launched a new and completely redeveloped integration between its InterAction CRM software and the Novell GroupWise system. As similar links already exist for Microsoft Outlook and IBM Lotus Notes, the move means InterAction is now the only CRM to offer full, server-based, bi-directional integration with all the leading PIMs (personal information managers).

► RIGHTFAX NOW SUPPORTS MFDS

Capartis has just announced that its RightFax network faxing system is now compatible with the latest multifunction devices (MFDs) that combine faxes, copiers, scanners and printers in one unit. RightFax is distributed in the UK by Avanquest.

www.avanquest.co.uk

► ASHFORDS EXETER GO CASHLESS

Following its move to a new out of town development in Exeter, Ashfords has introduced a new smartcard that provides staff with access control and cashless payments within the office. The system was supplied by VMC (01926 816400).

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Survey reveals lawyers are still luddites at heart

The results of a new survey, conducted on behalf of the telecommunications group Bailey Teswaine, suggest that despite all the investments law firms have been making in IT in recent years, most lawyers are still luddites at heart who would prefer to deal with clients either by phone or on a face-to-face basis.

For example, although 24% of lawyers said email was their most commonly used communications tool (over double the figure for accountants, who were also surveyed) 53% said they preferred to speak to their clients by phone and, when it came to dealing with their peers, 56% prefer face-to-face meetings.

When asked whether important decisions should always be communicated face-to-face, 89% of the lawyers in the sample agreed with this statement. 88% also felt that if you want to resolve something quickly, you pick up the phone – and 41% believed that people use email specifically because they don't want to speak to someone.

Perhaps indicating that lawyers are out of touch with people under the age of 30, 65% said text messaging is never a suitable way to communicate about business – unlike accountants, where 1% felt texting was even an appropriate way to notify staff that they were being made redundant.

Inevitably, the survey shone some light into the convoluted canyons of the legal psyche. For instance, when it came to security, 76% said they would not use fax for communicating confidential information and 60% would not use email for similar reasons. Such reservations are understandable but 29% said they would not use letter post, 21% were concerned about the security of phones and 9% said they would not even communicate confidential information in face-to-face meetings, which does rather beg the questions: how do these lawyers communicate with their clients?

Bizarrely, despite this lack of enthusiasm for IT in their dealings with their clients and colleagues, the survey also found that 'the legal profession were least likely to catch up with friends or family in person, yet most likely to stay in touch by email,' – which is bad news for those 25% of lawyers who try to avoid online communications because they are concerned their messages will be monitored by their firm's IT departments.

Epoq launch phone based legal service

Epoq, the company behind the Desktop Lawyer online legal service, has launched a new phone-based legal service. The first of the new service's offerings include simple wills from £99 and more complex Inheritance Tax planning wills, complete with a discretionary trust, from £299. The service combines a call centre operation with Epoq's own Rapidocs document assembly system, so clients can phone in their requirements and receive the finished will through the post. www.epoq.co.uk

Osprey now available in three flavours

Pracctice (0870 443 6300) has revised the pricing and structure of its web-based Osprey.TM case and practice management system. As before, Osprey.TM is delivered as a hosted service – all users need is broadband access and a PC capable of running Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.0 – however from this week it is available in three flavours: a small office edition for up to 5 users, a small business edition for firms with between 6 and 50 users, and an Enterprise edition for 50+ users.

The biggest change is there will be no up front software costs for the small office edition, instead it will be available on a monthly subscription from as little as £500 per month, subject to an initial term of 12 months and 3 months notice thereafter.

Pracctice sales director Martin Siddle said “We believe we have got the pricing right, especially when you consider all you need to get going is an internet connection, as opposed to competitor systems that require servers, database licences and high spec PC hardware.” Siddle estimates the small office edition will save firms up to 35% on their year on year IT costs.

Following the introduction of new intranet facilities, Pracctice has also rebranded its Groupware email and diary system as PortalWare. This costs from £20 per user per month.

Stevens Drake and Martineau Johnson buy Debttime SQL

Martineau Johnson and Stevens Drake have become the latest firms to invest in Linetime’s Debttime SQL debt collection software. Martineaus will initially be using it for their niche student debt recovery business, while insurance specialists Stevens Drake in Crawley are replacing their old Timeslice debt collection system. (Timeslice currently has no plans to replace its legacy debt system.) In addition, Hutchinson & Buchanan in Ripon and Ivesons in Hull have both ordered new Liberate practice management systems from Linetime (0113 250 0020).

Recruiters say ‘busiest time for two years’

The JPL Group (0870 800 9494), one of the UK’s biggest legal IT recruitment agencies, is reporting a major upturn in business over the past six months. According to JPL’s Mark Lennard “The good times are back and recruitment is on the up after a long and tedious downturn over the past two years.” Lennard says both legal systems vendors and firms are actively recruiting “to replenish their staffing gaps.” The biggest demand is for people with case management development skills. There is also a growing call for staff with digital dictation systems integration and .NET development expertise, while among law firms JPL is seeing a demand for email management and security skills.

NEWS IN BRIEF

► NFLOW LAUNCH TDI LINK

Digital dictation systems developer Nflow (01376 532266) has launched a telephony dictation interface (TDI) that will allow users to dictate from any push button phone. Nflow’s Rob Lancashire said that while not a new idea, the Nflow system had been optimised for mobile phones, so that users could dictate from anywhere without worrying about losing their dictation if they lost the signal. The new TDI offering also includes a low cost, single line option for smaller firms or firms looking for an emergency remote access point.

► BOOMING TIMES FOR MSS

MSS (01252 371121) who scored the highest ratings in this year’s customer feedback research for the Law Society’s *Software Solutions Guide*, have signed up 38 new sites within the past three months, including a number of start-ups. The new signings include Sharpe & Co, Rustem Guardian, Max Willey & Co, Beveridge & Co, Cale Palmer and Clayton Reeve. MSS has also seen 79 of its existing AlphaLaw users order upgrades within the same period.

► DPS LAUNCH WEB COURT DIARY

DPS Software has launched a web-based court diary system that ensures any court appointments logged in the DPS case management software or mentioned in correspondence are automatically published on a practice’s central diary. The system will also automatically send a confirmation email and calendar appointment to the relevant fee earner and record it in their Outlook calendar. DPS Court Diary is written in ASP.net and can be accessed from any location by a web-enabled device, including laptops, PDAs and smart phones. For more details email marketing@dpsoftware.co.uk

► CALVIS/DEALBUILDER LINK UP

Business Integrity and Calvis have signed an agreement that will see the two companies working together on data exchange and automation projects for the real estate sector. Both companies are committed to the PISCES XML data exchange standard and share a common customer in British Land plc, which uses Business Integrity’s DealBuilder software to support its online processes.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

► PIPER ALDERMAN SELECT CMS

To support its expansion plans, Sydney-based law firm Piper Alderman has selected Aderant's CMS.Net and Business Intelligence software as the basis for its new practice and financial management system.

► DDS GOES INTO CAIRNS FIRM

Marino Moller Lawyers, which has offices in Cairns and a number of small far north Queensland townships, has implemented Winscribe digital dictation throughout the firm. The new system, which can support fee earners working from home as well as in the office, means the firm's Cairns typing group can now handle overflow transcription from the branch offices. The system was sold and is being supported by Winscribe Pty Ltd (+ 61 7 4044 0300 – part of the Integrated Solutions Group) who were able to reduce costs for the firm by reusing their existing dictation and transcription hardware.

► HGR PICK THOMSON ELITE

Herbert Greer & Rundle, a 125 fee earner firm that has offices in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, has selected Thomson Elite as its new practice management system. The firm is also taking the Elite Apex CRM module. The Elite system at HGR will replace the firm's current Law 3000 legacy software. Commenting on the deal, Elite APAC regional director Kaye Sycamore said "uncertainty about the future of Law 3000 has been a consistent driver behind recent sales by Thomson Elite to large firms in the region, including Deacons in Hong Kong and Hunt & Hunt in Australia".

► DOC AUTO EXTEND OFFERINGS

Atlanta-based Document Automation Developers (or DocAuto), a leading developer of utilities and add-ons for the Interwoven Worksite DMS, has released OutiM 3.0, a Microsoft Outlook integration module that allows users to import bulk emails and file attachments into Worksite.

DocAuto has also appointed two new resellers outside the US. They are Work Online in Switzerland (email Peter Schmitter at peter.schmitter@workonline.ch) and Technovation in New Zealand (email Don Staples at don.staples@technovation.co.nz).

www.docauto.com

Call for 'one market, one standard and one price'

Responding to the latest round of consultations with the Office of Fair Trading, as it conducts its market study into the supply of property searches, Mark Riddick, the CEO of the NLIS online conveyancing search provider Searchflow, said that what the sector needed was "one market, one standard of information and one fair pricing structure".

"The government must appreciate that market distortions in price, guarantees and access lines need to be removed. The price of information delivered, whether by personal searches or electronic means, should reflect the cost of compiling and maintaining the data. The reality is that as electronic means is the most efficient, it should be the cheaper option," he added.

Riddick said another issue that has to be addressed is the efficiency of local authorities: "At present no incentives exist for local authorities to provide information in an affordable and accessible manner and there is no obligation on their part to link in with NLIS. We strongly urge the OFT to use the powers it has to address these issues as a priority."

The OFT is expected to publish its report during the summer of 2005 and the government is committed to making a response within 90 days of the report being published.

Government confirms intention to work with PISCES

The UK government has confirmed its intention to work with PISCES property information systems common exchange standard. In a letter to PISCES director general Roger de Boehmler, Ian Goodall, the director of e-conveyancing with HM Land Registry, outlined his intention to develop a set of standards accepted in both the private and public sectors. "We will use the strengths, knowledge and experience of the Land Registry to work alongside PISCES to assist in the development of a set of standards for electronic conveyancing."

David Duckworth, the chairman of the Direct Conveyancing Association, said "The advantages of a quality, accepted standard really is a no-brainer for those involved in the home moving industry. The optimum benefits of paper-free conveyancing cannot be achieved without a common language and format – PISCES can provide that. I now foresee an even greater escalation of the PISCES banner by industry players."

► Adobe, the developers of the PDF portable document file format, has become the latest company to become a member of the PISCES organisation. PISCES director general Roger de Boehmler described Adobe as "a key new member... Already with Adobe's expertise, experiences and strong contact with various standards bodies, we are successfully expanding support for an open standard from government and industry. This is critical to our goal of delivering a data exchange standard to the High Street." www.pisc.es.co.uk

FRESH ON THE RADAR

► COMPLIANCE – BLOCKING OUT WEB CONTENT

Peter Neate, the business development director of Astro Communications (01322 610100), has been in touch to say that although the company is currently celebrating 20 years in business and still continues to supply conventional data communications services and products, including network design and videoconferencing, it has now diversified into the broader compliance sector and has two new products it believes will be of interest to law firms.

These are: CyberArk, which is essentially a network 'safe' or secure vault for password management, which includes full audit trails on who went where to retrieve particular files and passwords. This system was originally developed for the US market, where two of its most common applications are controlling access to administrative passwords and creating Chinese walls around sensitive documents on a network.

The second product is Bloxx, a web content filtering and reporting system to help firms monitor and prevent access to unacceptable web sites. Nothing new about the concept however Bloxx is supplied as an appliance with no additional charges for user licences, thereby giving it a low cost of ownership.

www.astro.co.uk + www.cyber-ark.com + www.bloxx.com

► AN ALTERNATIVE CRM SYSTEM ?

Another relatively new face in the legal market is Innovation Software (01634 812300) whose CreditForce PSE software has been implemented in a number of law firms over the past five years as a credit, collections and work-in-progress management application for accounts departments to use in conjunction with a practice management system. UK users include Baker & McKenzie, SJ Berwin, Hammonds, Ince & Co, Olswang and Walker Morris.

Innovation has also introduced 360° RI, a CRM plus relationship intelligence and event management system, which is currently in use at Mace & Jones in Liverpool. This system is also designed to interface with a firm's existing PMS and to-date Innovation have completed integrations with Axxia, Thomson Elite and Miles 33 systems. www.innovationsoftware.co.uk

► VOIP AND WIFI AT WAVESTREAM

Our third new face this issue is Wavestream (01256 844259), a data networking company that has moved into the VoIP (voice over internet protocol) telecoms sector. Wavestream is currently working with the US company Zultys and has recently installed a Zultys MX250 enterprise media exchange at its Basingstoke offices and is using it to provide the company with a WiFi-based telephone network, using Hitachi wireless IP phones.

Mike Ryan of Wavestream says the MX250 has the great benefit of being designed from the outset as a multimedia exchange capable of handling data, fax, video and voice traffic, including IP phones as well as analogue POTS calls, whereas most rival products were either IP systems with telephony added on – or traditional PBX exchanges with IP added on top.

www.wave-stream.co.uk + www.mx250.com

PEOPLE & PLACES

Spring is here and people are on the move. **Martineau Johnson** head of IT **Ken Agnew** is leaving the Birmingham firm. **Browne Jacobson** IT director **Jonathan Swan** is also departing – he is joining case management systems developer **Visualfiles**. **Ben Mitchell**, previously with **DespatchBox**, has joined **Hummingbird** as a senior account manager. And **Kevin Connell**, the IT director of pre-merger **Masons**, is heading up IT, as functional information director, for the inhouse legal team at **BP International**.

► NEW CIO FOR KEOGHS

Bolton-based Keoghs has appointed John Smith as chief information officer. Smith, who has held senior IT line management positions with companies such as Alliance & Leicester, as well as worked as a consultant with Deloitte on project management and IT implementation projects, will be responsible for the firm's information systems strategy.

► NEW APPOINTMENTS AT TM

TM Property Service, the e-conveyancing services company, has appointed Andrew Strivens – previously the COO for the London offices of Weil Gotshal Manges – to the new position of chief operating officer. And, Simon Ward, whose track record includes working in sales for SAP UK and Cognos Software, has been appointed director of sales, replacing Carl Cockerham who has emigrated to Australia.

► SHOOSMITHS NEW IS MANAGER

Adrienne Mansfield has joined Shoosmiths as IS Programme Manager, following the departure of Lisa Ingleby to Hummingbird.

► NEW SALES HEAD AT VOICEPATH

The digital dictation outsourcing services suppliers Voicepath has appointed David Blower, previously with companies such as Samsung and HP as its new sales manager.

► NEW WORKSHARE EXECUTIVES

Workshare has appointed Ilya Beyer as VP of technology and George Korchinsky as executive VP of market development. Korchinsky, who has held senior posts with companies such as Cognos, Symantec and Sun, will be responsible for expanding Workshare's distribution channels.

Minter Ellison reports big benefits from case system

Following on from last month's story about the return on investment from digital dictation systems, Minter Ellison Adelaide has now gone public on the benefits it has been enjoying since deploying Axxia case management software in its workers compensation and debt recovery departments (the software has subsequently been rolled out to other departments) just over 12 months ago.

According to the firm's Ian Thompson (originally a solicitor with Morton Fraser in Edinburgh, who helped Minter Ellison with the implementation and liked Australia so much that he decided to stay there) "even though the technology is only in its first year of operation, the financial rewards have been considerable and we anticipate this to improve significantly in the coming year.

"To give two examples, our workers compensation team has exceeded full year net profit budget for the first time. They are now a contributor to the overall profit pool for partners in the firm and have significantly increased their file capacity whilst reducing staff from eight to six people. They have shown a 32% improvement in net margin. And our debt recovery team has also experienced positive returns. Prior to implementing case management, the team had achieved only 73% of budget. Now they are achieving 113% of budget year to date and this is after a 20% increase on their fee target in the current year."

Context relaunch Justis

Following extensive consultations with existing users, next week (11th April) the electronic legal publisher Context is relaunching its Justis legal information service with a more modern interface, including an enhanced toolbar, and improved usability. There is also a new toggle button that allows instant switching between Justis and Context's JustCite citator service, so users can see parallel citations and both previous and subsequent cases. JustCite is available free on charge until 11th May.

Justis Classic and the new look Justis are being run in tandem, so existing users can familiarise themselves with the service before switching. In addition, a two-week free trial is available by contacting the Context sales team on 020 7284 8080.

Browne Jacobson to rollout M2

Having been one of the original pilot sites, Nottingham-based Browne Jacobson has just announced that it is rolling out the new Visualfiles M2 system on a firm-wide basis. IT director Jonathan Swan said "Embedded in Microsoft Outlook, out of the box M2 provides a practical solution to the current issues in terms of email management and in this respect it will be a success because it works the way lawyers need and expect it to work."

New risk and project management service

After 18 years working in technology, most of that time in the legal sector, Tanya Collett has set up her own consultancy. Called Project Skill (07773 957061), its primary focus will be providing a project management service, helping clients implement change within their business and IT functions. Collett can also offer interim management cover and assistance with BS7799 information security projects.

In addition to being head of IT at Cripps Harries Hall, Collett also has experience of programme and project management work at Lovells and Pinsent Masons. These include implementation of document, knowledge and practice management systems, an award winning intranet and, most recently, merger integration projects. Collett will be speaking at the National Information Security Conference in St Andrews in May on managing a BS7799 certification project in a law firm. www.projectskill.com

Penningtons swap DMS

Penningtons has entered into an agreement with Phoenix Business Solutions to swap out its existing Hummingbird document management system and replace it with Interwoven Worksite 8. The firm's IT manager Marcus Shepherd said the new system would bring benefits in terms of email management and intranet support.

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