CHARLES CHRISTIAN's
LEGAL TECHNOLOGY iNSIDER

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO WHAT'S HOT (AND WHAT'S NOT) IN LAW OFFICE SYSTEMS

ELECTRONIC FORMS FROM OYEZ – HERE AT LAST

In an interview 18 months ago, Barry Green of Laserforms International predicted that the market for conventional pre-printed legal forms would be dead by 1999. A remark which inevitably prompts the question: where does that leave a company like the Solicitors' Law Stationery Society, which was built on the paper forms business?

One month ago that was still a valid question however such uncertainties have now been knocked on the head by the launch of OyezForms, a disk-based version of Solicitors' Law's ubiquitous Oyez legal forms series.

The new electronic forms made their public debut at the recent Software for Solicitors Show in Manchester and one aspect immediately appreciable is they are precisely what they are claimed to be: exact screen-based replicas of conventional legal forms, right down to the image of the Oyez reference number at the bottom of the page. In fact the one difference is that electronic forms are probably easier to complete as certain standard information, such as Land Registry addresses, can be filled in automatically.

Another aspect of OyezForms likely to help them stand out is that they are a true stand-alone product independent of wordprocessing packages although they can be interfaced to a number of third-party document management systems. According to Oyez forms chief Janet Mathieson, it was a very ➥

➥ deliberate decision to go for a simple forms system that everyone could operate rather than diversify into the more problematic waters of "smart" forms and case management.

Oyez believes a key selling point will be the huge range of forms it can offer. At the launch this totalled 400 but Mathieson says almost all the 1200 forms in the Oyez catalogue will be available on disk within 12 months. As to cost, there is the option of outright purchase or an annual rental scheme, which includes a forms update service. Mathieson describes the forms pricing as "very competitive".

☞ **Technical Note...** To run OyezForms on disk you need a 386 PC supporting Windows 3.1 with at least 2Mb of RAM memory and a Hewlett-Packard compatible laser printer. Free demonstration disks can be obtained by calling Oyez Legal Software (✆ 0171-232 1000).

SUPPLIERS TO FORMALISE RULES

At a meeting at the end of October – prompted by worries about what were described as "increasingly aggressive marketing" tactics by the (English) Law Society – the Association of Legal Technology Suppliers unanimously agreed to formalise its rules as a trade association.

Over coming weeks sub-committees will draw up a code of conduct, new complaints and arbitration procedures and review joining criteria. ALTS chairman John Meehan said he hoped the new rules would be in place by New Year and put an end to unfair accusations that suppliers were providing their users with poor service.

REFLEX ACTION

Dart Legal Systems has completed its merger talks with Reflex Business Systems to form the Dart-Reflex Systems Group. The company will now operate out of new offices in West London (✆ 0171-384 3576). Dart has also formed an alliance with Barrett Edwards International, a major integrator of Novell GroupWise systems.

SITE LICENCES

In response to requests from readers, LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER now has a site licence scheme for subscribers who want to photocopy this publication for internal circulation. Contact the editorial office (✆ 01379-687518) for details.

AXXIA WIN FINERS AND FIND NEW CHAIRMAN

As part of a major office automation and integration project, the central London law firm Finers has ordered the Arista practice management system from Axxia Systems. The total deal is worth approximately £500,000 and includes a network of PCs, a Unix server running on Digital hardware plus a combination of SoftSolutions and WordPerfect 6.1 for Windows to handle the wordprocessing and document management side of the project.

Finers' practice director Philip Mitchell concedes the project "represents a significant investment" for a 28 partner firm but anticipates it "will pay dividends in increased fee earner productivity and improvements in client service".

Philip Mitchell believes the Axxia (✆ 01734-602602) offering "is the most advanced on the market" and that it now puts Finers "ahead of many of our competitors".

Technical assistance was provided by Finers' in-house IT manager Susanne Jones and with assistance from Andrew Levison from the David Andrews Partnership/Grant Thornton (✆ 0171-728 2256) consultancy.

☞ **Comment...** Although the core of the Arista system remains the Informix relational database, feedback from recent wins suggest it is Axxia's Windows-based Fee Earner Desktop that is now securing the orders. Certainly the company has poured a lot of effort over the last two years into the development of an intuitive and easy-to-use front end for lawyers.

However with all the other major legal systems suppliers (particularly AIM, Norwel and Miles 33 who are in direct competition for the same class of business) now catching up with their own Windows front end offerings, Axxia's competitive edge may have peaked. ➥

🖑 In a totally unrelated development, six months after the MBO, Axxia has appointed John Boyd QC as the company's first chairman of its board of directors. A former director of legal services at the Digital Equipment Corporation (Axxia's old parent company) and a member of the Monopolies & Mergers Commission, John Boyd is widely rated in legal circles as one of the most distinguished members of the Bar working in industry.

THANKS BUT NO THANKS

Applied Computer Expertise – who as well as selling to solicitors are also market leaders in the supply of systems for barristers chambers – has declined an offer to buy the InnView product from the receivers of Wildings' defunct software development division.

☞ **Comment...** InnView may not be attracting takers but there is clearly interest in making acquisitions. Over the past three weeks **LTi** has been contacted by eight companies looking to buy suppliers of legal accounts systems. **LTi** has also been approached by an electronic publisher who wishes to sell a database of summarised European Court of Justice decisions. Any takers?

FOUR GO ALPHA

The Reynolds Partnership of Bishops Stortford has installed an AlphaLAW accounts and time recording system supplied by **Management Interface Ltd** (✆ 01992-788288) as have Forbes & Co of Hornchurch, Raggett Tiffen & Harries of Ongar and Kennards, who have offices in Leytonstone, Romford and Redbridge.

GAVEL & GOWN

Former Sumlock Legal and Admiral Legal head honcho Alan Roberts has formed his own legal software company **Gavel & Gown Ltd** (✆ 01242-243344). More news and a product review next time. ❏

BETTER VOICE RE-COGNITION ?

If voice recognition software is so good, how come so few people are using it? This was the starting point adopted by John Mitchell, when two years ago his company AllVoice Computing began development work on what was to become the WordExpress system.

Although AllVoice (✆ 01626-331133) is one of the UK pioneers of the technology with its Assistant Plus software, Mitchell says the company realised major speech recognition engines like DragonDictate and IBM VoiceType placed far too much emphasis on speed and accuracy, apparently ignoring the fact that users still needed to master operating computers and wordprocessing software to enjoy any real benefits. The company therefore set itself the task of "making voice recognition work for the majority rather than just the ardent computer buff".

Building on VoiceType, which Mitchell has no doubt is a faster and more accurate system than Dragon, AllVoice has created a system which allows voice dictation to go directly into a Windows wordprocessing package – currently Microsoft Word. However, a version compatible with WordPerfect will be available by the New Year.

In addition, WordExpress has a PIM-style address book, which can be linked to external databases. This avoids the usual delays associated with trying to recognise proper nouns. There is also a "delegated correction" facility, so that along with files of "dictated" text, the system stores a recording of the original voice dictation, as well as any verbal instructions the user may want to leave secretarial staff delegated the task of correcting the document and preparing it for print. Mitchell believes this will be a major selling point as it more closely reflects the way lawyers actually work. ➥

➡ WordExpress is being formally launched on the afternoon of Monday 20th November at IBM's Southbank centre in London. To reserve a place contact Don Bissell at AllVoice asap.

☞ Still on the subject of voice recognition, Michael Kaye, a partner in Kaye Tesler & Co (✆ 0181-809 6756) and a great enthusiast of the technology, is running a series of lectures and demonstrations on the way lawyers can use it to improve their productivity. The next lecture is tomorrow (14th) in Manchester followed by Leeds on the 15th November, with further sessions planned for Newcastle, Glasgow, Cambridge and London. Call Kaye Tesler & Co for more details.

COUNCIL TECHS

Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council has ordered Timebase from **Total Computer Systems** (✆ 01992-575147) as the basis for time recording in its legal, property, personnel and building control departments. The move was prompted by preparations for CCT and the council will run the software on Psion Series 3As and Windows PCs.

NEWS FROM HOME

This issue sees LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER increase in size to an 8 page format. This move was made possible by the tremendous take up of the newsletter since launch and a subscriber list that now includes firms in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, the Channel Isles and East Africa, varying in size from small to international giants – plus, all the major technology suppliers and IT consultancies.

New production methods mean deadlines have been trimmed – stories reaching LTi by 16-30 on Friday can be included in Monday's edition. And more space means new features, including former "Lawyer" contributor Alexis Byter's "Computer Lore" column looking at the small but important aspects of legal IT. ❒

ALLO ALLO

Accent Software (✆ 01923-208435) has announced the Duo range of bi-lingual translation software which integrates English-to-Spanish, Italian, German or French translation with Windows versions of Word, Word Pro and WordPerfect wordprocessing document formats. The software costs £99 per language and allows translation to and from English.

AND HELLO

Jim Paton has joined Usher Systems in Edinburgh (✆ 0131-226 6203) as general manager, bringing what managing director John Wilde describes as "a wealth of hands-on management experience." Interestingly Mr Paton comes from the general IT industry, including a 12 year stint with Ferranti.

RAM RAIDS – A GROWING RISK FOR LAW FIRMS

Law firms have always been prey to the casual opportunist thief who sneaks into an unattended office to steal a purse, mobile phone or calculator etc. But, now there is a new problem: the so-called RAM raiders who break into offices overnight to steal computer equipment or in some instances merely the more valuable components and chips from within the hardware...

The Metropolitan Police – who set up Operation Bumblebee earlier this year in an attempt to coordinate resources and tackle what is becoming a growing problem – estimate thefts of this kind are already costing UK businesses nearly £200 million a year.

Furthermore, it is quite clear that a lot of RAM raids are "thefts to order" being carried out by a new generation of computer-literate burglars who are discerning in what they steal - and also what they leave behind. Thus there is little interest in dumb terminals, monochrome screens and old DOS PCs but there is a demand for high-end 486 and Pentium machines, laser printers and larger screen high resolution VDU monitors.

A SOFT TARGET ?

Over the last six months law firms throughout the UK have been hit by RAM raids, the victims varying in size from small county town practices through to larger commercial firms including a fortnight ago one Top 30 partnership in the Fleet Street area of London.

What makes this trend all the more disturbing, especially in the light of the reports of violence now being used, is the suspicion that law firms are being deliberately selected because they tend to be relatively high on technology but low on security. In otherwords, they are soft targets – not least because many of ➥

HOTTER THAN HEROIN

The City of London Police recently said that weight for weight computer memory chips are now worth four times as much as heroin and that even on the black market stolen PC components retain about 80 percent of their legitimate saleable value.

THREAT OF VIOLENCE

Last month Knight Ridder Financial's service centre in New Cross, south-east London, was raided by a gang of four men armed with sawn-off shotguns, pistols and CS gas who overcame the staff and in the space of 20 minutes made off with over £150,000 worth of computer equipment.

➤ them still close their doors at 5.00pm on Friday evening and remain closed until the following Monday morning, thus giving thieves an undisturbed weekend to get on with their raid.

☞ The Christmas/New Year shutdown this year is likely to provide a field day for RAM raiders with some offices closed for an unbroken ten day stretch.

WHY NOW ?

The main reason why RAM raiding was almost unheard of nine months ago yet has now become such a hot topic is the growing demand for hardware that can support Windows computing.

For example, until relatively recently most PCs were sold with just 4Mb of RAM memory as standard whereas to run many Windows 3.1 software applications, particularly graphics and spreadsheet programs, you actually need a minimum of 8Mb of RAM.

If you are planning to move to Microsoft's new Windows 95 operating system, it is generally reckoned that to take full advantage of the system's features users will need between 12Mb and 16Mb of RAM.

Given Microsoft sold over seven million copies of Windows 95 in the first two months following its launch and standard 4Mb SIMMs (single in-line memory modules) sell for between £100 and £200 each, it is easy to see why computer components have become such an attractive underworld "commodity".

Along with RAM, thieves are also stealing microprocessors and other easily detachable elements such as sound and network cards.

The result is staff in more and more organisations are returning to work on Monday mornings to find that either their computers have vanished – or else their hardware cases have been opened-up and all the most valuable components removed.

But, what measures can a firm take to protect against this problem? ➥

STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL

① The first line of defence must be the burglar alarm systems and security measures with which an organisation normally protects its premises.

② Next, you may have got it but don't flaunt it. In an attempt to break with the past and promote a new modern image, some solicitors practices with High Street premises have made their IT systems a focal point visible to passers-by. Unfortunately it also makes the technology visible to prospective RAM raiders.

③ Invest in some of the security gadgets now available that will physically restrict access to or the removal of computer equipment. ☞ See next column.

④ Ensure you have adequate insurance cover for not only the cost of replacing stolen equipment but also any business disruption and the cost of restoring or re-compiling lost data and files.

⑤ Maintain friendly relations with your computer suppliers. If you are hit by RAM raiders you need to be up-and-running again as soon as possible. It is therefore essential to have suppliers who are willing to pull-out the stops in an emergency.

⑥ Have adequate procedures for regularly backing up data files – and ensure a copy is stored off site. There have been reports of thieves stealing data storage media in raids, media which in some instances has included an organisation's back-up files. Where possible also keep copies of all system and applications programs, so restoring files doesn't also mean having to master an upgraded version of software.

⑦ Carry out a dummy run through your contingency plans so everyone knows what to do if disaster does strike. This is the IT equivalent of the regular fire drill.

AND THE GADGETS

New security gadgets are being launched every week, some of the latest include…

• Steel cases that fit over equipment so as to not only prevent it from being moved but also to deny access to the components on the inside. Call Aegis Security Enclosures (✆ 01582-410110).

• Kodit Data Base (✆ 01625-529283) have a tagging system whereby components have individually numbered tags glued to them with a strong resin. Kodit say the approach works as a deterrent as tagged chips are virtually worthless on the black market - so there is little incentive to steal them, not least because attempts to remove the tags will irreparably damage the component they are attached to.

• A less subtle approach is deployed by Westcoast Management (✆ 01234-713040) with the Barracuda. The first element is motion detector which sets off a 117 decibel siren if anyone tries to disconnect and move a PC on which the alarm has been armed. If this doesn't work, when the PC is opened up it releases a jet of red dye which, although harmless to the operation of the hardware, leaves an indelible mark on components thus branding them as stolen. Barracuda retails for £70 and can be fitted into a spare expansion slot on most PCs.

SAY NO TO PUBLICITY

After successfully recovering from the misfortune of a RAM raid, there is a natural tendency to want to tell the world, and more importantly your clients, that you are back in business.

Resist the temptation for mass publicity. This invites trouble as police statistics suggest there is a risk an organisation hit once will be hit again. Probably by the same people who carried out the original raid – afterall they are already familiar with your office and security. ❐

NOT JUST THEFT

While it might be tempting to think your firm will never be hit by RAM raiders, never lose sight of the fact there are plenty of other disasters that can befall a computer installation.

These include fire (if the flames don't get the system, smoke or water from the fire brigade's hoses will) flooding and even structural collapse caused by subsidence.

If you do nothing else, do ensure you back up your data files and keep a copy off site.

HOT CHIP

November 1st saw the global launch of Intel's new Pentium Pro microprocessor (otherwise known as the "P6") – the 32-bit successor to the current "P5" Pentium chip.

Although the advent of the Pro is expected to trigger another round of cuts in PC hardware prices, one shadow was cast over the launch by Compaq Computer who reported problems using the Pro on some network configurations.

Compaq has postponed shipments of new Pro desktop PCs until the matter is resolved. However Intel say the problem is rare.

WORKFLOW – A TECHNOLOGY WHOSE TIME HAS COME ?

Although it has been a long time coming, the penny has finally begun to drop. Most fee earners do not work as isolated individuals but as members of teams. It also therefore follows that practice wide office automation networks could be even more efficient if they too reflected this teamwork ethos – a message not lost on some of the larger City of London firms who have been working on "workflow" projects since the early 1990s.

The concept behind workflow software is that it can simplify everyday business processes and increase staff productivity by ensuring tasks are automatically – and electronically – passed to the right people at the right time. Thus instead of physically writing a memo, passing it on to the member of staff handling that aspect of the matter to action, and so on down the line until the completed task returns to your desk several days – or weeks – later, with workflow documents etc are not just completed on screen and dispatched by electronic mail but they actually automatically "know" where to go next.

Workflow applications have tended to be limited to routine administrative tasks, such as cheque requisitions or booking holiday leave, however after a slow start workflow systems are now becoming the subject of serious interest from firms of all types and size.

For example Denton Hall is planning to use **Banyan Systems** (✎ 01293-612284) Beyond Mail for a new range of workflow applications. Maritime law specialists Sinclair Roche & Temperley by comparison has chosen Novell Group-Wise 4.1 as the basis for networked diary, project scheduling and workflow tasks within the firm's London office. ➥

➥ Over in the west of the country, **Mercury Computing** (✎ 01628-778222) who only expanded into legal systems earlier this year (the company has a networking and integration background) has already won orders for its InControl Legal workflow package with Taunton-based Clarke Willmott Clarke, Tozers in Devon and Hugh James Jones & Jenkins in Cardiff.

One of the most interesting trends to emerge however is whereas workflow began life as a specialist office automation oriented concept, its features are now beginning to appear in the more "traditional" legal software applications produced by mainstream suppliers like **AIM Professional** (✎ 01482-326971). Indeed the latest enhancements to the AIM Evolution practice management system have specifically targeted its workflow capabilities.

These include changes to the Toolkit to simplify the creation of workflow and case management processes by lawyers themselves, and the release of ready-configured procedures to cover basic steps in handling residential conveyancing, personal injury, matrimonial, mortgage repossession, debt recovery and criminal work.

Cole & Cole in Oxford have used the Toolkit to create their own defendant personal injuries system, while Wright Hassall in Warwickshire are using it to develop procedures for handling different aspects of housing association, right-to-buy and DIYSO (do it yourself shared ownership) transactions. Although the ready-configured procedures were created by AIM, they can also be amended and revised by users to accommodate the specific needs of their own firms – an option Geoffrey Leaver, Solicitors in Milton Keynes are taking.

☞ Other suppliers actively developing legal workflow procedures include **Lawtech Ltd** (✎ 0171-583 2345) with the Sound Practice system and **Applied Computer Expertise** (✎ 0171-404 557) with Strategy Planner.

CD-ROM TITLE CAUGHT IN CROWN COPYRIGHT ROW

The long simmering controversy over Crown copyright and the status of public documents once Her Majesty's Stationery Office is privatised next year has finally blown-up. HMSO is accusing Butterworths of copyright infringement and commencing legal proceedings against Compliance Ltd, an electronic publishing company that produces Inland Revenue tax manuals on CD-Rom in a joint venture with Butterworths.

Butterworths say they and Compliance already hold valid licences to reproduce Crown copyright materials both conventionally and electronically and expect to see HMSO in court in about twelve months time.

☞ Elsewhere the steady march of legal electronic publishing continues un-abated. **Butterworths** (✆ 0171-400 2909) has launched a CD-Rom version of the All England Law Reports, which covers the whole series back to 1936. And **Ellis Publications** (✆ + 31 4457 2275) has produced a Windows version of OJCD, a full text CD-Rom incorporating the CELEX database and covering legislation, case law and associated documents as published in the Official Journal, European Court Reports and other sources.

HARD TIMES FOR THE BIG THREE

Meanwhile, the so-called "Big Three" software developers, Lotus, Novell and Microsoft, have their own problems. Lotus lost its chief executive just 99 days after the takeover by IBM, prompting rumours of an imminent "brain drain". Then Novell announced it was planning to sell its business applications division, whose products include WordPerfect. And, the Office of Fair Trading has asked the ➥

➥ European Commission to investigate complaints that Microsoft charges UK-based PC manufacturers 60% more for software than comparable US-owned companies with plants in Ireland.

☞ **Comment...** Although the developments at Lotus and IBM can be written off as local difficulties, the question mark surrounding the future of WordPerfect is more problematic. The up-front nature of the announcement suggests Novell is confident there will be no shortage of buyers at the right price to meet its 31st January deadline for a sale.

✎ Meanwhile Novell (✆ 01344-724100) continues to enhance the WordPerfect range, announcing Version 5.2+ for character based Unix systems and Version 6.0 for graphical Unix systems, as well as Version 5.1+ for the Digital Equipment Corporation's VAX and Alpha platforms – all strengthening the claim that WordPerfect is still the only viable wordprocessing solution "for heterogeneous computing environments", including Windows, DOS, Unix, Macintosh and Open/VMS.

Following further delays surrounding the availability of Microsoft's rival Exchange product, Novell has also extended the duration of its 20% GroupWise price discount promotion until the end of the year. The GroupWise product is not affected by the proposed sale of WordPerfect.

DENTONS TO GO OPTICAL

As part of the ongoing implementation of its corporate IT strategy, City of London firm Denton Hall has indicated future areas of development include: adding incoming fax capabilities for desktop users, making more use of optical storage to access legal publications on screen, and installing optical CD writers to allow precedent documents to be sent out on CD-Roms to overseas offices. The systems integration work is being carried out by **Text Systems plc** (✆ 0171-403 4033).

QUALITY FIRM

Blake Lapthorn has installed a 15 screen version of Eclipse Legal Systems (✆ 01274-395299) Chase II personal injury and medical negligence package. The Southampton based firm has a legal aid franchise and also is ISO 9001/BS5750 accredited.

HOT PRICE

Sharp Electronics (✆ 0161-205 2333) has launched the JX-9200 range of what it claims are the smallest and cheapest laser printers in the UK. Retailing for under £300, the 300 dpi printers are compatible with Microsoft's Windows Printing System and Windows 95.

Alexis Byter's
COMPUTER LORE

Solicitors in England may recall a publicity campaign run by the Law Society a few years' ago warning of the danger of listening to "Mr Know-it-all" rather than going to a lawyer for legal advice. Nowadays Mr Know-it-all (let's call him Noel) doesn't just dispense dodgy legal advice, he is also an expert on computers, which is where this story begins...

"Of course the way to pick up a real bargain," said my friendly, neighbourhood Noel "is to attend one of those liquidators sales where they auction off hardware and office equipment belonging to companies that have gone bust."

Personally this has always struck me as a dubious proposition because not only is the hardware inevitably out of warranty and you have no idea how it was treated in the past – but there is always the suspicion that on receiving their P45s, outgoing employees deliberately trash their PCs. But, undaunted, Noel insisted I tag along when the local auctioneers held a sale at the premises of a systems house that had recently folded.

It was standing room only at the auction and what followed can only be described as a feeding frenzy as people fell over themselves to bid for kit. But, were there any bargains to be had – the answer was a resounding "No". ➤

➤ To give a typical example: people were were paying between £2000 and £2500 for used 486-SX personal computers. Now excuse me but how can this be a bargain when you can buy a brand new, fully guaranteed and much more powerful 486-DX machine for £750!

More to the point, not only were the punters paying over the odds but they were letting themselves in for trouble as many of the machines had been used in R&D work and either contained non-standard components or had elements – such as video cards – removed. I know this because a large bundle of video cards were auctioned off as a separate lot.

So, a good day for the auctioneers and a good day for the company's creditors but I suspect few other people came away from that auction having received value for money.

IN THE NEXT EDITION
• Are legal systems suppliers really providing such a poor quality of service – or did Robson Rhodes get it wrong?
• What next? We look at Axxia six months after the management buyout and Timeslice 18 months after the City Computers takeover.
• New from the US – could Amicus Attorney beat Carpe Diem at its own game?
• The Windows dilemma – to go for 95 now or wait until Windows NT arrives?