
CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

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

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SCOTS PREVIEW HIGH STREET BUNDLES

At their AGM at the Gleneagles Hotel on Saturday (23rd March) the Law Society of Scotland provided their technology seminar delegates with a preview of three low-cost software systems that are now being developed for first-time users and smaller firms.

According to George Sampson of the Scottish Law Society, the objective is to create an inexpensive range of "High Street starter pack" systems comprising accounts, client and file database, word-processing and office automation software that will help make it simpler and cheaper for small firms to computerise.

Sampson's intention is that a software plus hardware bundle (but excluding printer, training and consultancy) will retail for under £3000. And, once development work is complete, it is envisaged the High Street starter packs will be awarded official Law Society accreditation and branding.

Sampson says he understands the Irish and Northern Ireland law societies are also working on similar initiatives. As for Scotland, the next item they would like to see developed is a low cost conveyancing system. The possibility of other suppliers being added to the accredited list has also not been ruled out. However one thing Sampson is very clear about is that "The Law Society of Scotland has no intention of getting into the hardware and software market. Once we are happy with the systems, we will ➔

➔ leave the selling and support to the suppliers".

➔ **Technical Note...** The three suppliers previewing products were: Office Solutions UK of Manchester; Robson & Taylor's RT Business Systems with Lotus Notes; and Curat Lex, who have a Scottish distributor Harkins & Anderson.

Of the three, the Curat Lex product seems the most advanced in development terms. Called Curat Lex Professional, it is a single user licence version of the company's Sovereign LAW Caledonia system which has already been configured to handle Scottish solicitors' accounts rules. It will retail for around £1500 and offer a clear upgrade path to Sovereign LAW. Curat Lex has also begun development on a low cost conveyancing system for Scottish lawyers. □

AND CHANCERY LANE PREPARES TO SPEAK

In a related development, it is understood that later this week the English Law Society will finally unveil its strategy for High Street starter packs. The move comes 12 months after the launch of the less than successful Law Society backed Lawtel/Compuforms/Microsoft software bundle and follows other initiatives, including the formation of the *Legal IT Open Systems* group.

Meanwhile, relations between the Law Society and legal IT suppliers have sunk to an all-time low, with Chancery Lane recently threatening one electronic forms publisher with a *cease and desist* order for alleged trademark infringement arising from the publisher's use of the Law Society crest in its advertising. □

LIBRARY SYSTEM FINE

Library software specialists Soutron Ltd (☎ 0115 944 1664) last week released Version 5.3 of their Sydney PLUS library system. The new version includes further records management integration so "library" material and archived data can be stored on one database plus additional Windows functionality.

LOTIES REMINDER

Remember the closing date for nominations to the Law Office Technology Innovation Awards (the LOTIES) is 18th April. If you have any queries about who can nominate what for which, don't hesitate to contact the LTI office.

PHILIPS ADD THEIR VOICE TO SPEECH MARKET

At last week's CeBIT office technology fair in Hanover, Philips Dictation Systems debuted its new SpeechPad digital pocket memo, which the company describes as the "missing link" between the portable dictation machine and the personal computer.

The SpeechPad is the same size as a conventional Philips Pocket Memo recorder, right down to the four-position switch on all Philips dictation products. However, instead of recording onto tape, speech is recorded digitally and stored on credit-card sized PCMCIA-style SpeechCards.

The SpeechPad is not scheduled for commercial availability in the UK until September but transcription options that are expected to be available include stand alone units and being able to insert Speech Cards directly into the PCMCIA/PC card drive of a personal computer for wordprocessing and printing.

Philips has also reached agreement with Grundig and Olympus on version 1 of a new Digital Dictation Standard to ensure the compatibility of the PC card media used to store dictation. In standard recording mode, cards will offer 10 minutes of dictation per megabyte of storage capacity.

In addition to the SpeechPad system, Philips is also working on a number of other continuous or "natural" speech recognition projects, including SpeechFlow.

This is a PC based digital dictation product designed for organisations with an existing PC network, operates under Windows and will interface with all major wordprocessing packages.

Users dictate through a standard Philips microphone plugged directly into their own PC and text is instantly routed to a secretary's PC for transcription. In addition, SpeechFlow's management software enables jobs to be prioritised and ➡

➡ tracked via on-screen displays.

What makes the SpeechFlow system of particular interest to the legal market is that it is currently on trial with a number of solicitors' practices in the south-east of England and is scheduled to be publicly demonstrated for the first time at the Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition at the Barbican in June.

In addition, Philips is also continuing its collaboration with legal systems supplier Technology for Business on the development of case and practice management systems that integrate voice recognition technology.

☞ **Related Developments...** First reports LTI has received from users of the recently upgraded VoiceType system from IBM (see Issue No 10 for full story) are all favourable. One user described it as "a great improvement and a step in the right direction"

Another user has pointed out that IBM VoiceType offers an English spelling dictionary (as well as an optional English legal dictionary) whereas most systems based on DragonDictate default to American spelling. □

ANNUAL SURVEY OF LOW COST ACCOUNTS SYSTEMS

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER is currently compiling its annual survey of low cost legal accounts systems.

We are interested in software packages suitable for smaller solicitors practices that have an entry-level price (ie single user licence, no hardware) of under £2000.

Over 20 suppliers have already been identified and contacted - and we are pleased to say several faxed back their completed questionnaires the same day they received them. However, if you have not yet done so or think you should be included in the survey, please contact the LTI office before 5th April.

The survey will be published in the 22nd April issue. □

FILENET TARGETS SMALLER FIRMS

Although the FileNet Corporation is well known as a supplier of large scale document image processing (DIP) systems, its recent acquisition of the Saros Corporation (generally rated No.3 in document management after SoftSolutions and Docs Open) has led to a change of direction, as marketing director Richard Newton explained to LTI reporter Maya Anaokar...

FileNet's acquisition of Saros, completed earlier this month, will make the latter's document management software available to small and medium sized law firms, said Newton. "Until now, Saros has sold directly to large practices but not had the resources to target smaller firms. However FileNet, as part of a global plan to double revenues over the coming 12 months, will be selling the Saros Mezzanine product through dealers and value added sellers into organisations with as few as 50 users."

Said Newton: "I want to come up with a plan that promotes it to a receptive audience and the legal profession is one such audience. The business of law firms is recorded on paper and they have a critical need to keep it under control, to have an audit trail and the ability to share paper-based information. That is what Mezzanine gives you."

Saros is the third company FileNet has bought since July 1995 as part of a strategy to turn it from the provider of high-end workflow and document imaging software, into a company that offers DIP, workflow and document management products for all sizes of business using Unix or Windows NT platforms.

In January FileNet acquired Greenbar Software, a maker of system-independent computer output to laser disk products. Last year it bought Watermark Software, which gave it document imaging for workgroups and departments. FileNet's own imaging product is for high-volume use, such as claims processing ➡

➡ and accounts payable. But, the company believes document imaging is set to become more widespread, with more applications becoming *image-enabled*.

"Imaging technology is currently used by companies that handle large volumes of paper and they've been able to justify the cost because it's cheaper than storing all those pieces of paper." However Newton said the Watermark acquisition will make the technology affordable for smaller firms that do not handle so much paper or want to store paper archives on a computer system.

According to Newton, there will be "a convergence of several technologies - image, workflow and document management - into one. We want to address all parts so customers don't have to integrate the elements themselves. The idea is we take these *best of breed* products and integrate them into a total enterprise document management family."

In a move designed to provide better customer service, FileNet (☎ 0181 944 5111) will be merging the three companies into one unit in the UK. ☐

PICTONS TAKE AIM

The 30 partner St Albans-based firm of Pictons has just gone live with the first phase of a major IT project, which sees their old Miles 33 system replaced by AIM's Evolution practice management system. The next phase involves the implementation of the AIM (☎ 01482 326971) integrated workflow management system and progressively upgrading the firm's seven office PC network to a Windows desktop environment.

Pictons IT manager Andy Porter said the firm is: "very keen on procedures as a means of delivering a consistent quality of client service and we already hold a Legal Aid Franchise. However, we see the potential for achieving even higher standards by using the Workflow tool to create computer aided procedures based on our existing methodologies and precedent documentation." ☐

FRANCHISE BILLING

MSS Management Support Systems (☎ 01252 371121) has made its Legal Aid Board (LAB) Billing function a no-cost option within its Alpha-LAW accounts system. With this function all bills for Legal Aid work are pre-recorded as they are issued. On receipt of the payment statement, the relevant bills are selected from the list and automatically posted into the accounts system.

PC SALES UP BY 21%

Latest figures from IT market research group Romtec show sales of PCs in the UK increased by 21% in 1995 to 2.5 million units. Pentium-based machines took 34% of the market, compared with 4% in 1994. Compaq was top supplier with a 15% share, followed by IBM with 8% and Dell with 7%.

INTERNET SEMINAR

Border Network Technologies and Peapod Professional Solutions are hosting a seminar on Internet security issues for the legal profession at a half day conference at the Canadian High Commission in London on Tuesday 16th April. For details call Linda Quemper of Border on ☎ 01753 583400.

ESTATES GAZETTE ONLINE

Publishers Reed Elsevier are working on an online version of the *Estates Gazette* property and law magazine. At the moment it is on trial with 20 larger London estate agents with a view to a full launch in June.

LAW SOCIETY ACQUIRE LAW ON A DISC RIGHTS

The Law Society Publications Department has extended its range of electronic titles by acquiring marketing rights to DiscLaw Publishing's *Employment Law On A Disc (LOAD)* product.

LOAD is a Windows system which differs from many other electronic publications in that instead of being a screen-based version of a conventional book, it provides a searchable database of employment law topics with attached explanatory notes.

DiscLaw's Henry Scrope says its main purpose is to aid fast and accurate location of employment law and as such is principally designed for general practitioners and inhouse lawyers. However its extensive notes mean it can also be used by a wider audience, including personnel managers and advice centres

With this in mind, LOAD is available in two versions: a shorter business version and a more detailed professional adviser version, for which the Law Society has now acquired exclusive marketing rights. Prices range from £100 to £400 depending upon the version and type of licence. A single user licence for the professional adviser version (including update service) retails for £175 plus VAT.

☞ **Comment...** DiscLaw (☎ 0941 112002) originally marketed LOAD by issuing sample disks. More recently they opened an Internet Web site at <http://www.gold.net/ifl/disclaw> which, along with usual product information, contains a lucid and easy to follow demonstration of how to research a particular point of employment law.

The site was designed by Information for Lawyers and seems to overcome many of the problems associated with sending out program samplers on disk. (Smiley Rating: ☺☺☺☺. See page 7 for details of Web site review rating guide.) ☐

STILL CONFUSION OVER HMSO CROWN COPYRIGHT

Although a last ditch attempt by the Labour Party to delay the privatisation of HMSO by the UK Government until after the next general election failed in Parliament last week, public service minister Roger Freeman's recent statement (☞ see *Issue No 9* for full story) still leaves uncertainties about the exact status of Crown Copyright and electronic publishing.

For example although it will soon be possible to download the full text of Acts of Parliament from HMSO's Internet site at <http://www.publications.hmso.gov.uk/> because of the HTML coding that has gone into their creation, they would still appear to be subject to copyright. So, if a pressure group or law firm were to copy an Act straight from the HMSO site and place it on their own pages, they would be infringing HMSO copyright.

Also, where the Freeman statement talks about "value added" publications, does this mean the concession *only* extends to publishers who add value to Acts by adding commentaries etc - as distinct from a straight reproduction of the text of an Act? Finally, it has to be remembered that this is merely a concession and presumably can be cancelled with little or no notice. ☐

LIBEL LAW SET FOR REFORM

The UK Government's Defamation Bill - the first piece of legislation to reform the laws of libel and slander since the 1952 Act - has received an unopposed second reading in the House of Lords. The Bill, which contains measures to accommodate new forms of electronic publishing including the Internet, is expected to reach the Statute Book by the end of the current Parliamentary session. Internet publishers, including Microsoft and CompuServe are lobbying for clarification on how proposed changes to the *innocent dissemination* defence will impact on online services. ☐

Q & A Clinic

A firm in the South-East submitted the following question... "We are a medium sized firm with 20 fee earners and a total staff of about 55. We have an accounts system from one of the established legal suppliers, which is working well. We now wish to expand our word processing and have obtained estimates from our main supplier for 10 PCs and three laser printers. But, their estimate is about 20% higher than the advertisements we see in newspapers and glossy magazines. What should we do?"

Independent computer consultant Delia Venables replies... Some of the suppliers you see advertising in the newspapers – such as Dell, Compaq, Toshiba and Gateway – are well known brands with good reputations. It may be tempting to take the lower prices on offer there rather than pay more from your current specialist legal systems supplier. However, here are three very good reasons why the more expensive option can often actually offer you a better deal...

☉ If you buy your computers by mail order or go to a computer warehouse and carry away boxes of hardware (such suppliers are known as *box-shifters*), you are very much on your own.

You have to set up all the equipment up yourself, possibly taking back-up copies of software already loaded on the hard disk. (Microsoft Office, for example, needs to be copied onto around 20 floppy disks). You have to fill in licence and warranty registration forms for all the elements you buy: the computer itself, the Windows operating system, the MS Office or WordPerfect applications software, sound cards, PCI bus, modems etc.

You have to be able to spot if any of these are not working. And, you also have to know enough about communications to get your fax, LINK and Internet software etc running on your modem. ➔

➔ ☉ Assuming you can get all this up and working properly, you may well have several months of everything going well. But, suppose then that the printing starts to take longer than it should. You ring up the supplier or the support line and, after a great deal of time listening to their idea of soothing muzak, you are told that: "It is a printer problem, you need to ring the printer manufacturer instead." Or, that it is a software problem, or that "you need to run a diagnostic program on your hard disk". Or even that "it is caused by fluctuations in the power supply and you need to complain to your local electricity company".

If you are not careful, you can find yourself caught in the middle of some very time consuming and infuriating passing of the buck .

☉ Once you have established the use of these PCs, you will want to include them on a network and link the network to the accounts computer. But, who do you turn to help carry out this task?

If you go to a local computer expert, he or she is unlikely to know much about solicitors' needs or the specific accounts software you run. If you go to the accounts supplier, they will do their best to help but you cannot blame them if the computers are not adequate for the job. For example, not all PCs are *Novell certified*. You will still have to pay for their services which, at a rate of £300 to £500 a day, will eat up your original "savings" at an alarming rate. You will also have to pay for any hardware upgrades they suggest.

☞ **Recommendation...** If you are confident you have the in house expertise to handle all these situations, then you can save money by shopping around to buy the cheapest hardware available. But, if you are a novice or there are no computer enthusiasts in the firm, I believe it is better to pay more to your existing supplier – and at least get the job done properly. ☐

HOT OFFER

The Barracuda PC alarm system (see Issue No 10 for full details) is still available to LTI readers at the special 25% off discount price of £59.95 (+ £5 p&p + VAT). The system, which will fit in any standard PC, contains a 120 dB alarm and an optional dye jet that will indelibly mark components if anyone tries to tamper with the hardware.

☞ **To order, call Mike Bazeley of Barracuda on ☎ 01234 713040 and ask for the Legal Technology Insider reader special offer.**

PSION BARGAIN

Psion, makers of the Series 3a palm-top computer, are running a price promotion on their PsiWin PC integration software. The program, which allows users to exchange data files between a Psion and a PC, is available until 27th April for £40 (approx half the usual price) to anyone buying a 1Mb or 2Mb Series 3a from a Psion stockist.

HIGH SPEED GSM CARDS

Communicate Ltd (☎ 01344 291294) a maker of PC cards, is launching a new range of high speed data cards for users of GSM digital phones. Called the Liberty range, they go on sale in April and offer data transfer speeds of up to 36,000 bps. The cards are supplied with Delrina Win-Fax software.

FIVE MORE ELECT FOR SELECT

Hessle-based Select Legal Systems report that the last six months have seen five more firms of solicitors purchase their accounts and time recording software.

The five are: Butcher Andrews in Fakenham, Archer & Archer in Cambridge, Eking Manning in Nottingham, Winder Taylor Fallows in Bolton and Blain Boland in Liverpool, bringing to over 20 the total number of practices now using the company's software.

Select director Steve Ness says that by the time their current financial year closes on 30th April, they expect to see a 100% increase on the previous year's turnover.

Select (☎ 01482 644334) entered the legal systems market in 1992 and all its products are based on an Informix database. Along with accounts and financial management, the company can also supply marketing plus a range of workflow/case management applications, including matrimonial, criminal, litigation and commercial conveyancing work.

In common with most other legal systems suppliers today, Select are working on a Windows-based *fee earner desktop* - Select have gone the Visual Basic rather than C++ route. However, Ness feels "it is unwise to force solicitors down the PC route wholesale and therefore (Select) will continue to maintain our character based interface for those practices where price-performance and re-use of existing equipment is an issue."

Ness also points out that there are now a growing number of firms "mainly those with a partner or practice manager with IT experience" wanting to use Microsoft products like Excel and SQL Server as management reporting tools for accessing and manipulating information on the database. Or, as Ness puts it "I suppose now they have baked the cake (by computerising) they want to add the icing." □

TRAVELS WITH A LAPTOP - BUT WILL IT STILL BE WITH YOU AT JOURNEY'S END ?

Planning to travel abroad with your laptop computer this year? You have your PC card modem and a suitable adaptor for your battery recharger - but have you thought about security?

Insurance companies and IT security consultants say laptop computers have become "a premium target for theft" throughout Europe, to the extent that today anyone planning an international - or even domestic - flight should be alert to the risk of someone attempting to steal it.

Two techniques that have recently come to the attention of LTI, both involve a team of two thieves.

Brussels Airport advise one method involves the use of security x-ray machines. The first thief precedes the traveller through the security check point and then loiters around the area where the carry-on luggage has already been examined. When the traveller places his laptop on the conveyor belt of the x-ray machine, the second thief steps in front of him and sets off the metal detector. While the traveller is delayed and distracted by this, the second thief removes the laptop and makes his getaway.

Frankfurt International Airport report an alternative and far more low tech approach. As a traveller made his way through the crowds of people in the terminal, carrying his laptop on his roll-bag, he was preceded by the first thief who suddenly stopped in his tracks. This caused the traveller to halt abruptly, whereupon the second thief, who was following immediately behind, quickly removed the laptop from the rollbag and disappeared into the crowd.

Keep any serial numbers, make and model information relating to your laptop separate from the item itself, so that if it is stolen you can give precise information to the authorities and your insurers. □

@work.co

With more and more law firms and legal technology suppliers opening Web sites, this week **L*T*i** starts a new **WEB VERDICT** system so readers can see at-a-glance if a site is worth visiting. The review takes into account a site's style, technical merits and content with pages awarded an appropriate *Smiley Rating*:



Great - definitely visit



Good - worth looking



So-So - must try harder



Sad - don't even bother

Web site operators are welcome to create hyperlink *jumps* from their pages to the recently redesigned **L*T*i** site home page at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/cloudnine/>

PEAPOD TO DISTRIBUTE TEL-ME

Peapod Professional Systems has extended its range of Internet-related products for the legal profession and is now distributing the Tel-Me system from PhoneLink.

The Tel-Me software (which in the latest release 2.1 is compatible with OS/2 and Windows 95, as well as Windows 3x) provides users with Internet email and online access to over a dozen frequently used business information services, such as AA Roadwatch, British Rail timetables, and CCN company profiles. There is also an optional link with the Pipex service to provide users with full WWW access.

The thinking behind the service is to offer businesses an Internet-in-a-box system - you can even buy the software bundled in with a ready-to-use modem. While the generalist nature of Tel-Me may not suit all law firms, its approach can certainly remove some of the aggravation often associated with online research.

Peapod Professional (☎ 01753 581600) is also the UK legal market distributor for BNTI's BorderWare Firewall Server range of Internet gateway and security systems. □

AN EMPTY LEGACY ?

The announcement from Legacy Marketing & Communications said: "The Future has arrived" and that as of Monday 11th March "the definitive Internet directory of UK solicitors is now operational and is rapidly becoming the premier point of reference for anyone wishing to appoint or gain information on a solicitor within the UK".

Leaving aside obvious quibbles, such as the fact that currently there are certainly not (as Legacy claim) 70 million people worldwide using the Internet (the figure is nearer half that), or, that Legacy seems to be unaware of comparable services offered by LINK, The Law Society, Court on the Web, Delia Venables' Legal Resources Pages, as well as the LawNet and ALERT law firm networks, probably the biggest disappointment is the Legacy site at present only lists a small number of firms and all its legal information pages are still under construction.

☞ **Comment...** With a one-off registration cost of £25, an annual charge of £89 and a £10 a time amendment fee (all plus VAT), the Legacy project seems to be yet another attempt to make money out of a *Yellow Pages* style Internet directory. Fair enough - except there are plenty of free directories on the Net already. **L*T*i** has been unable to obtain any further and better particulars from Legacy (☎ 01604 880190) so for the time being their Web site at <http://www.legacy.co.uk> has to receive a sad ☹ *Smiley Rating*. □

WEB VERDICT

Edgware software house and legal market newcomer IT Strategy & Solutions (☎ 0181 952 0844) has acquired the UK distribution rights for Dataflight Software's Concordance information retrieval system. The company says the system can be used in litigation support applications and further information is available on its Web site at <http://www.win-uk.net/~itss> *Smiley Rating*: ☺☺ □

CIS GETS ISDN ACCESS

The CompuServe (CIS) online information and Internet access service can now offer ISDN links for UK users. There is no extra charge and it can support speeds of up to 57.6 Kbps. For details call ☎ 0800 000400 or 01734 525566.

SHRINK WRAPPING FOR WEB

An industry-wide initiative in the USA, headed by Microsoft and VeriSign Inc, is working on the development of a "digital signature" so users downloading software off the Internet can be confident the software is virus free. More details are expected later this summer.

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Alexis Byter's COMPUTER LORE

A despairing law firm IT manager phoned me the other day to ask if I could offer any useful insights into the psyche of solicitors, as she had just started a new job with a practice that had only recently installed a Unix network running one of the many Unix flavours of WordPerfect 5.1 on dumb terminals.

"It was like going back in time ten years," she said, "to a world that had never heard of Windows or personal computing."

But, what really seems to have choked her was that when she asked the firm why they had gone the Unix route, the managing partner replied: "Well, all the other lemmings cannot be wrong!"

Presumably these are the same "lemmings" who now sob into their gin-and-tonics late at night, as they think about how they spent hundreds of thousands of pounds buying systems that have rather less functionality than new systems costing tens of thousands of pounds.

Or, perhaps they are the firms who were still clamouring to buy proprietary Wang technology at a time when the company itself was struggling to stay solvent. Although perhaps that is a bit unfair as the English Law Society also tried to hang on to its Wang

strategy long after everyone else had seen the writing on the VDU screen. And of course Chancery Lane is now digging itself into another hole over its REGIS practising certificates system.

However, while it is easy for outsiders to be wise after the event, we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that for most lawyers, technology is still an alien culture. Even today the majority of students coming out of law school see a legal career as being about the practise of law and membership of an ancient profession.

They most certainly do not see law firms as being in a service business and primarily concerned with the efficient delivery of a product to their customers.

"Ah, well," I hear you say, "it will take time for a cultural change like that to work its way through the profession."

But, how much time? And, more to the point, will the clients be prepared to wait that long?

Consider the average commercial client today - it is the younger computer literate executives who are issuing the instructions to law firms. With who are they going to have the greater rapport?

High tech lawyers using the same types of office systems as they do? Or, old buffers with fountain pens and postage stamps?

Besides, since when has a lemming been a role model!

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