
CHARLES CHRISTIAN's

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

INSIDER

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

IN THIS EDITION...

Technology suppliers unveil new trade association... 2

Whatever happened to the US litigation support industry... 3

'Problems over' say WordPerfect... 4

Equitrac logs onto the Internet... 5

Quill reinvent the bureau... 6

✓ SOLEX '96... Along with our continuing preview of this year's Barbican Exhibition, this edition also contains a complimentary ticket for the event.

AXXIA OPENS DESKTOP TO THE MARKET

Axxia Systems is upping the stakes in the UK legal IT market with the launch at this year's Barbican Exhibition of a new open systems version of its Fee Earner Desktop.

By uncoupling the front office Fee Earner Desktop (Arista++) from the Arista case and practice management system and making it database independent, the company says it can now offer law firms greater freedom of choice, as they will be able to run Axxia fee earner productivity applications in conjunction with other vendors' back office technology.

Axxia managing director Stuart Holden says this is "breaking the mould" but feels now is the time to get away from the old pattern in which suppliers effectively locked law firms into a single front and back office proprietary system.

"It has become increasingly obvious firms need a way to maximise existing IT infrastructures while taking advantage of new technology. But until now it has been extremely difficult to justify the purchase of new complete solutions because of the high costs involved."

Holden believes the new approach will give firms a way of installing the latest innovations while protecting and prolonging their existing IT investments.

The Windows-based Arista++ system be linked to any ODBC compliant relational database running on Unix or Windows NT and within the next few weeks will be available for Informix, SQL Server and Oracle platforms. ➔

➔ Pricing will depend on the number of desktop elements ordered but the entry level price for Arista++ including on-screen time recording will be around £400 per seat. An added attraction is there are no extra charges by way of indeterminate consultancy and systems integration costs. Axxia is already in talks with a number of firms and anticipates the first orders being announced in the autumn.

☞ **Comment...** For nearly three years some UK legal systems suppliers have been talking about developing shrink-wrapped or open desktop products that could sit on top of other suppliers' back office applications. However, Axxia is the first to be commercially confident enough take the plunge.

At its most basic level Arista++ provides a viable challenge to US stand-alone products like Carpe Diem and Amicus Attorney and so could well prove to be an alternative front end at an Elite installation.

But, there is also an important Trojan horse element here as Axxia can now approach and sell to firms who are currently not in the market for a new back office system having, for example, recently installed a new Miles 33 package, and so have their foot firmly in the door – as well as in competition with the incumbent supplier – when the system comes up for review in a few year's time.

✓ **SOLEX '96...** As well as the usual product presentations, at this year's Barbican, Axxia will also be running a series of free seminars on the Internet, fee earner support systems and making the most of practice data, in the theatre section of the company's stand. □

CRIME DOES PAY ?

Glaisyers, widely regarded as one of the leading criminal and legal aid practices in Birmingham, has gone "live" with a new case management system developed for them by Linetime ☎ 0113 250 0020 using their Dataflow workflow management package.

✓ SOLEX '96... As well as Dataflow, at the Barbican Linetime will also be running demonstrations of the new FeeStyle fee earner desktop system.

OBSCURE FACTS CORNER

The LSSA launch (see main story) took place at Brown's Hotel in London, the setting in 1876 for the first successful telephone call made in the UK by Alexander Graham Bell.

SUPPLIERS COME OUT FIGHTING

After over two years of deliberation, a major group of technology suppliers serving the English and Welsh legal markets (a Scottish element is to be announced shortly) have formally launched a trade organisation which they hope will represent and effectively regulate the software companies that sell to the legal profession...

The new body is called the Legal Software Suppliers Association (LSSA – pronounced "Elsa") and its first chairman John Wilde (of AIM Professional) reckons its 20 founder members are responsible for installing 75% or more of all the legal systems now used in law firms.

However, Wilde is also keen to ensure the LSSA "never becomes a cozy cartel" and, as he puts it: "the doors will never be closed to new applications". This *open door* policy is reflected by the fact the founder members include not just the larger and/or longer established names in the market like AIM, Linetime, MSS, Quill and Technology for Business but also smaller suppliers like Acculaw, as well as relative newcomers such as Perfect Software and Jackson Computer Solutions.

At the heart of the LSSA's self regulation plans is a surprisingly strict *Code of Practice*, which includes requirements that members: maintain some form of professional indemnity and product liability insurance; maintain escrow agreements or equivalent, so customers can have access to the source code in the event of the supplier going out of business; and ensure all their distributors and subcontractors comply with the *Code* so there is no buck passing.

Failure to comply with the *Code* evokes the LSSA's complaints and disciplinary procedure. This does seem to have teeth as expulsion – complete with publicity for the reasons why the supplier has been expelled – is the ultimate sanction.

It is also interesting to note that membership must be reapplied for each ▶

▶ year, with bank references etc being taken up to ensure "flakier suppliers" are not propped up by their association with the LSSA.

All this is just "the first step on a long road" as vice chairman Tony Landes of Quill puts it. In the months to come the LSSA hopes to launch initiatives in the fields of staff training and quality (probably IIP) so over time its credibility grows. In fact Landes hopes that in five years time the Association's reputation will be such "that solicitors will not buy from anyone but LSSA members".

The joining fee is £1000 and the annual subscription is £500 to £2000, depending upon the size of the company. Enquiries should be directed to the LSSA's independent secretary Roger Hancock on ☎ 01789 296096.

☞ **Comment...** The origins of the LSSA and its immediate predecessor the ALTS can be traced back to the mid-1980s, when a number of suppliers first got together to voice concerns that the English Law Society didn't understand the workings of the software industry – nor the IT needs of most solicitors.

Ironically a common cause for concern may have originally helped the suppliers come together but this element of confrontation and a fear "it may upset our relationship with the Law Society" has clearly deterred others from joining.

Probably the more common view among *refuseniks* is that the LSSA is unnecessary as they already follow an ethical code of business and/or if there is a need for regulation, it should be left to the Law Society.

This latter view does however ignore the fact that in over a decade the Society has singularly failed to come up with any concrete proposals and if the latest rumours coming out of Chancery Lane are anything to go by, the next round of economising to be discussed at the June council meeting will see cuts made to the Society's practice development and technology departments. □

WILL THE LAST ONE OUT PLEASE SWITCH OFF THE LIGHT

Within the next few weeks Quorum Litigation Services will be closing down its London office and heading back to the USA - thus bringing to a close one of the less successful forays by American suppliers into the UK legal market.

Five years ago it was an entirely different story with companies like Aspen Systems, Rust Consulting, Jamerican and Quorum queuing up to pitch for litigation support business from major London law firms.

Today by comparison they have gone back to the USA and the three names now most consistently to be found on project short lists are all home grown: Elliott Slone (☎ 0171 929 5252), Bowhawk Consulting (☎ 01252 716694), and Legal Technologies (☎ 0171 935 8242) - now fully Anglicised after the recent MBO from its parent company.

So where did the Americans go wrong? Various suggestions have been made, including price, legal culture and procedural differences. For example US litigation is deposition and trial oriented whereas in the UK the emphasis is on discovery and interlocutory procedures.

Bowhawk's Nigel Murray believes some US suppliers didn't appreciate the way UK firms operate and tried to "tell" them how to handle litigation, whereas what solicitors were really looking for were "flexible, individualistic" solutions.

While Howard Slone suggests another disadvantage the Americans faced was that most of their processing operations were located in the US or overseas, which in turn raised time and security issues "whereas companies like ours are an around the corner solution".

The competition could however be set to heat up again as former Quorum UK head Kelvin McGregor has now moved to Westminster-based DP Advisers (☎ 0171 834 4068) where he is working with

▶ the document management systems company to set up a new division that will provide litigation support services. Further details will be released at the Barbican Exhibition.

☞ **Related Developments...** Staying with litigation support technology, Ymijs Ltd (☎ 0181 518 1414) has recruited former Usher Systems imaging products specialist John Gailey to run Ymijs' new Northern operation out of Edinburgh.

From the beginning of next month, Ymijs is also rolling out a new generation of imaging and workflow products that use Intranet publishing technology to disseminate information.

And, PageNet Systems (formerly Patent Systems) is back in contention following the merger of PageNet and Insight Business Consultants of Canada to form LAVA Systems (☎ 0171 609 6600). The company's flagship product has been "re-architected" as LAVA 4.3 and now offers closer integration between workflow document management, imaging, and back office business applications.

✓ **SOLEX '96...** Along with DP Advisers, Elliott Slone, Legal Technologies and Bowhawk Consulting will also have stands at the Barbican. Bowhawk is also showing a new "three clicks and you can find any document" low cost document management system called InfoGrator. ☐

SOLACE FOR USERS

Solace Legal Systems (☎ 01780 64947) has changed its pricing policy with systems now sold on the basis of an annual licence fee, which includes maintenance, helpline support and software upgrades. The company says one of the benefits of the approach is it will ensure all users are running the same version of the software.

✓ **SOLEX '96...** Visitors to the Solace stand will be able to see a preview of the company's new Windows products which are being developed under Delphi. ☐

FAX ON THE UPGRADE

Fax management specialist Hexar Ltd (☎ 0181 563 9000) has launched release 4.0 of its FaxSwitch system. The new system has already been implemented by Gouldens, Booth & Co and Theodore Goddard.

BILL JACOT DIES

IT consultant and expert witness Bill Jacot, whose DBA consultancy was a founder member of the Association of Professional Computer Consultants, has died of cancer. DBA will continue to trade and is now headed by Andrew Thornton (☎ 01344 886999).

NEW GUIDE TO IT SYSTEMS
The English Law Society is about to publish a new guide to the legal IT market. Called *The Information Technology Directory* it contains extensive corporate and product information on 96 suppliers plus informative articles on IT topics. Publisher Carl Upsall says the guide has an entirely different format to the 1992 listing which was plagued with inaccuracies.

✓ SOLEX '96... The *Directory* will retail for £34.95 but visitors to the Barbican will be able to buy or order it for £29.95.

WORDPERFECT ADMIT DELAYS BUT CONFIRM SUPPORT

Ample stocks of the Windows 3x version of WordPerfect 6.1 should be available from today (Monday 20th) in the UK says the wordprocessing system's new owner Corel.

Following reports that it was difficult to locate copies of the software, LTI spoke to Corel product manager Eric Lefebvre at the Ottawa head office. He admitted there had been problems caused by supplies of the Novell version of the software drying up before Corel had replacement stocks in place but is confident these are over.

In the course of the interview, Lefebvre also answered questions on other aspects of Corel's product strategy:

From this week, it will no longer be possible to buy WordPerfect 6.1 as a standalone product for a Windows PC. Instead the entry level will be the Corel WordPerfect Suite. This includes other applications besides wordprocessing but Lefebvre reckons it is a bargain as the cost remains the same "so for the price of a wordprocessor you get a full suite".

Next comes Corel Office Professional, an extensive suite containing all the features of the WordPerfect Suite plus a database, the InfoCentral PIM and a version of CorelDRAW. As such, this replaces the old Novell PerfectOffice Professional product.

In terms of platforms, the versions launched this week are for Windows 3x - termed 16-bit products by Corel. And at the beginning of June 32-bit versions of WordPerfect Suite and Office Professional will be launched for Windows 95.

These will be followed by a new version for Macintosh, scheduled for the end of June, and "during the Fall" the Unix editions of WordPerfect will be upgraded to Version 6.1. Lefebvre also confirmed that Corel was committed to supporting the DOS platform for the immediate future. ➔

➔ Corel is currently reorganising its UK, Irish and European support operations and Lefebvre promises this will be better and cheaper than in recent years.

He went on to say that although WordPerfect may have seemed without direction for some time "Corel believes it has more of a feel for the market than Novell," will be "very aggressive in its campaign to recapture the wordprocessing market from Microsoft" and is prepared to compete on price, quality and service.

Full details will be unveiled at a corporate presentation in London in early June which LTI will be covering. □

ACE BEEFS UP ACTIVITIES IN SOLICITORS' MARKET

Applied Computer Expertise (ACE) is beefing up its activities on the solicitors' side of the English legal technology market following the appointment of Stephen Murphy as the company's new sales & marketing manager.

Until recently Murphy was the lead salesman for MCS and its DPS case and document management system. In his new role at ACE he will be responsible for marketing the Infinity integrated practice management system to law firms - ACE admits that over the last 12 months it has not been actively selling to solicitors, so as to be able to concentrate efforts on the barristers' market.

Along with Infinity, ACE is also starting to promote its Strategy Planner workflow/case management system. This has undergone extensive testing over the last 12 months at Rogers & Norton in Norwich, who have used it to develop computerised procedures for handling ULR and remortgage work.

✓ SOLEX '96... ACE (☎ 0171 404 5577) will be showing the Windows NT version of Infinity at the Barbican, plus a Windows 95 version of the Quantime on screen time recording system, which has just gone live at Schilling & Lom following a six month pilot at the firm. □

EQUITRAC TO LOG THE INTERNET

In a move which reflects the growing importance of the Internet to professional practices, the Equitrac Corporation has announced the upcoming release of a new Web browser and email product that will give law firms the ability to assign billing and project information on Internet use.

Called the Equitrac Professional Internet Client (or EPIC), this is a full featured Internet browser (WWW access, email, newsgroups, gopher etc) tailored to meet the needs of vertical professional markets like law by including the ability to track online research and email for billing and management purposes.

Equitrac product manager Brad Nickel said the thinking behind the product was that while as a research and communications tool "the Internet was opening a whole new world to vertical market professionals like lawyers, firms have been reluctant to take part because of the lack of control and tracking ability for their employees and partners".

EPIC can be integrated with third party online research services, time and billing and project management software products as well as Equitrac's own cost recovery systems. EPIC's development is based on Microsoft's ActiveX system and free beta copies will be available by the end of June, email: webmaster@equitrac.com for details.

This browser will include toolbar buttons for instant upgrades and allow users to automatically send feedback on features they would like incorporated. At the end of the beta phase, copies of EPIC will be available from Equitrac's web site (<http://www.equitrac.com>) on a 30 day free trial basis, after which users can purchase copies with price breaks for 10 seats or more.

✓ **SOLEX '96...** Equitrac (☎ 0171-831 7818) will be providing further details about the EPIC system at the Barbican. □

FATHOM TECHNOLOGIES SURFACE

When the old Law Data company folded five years ago, it created a major gap in the market leaving many law firms, local government and corporate legal departments floundering to know where to turn for their next generation of debt collection and case management software to replace the old Debtco system.

Several suppliers have since stepped in to fill the gap although ironically one of the most successful - Reading-based Fathom Technologies (☎ 01734 750886) - also has such a low profile that it is virtually unknown outside its own niche market.

Inevitably a lot of Fathom's wins have been at old Debtco installations, such as Veale Wasbrough in Bristol and Fennemores in Milton Keynes. However, the company is also winning orders from green field sites and against competition from other suppliers' products.

For example, Brindley Twist Tafft & James in Coventry, who were the original pilot site for Hatton Blue's case management system (a new Windows development at one time highly rated by some consultants), subsequently rejected the Hatton Blue solution in favour of Fathom's CaseFlow product.

Fathom's Julian Lipman suggests one reason for this success is that Fathom is a relatively recent entrant into the market and so "is not hindered by a legacy of having to support mid-1980s technology". And, because it has been developed under the Progress 4GL, it is also sufficiently "open" to run on most hardware platforms from a standalone DOS PC through to IBM AS/400 minis by way of Unix, Novell and Windows NT.

☞ **Comment...** The product's pricing is also keen, with the core software costing around £2000 plus £250 per user licence and a modular library of different debt recovery procedures (ULR, rent arrears etc) available to buy at prices ranging from £500 to £1250 per procedure. □

N&P GO FOR SOLICITEC

After using Solicitec software for nearly 10 years, the National & Provincial Building Society's legal department has upgraded to the new Windows SolCase case management system from Solicitec (☎ 0113 278 7757) to help handle its conveyancing and possession work.

THE ONLINE MEETING

Prisma Office (☎ 01753 810899) has launched a new groupware product called The Meeting Room which will allow users to hold interactive meetings from their PC desktops using a combination of network, email, audio and information sharing tools. A 10 user starter pack costs £495.

HOT DOG IT'S HOTFORMS

The US Capsoft Corporation has just launched a new add-on for its popular Windows-based document assembly package HotDocs. Called HotForms, the system automates the production of legal forms.

✓ SOLEX '96... HotForms makes its UK debut at the Barbican where Information for Lawyers Ltd (☎ 0181 878 3033) is previewing a number of applications developed around HotDocs and HotForms.

☞ IFL will also be providing details of its electronic publishing and Internet consultancy services.

QUILL RE-INVENT THE BUREAU FOR THE 21st CENTURY

In a bold move which sees the company diversify away from its traditional role as a software supplier and become a service provider, Quill Computer Systems has launched a new nationwide accounting and bookkeeping service for law firms.

Called PINpoint and operated by wholly owned subsidiary Quill Pinpoint Accounting Ltd (☎ 0161 236 2910) the service is designed to meet the accounting and time recording requirements of small firms for who the cost of buying a computer system and employing a cashier, even for a couple of days a week, would be onerous.

For a fixed monthly fee (the entry level price is likely to be £450) the PINpoint user will at the close of each day send accounts postings chits to Quill via DX, where they will be processed on a computer by Quill cashiers and the firm's records updated.

At the end of each month Quill will supply users with extensive management information, such as aged debtor lists, profit & loss balance sheets, as well as the normal audit trails. In addition, a dial-up facility means users can access their records to look up billing guides or print off ledger cards at any time.

Updated accounts information will be available by the afternoon of the next working day while time recording data will be ready by the evening.

Tony Landes of Quill describes the service as "updating the computer bureau for the 21st century" and suspects that although it has been designed primarily for smaller firms, it will also be of interest to larger practices who want to outsource some of their administrative functions.

☞ **Technical Note...** A pilot service has been running at two firms since the beginning of the year and it was on the strength of the feedback from them ➔

➔ that Quill decided to launch the service nationally. The dial-up service can use existing PC hardware, providing there is a suitable modem; information is protected from unauthorised access by a series of passwords or PIN numbers; and firms can use the service without having to make a long term commitment. ☐

COMPUTING MADE SIMPLER

Another supplier offering an alternative to the outright purchase of a computer system (see *Quill story on this page*) is Professional Productivity Solutions (☎ 01865 201801) which in June launches its "worry-free kick-start bundle" comprising software, hardware (Windows and Macintosh platforms) plus support for a fixed monthly lease payment. PPS suggest that as well as simplifying the selection of technology, this approach can also have a beneficial effect on cashflow.

✓ SOLEX '96... The PPS bundle will make its public debut at the Barbican. ☐

DIARY DATES

☎ 5 April 1996 - **Day of Difference.** Informal mixture of seminar sessions and software demonstrations organised by Norwel Computer Services. Speakers include Charles Attlee of Druces & Attlee and Withers' director of business development Philip Hall. Chiswell Street Brewery, London EC1, admission free, starts 11.00am. Call Deborah Stevenson on ☎ 0161 945 3511 for details.

☎ 13 June 1996 - **Case Management or legal process re-engineering starts here!** One day conference organised by Society for Computers & Law. Speakers include Brian Capstick, Nicholas McFarlane-Watts and Neil Cameron. Royal Aeronautical Society, London W1, fee £175 + VAT, £35 supplement for non-SCL members, discounts also available, starts 10.00am. Carries CPD points. Call the SCL on ☎ 0117 923 7393 for details. ☐

COMMUNIC@TIONS FUTURES

With the Internet and related intranet technologies becoming an increasingly mainstream feature of business (see next story) we are broadening our coverage to take in other aspects of communications – hence the name change for this section. Web site operators are still welcome to create hyperlink jumps to the **LTi** home page at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/cloudnine/> And don't forget to point your browsers at <http://www.ltl.co.uk> to take part in the interactive CyberForum hosted by Legal Technologies Ltd and **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER**.

INTERNET BUSINESS USE SET TO SOAR

Speaking at a conference in Paris last week, the head of IBM's European network computing operations Christian Thommessen predicted that by the end of the decade the total number of Internet users worldwide would have increased from 35 million today to "perhaps 500 million".

He also predicted Internet traffic would "probably exceed voice telephony" by the year 2000 and went on to note how the demographic profile of Internet users was changing rapidly "reflecting its transformation from a mainly academic network into a business tool". In the last six months alone the average age of Internet users has increased from 31 to 35 years.

"The Internet," said Thommessen, "is moving from a subsidised utility structure through an information network to a full blown electronic marketplace. Within five years it will be the world's largest, deepest, fastest and most secure marketplace" handling business transactions worth \$1 billion a year.

He concluded by warning that "we have continuously underestimated the Internet" and urged businesses to seize the opportunities now being presented. □

DOMAIN NAMES WAR TURNS DIRTY

A row that has broken out within the UK Internet industry now looks to be escalating in a way that could have serious legal implications.

For the last three to four years the approval and allocation of ".co.uk" business domain names on the Internet has been handled on a relatively informal basis. However with a growing volume of activity UKERNA (the *de facto* governing body for the Internet in the UK) now wants to set this on a more structured commercial footing.

UKERNA members have recently voted to form a new company called Nominet UK (☎ 01235 822270) which will charge a one off £100 fee for the allocation of new ".co.uk" domains, as well as charge all the current 14,000 ".co.uk" domains an annual £50 registration fee.

Given the Internet's traditional non-commercial culture, the Nominet proposal has inevitably led to complaints that this will create an unfair monopoly and prompted the creation of a rival organisation NomiNation Ltd (☎ 0171 384 3050 or at <http://www.nomination.uk.com>) to establish an alternative service which will register ".uk.com" domains for £45 for two years.

Confused? Well after several weeks of harmlessly sniping at each other, the dispute now seems to be turning ugly, with NomiNation alleging that a week ago the Director Designate of Nominet UK was responsible for causing their main name server computer to crash by maliciously flooding – or "spamming" – it with Internet "packet" messages, via a computer at Southampton University.

Southampton University technical staff were unaware of the problem until NomiNation complained and are understood to have now closed the Internet account through which the packets were sent. The individual concerned has also resigned as Director Designate of Nominet and from the Internet Service Providers Association (ISPA). □

LEGAL ISSUES CONFERENCE

The CCTA (the UK Government's Central Computer & Telecommunications Agency) is mounting a series of one day conferences on *Legal Issues & the Internet* in Edinburgh on 3rd June, Belfast on 10th and London on the 20th. Speakers include the Data Protection Registrar, barrister Nick Lockett and Bird & Bird partner Hamish Sanderson.

☞ **The fee is £175 (London £195) + VAT. Details are available on ☎ 01442 828200 and on <http://www.open.gov.uk/ccta/cctahome.htm>**

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Don't miss the next edition No 16 out: 3rd June

**Alexis Byter's
 COMPUTER LORE**

By now it has become the new orthodoxy that the way for law firms and legal departments to attain greater productivity and operational cost effectiveness is by radically "re-engineering" various "non value added" business processes.

Those of us who are of a cynical persuasion assume this is shorthand for "getting fee earners to do their own typing so we can sack some of the secretaries or have them doing paralegal work so we can cut down on the number of assistant solicitors we employ." Sorry, did I say "sack"? I meant downsize".

Clearly only a Luddite would stand in the way of the profession's steady march towards global fee earner desktop computing. However, while more and more lawyers struggle to overcome their incipient "qwerty-phobia" by learning to operate wordprocessors, I think we should not overlook one of the great unsung, seldom mentioned benefits of doing business the old fashioned way.

Namely the fact that at least when you have a secretary to transcribe your dictation, you have another human being to monitor your output for grammar, style, context, tone and taste.

Yes, you can get spelling checkers and even software to warn you against splitting your infinitives, whatever that ➔

➔ means but no computer can read through your work and say "You cannot seriously be going to write to someone using that tone, the poor soul's only been widowed a week".

Sadly some of the profession's great dictators, who are now scheming to put their secretaries on the scrap heap, probably never realise just how often their staff subtly edit their work to cut out the waffle, improve clarity and generally prevent dumb comments from being enshrined forever in print.

Or, to put it another way, the secretary has always provided a useful failsafe mechanism between you, your motor mouth and the outside world.

Doing your own wordprocessing may be fraught with risk but this is nothing compared to the hazards of electronic mail, where all too often responses are rushed off instantly while the users are still online and going through their "in" mailbox.

What do I mean? Well, had a secretary been there to monitor his output, would campaigning solicitor John Edge really have gone public on LINK's "General Chat" online discussion area with the rather less than tactful comment that he would be more inclined to worry about what the public think of solicitors "when the public show they deserve our respect by being prepared to pay a reasonable fee for our services". ☐

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