
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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AMERICANS LAND IN THE NORTH-WEST

The North-West is currently seeing a flurry of activity from local suppliers promoting accounts and case management systems of American origin.

Preston-based MIPAC (call John Lowe on ☎ 01772 909090) is currently showing an accounts system from Great Plains Dynamics. This is a general purpose accounts system – although it is used by a number of US law firms – and is being offered in conjunction with Lotus Notes to develop case management and document assembly applications, while time recording will be available through either ProSoft's Carpe Diem or a package from CompuLaw, another US supplier.

John Lowe says it is “still early days” but anticipates being able to announce fuller details by the end of August. However one Lancashire firm that has seen the system said they found “the flexibility and drill-down features extremely simple and user friendly”.

The second new system is the “low cost” Case Flow Management package being distributed in the UK by Lindon Wood Management Consultants (call Terry Lindon on ☎ 0151 236 1724).

The system has attracted a lot of interest since first being mentioned on the LINK network, not least because it really is a low cost package with an entry level price of just £150 per user (+ VAT).

One Manchester firm has been quoted £1250 for a 16 user system plus £500 for two days training. The firm's senior partner described it as “seeming to be a very good and cheap system”. And ➔

➔ it is already in use in the Liverpool firms of Caplan Goodman & Co and Linskills.

👉 **Technical Note...** The system is a Windows package based on a database product from the American Richmond Technologies group. While it does contain DDE hooks, so it could be linked to Laserforms or third-party accounts systems, Lindon says that because the initial market is firms with little or no IT expertise who need a cheap and simple system, keeping it as a stand alone will keep support costs to a minimum.

For example it cannot be integrated with an accounts and time recording system, so users would have to manually rekey client and matter data from one system to the other. ☐

HIGH STREET SYSTEM BECOMES ELECTION ISSUE

Although the English Law Society's low cost “High Street starter kit” (HSSK) accounts and practice management system for small firms only enters its pilot phase later this summer, it has already become a political issue with presidential candidate Tony Girling pledging to have it installed in “at least 500 firms in the first year”.

👉 **Comment...** When the Law Society of Scotland launched its High Street starter kit earlier in the year, one unanticipated knock on effect was to raise expectations, with some firms under the impression they just had to plug in a PC and start computing – without the need to plan the implementation of the system, training or any other preparatory work. ☐

GAVEL & GOWN DATES
Gavel & Gown (☎ 01548 857775) is running a series of one hour seminars featuring the Amicus Attorney system running in conjunction with Dragon Dictate speech recognition. The dates are Leeds 23rd July (Merrion Thistle Hotel) and Newcastle 24th July (Old Assembly Rooms). Session times are 8-45, 12-45 and 16-45. For details call ☎ 01242 243344.

PRACTICE BUYS PRACTICE
Recently formed Bournemouth commercial litigation practice Clarke & Co has installed the Practice II accounts and law firm management system from Linetime (☎ 0113 250 0020).

KEYSTONE COPS FIRST ORDER

The highly rated Keystone practice management system from New Zealand has won its first UK order and will shortly be going into Ashurst Morris Crisp in the City of London.

The order is described as worth "over £1million" and will replace the firm's existing IBM system. The consultant on the project was Neil Cameron.

Keystone has now established a UK subsidiary – Keystone Systems UK Ltd – with a London office at 1 Gunpowder Square, London EC4A 3DE. Call Colin Morris or William Davis on ☎ 0171 583 6393 for details. □

MIDLANDS FIRM COMMISSIONS NEW CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Wolverhampton solicitors Chapman Everatt has asked Quill Computer Systems (☎ 0161 236 2910) to develop a specially adapted case management system to handle defendant personal injury work. The firm is also installing a new office automation network running Quill's Quantum accounts package.

Formed in 1992 as a niche practice, the firm now has a staff of 14, with 95% of its caseload comprising defendant insurance-funded litigation. □

JOBS SHORTAGE CONTINUES

Legal IT staff continue to be in short supply (for first reports see Issue No 17) with systems supplier Norwel (☎ 0161 945 3511) currently looking for two additional sales staff.

Mark Atherton of legal recruiters Longbridge Consultancy (☎ 0171 726 4011) says that on the law firms' side of the equation there is a shortage of inhouse training staff, particularly to help practices upgrade from WordPerfect 5.1 for DOS to Microsoft Office, Word and WordPerfect for Windows. □

GOODBYE AMSTRAD ?

The announcement that the handheld computer manufacturer Psion is planning to takeover Amstrad looks like driving the final nail in the coffin of the Amstrad PCW system, which is still the favourite technology of many sole practitioners and small firms.

Although the proposed deal has been generally welcomed, the small print suggests Psion will only buy Amstrad's Dancall mobile phone and Viglen PC operations, leaving the consumer electronics business (which includes various gadgets, as well as the PCW range) in the hands of a "rump" Amstrad.

☞ **Comment...** Given the less than enthusiastic welcome the revamped PCW received when it was launched last December, there seems a grim future for it in the new Amstrad, leaving remaining PCW users with little option but to finally throw away their 3" disks.

👉 **Note...** Another company currently suffering a reversal of fortunes is Digital, which has just announced it is to cut back on its PC manufacturing business and shed 7000 jobs worldwide, after being caught out in the recent PC price war (along with Olivetti and Packard Bell). Digital will now concentrate on server systems and its Alpha range.

Doug McLachlan of Axxia Systems (itself a former Digital subsidiary until the 1995 MBO) says the changes have no impact on Axxia. Although the company has in the past supplied Digital PCs to users, McLachlan says Axxia has reviewed its hardware strategy and is already looking at alternative brands. □

LAWYERS ON DISK

London firms Nabarro Nathanson and Denton Hall have both launched new promotional "brochures" using CD-Rom disks rather than conventional print as the publishing medium. Denton Hall was also a pioneer of Internet marketing. □

TIMESLICE SAYS REPORTS OF USER DISSATISFACTION EXAGGERATED

A quality assurance survey conducted by Timeslice Ltd has found little evidence to support the view there is widespread dissatisfaction among the users of legal systems.

Although the company achieved ISO9001 and Tick-IT quality standards accreditation in January 1996, marketing manager Brendan Conroy says he was concerned about "the reports emanating from the Law Society about the low esteem in which many in the legal profession regard their software suppliers".

To resolve the issue with its own users, Timeslice conducted a customer satisfaction survey asking users to rate the company's performance on a five point scale (excellent - good - average - fair - poor) covering a variety of support issues, including response times and the proficiency of the staff in fixing problems.

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents placed performance in the good-to-excellent bracket and 87% put them in the average-to-excellent range.

According Conroy: "If these responses are typical across the legal software industry, it would suggest that the reports of customer dissatisfaction are greatly exaggerated."

☞ **Comment...** The Timeslice study echoes similar findings in customer satisfaction surveys conducted in recent months by AIM Professional and Axxia.

Given that management consultants Robson Rhodes are generally credited - or blamed, depending upon your point of view - with having started the whole quality/satisfaction debate, it is interesting to note that the 1996 report (see page 6 for full story) also suggests most users are happy with their systems.

According to Robson Rhodes, 60% of firms rate their software in the ➡

☞ good-to-excellent range, while only 6% described it as "poor".

The Timeslice survey also threw up one other interesting fact: namely a considerable number of firms apparently do not know who are their suppliers. ☐

TWO MORE FOR EQUITRAC

Two Manchester practices - Wacks Caller and Cobbetts (previously Cobbett Leak Almond) have installed the Equitrac (☎ 0171 831 7818) cost recovery system.

At Cobbetts the Equitrac Alpha control terminals, fitted to photocopiers to monitor usage, are also linked to the firm's Linetime accounts package for the automatic posting of billable charges onto client ledgers. ☐

ALL IN A GOOD CAUSE

Back in 1992 Owen Barder wrote a small DOS application called Dates to help personal injury practitioners calculate special account interest etc accruing on loss of earnings awards. There is now a Windows version available (so users can paste the results of calculations into wordprocessing documents) and the DOS version has also been updated to provide additional functions, including mark ups and "calendar month" calculations.

☞ **Comment...** What makes Dates different is this is *charityware*. It is not sold commercially but distributed on a "try it and if you like it buy it" shareware basis with users asked to make a contribution to charity - to Oxfam or Wells for India - when they register their copies of the program. Barder says the average donation is £50.

Copies of Dates can be obtained by downloading it from LINK (Personal Injury Conference) and CompuServe (UK Professionals Forum, Legal/Law section) or by sending a blank, formatted disk and sae to Owen Barder, 1 St Mary's Gardens, Kennington, London SE11 4UD. ☐

PRE-LEASING MAKES SENSE

Following the report in the last edition about the *pre-lease finance scheme (see Issue No 18, p.4)* from Schrodgers (☎ 0181 422 7101) the firm of Gisby Harrison in Cheshunt has contacted LTI to say it found pre-leasing an invaluable way of financing an extensive cabling project prior to the installation of a new network. Rosling King in London EC4 has also opted for a pre-lease scheme.

WRONG NUMBER

The incorrect phone number for Wyse Technology was inadvertently printed in the last edition of LTI (see "*Skinny Clients*" story, Issue No 18, p.6). The correct number is ☎ 01734 342200.

MONSTER JOB PROSPECTS

Recruitment consultancy Moxon Dolphin & Kerby this week launches the Monster Board, an Internet-based recruitment service. The site can be found at <http://www.monster.co.uk> and MD&K hopes to offer at least 500 vacancies in the UK legal, insurance and financial sectors.

REED ALLIANCE

The publishing group Reed Elsevier, owners of Butterworths and Lexis, is entering into a partnership with the US Times Mirror group to acquire Shepard's, a US legal publisher and producer of CD-Rom and online services. The move is likely to see the Shepard's business combined with Matthew Bender, another US legal publisher already controlled by the two groups.

IS NEW SAGE SYSTEM THE RIGHT FLAVOUR ?

In the general business world the Sage Group dominates the UK's PC-based accounting software market through products such as Sage Sovereign and Sage Sterling. Last week it launched Sage Timeslips, a new Windows version of the on-screen time recording system it recently acquired from the US and is now being aimed at the legal profession. But will it hit the target?

On the face of it, this should be a winner. For example, the product's pedigree is good - Timeslips has been available in the USA for over a decade and is widely used by US lawyers.

The new system is also easier to use - thanks to the cleaner "Navigator" front end. It is flexible enough to fit the needs of the sole practitioner through to the larger practice. There are extensive reporting facilities, including 50 standard reports to analyse work by client, user and activity.

The product has the backing of Sage and will be available and supported through a nationwide dealer network - whereas distribution channels for the old Timeslips could be a bit hit and miss.

And, it is relatively cheap - £300 for a single user version, £700 for a 2-to-4 user network and falling to around £100 per seat on larger networks.

That's the good news. The bad news is that despite all the redevelopment work (it is written in Delphi) this is still a relatively unsophisticated Windows (16-bit) product. For example there are no hooks to DDE or OLE links, so data can only be exported to another application (such as an accounts system) in an ASCII format.

Rather more crucially, the system still has an American flavour to it, in the sense it more closely reflects the way US attorneys operate than the way UK law firms work. For example an American attorney will usually work for a

➔ relatively small number of clients at any one time and record substantial amounts of time in blocks, whereas High Street solicitors tend to have a large number of files on the go at any one time but typically record only a small amount of time per day per file.

So, does this mean Sage Timeslips has missed its mark? Certainly it looks to be too cumbersome for anyone recording time on legal aid files and probably inappropriate for most busy High Street practices.

On the otherhand John Waldron, a practising solicitor and managing director of Curat Lex (whose software is based on Sage products) believes it will appeal to some sectors of the legal market. He identifies three areas...

- Niche practices doing substantial amounts of work on a limited number of files, particularly those with a requirement for detailed "American-style" billing.
- The SoHo sector (sole practitioners and very small firms) looking for Windows time recording but not concerned about having full integration with a legal accounts package.
- Large commercial firms and inhouse legal departments where it could act as data collection software and/or be used by teams working on one or two major projects. □

WILDE SAPTE OPEN UP

City of London firm Wilde Sapte has just installed the DOCS Open document management system from PC Docs to help it "unlock the legal knowledge and expertise" previously buried in over 50 gigabytes (the equivalent of over 13million sheets of A4 paper) of wordprocessed documents stored on its live network.

According to Wilde Sapte IT director Simon Kosminsky, DOCS Open, which was supplied by Quintec (☎ 01628 270601) is also playing a key role in the development of the firm's new know-how database system, which is scheduled to go "live" later this year. □

ME AND MY PC

This week Mike Willstrop, managing director of debt collection software specialists The Beaver Corporation, reveals what technology he – someone who earns his living developing and selling systems to solicitors – uses in the course of his business.

What is your main PC hardware set up? On the desktop – a Dell Optiplex 486, with 24Mb of RAM, an 525Mb hard disk and a local 8Gb network drive. My notebook PC is a Compaq Pentium with 16Mb of RAM and a 600Mb hard disk.

Which operating system do you use? Windows 3.1 on the desktop, Windows 95 on the notebook.

What are the main applications you run? Wordprocessing, spreadsheet, DTP (desktop publishing), diary/scheduler, email, and graphics plus presentation software.

What are your key software programs? Microsoft Word, MS Excel, MS Publisher, WordPerfect email and diary, and Harvard Graphics.

What is your favourite program? MS Publisher – closely followed by Doom.

What is the most disappointing program you have encountered – and why? WordPerfect Diary Scheduler – it is so slow that by the time the scheduler has found any gaps in my diary, it is already the next month.

What was your worst moment with a computer? Not was but *is* as it keeps happening. When I am putting the finishing touches to a document in Publisher and I load a final element from a floppy disk. The virus detect alarm goes off, which not only makes me feel I have just been caught escaping from Colditz but also ensures all my work is lost! ➔

➔ **When does your PC go on in the morning – and get switched off again at night?** From 9.00am in the morning until 7.00pm in the evening.

How many times a day do you check your email? Constantly – it is proactive so it checks me!

What do you never leave home without? Credit cards and mobile phone. ☐

JUST FOR LAUGHS

Electronic publisher Context Ltd (☎ 0171 267 8984) is best known for its legal titles on CD-Rom, including the new *electronic Law Reports* (see *Issue No 9* for details).

But, in a joint venture with the University of Kent, the company has diversified into humour with the publication of *CartoonsCD-Rom*. Priced at £450 + VAT, the Windows format disk contains 18,000 political cartoons and caricatures by artists such as Vicky, Garland and Low from the period 1912 to 1990. ☐

LTI INFORMATION - A NEW SERVICE FOR SUBSCRIBERS

Need a telephone number, a product name, a contact name or any other elusive item of information concerning legal technology? We can help.

As a free service – and only available to subscribers – you can call **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** on ☎ 01379 687518 (or fax us on 01379 687704 or email jcxian@cloudnine.co.uk) and we will provide you with the specialist information you require.

We are happy to provide the names of specific products, information on systems, suppliers, telephone contacts etc between 9-30 and 17.00 Monday to Friday. But, please note the information we supply should not be regarded as an official endorsement – and nor do we offer IT consultancy services. ☐

SPECIAL OFFER FROM PPS

Professional Productivity Solutions (☎ 01865 201801) is currently running a special offer of a copy of the *Discovery Edition* (ie entry level version) of the PPS Practice Management Core System for just £25 + VAT. The software (which will allow firms to organise their client, matter, branch and fee earner records) is available for the Windows and Apple Macintosh platforms and can subsequently be upgraded to the full version.

➔ **LTI is planning to make a regular feature of the latest deals and bargain offers available from suppliers. Any suppliers running genuine special offers or promotions should contact the editorial office. There is no charge for a listing.**

THE 1996 SAMPLE

Approximately 1000 firms across England and Wales were sent copies of the extensive questionnaire and 312 returned it by the Easter cut-off date. Together these firms employ over 19,000 fee earners and 19,000 support staff. Half the firms had a presence in London and the South East, 14.7% were large firms (with more than 25 partners), 17.0% were small firms (1-to-5 partners) 34.4% had 6-to-10 partners and 33.8% had 11-to-25 partners.

AVAILABILITY OF THE REPORT

The 1996 Report is issued free of charge to all participating firms. Copies can also be purchased for £150, with proceeds going to the Solicitors Benevolent Association. For details contact Jim Sloane or Richard Blasdale on ☎ 0171 865 2197.

ROBSON RHODES - THE 1996 LEGAL IT SURVEY

The 1996 results for Robson Rhodes annual legal IT survey - the report many suppliers say they hate but always want to get their hands on - has now been published. But does it contain anything new?

When it first appeared seven years ago, the report broke new ground. Since then the report has become more sophisticated - but so have its critics.

For example, with a total of 10,500 firms in England and Wales, a sample of 312 is hardly significant. Nor is the skewing towards the South-East, which cuts out a number of IT suppliers with primarily regional customer bases.

That 17.0% figure for small firms equates to just 53 practices, compared with the national total of closer to 9000 firms. And, as for supplier market share, who is the bigger - a company that sells two systems worth £100,000 each or one that sells 20 systems at £10,000 each?

One result of this is to render the figures for IT suppliers' market share almost meaningless. As the report suggests, Axxia and AIM are two of the biggest suppliers yet MSS and Quill don't even make it into the supplier top 20.

Then there is Elite - the score of a 2% market share disguises the fact that the company sells to virtually no-one outside of the top 50 law firms or that within the top 20 City of London firms it has sold more systems than all the other suppliers added together.

Rather more useful are findings relating to the types of system being installed.

Inevitably accounts and WP are still big business (although interestingly WordPerfect's once commanding lead is slowly being chiselled away by Microsoft Word) but the last twelve months have also seen "a massive increase" in the number of fee earners (including partners) with workstations (usually PCs) on ➔

➔ their desktops. Robson Rhodes reckon the number of firms providing desktop computing for *all* fee earners has doubled in a year.

However, before we get too excited, the downside is that among small firms (10 partners or less), one third of the sample did not supply any of their fee earners with workstations.

It is also interesting to see what this technology is being used for.

There is a drift towards case management systems, particularly the newer generation of more flexible workflow products although among smaller firms (25 partners or less) systems to support high volume/low cost work, such as debt collection in its various guises, remain the most popular.

More noticeably, the last year has seen the profession wake up to the digital communications revolution with email now in use in 43% of firms responding to the survey.

As already mentioned in the Timeslice story in this edition (see page 3) criticisms about the quality of products and services delivered by IT suppliers have dropped "significantly", with 60% awarding good-to-excellent ratings and only 6% complaining of "poor" quality.

Robson Rhodes suggest the formation of the Legal Software Suppliers Association and initiatives by the English Law Society are helping in this area. But, if the survey's findings are reliable, then perhaps Chancery Lane and LSSA should now be doing something to address the problem of IT training.

According to the report, partners in small firms rarely receive more than half-a-day's training a year and two-thirds of these firms gave *no* IT training at all. The position does improve slightly in bigger firms "but even in large firms it is rare for more than two days' annual IT training to be provided".

Robson Rhodes say it is a "false economy" for firms not to invest in adequate training for partners. Disgrace might be a better word for it. ☐

COMMUNIC@TIONS

FUTURES


Web site operators are welcome to create hyperlink jumps to the **LTi** site at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/cloudnine/>

POSTAL STRIKE BOOST FOR ELECTRONIC MAIL

"Today, its email or no mail" was the theme of the advertising campaign leading UK Internet service provider Unnet Pipex ran during the recent postal strike and the message seems to have sunk in with the company reporting a substantial increase in email traffic over the strike period.

Pipex say that on the strike days themselves (Friday 21st and 28th June) there was an approximate 50% increase in the volume of traffic (2400 email sends per hour compared with the usual 1600 esph) while on the Saturdays following the strikes, network traffic more than doubled. Significantly, on the following Mondays email traffic did not sink back to its pre-strike levels.

Netcom, another Internet service provider, noted a 10% increase in the volume of phone calls and faxes on the strike days but a tripling in email traffic.

 **Technical Note...** Pipex has released pricing figures comparing the cost and time of sending a 10 page document from the company's head office in Cambridge (UK) to London and to Virginia in the USA by post, fax, courier and email.

Cambridge to London

First Class Post (1-2 days)	...£	0.38
Fax (4 minutes)	...£	0.40
Courier (next working day)	...£	27.80
Email (call at local BT rate)	...£	0.15

Cambridge to Virginia

First Class Post (5-7 days)	...£	1.56
Fax (5 minutes)	...£	2.00
Courier (two working days)	...£	29.27
Email (call at local BT rate)	...£	0.15

NEW EMAIL NEWSLETTER FOR SOLICITORS

Norwich based solicitor Karen Brockman has launched a new email newsletter - or "ezine" - for solicitors in England and Wales.

Called *LawNews*, it is available free of charge and contains a mixture of professional news - inevitably reports on the ongoing squabbles at Chancery Lane and a listing of events - both social and legal but with particular emphasis on the needs of freelance solicitors.

There are some useful technical tips, for example the latest edition explains how to add voice annotations to a wordprocessing document so amendment instructions can be passed on to a secretary without the need to use a dictation machine or a computer keyboard. And, there is an extensive listing of situations vacant, including part-time, full time, UK, overseas, permanent and locum posts.

LawNews is published by Badger Applications email: jeremy@badgerap.demon.co.uk

EASIER FAX BY MS MAIL

RedRock Technologies (☎ 01908 246410) has just launched Faxgate for Microsoft Mail, a gateway program that allows any MS Mail user to send a document by email to a fax address - and without the need to manually convert the document into a special file format.

RedRock say the main benefits are that the system automatically looks after file conversion and that no additional training is required - users just "attach and send".

Faxgate is already available for Lotus cc:Mail and Novell GroupWise and the next scheduled releases will support Microsoft Exchange and Lotus Notes.

Faxgate for MS Mail requires a network PC (486DX/66 with 8Mb of RAM running Windows 3.1 and prices start at £1295. A free 30-day evaluation version is available on request from RedRock.

FREE WEB SPACE

Easynet Group plc (☎ 0171 209 0990) has announced that it is to give unlimited Web space to all its subscribers at no additional charge. The company has also unveiled a new utility called Easy Web Wizard, which it describes as "a simple and effective way" for users to publish their own home pages. The standard Easynet charge for Internet access is £13.98 (inc VAT) a month.

OPEN TEXT MOVE

Document management and Intranet systems specialist Open Text UK has moved to new offices at Hayley House, London Road, Bracknell, Berks RG12 2TH. Call ☎ 01344 482200 or check the Web site at <http://opentext.com>

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Don't miss the next edition No 20 out: 29th July.

Alexis Byter's COMPUTER LORE

Normally I don't have much time for management consultants.

In fact I have recently been chasing one consultancy for the best part of a month to find out the intended publication date for one of their regular reports. After many, many unreturned phone calls I was eventually given the definitive answer: "Er, next week, I think".

Twelve hours later it turned up in my post. Considering this consultancy has in the past made a name for itself as the scourge of sloppy IT suppliers who are slow to respond to calls from customers or fall behind schedule delivering new products, I find that just a tad ironic.

But, I digress and in an exception that possibly proves the rule, the Henley Centre has recently published a new report *Teleculture Futures* which suggests that instead of worrying about creating an Internet presence, many organisations would make better use of their time and resources if they concentrated on making more effective use of their existing telephone technology.

In fact, according to Henley, in the course of last year a total of 18.2million customers were lost to businesses within the UK retail, banking, travel and leisure markets alone, because they didn't answer their phones promptly enough, ➔

➔ kept callers hanging on indefinitely with only the muzak version of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* for company, or were just plain rude and unhelpful.

But, no need to be smug, it is not just boutiques, banks, travel agents and cinemas who could benefit from a few lessons in telephone culture. How many prospective new clients do law firms fail to pick up in the course of a year, because someone in the office fails to pick up a phone quickly enough or pass on a vital message?

The report concludes with the thought that most businesses are still treating the telephone as a bolt-on rather than core strategy "but for those firms that are meeting customers' expectations over the phone, the dividends are enormous".

And talking of enormous, so is the price of the *Teleculture Futures* report - a stonking £960 no less.

Alternatively, you could spend just a fraction of this money subscribing to a call waiting or call forwarding service. You could sign up with a voice mail bureau like CallCatchers or a pager/messaging service. You could even - and I appreciate this may be an unfashionably low tech suggestion - buy a telephone answering machine.

Better still, just spend some time explaining to your staff why the phone is so important to your practice. ☐

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