
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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THE RACE IS ON TO DELIVER CONTINUOUS SPEECH

After talking about it for the best part of two years, this summer could finally see the commercial launch of the first truly continuous (or "natural") speech recognition systems that can be used by lawyers and in general business applications.

Although continuous (as distinct from *discrete*) speech recognition systems have successfully been used in some clearly focussed medical disciplines – such as pathology and radiology – for several years, their move into the wider commercial world has been hampered by the lack of industry specific vocabularies known as *contexts*.

Until now it had appeared that Philips were making most of the running, having not only pioneered continuous speech in the medical world but also collaborating in the UK with various legal IT suppliers and, more recently, teaming up with legal publishers Legalease to develop suitable context sets.

Philips are expected to preview a property law continuous speech context at next month's *Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition* at the Barbican in London but it now looks as if their thunder could be stolen by Dragon Systems, who will be unveiling their new NaturallySpeaking product.

NaturallySpeaking is described by Dragon as "the world's first general purpose large vocabulary continuous speech recognition system" but the key ➤

➤ point to note is that it does not require any special contexts – you just switch on your PC and start talking.

Presumably in an attempt to beat not just Philips but also Kurzweil and IBM (who are also known to be working on continuous products) to the finishing line, Dragon is officially only launching a *beta* product this June, with a full release shipping later this year. However Dragon resellers who have seen it say the *beta* system is effectively the complete product.

It is also being described as very fast – capable of coping with dictation speeds in excess of 100 words per minute – and, according to one long established London dealer of speech recognition systems, the most "stunning" speech product to-date.

Pricing has yet to be finalised but is expected to be in the £600-to-£700 region. This falls midway through the current Dragon discrete systems range, which runs from £85 for the Singles edition through to £1189 for the Power product. Dragon will also be offering discounts to users upgrading from the DragonDictate Classic product, which today has a £489 rrp.

Dragon recommend a high spec PC as the hardware for NaturallySpeaking which will only be available on Windows 95 or NT Workstation platforms. Dragon suggest a 133MHz Pentium (preferably MMX), with a 16-bit sound card, 32Mb of RAM (48Mb for NT) and at least 60Mb of spare hard disk capacity.

Several distributors, including Dragon Systems UK and WaspVox, hope to have the system in time for the Barbican, in the meantime further details can be found on Dragon's web site at <http://www.naturalspeech.com> ☐

New office for PC Docs
Following its acquisition of UK distributor Quintec, the PC Docs Group has opened a new central London office as a base for the sales and support of the CMS Open practice management system. PC Docs Group Europe Ltd is at: 4th Floor, 90 Fetter Lane, London EC4A 1EQ, ☎ 0171 505 1200.

Document management DSA, one of Europe's largest document management companies, is now supplying scanning, imaging and archiving systems which the company describes as being "tailor made to meet the needs of individual law practice administrators". For further details call DSA UK on ☎ 01268 288400.

NO PROBLEM WITH INFORMIX ...SAYS AXXIA

Recent newspaper reports suggest that database company Informix is to change its product strategy. As this coincides with a profits warnings by the US parent company, does this mean Informix is losing its way?

Although Informix chief executive Phil White has been criticised in the USA for devoting too much marketing effort to criticising arch rival Oracle, at the expense of promoting his own company's products, its current lacklustre financial performance is not regarded as any real cause for concern.

What is worrying users (who in the UK include law firms running Axxia and Elite software) is the suggestion, first voiced in the USA, that from the autumn of next year Informix would drop its current Online Dynamic Server (ODS) range to concentrate on the new Universal Server multimedia database.

Informix European marketing director Barbara Stanley has said it has never been company policy to force users to adopt new technologies and this view is now being confirmed by independent third parties.

Axxia Systems director Doug McLachlan says that although the Universal Server is a good product, the legal market is not ready for multimedia databases "and certainly not at the prices Informix is currently charging".

Axxia's discussions with Informix leave McLachlan convinced the company will continue to support the Online range for at least the foreseeable future. But, he also believes some confusion may have arisen from the fact Informix recently cut the price of its Online Workgroup Server, so it has now effectively becomes the entry level system in the Online family.

☞ Axxia has just completed its second full year of trading since the management buy out in 1995. Although the results ➡

➡ are still being finalised by the company's auditors, McLachlan says the figures are "very healthy" and will give the competition something to worry about. ☐

MILLENNIUM COUNTDOWN

☎ Solicitec Legal Systems say that because their systems were designed from the outset to use a four digit rather than double digit date format, all their software from 1987 onwards has been fully Year 2000 compliant. For further details call Solicitec on ☎ 0113 250 0020.

☎ Lloyds/TSB (the banking group) has warned that one of the biggest problems associated with the Millennium date change is likely to be managing the "interdependencies between data partners". Speaking at the inaugural seminar of the Kane Thompson Centre for Information Systems Studies at the University of Glamorgan, Lloyds/TSB year 2000 projects manager David Hussey said that while it was vital to have compliant internal systems, it was also essential to ensure data partners - such as BACS and Visa - had Year 2000 proof systems.

☎ Crisis, what crisis ? Attempts to get people to take the Millennium problem seriously received a set back at the end of last month when Robin Guenier, who heads the UK's Taskforce 2000 agency, admitted that the £31 billion figure quoted as the total cost of fixing IT systems was a headline grabbing sum taken from "cloud cuckoo land".

In fact the soon-to-be-published *Holway Report* suggests the total cost will be nearer £10 billion and as most of this will be taken up by normal IT budgets and routine system replacements etc, the additional cost to UK businesses over and above their expected computer spend may be as little as £3 billion. Perhaps the clocks striking midnight on 31st December 1999 will not signal the end of the world as we know it! ☐

LEGAL SOFTWARE ON WINDOWS NT GATHERS SPEED

Pilgrim Systems, one of the first UK legal suppliers to back Microsoft's NT/SQL client/server technology by using it as the platform for its LawSoft system, reports that demand has taken off substantially during the past three months.

According to managing director Ronnie Paton, since January Pilgrim has taken seven major orders for LawSoft. This represents a total order value of around £500,000 and, when fully installed as practice-wide applications, will see the software running on over 400 workstations.

☞ **Comment...** Paton says there are two principal reasons why LawSoft is being taken up by firms such as Fyfe Ireland WS and Wright Johnson & Mackenzie (the, respectively, Edinburgh and Glasgow based firms have both taken LawSoft to replace Digital VAX plus dumb terminal installations).

The first is that in choosing LawSoft they get a "unified" product with marketing, conflict searching, case management, document management, cash and time accounting and billing all capable of being handled from any workstation, from a single relational database.

The second reason cited by Paton is it provides users with a leading edge combination of a Windows NT network, SQL Server database and Windows 95 or NT Client on the desktop, with full integration into the Microsoft Office suite of wordprocessing, spreadsheet and office automation applications.

Other Windows NT news

Pilgrim's experiences are echoed by the Bar and solicitors supplier Applied Computer Expertise (ACE), who have just taken an order worth £150,000 from E. Edwards Son & Noice, one of the largest legal aid practices in London. ➔

➔ As part of a two stage project that will eventually put over 100 staff and fee earners online, the firm is phasing out its old Unix/Novell systems and replacing them with the ACE Infinity package running on Windows NT, with Windows 95 on the desktop.

The firm will also be installing Microsoft Word as a replacement for its WordPerfect for Windows wordprocessing environment. ☐

SAXON EXPAND AS MARKET PICKS UP

Bury St Edmunds-based systems supplier Saxon Computer Systems (☎ 01284 702562) has expanded its offices and opened a purpose-built training facility to meet the growing demand for IT services from East Anglian law firms.

Although Saxon is a distributor for the Avenue Legal Systems family of legal applications software, the company also supplies a full range of office automation products, including project management, spreadsheets, databases and wordprocessing programs.

Saxon say it was this side of the business that led them to recognise the need among law firms for off-site training on standard business software – but by trainers who understood the way legal practices work.

Keith Dalton of Saxon believes the company's location (just off the A14, one of the best roads in East Anglia) also works in its favour, as do the competitive rates charged – from £99 (+VAT) per day per delegate.

☞ **Comment...** In terms of the broader legal software market, Dalton says 1997 has seen a significant upturn in business with orders now coming in at rates not seen since the first half of the 1990s. The greatest interest is in fee earner support systems that can help increase billable productivity, while at the same time keeping down or even realising savings in back office administration costs. ☐

Thompsons order Hatton Blue

Thompsons, the Bloomsbury-based solicitors which has one of the biggest trade union personal injury practices in England, has ordered the new Vectus software from Hatton Blue (☎ 01789 470489) as part of the ongoing development of its internal case management systems.

Who is looking after your data tonight ?

Secure Backup Systems has produced a new guide to data security that looks at the various storage options now available including DAT, CD, Zip drives outsourcing and online, off-site systems. The guide is free and can be obtained from SDS on ☎ 01252 403400 or visit <http://www.securebackup.co.uk>

Using the Net
Kevin McGuinness, professor of business law at Bournemouth University, has written a new guide on using the internet for research in business law and related subjects. *Using the Net* is published by the Old Bailey Press (☎ 0171 385 3377) price £19.95. Included with the book is a disk containing HTML files holding the URLs for some 2000 web sites - so readers do not have to rekey them into their browsers.

New Proxima distributor
Proxima Europe, who make a popular (but expensive) range of digital and multi-media projectors for exhibitions and seminars, have appointed Sahara Visual Systems as their new UK distributors. Sahara (☎ 0181 319 7777) will sell the projectors through a regional dealer network.

BOOM TIME FOR INTRANET TECHNOLOGIES

In the USA intranets and extranets are now being described as the "killer app" for law firms - something so essential no self-respecting practice can afford to be without one. While this position may not yet have been reached in the UK, the last few weeks has undoubtedly seen the start of a boom in intranet related technology.

FileNet has launched a new version of its Saros document management system - Saros@mezzanine Version 1.2 - plus a new application called Kiosk Builder, which together allow network administrators to build intranets without getting heavily involved in writing software code. For further details call ☎ 0181 867 6338 or check <http://www.filenet.com>

Email integration

Slough-based Technocom is targeting the legal market with its new T-Mail concept, which allows firms to create a "virtual private data network" using the internet and existing internal email services (such as cc:Mail, Lotus Notes and GroupWise).

Peter Hill of Technocom says the benefit of the approach is firms with branch offices can exchange data and files electronically without the expense of installing router-based wide area networks (WAN) using ISDN or leased lines.

Connections are channelled via Technocom through what is in effect an extranet. This has an added security spin-off in that the firm's own local area network (LAN) is not directly connected to the broader public internet. For details call ☎ 01753 714200 or check <http://www.technocom.co.uk>

Blue Ice

Blue Ice is a new Cheltenham based intranet services consultancy that can provide technical assistance with the design and development of both internal intranets and wider based extranets. ➔

➔ While this may be nothing new, the company's web site is certainly worth visiting as it includes working examples of intranet applications, along with explanations of the various technologies, how they fit together and what business benefits they can deliver.

Blue Ice is on ☎ 01242 227188 and its web site is at <http://www.blueice.co.uk> One of the directors is Neil Cameron but not, it should be pointed out, the well known legal IT consultant Neil Cameron with a different hat on. ☐

BUILDING A BETTER COPIER

Although laser printers, fax machines and photocopiers all use the same basic scanning plus digital printing technology, it has only been relatively recently that viable "multi function" office equipment has appeared on the market - and much of this has been targeted at the SOHO (small office/home office) sector.

One new system that could appeal to medium-to-larger sized law firms and legal departments is NashuaTec's D420. Although its footprint is the same as that of a conventional A3 photocopier (and it can handle A3 copying) within the one unit it combines a "scan once, copy many times" digital photocopier, a 20 pages per minute, 600dpi network laser printer, a network scanner and a walk-up A3 fax machine. By the end of this year it will also have a network fax facility.

Distributors Portrayal Ltd (☎ 0117 974 1118) say this combination of technologies gives users a system that can create photocopies that are the same quality as laser prints, while at the same time producing laser prints that cost no more than photocopies.

☞ **Comment...** The D420's all-in price of under £9000 is less than the rival Xerox System 35 Document Centre and when the network fax element is added to the configuration, it could even give products such as RightFax and FaxSwitch a run for their money. ☐

CONSULTANTS... THE CONTROVERSY BLOWS UP - AGAIN

The love-hate relationship between legal systems suppliers and computer consultants continues to smoulder on, as this week a leading supplier complains that too many consultants simply do not understand the market.

Picking up from the report on the consultants survey that appeared in Issue No.36 of **LTi** (see page 3 for full story) John Meehan of MSS Management Support Systems comments: "You state that it is the client that is paying the consultant's fees. This is correct. The consultant gets paid to ask deep and meaningful questions but the supplier does not get paid for spending many hours in responding to them."

Meehan suggests that if suppliers were to charge for time spent over and above a normal cost of sale then the final bill to users would rise considerably.

"Surely," says Meehan, "a true consultant should know the products they are evaluating on behalf of a client and not have to ask the same questions for every new client? That should be the skill and knowledge they are offering.

"Research and evaluation of products should be funded by the consultant in his own time, not by the client. That is the expertise they should be supplying.

Meehan says he believes consultants should be qualified people with in-depth knowledge of their subjects, "not paper gatherers which, sad to say, many are." Similarly," he adds, "their fees should be based on their skills not their ability to collect proposals."

Although he has been involved in the UK legal systems market since the late 1970s, Meehan says he "does not know of a single instance where a consultant has contacted us to gain information about our product line for their own understanding and benefit" as distinct from on behalf of their clients. ➡

➡ "I do not know the number of law firms that responded to the **LTi** questionnaire but I am very surprised that none recorded poor. We continually meet firms that have used a consultant in the past with quite disastrous and very costly results.

Meehan concludes by saying: "I am sure that if a solicitor used the services of an expert witness they would expect more than the ability to send out standard questionnaires and collate the results. Suppliers have to live with their mistakes - if any - while the consultant just moves on."

☞ **Comment...** While it is undoubtedly true John Meehan has a reputation for holding strong opinions and not mincing his words - he has long been a critic of the Law Society's dealings with legal IT suppliers - he does raise concerns that have been echoed by other suppliers.

During the course of conducting the consultants survey, several less prominent players in the legal systems market complained to **LTi** of having devoted resources to responding to consultants' highly detailed invitations to tender (ITTs) (and in some instances even putting on product demonstrations and presentations at a firm's premises) only to learn from the firm that they were never a serious contender and apparently had only been invited along by the consultant "to make up numbers".

No doubt some complaints can be explained away as just sour grapes by suppliers annoyed they were not awarded a contract. On the other hand there remains a suspicion that the benefit to law firms of using consultants may sometimes be illusory.

For example, knowing they are to be faced by a consultant who justifies his rates to his clients by telling them the price reductions he will negotiate with a supplier will more than pay for his fees, how many suppliers have not been tempted to increase their prices to cover precisely this eventuality? ☐

Just the ticket

Legal systems integrators TiKiT Ltd (☎ 0171 717 1580) has acquired UK distribution rights to a new "contact relationship management" system called InterAction. The system was developed in the USA by Interface Software Inc and is designed to create, use and share information about a law firm's many different contacts.

☞ **TiKiT say a key feature is its ability to "link" data, so as to avoid the scattering or duplication of contact details across a network. It runs on any Windows platform, is available in 16 and 32-bit versions and is compatible with SQL Server, Oracle and Sybase database products. Subject to licence volumes, prices range from £200 to £80 per user. TiKiT will be showing the system at next month's Barbican Exhibition.**

Demon looks for investor
Demon Internet, the UK's largest independent internet service provider (ISP) with in excess of 100,000 subscribers, has confirmed it is looking for a "strategic partner" to help it expand into Europe after telecoms liberalisation in 1998.

Macfarlanes target public
City of London law firm Macfarlanes has launched a new web site designed "to be of real benefit to the users" rather than full of the usual brochureware material. Current features include an interactive "maternity leave calculator". The site can be found at <http://www.macfarlanes.com>

COMMUNIC@TIONS FUTURES

Direct hyperlinks to all sites mentioned on this page can be found at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/hotlinks/> Details of the Web Master/FM outsourcing service for web site maintenance can be found at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/fm/> □

WATCH OUT, THERE'S A HOAXER ABOUT !

The story in the last edition of **LTi** about the *You Have Got To Read This* email virus prompted Lawrence McNulty of legal marketing consultancy Client Appeal to point out that along with genuine viruses, the internet is also plagued by practical jokers who worry users with tales of hoax viruses.

There are a number of "hoax alert" sites that shed light on the latest bogus viruses. These can be found at <http://kumite.com/myths> and <http://ciac.llnl.gov:80/ciac/> - the latter contains news on genuine viruses as well. McNulty suggests Dr.Solomon's "don't panic" page at <http://www.drsolomon.com/dpanic/> is also useful.

Huw Davies, the IT manager at Browne Jacobson, says that although it is not listed on the CIAC site, the *You Have Got To Read This* virus may itself be a hoax as its description and *modus operandi* is remarkably similar to that of the *Pen Pal Greetings* hoax virus.

Mr Davies adds that a virus cannot usually be activated until its host program is run. This is not achieved by reading an email message. Although *trojans* and viruses have been found as *attachments* to email messages, they must still be extracted and executed before they can do any harm. □

WEB USERS WANTED

Applied Computer Expertise's sales manager Stephen Murphy reports that when the company recently held a ▶

▶ series of seminars for law firms on case management and the internet, delegates were asked if they had ever surfed the web. Out of 55 - in Murphy's words - "computer savvy" partners present, only three had ever used a web browser. □

VOLUME OF TRAFFIC CLOSES MSN FOR 48 HOURS

Over two million users of the Microsoft Network (MSN) were deprived of email services for nearly 48 hours at the end of last month after Microsoft shut-down the network to carry out vital maintenance work and double the number of servers supporting the system.

MSN, which has increased its membership by 40% in the last six months, said the move was necessary to forestall more serious disruption caused by the growing volume of email traffic carried by the network. After the service was restored, MSN took three days to clear a backlog of three million emails.

☞ **Comment...** If a company with all the resources Microsoft has at its disposal can misjudge the explosive growth of the internet, should we really be surprised when a relatively low-key operation such as the LINK network occasionally hits technical problems or under capacity? □

KOMMUNICATE LAUNCH WEB CLIENT FOR FAX

Network fax specialists Kommunicate Ltd (☎ 01252 815514) has launched a new web client option for its RightFAX LAN fax system.

What this means is mobile or telecommuting staff can log in to the web address of their faxserver, via standard web browser software, to access their fax messages. The new module also avoids cross platform compatibility problems, for although RightFAX runs under Windows NT, faxes can be sent or received from any workstation that supports a browser, including Unix, OS/2 and Macintosh. □

COSTS PLUS ON THE WEB

Wordwright Associates, who produce the Costs Plus taxation costings software, now have a web site and official email address. These are <http://members.aol.com/wwalegal> and wwalegal@aol.com. Wordwright say they have deliberately designed a plain site to avoid lengthy graphics downloads.

Since Costs Plus was reviewed in **LTi** (see *Issue No.26, page 5*) Wordwright have added extra functionality to the software, including: work-in-progress analysis, a *drafting mode* feature for costs draftsmen aimed at rapid case entry immediately prior to bill production, as opposed to the normal mode of operation by a firm where files are updated as a case proceeds, and improved handling of legal aid franchising, so non-franchised and franchised rates can, if necessary, be mixed in the same case. Wordwright can also be contacted on ☎ 01473 21275. □

LATEST PATENT NEWS

Derwent Information (☎ 0171 344 2800) has launched a new internet news service reporting on global development in the patents sector. The service is free and covers such topics as patent infringement lawsuits, new legislation and stories on new patents. The site is located at <http://www.derwent.com/news/patnews.html> □

CARPE DIEM SITE OVERHAUL

ProSoft Corporation, the developer of the Carpe Diem system, has just completed a total overhaul and redesign of its web site. Now called ProSoft Online, it includes new navigation controls, a site-wide search engine (as well as searching just on technical documents) and a downloadable *Guided Tour of Carpe Diem*.

The site (at <http://www.pscorp.com>) will shortly be linked into the company's help desk system, so users can log questions or problem reports themselves, as well as check the status of previously reported issues. □

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY DIARY DATES

☉ **May 12 - Support Services in Law Firms** One day conference. Fee £349 + VAT with £50 discount for members of the Solicitors Personnel Managers (IPD) Forum. At Radisson Marlborough Hotel, London. Call Centaur Conferences on ☎ 0171 434 3711 for details.

☉ **May 14 - Legal Issues of Doing Business on the Internet** One day conference on copyright, Web publishing and related issues. Fee £695 + VAT, the event qualifies for 7 hours CPD points. At Cumberland Hotel, London. Call ICM on ☎ 0171 436 5735 for details.

☉ **May 15 - IT for Small Firms** An evening presentation by Mervyn Rundle of Rundle Walker on how small firms can operate without secretaries or admin staff. Hosted by Society for Computers & Law East Anglian branch at Swallow Hotel in Peterborough. Call SCL on ☎ 0117 923 7393 for details.

☉ **May 28 - Public Sector Business Opportunities** One day conference on EC procurement rules and procedures organised by electronic publisher Context Ltd. Fee £225 + VAT. At Centre Point, London. Delegates also receive a free copy of the new Longmans book *Public Procurement Policy* by Paul Clarke, one of the speakers at the event. Call Context on ☎ 0171 267 8989 or check <http://www.justis.com> for details.

☉ **June 3, 4 & 5 - Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition** The UK's leading legal technology exhibition. The location is the Barbican Exhibition Centre in London and admission is free. The doors open each day at 9.30am and close at 6pm on Tuesday and 5pm on Thursday - on Wednesday there is 7.30pm late night closing. For details call Truemist on ☎ 0181 742 3399. □

READER SERVICES

Need help or information ?

If you need a phone number, product name, contact point or any other elusive item of information concerning legal technology, just call the Insider Info Line on ☎ 01379 687518.

Hotlinks

Readers with internet access can visit the Insider Hotlinks pages at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/hotlinks/> where you will find hyperlinks to the Web sites of organisations mentioned in this and previous issues.

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Next issue...
Issue No 39 of the Insider will be published on Monday 19th May, don't miss it.

MARKETING IT MATTERS

This issue sees the start of a new column looking at the relationship between marketing and technology - both how legal technology is marketed and the ways technology can be used to market legal services.

Truemist in sponsorship deal with The Lawyer

Truemist Professional Exhibitions, the organiser of the *Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition* at the Barbican, has secured *The Lawyer* magazine as the sponsor for its new two day *Northern Legal Office Exhibition* at the Manchester GMEX Centre in October.

The event replaces the northern and midlands legs of the one day *Software for Solicitors* show Truemist has run each autumn for several years. Companies who also exhibit at the Barbican can benefit from "significant reductions on the price" of stands at Manchester. Truemist is expected to announce details of its sponsorship arrangements for the 1998 *Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition* at this June's Barbican event.

Meanwhile, *The Lawyer* is putting the finishing touches to its soon-to-open internet site. Along with the latest news, this will also include web pages carrying legal recruitment advertising. ➔

The Gringras is greener

Over the last decade it has become accepted practice for lawyers to try to market their services, as well as establish brand images for their firms, by being associated with books or speaking at conferences and seminars. But what are we to make of Clive Gringras, who is one of the speakers at IBC's *Brass Tacks & the Internet* workshop this summer?

Clive, who co-wrote one of the top selling games for Acorn computers several years ago, is described as the author of Butterworths' *Nabarro Nathanson: The Laws of the Internet*. Nice credit, except the brand image is rather blurred because he now works at the rival new media law firm Olswang.

Talking of titles, IBC is also hosting a conference this summer called *Cyber!@w* - apparently it is all about "doing business in the Global Village". Well, why make do with one cliché when you can have two?

One click and it has gone

Finally, if you are considering paying to advertise on the web, check out <http://www.pawluk.com> where US high tech advertising consultant Hal Pawluk argues that most *banner sites* are poor value for money and may be overpriced by as much as a factor of 50. He reckons most of \$300million spent on web advertising in 1996 was "money down the tubes". ☐

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