

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

iNSIDER

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

In association with



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Y2K - 434 DAYS LEFT BUT ARE YOU ONE OF THE 25 PERCENT ?

By the time you read this there will be 434 working days (and just 90 weekends) left until the end of the century. After that you risk being hit by Year 2000 computing problems.

Amid signs the UK government is finally taking the problem seriously (last week Tony Blair announced an extra £97 million of government funding to tackle the millennium "bomb") the good news for law firms is that thanks to being relatively late arrivals on the computing scene and not having a legacy of large mainframe systems to support, most firms should face little or no Y2K disruption from their internal IT systems.

Nevertheless, from the data at our disposal **LTi** estimates that at least 25% of computerised legal practices in the UK are exposed to Y2K risks because they are either still running outdated hardware and/or non-millennium proof operating systems, such as some of the earlier versions of Unix.

The message is clear. If you have not already done so, you must commence your Y2K planning now, with a view to commencing the implementation of any projects no later than the early autumn of this year. In an ideal world you should aim to have any replacement systems in place at least 12 months before 1st January 2000.

Topics to cover include not only a review of your own IT systems (computer hardware and software etc) but also any other office technology containing "embedded chips" (see story on page 5). ➔

➔ In addition, you must check the Y2K policies of third party organisations you have regular commercial dealings with (such as online service providers or the Legal Aid Board) to ensure that a possible failure of their IT systems does not expose your practice to financial or legal risk.

Along with special stories on the topic, **LTi** will in future flag Year 2000 computing items with a **X Y2K** logo. ☐

AND THEN THERE WERE NINE

The English Law Society's project to identify suitable IT "partners" who can supply low cost practice management systems for smaller High Street firms has taken another step forward with the 26 "serious" contenders being whittled down to a final shortlist of nine suppliers.

Chancery Lane hopes to appoint three or possibly four suppliers as official partners and is currently using an independent research company to conduct a customer satisfaction survey among these companies' existing users.

For commercial reasons the names of the nine will not be disclosed until after the selection process has been completed. However **LTi** has been able to identify the suppliers who failed to get through to the shortlist (reasons for rejection included price, small user base, not having 32-bit technology and limited relevance of software) as well as others who refused to put their names forward.

Among the *refuseniks* are MSS, Laserform and Perfect Software. Possibly the most surprising *reject* is the Office Solutions group, which was involved in the original HSSK project and has just been selected as a high street solution provider by the Scottish Law Society. ☐

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Peapod to launch branch system

Peapod Solutions is to launch a new version of its One Stop Solution system to meet the needs of firms that carry out accounts postings through semi-autonomous branches. Instead of having real-time links between the branches and head office, the central system will *poll* the branches for the day's data during the night, update the ledgers and then send a copy of the updated records to each branch in time for the next day's start of business.

From Docs to Resolution

Former PC Docs salesman Keith Hardell, who had worked on the document management and CMS Open sides of the business, has joined Resolution Systems. He will now be working on the sales team handling the company's FirmWare PMS system.

NEW LIFELINE FOR FOR ACE INFINITY USERS ?

The on-off saga of Applied Computer Expertise's attempts to dispose of its ACE Infinity legal systems for solicitors business has taken another turn – this time in a more positive direction – with the news that Peapod Solutions and TCO are now offering a joint rescue plan for larger ACE users.

Although ACE originally said it would cease to offer support services from the end of March this year, the lack of a buyer for the business plus the threat of legal action has compelled ACE to extend this deadline by a further six months.

Peapod, which has already converted a number of smaller ACE users over to its One Stop Solution for High Street firms, is now working with TCO to offer larger ACE users a more powerful case and practice management solution.

Peapod managing director Ian Wimbush says that along with the various technology arguments, one of the attractions of this deal is ACE users will be able to exchange their existing Infinity software licences to TCO licences “at a fraction of their usual price” providing they commit to proceed before the end of May this year.

Or, as Wimbush puts it: “Firms clinging to the extension to ACE's deadline may think six months is a long time but in software terms unless a commitment is made shortly, that time will soon flash by.”

Another benefit of this deal is that the TCO team also includes Geoff and Jane Morris who, having in the past worked for ACE, have an in-depth understanding of the Infinity product.

✕ **Y2K** The UniVerse database in ACE Infinity is Y2K compliant but Peapod and TCO are warning users that they could still face year 2000 problems if they continue to use the WordPerfect 5.1 version of the ACE WordTrack document management system. ➔

➔ ➔ **Comment...** This development does sound like good news for ACE users – at least for those that have not already signed up with SOS, Axxia and others. In the meantime, what of the users of the Admiral LegalMind system – another group of firms that appear to have been left in the lurch?

The latest intelligence received by **LTi** is that senior Admiral legal division executives have been visiting the senior partners of law firm user sites to ask for their patience and to assure them there will be a satisfactory resolution to the current uncertainty surrounding the future of the LegalMind product. □

COMPETITION BACK IN DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT FIELD

For the last three years the UK document management software market has been dominated by the DOCS Open system from PC Docs to the extent that one-time market leader SoftSolutions is now nowhere to be seen. But, could the DOCS' hegemony be coming to an end?

World Software and its UK distributor Text Systems are making another attempt to win support for its rival Worldox system. In the United States the product was recently rated a better deal in terms of price, performance and ease of use than DOCS.

After a period in the doldrums, the Saros Mezzanine document management system (now part of the FileNet group) is staging a come-back. FileNet now has a “strategic alliance” with legal PMS systems supplier Resolution and the two are working on a major project for a “top 10” City of London firm (believed to be Slaughter & May).

Finally, and in keeping with its reputation for pioneering technologies other firms only dream about (NeXT, SPARCstations etc) Linklaters & Paines is currently piloting a project using the Documentum document system. ➔

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➔ ➔ **Comment...** Although it has been described as a transient technology that will be redundant when Microsoft finally gets around to incorporating a decent document management facility in a future version of one of its operating systems, there still seems to be plenty of life left in the UK document management market. (In fact PC Docs is part of a joint venture with Microsoft in the USA to develop a comprehensive electronic filing system "for the legal and justice communities").

The current competition is also good news for users as it is creating a buyers' market and an opportunity to negotiate bargains. L*Ti* has heard of DOCS licences selling for as little as £100 per seat whereas the list price a year ago was over £400.

✕ **Y2K** There is uncertainty on the point but it appears that to ensure the Y2K compliancy of Novell's SoftSolutions document management system, you must upgrade to GroupWise version 5.1. □

WINDOWS 98... A LAME DUCK ?

Microsoft is now expected to launch its much delayed Windows 98 operating system on 25th June. The list price will be £125, the street price is likely to be nearer £105 and an upgrade from Windows 95 is expected to cost £60.

Although the next couple of months will inevitably see a growing volume of Microsoft inspired hype for the product, there currently seems to be very little enthusiasm for the upgrade within the computer industry.

The view among systems houses, resellers and consultancies (some of whom are already describing 98 as a lame duck) is that whereas there were good reasons for migrating from Windows 3.1 to 95, there are few business advantages in moving from 95 to 98. Or, as one American consultant put it: "98 amounts to a few bug fixes and feature enhancements". ➔

➔ An added complication is Microsoft has itself admitted Windows 98 is an end of line product that will be superseded by an expanded family of Windows NT operating systems. This in turn is fuelling the view that rather than have the aggravation of moving to 98 and then on to NT, law firms should either stick with Windows 95 or, if an upgrade is necessary, move straight to NT. (And of course there are also a lot of firms that are still rolling out Windows 95.)

➔ **Comment...** In addition to the NT or 98 consideration, a further issue is Windows NT versus the Hydra *thin client* debate.

On first impressions Hydra (now expected to be launched at the end of this year) seems to be an attractive option because the PCs or "Windows terminals" it runs on need only 8Mb of Ram. This is in sharp contrast with the 32Mb of Ram needed for Windows NT 4.0 or the 64Mb Microsoft is recommending for next year's NT 5.0 system.

But, some cracks are starting to appear in the Hydra facade. For example, the maximum number of terminals that can be attached to a single Hydra NT server is limited to 25 per processor.

A rather more serious limitation is that although Microsoft originally said 90 percent of Windows applications would run on Hydra "out of the box", within the last couple of weeks the company has begun warning businesses that "a lot of applications" will have to be revamped using Microsoft's NT Server guidelines in order to get "acceptable performance".

NT 5.0, Hydra, Windows 98? It may be exciting to be at the sharp end of the technology but these are so leading edge as to be bleeding edge.

Until the dust settles and some of the current uncertainties are resolved, it looks as if the best advice for law firms is to let other people be the guinea pigs and, for the time being at least, stick with tried and tested products such as Windows 95 or even Windows 3.1 □

People and places

Manchester firm Kuit Steinart Levy, which recently merged with Hammelburger Marks to form a 16 partner practice, has ordered an 80 user Wisdom Suite practice management system from Avenue Legal Systems.

According to Nationwide Exhibitions, over 2000 people visited the new Solicitors National Legal Office show at the Birmingham NEC. Nationwide say the majority of exhibitors reserving stands for next year, including Lexology and Peapod, are taking much larger spaces.

High-tech marketing guru Geoffrey Moore, the author of *Crossing the Chasm*, has joined the board of document management specialists Documentum. Visit <http://www.documentum.com>

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Publishing news

Butterworths is gearing up to announce new developments in its electronic publishing programme. Full details next month but one suggestion is that it could involve a link up with Smith Bernal's Case Track service (see *LTi* issue 50).

Bond Street solicitors Jeffrey Green Russell has relaunched its *Internet Law Digital Newsletter* as a publication all organisations (not just the firm's clients) can receive. There is no charge for the monthly newsletter, which is sent by email.

JGR senior partner Clive Whitfield-Jones said the move had been prompted by the "clearly unmet demand for news, comment and analysis on developments in internet law". To subscribe, send a note of your name, organisation and email address to: info@cloudnine.co.uk

LEGAL PUBLISHERS IN FORMS INITIATIVE

In a joint initiative to promote the benefits of electronic publishing, the English Law Society and a number of legal publishers have produced 20,000 copies of a free sample CD-Rom disk containing a selection of legal forms most solicitors practices will find useful.

The disk contains employment precedents from Croner, residential conveyancing forms from the Law Society, county court, matrimonial and trust forms by Proforma and Companies House forms supplied by Capsoft UK.

The common element is all the material uses HotDocs, the document assembly software which can be found in a growing number of electronic forms and precedents. Other HotDocs publishers include CCH, Sweet & Maxwell, W.Green and FT Law (now Sweet & Maxwell).

As part of the promotion, the CD includes a free copy of HotDocs Player, a software package that allows users to access, complete on screen and then print off all the sample forms on the disk.

Commenting on the initiative, Russell Shepherd, managing director of HotDocs distributor Capsoft UK, said: "We hope to increase the awareness among solicitors of a useful technology now emerging as a common platform for legal publishers. Once firms have tried the samples, we believe they will want to buy additional forms and precedents."

☞ **Comment...** Copies of the CD are being distributed with this week's issue of the *Law Society's Gazette* but additional copies can be obtained from Capsoft UK (fax: 0131 476 7190). The latest HotDocs software runs on all Windows systems (3.1, 95 and NT) and is compatible with Windows versions of WordPerfect Word, and Ami Pro. Other programs in the HotDocs range (starting with HotDocs User with retails from £99) will allow firms to create and edit their own forms and precedents. ➔

➔ Capsoft UK plans similar initiatives in the Scottish and Irish legal markets and has launched a new web support site at <http://www.hotdocs.co.uk> where visitors will be able to access additional software and forms for free download and use. ☐

THREAT TO NEXT DAY LAW REPORTS ?

With an ITAC (Information Technology & Courts) working party under Lord Saville looking at the role of electronic law reporting, there are now suggestions that the market for next day unapproved judgments could be coming to an end.

Although Lord Saville is an IT enthusiast (he was responsible for first putting a Court of Appeal judgment on the internet) he and other judges are concerned about the growing volume of *unreported* and unapproved judgments now available on online and web-based law reporting services.

While quality is an issue, another worry is that relevance may be being sacrificed as rival services rush to publish as many cases as possible in the minimum period of time, typically within 24 hours. The result is that in a growing number of cases judges are hearing arguments based on "precedents" of uncertain pedigree.

The ITAC committee is expected to recommend reducing the time it takes judges to produce official judgments and at the same time narrowing the period in which unapproved judgments are admissible in court.

☞ **Comment...** While Butterworths has always said its *All England Reporter* next day service can be differentiated from the competition because its material is "reliable, accurate and authoritative", it is a moot point how services with shorter track records in law reporting, such as Lawtel and *New Law Online*, will cope if there is a curb on the use of unapproved judgments. ☐

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COUNTDOWN TO THE MILLENNIUM

Less than twenty-one months to go until the clocks strike midnight on the 31st December 1999 and – according to one theory at least – the end of civilisation as we know it.

Although, as reported on the front page, the legal profession may be less exposed to Y2K computing problems than some other industries, there is no room for complacency and so in this issue we report on some of the latest developments.

Informix The database developer Informix has issued a statement to the effect all currently supported Informix products are Y2K compliant and the use or occurrence of dates on or after 1st January, 2000 “will not adversely affect performance”.

But, the company has also warned that some Y2K issues are not within the control of the database software. “Specifically, the manner in which an application is written to accept a date value.”

Informix suggests problems of this nature must be addressed at the application level – which means law firms should take it up with the third-party legal systems house that developed the particular application. However, Informix has also added a “DBCentury environment variable” to a wide range of its products and these may help users provide Y2K compliance without recoding.

The Informix product manager with responsibility for Y2K compliance is Terry Lawlor on ☎ 0181 818 1098.

Technology for Business TFB has advised users that its older character based Accounting Partner system, which was developed using Meta4, is not Y2K compliant. The company is preparing an upgrade using the MF Desk development tool and hopes to be able ship this by the end of this year. TFB’s new 32-bit Partner for Windows system, which runs on a Microsoft NT/SQL Server platform is fully millennium compliant. ➔

➔ **Lexis** The Lexis-Nexis online information service now has an extensive archive of Y2K related news stories from leading business publications from around the world. Look in the “NEWS” library under the new “Y2KNWS” file.

Embedded Systems The Y2K problem is not confined to computer equipment (hardware, applications software and operating systems). Thanks to the use of “embedded chips” just about every piece of office technology employing a double digit (ie “98” not “1998”) date format could be non-Y2K compliant.

Among the devices that could contain a problem are: heating and air conditioning controls; CCTV, fire and security alarms, access control systems and lifts; faxes, photocopiers, telex and franking machines and telephone switch boards; lighting and car park controls; and laser dot and bar code systems.

Although manufacturers of these systems are claiming that so far only about five percent have proved non-Y2K compliant, the difficulty is identifying that percentage.

For example, you could test a fire alarm by advancing the clock settings to 01/01/00 but if the system is non-Y2K compliant, that might permanently disable it and you may then be unable to return it to its pre-test condition.

The better strategy has to be to carry out an audit to identify the systems at risk and then contact each supplier or manufacturer.

BIOS testing Most of the more modern personal computers that are non-Y2K compliant can be fixed by adjusting the BIOS element. Obviously many firms will regard this as under-the-bonnet stuff to be left to their hardware suppliers. But, firms wanting to tackle it themselves should be aware there are a growing number of software products available to test and/or fix the BIOS.

These include *Timebomb* from Continua Systems (☎ 01772 622700) price £30. *Millennium Bug Toolkit* from Computer Experts (☎ 01273 696975) ➔

➔ price from £44.65. There is also a network version of this application from £450. *Millennium Buster* from Euromax Electronics (☎ 01262 601006). The diagnostic element costs £9.99, the BIOS fix costs an extra £29.99. *Check 2000 PC* from Greenwich Mean Time (☎ 01243 787468). The stand alone version costs £49.99 and there is a client/server version from £250. *Y2k PCPRO* from Year 2000 Consultants (☎ 0800 472000). The test element is free and can be downloaded from the company’s web site, the fix costs £29.95. *Prove It 2000* from Ninety Nine 2000 (☎ 01480 372000), price £39.95. And *Centennial 2000* from Centennial UK (☎ 01488 682444) which is only available for networks, with prices starting at £28 per unit and falling to £8 per unit for 4000+ user networks. □

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Seen around the Web

The English Law Society is now adding the final touches to its new web site at <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk> The site, which is due to go live at the end of April, will include member services, an online version of the *Gazette* plus material of interest to the public.

Along with the main Lexis-Nexis European web site at <http://www.lexis-nexis.co.uk> there is now also a new US-based site at <http://www.lexis.com> which acts as a front end to the database's new Xchange facility.

In common with the standard Lexis proprietary online service, this is primarily a pay-to-use site but it does also feature a number of free facilities. Probably the most useful of these is a *Hot Law* service containing summaries of the latest high profile US cases and legislation going through Congress.

Internet & comms news...

KEEPING ON TOP OF EMAIL

The Folio Corporation, best known for its Folio Views CD-Rom interface in the electronic legal publishing market, has just launched a new email management system called MailMax.

MailMax is intended to make it easier to filter, archive and search the large volumes of email messages many lawyers now have to manage and store. Among the facilities available are: full text searching, data compression which can reduce archive sizes by 50 percent, the ability to annotate stored messages, and the ability to logically group related messages by personal criteria.

MailMax uses the same search and retrieval capabilities of other Folio technology and is available in the UK through Folio distributor Catalyst ☎ 01993 708700. Prices start at £26.75 +VAT for a single licence but there are volume discounts.

On a technical note, MailMax runs on a Windows NT/95 platform and currently supports just Microsoft Exchange (4 & 5) email however this will soon be expanded to include Microsoft Outlook, Outlook Express, GroupWise, Netscape and Eurdora Mail. □

NEW MS EXCHANGE-BASED WORKFLOW SOFTWARE

Eastman Software, part of the Kodak group, has just launched WMX, a new Microsoft Exchange-based workflow management system that will allow law firms to share and route documents between fee earners.

WMX is fully compatible with the Imaging for Windows accessory in Windows 95 and NT 4.0 and will allow document images, files, folders and complete projects to be moved around an Exchange network while at the same time maintaining a full audit trail.

The Eastman Software range now also includes Document Manager for ➔

➔ Microsoft Exchange (DMX) which can deliver a full range of document management facilities over an Exchange network. DMX uses the Verity Search '97 system as the basis for its search and retrieval facilities. Further information on the whole range can be found at <http://www.eastmansoftware.com> □

LINKLATERS SPENDS £3 MILLION ON NEW NETWORK

Linklaters & Paines has installed a £3 million voice and data network from Ericsson (☎ 01444 234567) to support 1500 staff who have relocated from three sites in London to the firm's new headquarters building in Silk Street.

Along with providing a LAN/WAN link between Silk Street and Linklaters' global support centre in Colchester, the new system will provide all staff with 10 mbps of bandwidth on the desktop, with the option of migrating to ATM in the future. Part of the project also includes installing Ericsson's MD110 Windows NT based voice network, supporting voice mail and call logging facilities. □

VIDEO CONFERENCING - IN SEARCH OF CRITICAL MASS

For the last three or four years the manufacturers of video conferencing equipment have been optimistically predicting that "this year will be the year video conferencing finally takes off".

But it hasn't and so why should 1998 be any different?

In fact the last twelve months have seen videocon hardware prices fall and, perhaps more importantly, BT has not only made its ISDN pricing structure more attractive but it has also extended the network so high speed lines are now available through almost all of the UK. (The last remaining areas should be connected by the end of the year.)

There are also now two organisations championing the use of video conferencing within the legal ➔

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➔ community. These are the Bar Council and the commercial organisation Video Conferencing for Lawyers (VCL).

Both take the same view, namely that barristers, solicitors, the courts and potentially every part of the justice system could save money if instead of having people travelling around the country to attend routine meetings, conferences and court proceedings, the majority of these "face-to-face" transactions could be conducted just as easily via a video conference link.

VCL's Michael Kaye, who is also a practising solicitor, reckons that if a law firm can avoid just one trip from offices in, say north London, to the Temple for a conference with counsel, it could save the £175 a month it costs to lease VCL's top of the range videocon system.

Kaye also points out that along with saving time, disruption, plus the fact travel is charged out for costs and legal aid at a far lower rate than other types of legal work, by not having to leave the office, the lawyer has the opportunity to handle other more profitable work.

L*Ti* has also heard that some lawyers in the United States are now supplying more important commercial clients with video conference systems as a goodwill gesture. The logic here seems to be that yes a lawyer's time is a chargeable asset but clients also value their time and would be rather be getting on with their business than attending meetings with their legal advisors.

Solicitors who have used video conferencing say that although initial meetings can be awkward, once both sides become familiar with the technology and accustomed to some of its foibles (there is still a slight delay between you speaking and the other side hearing what you say) the quality of instructions is actually better than can be achieved during a conventional telephone call.

On a rather more techie note, it should also be mentioned that British Telecom now offers a service called MSN (multiple subscriber numbers) with its ➔

➔ new ISDN 2e connection. This means that with the aid of a device called a terminal adaptor, you can not only have a video conference system linked to an ISDN line and a PC to internet comms link but also as many as eight separate conventional phone and fax lines.

Installing ISDN could therefore also be an opportunity to cut back on the number of standard business lines coming into an office.

☞ **Comment... Legal Technology Insider** has now installed ISDN and can now offer a video conference connection. We are using a Motion Media MM220 H.320-compliant dedicated videophone. The number to call on both channels is 01379 687690 - this line can also handle conventional speech-only calls. ☐

LEGAL IT DIARY DATES

April 22, The Future of Knowledge Management for Lawyers, Shakespeare's Globe, London. A free half day (starts 10.00 am) programme of seminars looking at the role of the DOCS Open range of products in document and know-how management. The session concludes with a tour of the theatre and lunch. For details call the marketing department of PC Docs on ☎ 01923 814700 or email marketing@pcdocs.com

April 23, Legal Technology Briefing, Clifford Chance offices, Paris. Invitation only briefing by L*Ti* editor Charles Christian on trends in law office technology and use of the internet by lawyers for heads of IT at the Paris offices of international law firms. For details email: keithc@copittrak-europe.com

April 30, Kaye Tesler Seminar, Crossmead Conference Centre, Exeter. Mixture of video conferencing open day, private lecture (attracting CPD points) by solicitor Michael Kaye on the use of the internet by lawyers plus workshops on internet and video conference systems. ➔

➔ Starts 9.30 am with the CPD lecture running from 2.00 to 4.00 pm. The event will also feature a live video link to St John's Chambers in Bristol. There will be a further internet/videocon seminar on **19th May** at the Holiday Inn, Brent Cross, London. For details call Kaye Tesler on ☎ 0181 809 6756.

May 20, Internet Workshops, Manchester Conference Centre. A full day (starts 10.00 am, ends 5.00 pm) of seminars and workshops on the legal and practical aspects of the internet, jointly organised by Manchester Law Society and the Society for Computers & Law. Speakers include solicitors Michael Kaye and Nigel Miller and consultants Neil Cameron and Delia Venables. For details call the SCL on ☎ 01179 237393 or email: ruth.baker@scl.org

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

Next issue...

Issue 59 of the Insider will be published on Monday 4th May.

Recruitment Advertisement

JOIN THE LAWSOFT TEAM

Pilgrim Systems is currently experiencing the most dynamic growth in its 20 year history. Our new Windows NT/SQL Server product – LawSoft – is the reason. We consequently have an on-going requirement for skilled IT people to join our team.

Installations Analysts

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Pilgrim are a Microsoft Solution Provider. LawSoft is written in Visual C++.
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Applications will be treated with strict confidentiality and should be sent to:
J C Cummings, Pilgrim Systems plc, 21 Young Street, Edinburgh EH2 4HU.
Telephone: 0131 226 5528. E-mail: jc@lawsoft.co.uk

Stop Press... Stop Press...

MICROSOFT REINVENTS THE TELEGRAM

In a move that can be best described as reinventing the telegram, the Microsoft Network (MSN) and the Royal Mail have launched a new service that allows email messages to be delivered to businesses that do not have an email address.

Called RelayOne, the service forwards ➡

➡ emails on to the Royal Mail, where they are then printed out and dispatched by either first class mail or airmail. The service is accessed by a web browser (at <http://www.relayone.msn.com>) and users pay by an online credit card transaction with prices starting at £1.50 per page. MSN say the attraction of the service is users will now be able to send all mail, both electronic and conventional, directly from their computers. ☐

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