

CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

THE SOURCE FOR INDEPENDENT LEGAL TECHNOLOGY NEWS, COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

DPS PLANNING TO ALSO BE TOP IN ACCOUNTS ?

Having had its software consistently rated the market-leading case management system in recent years (biggest selling stand-alone case management package in the UK according to the 1996 and 1998 Robson Rhodes reports), legal systems supplier DPS is now diversifying into the legal accounts market with a new product code named "Merlin".

Merlin, which will be given its first public preview at the *Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition (SOLEX)* at the Barbican in London next month (15th-to-17th June), is described by DPS managing director Osman Ismail as "a flexible modern accounts system offering high levels of functionality and fully specified to cope with the latest franchise and practice management standards".

Based on SQL Server client/server technology, although the system is primarily aimed at medium-sized practices wanting an integrated case and practice management solution, Merlin also includes a number of optional features, including multi-currency Euro-ready accounting and franchise management (DPS calls them "parameter switches") that should extend the software's appeal to both larger firms as well as smaller legal aid practices.

■ After trading as a partnership for 14 years, the MCS business has incorporated as DPS Software plc. All trading assets and liabilities of the partnership have been transferred into the new company. The address, phone numbers and staff remain unchanged.

SOLEX - THE PLOT THICKENS

Following the story in the last Insider about the *Solicitors & Legal Office Exhibition (SOLEX)* heading for a new venue in 2000, an irate Imark managing director David Pegler denied there were any plans to move the show to Earls Court. He did however admit the organisation had been investigating alternative London venues and dates but is refusing to comment further until next year's contractual arrangements have been finalised.

■ The word on the exhibitions' grapevine is that SOLEX will now stay at the Barbican in 2000 but be brought forward to the earlier date of 9th-to-11th May. Meanwhile Cordial Events, which was set up by former SOLEX organisers David Warren and David Collin, is planning to hold a rival exhibition and conference - *Legal IT 2000* - in London next year. The exact venue and date have still to be finalised but the organisers have secured *Legal Week* magazine as sponsors for the first two years' shows.

ALTERNATIVE TEAM GET NEW LOOK

In preparation for the launch of its new time recording software - *The Time* - legal systems house Alternative Team has revamped its web site to include a new search engine and online enquiry forms.

The new *Time* software is heavily slanted towards handling Woolf and legal aid work, with *Crystal Reports* incorporated to process LAB reporting requirements. Alternative's Bruce Argue says one of the key design concerns is to create a package that complies with the new legal aid and civil procedure rules yet is still compatible with firms' existing case and practice management systems.

<http://www.a-team.co.uk>

E-MAIL OK FOR ABA

The American Bar Association has given its approval to the practice of sending client documents by e-mail. The ABA standing committee on ethics and professional responsibility said that under most circumstances a lawyer does not violate a client's confidentiality by transmitting documents via unencrypted electronic mail. The committee compared e-mail to the use of land-line telephones, cellular and cordless phones, fax machines and postal services.

NEW FACES OF 1999

It is often said there are already too many legal IT suppliers in the UK but this does not stop a steady stream of new faces hoping to break into the market.

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THE INSIDER WEB SITE

Visit the Legal Technology Insider web site for up-to-the-minute news and hyperlinks to additional information, including a full listing of legal IT events.

<http://www.legaltechnology.co.uk>

PEOPLE AND PLACES

■ PROFESSIONAL PLUS, the new legal IT implementation consultancy set up by former KEYSTONE manager COLIN MORRIS, has moved into offices at Farringdon House, 105-107 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3BU. The phone number is 0171 713 8833 (fax 0171 713 8844). Email colin_morris@pplus.co.uk

■ Long-time AIM employee STEVE BROADLEY (he originally joined the company in 1978 as a programmer but in recent years has been involved in legal systems sales) has been appointed a director of AIM's Legal & Finance Division, with special responsibility for sales and marketing.

■ MOUNTAIN SOFTWARE, one of the current LAW SOCIETY-listed software solution providers, has been placed as one of the fastest growing IT companies in the Midlands in the recent DELOITTE & TOUCHE Fast 50 Programme Awards.

■ Former LAW SOCIETY head of IT ASHLEY SOLLITT has commenced unfair dismissal proceedings against his former employers in the North London Employment Tribunal. Mr Sollitt, who had been offered a £91,000 severance package by Chancery Lane, is reported to be seeking £300,000 in redundancy and compensation payments. The Law Society has subsequently outsourced a lot of its IT operations.

■ After just six months AVENUE LEGAL SYSTEMS has dropped ITPR as its PR consultancy (here on LTI we found their performance distinctly underwhelming) and reappointed its former agency JPR COMMUNICATIONS. JPR will also handle Avenue's new advertising campaign.

■ INTERFACE SOFTWARE, whose InterAction relationship management system is attracting a growing user base among UK law firms, has been named as one of the year's fastest growing Windows ISVs (independent software vendors) in North America in an annual award sponsored by INFORMATION WEEK and MICROSOFT. Interface's annual revenue grew by 170 percent in 1998.

QUILL STILL FINDING GREEN-FIELD SITES

Speaking at its recent annual user group conference, Quill Computer Systems' managing director Tony Landes told the audience the company was still winning a substantial volume of new business from solicitors' practices investing in computer systems for the first time. Quill says that in the past 12 months 48 percent of its business came from existing users, with the remainder coming from green-field sites or firms migrating to Quill from other legal IT systems.

■ On the technology front, Quill has adopted the Amicus Attorney system as its preferred Windows-based generic case management software however it is investigating the demand for dedicated systems to handle high volume debt collection and conveyancing. Quill has also completed Y2K upgrade work for firms still using its original Laudit system.

OFFSHORE E-COMMERCE SEMINARS ON CHANNEL ISLES

Sun Microsystems' e-commerce development manager Richard Barrington recently described the Channel Islands as an "interesting opportunity" for electronic commerce systems vendors as online businesses can benefit from an advantageous tax regime.

In particular, the VAT-free status is encouraging a growing number of online service providers to locate their web and e-commerce servers on the islands. This is because under present tax rules, Internet transactions are subject to the VAT rates prevailing in the country where the purchase is made - and this is usually defined as where the web server is located.

Reflecting this new status of offshore tax haven turned web hosting heaven, later this month Jersey law firm Crills (the first Channel Islands' firm to open a web site) is hosting two half-day conferences on the future of offshore electronic commerce.

The dates are 26th May on Guernsey and 27th May on Jersey. The events are being organised by IPC Conferences (0161 445 8623) and the fee is £210 per delegate - no VAT.

INDEPENDENT - AT A PRICE

The managing director of a long established legal systems supplier, who for obvious reasons would prefer to remain anonymous, has written to Legal Technology Insider to complain about the behaviour of so-called independent computer consultants.

In the course of running a series of one-to-one new product briefings for consultants, one asked for a £200 per hour consultation fee to attend the presentation and another said he would happily recommend the company's product but only if they paid him a commission of 10 percent on the total value of the sale.

FREESERVE RAISES TWO KEY QUESTIONS

Following last month's launch of the Freeserve Desktop Lawyer service on the Internet, the reaction of most lawyers seems to focus upon one of two key questions.

■ The first is what will be the impact upon the rest of the profession? Will it open up new markets or merely prove a zero-sum game, with the demand for legal services turning out to be a fixed pie that can be redistributed but not enlarged. The jury is still out on that and it will probably be a couple more years before the answer becomes clear.

■ The second question concerns the potential exposure to professional indemnity claims. The Freeserve Desktop Lawyer web site does carry an extensive terms and conditions section, when printed out it ran to four feet in length and includes the following disclaimer:

"We will not have any liability to you at all if you use any document without obtaining appropriate legal advice as to its suitability for your particular requirements. Whatever advice you receive is the responsibility of the solicitor or other person advising you and we cannot in any way be responsible for it... Nor will we have any responsibility at all for the alterations that may be made to the document after you have downloaded it or received it in any other way."

Fair enough although it is hard to see how this can be reconciled with the following comment which appeared in the Freeserve Desktop Lawyer's own publicity bumph: "The service... enables people who have no special training to customise legal templates downloaded from the web."

Reg Brown, a Lloyd's underwriter specialising in top-up indemnity cover for lawyers, told the Insider he thought that if a problem arose, it would lead to a "sue everyone" scenario, with claims being launched against Freeserve; Epoch Software, who developed the system; the barristers at 11 Stone Buildings who drafted the templates; and, if relevant, the LawNet solicitors providing advice on the helpline service. (At the time of going to print the helpline phone number appearing on the web site was incorrect.)

The Solicitors Indemnity Fund said it had identified online legal services as a potential source of future claims because of three main risk areas: (1) How can the solicitor be certain of the true identity of the client? (2) How can the client be prevented from downloading and using an inappropriate document? And (3) if a document contains an error, the web's one-to-many publishing model raises the spectre of multiple claims arising from the same mistake.

"HUGE INTEREST" IN SCHEME

The English Law Society reports that with still two days to go before the closing date for applications, the response from legal IT suppliers wanting to become involved with the 1999/2000 edition of its *Software Solutions* guide has been huge, with 26 companies already registering an interest.

DEALS AND TENDERS

■ Eleven-partner ERIC ROBINSON & CO, which has seven offices in the Southampton area, has signed a deal worth over a quarter of a million pounds with AXXIA SYSTEMS as part of a move to upgrade and expand the firm's IT infrastructure. The project, which will include rolling out a total of 130 fee earner desktop systems, aims to create individual LANs in each office linked to a practice-wide WAN.

■ As part of a major overhaul of its IT systems, this month sees NORTON ROSE embark upon the largest roll out of new hardware and software in the firm's history. The firm is to replace all its PCs and laptops worldwide with standard DELL machines, upgrade to Windows NT and MICROSOFT Office 97, and implement a number of enhancements to its management information systems. The firm has awarded UNISYS a contract worth £2.3 million over three years for global hardware supply and ongoing maintenance. This also covers the disposal of old PCs, Y2K compliance and the management of Microsoft licences.

■ HENMANS has installed a PAXDATA NETWORKS (01442 236336) Viper router system to handle voice and data communications between the firm's Oxford and Woodstock offices. The installation, which was carried out by SMT NETWORK SOLUTIONS, supports two inter-PABX voice connections plus LAN connectivity on one 256Kbps kilostream link.

■ The LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY, along with solicitors' practices SCOTT REES, JOHNSON & GAUNT, COBLEYS and LEEDS DAY have all ordered upgrades or enhancements to their IT systems from SANDERSON SYSTEMS over the last couple of months. Sanderson has also won new orders from MARTIN MURRAY & ASSOCIATES in West London and POWELLS in Weston Super-Mare - both firms are buying the recently launched Galaxy practice management system - and the FRIENDS PROVIDENT LEGAL DEPARTMENT has ordered a case management system.

PUBLISHING NEWS

■ LAND REGISTRY JULY FORMS

The Land Registry is scheduled to introduce a series of new and revised forms on 1st July this year. Peapod Solutions will be issuing an update CD containing the latest versions of these forms to all PRINTAForm users before the end of June.

■ CONTEXT LAUNCHES NEW CIVIL PROCEDURE RULES CD

This Friday (14th May) will see legal publisher Context (0171 267 8989) release its new JUSTIS version of the *Civil Procedure Rules* on CD-Rom. Prices start at £195 (+ VAT) for existing JUSTIS subscribers and £245 (+ VAT) for new customers. (Network licences, based on the number of simultaneous users, are also available.) The price includes free access to an online updating service.

Context managing director Robin Williamson said the decision to develop the new CD was entirely demand-driven, with the project receiving the go ahead immediately after a user group meeting on 20th April, at which a number of customers indicated they wanted access to the new rules under the JUSTIS software. Williamson says Context's development staff have broken all records by producing a new CD-Rom title from scratch in just over three weeks.

<http://www.context.co.uk>

■ ALWAYS SCRIBBLE, SCRIBBLE MR CHRISTIAN ?

Insider editor Charles Christian has been commissioned by Butterworths to write a book on marketing, selling and delivering legal services online. Called *The Virtual Lawyer*, it is due to be published in the late autumn.

■ INSIDER E-ZINES

Legal Technology Insider publishes a series of free current awareness e-mail newsletters (e-zines) providing news and comment on areas of legal practice. The titles are: *E-Business + Law*, *Watching Brief Online* (local government law) and the *Litigation Support Digital Newsletter*.

To subscribe send a note of your e-mail address to: info@legaltechnology.co.uk

NEW FACES OF 1999

They are lean, they are hungry and they are hoping to break into an already over-crowded UK legal systems market, welcome to the new faces of 1999.

■ INFORMATION MANAGEMENT - AREPO

Arepo Solutions (0171 928 7022) was formed in January of this year by the former IT development team of Rouse & Co International/Willoughby & Partners. Arepo director John Graham-Maw said he and his colleagues felt there was a need for a new type of legal software consultancy that placed the emphasis on information "management" rather than concentrating solely on the technological issues.

Currently Arepo is working on a number of intranet projects for law firms, as well as developing a trademark tracking system for the intellectual property market. "Cutting edge solutions at refreshingly realistic prices," is how Graham-Maw describes the company's approach.

<http://www.arepo.com>

■ BUREAU - KEY LEGAL ACCOUNTING

Key Legal Accounting Services (0171 626 6616) has been set up to provide dedicated accountancy and bookkeeping services for law firms. Key's founder George Ioannides believes his company has an edge on similar bureaux because as well as straightforward bookkeeping, it can also offer firms full management accounting services.

<http://www.keyaccounting.co.uk>

■ IKEN - RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Although Chester & Miles Ltd (0117 924 9241) has been working on consultancy and networking projects in the legal market for about 18 months, the company has now launched a software package it believes can bring the benefits of a "many-to-many relationship management system for people and paper" to High Street law firms but at a fraction of the cost of a product like InterAction.

Called Iken, the system is based around the low-cost Jet relational database (it is also available on Oracle and SQL Server) and can be integrated with a conventional legal accounts or practice management system. The company's flagship site is Trumps in Bristol, where it runs in conjunction with an SOS installation.

The product is a hybrid system - Elizabeth Miles describes it as bridging the gap between wordprocessing and case management - and to this extent probably its closest direct competitor is Amicus Attorney. It can handle document assembly and management. It has a powerful contacts/marketing management system, which takes into account the fact that in the average firm perhaps just 20 percent of contacts are actually clients. There is an administration facility that can be used to log reports of problems within a firm's IT system. The help system is also good. Prices start at £450 for a single user system. Chester & Miles will be showing Iken at SOLEX in June.

<http://www.chestermiles.co.uk>

HAS DOCS BECOME UNSTOPPABLE ?

Despite the fact the DOCS Open family of document management products continue to enjoy a huge commercial success in the UK and US legal markets, the parent company PC Docs seems to be one of those organisations people just love to hate.

In fact at one recent conference a leading legal IT consultant went so far as to show a slide headed "The Docs Backlash" and suggest it was primarily a dislike of PC Docs that was fuelling the interest in alternative document management systems, including NetRight's iManage, Worldox and, to a lesser extent, Documentum and Open Text's Livelink. For those of you belonging to the anti-Docs camp, here are two more alternatives to consider.

■ PRISM

Prism is an intranet-based knowledge and document management system that was developed by North London accountants Berg Kaprow Lewis (0181 922 9222/9366). It runs on Windows NT Server and offers a choice of Access or SQL Server as the underlying database. The actual documents can be stored on NT or Novell NetWare servers and the default client software is the Internet Explorer browser. Prices start at £3000 for up to 15 users, rising to £6000 for 50-to-150 user site licences. Optional extras include Microsoft Office 97 integration, archiving and a facility for handling inbound scanned documents although this total package effectively doubles the price.

<http://www.bklchart.co.uk>

■ 80-20 SOFTWARE

The second alternative - and one that is now attracting some interest within the legal market - is 80-20 Software's Document Management Extension (DME) for Microsoft Exchange. Developed just up the road from Microsoft in Washington, as the name implies, the system is essentially an add-on to the Microsoft BackOffice product range.

To run it, a firm must have NT Server 4.0 and Exchange Server 5.0 but 80-20 say there are no per-seat end users costs because the client software can be either Office 97, Outlook 98 or Internet Explorer - all products BackOffice users will already have installed. One consequence of this is that prices are exceptionally low - a five-user licence costs US\$ 98 and an unlimited user site licence costs just US\$ 6000. In the UK a number of Microsoft BackOffice specialists, including The Data Base (0115 971 2000), are currently evaluating DME. <http://www.80-20.com>

■ Despite the apparent unpopularity of DOCS Open in some quarters, the product still continues to sell by the lorry load, with some of the latest signings including: Wragge & Co (700 seats), Withers (300 seats), Theodore Goddard (300 seats), Speechly Bircham (200 seats) and Matheson Ormsbee Prentice in Dublin (200 seats).

LATEST WOOLF PRODUCTS

■ EAGER BEAVER FOR WOOLF

BCL Beaver Corporation has launched Legal ARMS 3.0, a new Woolf compliant version of its debt collection software for law firms, local authorities and inhouse legal departments. BCL's Mike Willstrop said that along with incorporating the new terminology and "milestones", the system had been revised to take account of the fact the whole emphasis of the debt recovery side of the civil procedure reforms is to encourage greater use of the Claims Production Centre (previously the Summons Production Centre) and County Court Bulk Centre in Northampton.

Legal ARMS is available both directly from BCL (0171 936 2828) and through its legal market distributors Technology for Business, Axxia Systems and Mountain Software.

■ AVENUE NOW ON FAST TRACK

Avenue Legal Systems (01489 609010) has launched a new Fast Track Case Manager module to support document production and dates compliance in law firms wanting to use computerised case management systems to handle Fast Track claims under the new civil procedure rules.

■ WORD RIGHT ON WOOLF

Wordwright Associates (01473 212752) has launched Costs Plus 5, a new Woolf compliant version of its costs drafting software. Version 5 can provide costing, analysis and new-format bills of costs, as well as a facility to produce statements of costs for summary assessment.

■ CIVIL INTERACTION

Lawtel (0171 970 4818) and *The Lawyer* magazine have launched a new online service called *Civil Procedure Interactive*. Updated every 24 hours, this will provide the latest versions of the new Civil Procedure Rules plus their schedules, Practice Directions and the personal injury & clinical negligence pre-action protocols. The service, which includes a commentary on the latest developments by Simmons & Simmons, is available free of charge to existing Lawtel subscribers.

WEB NEWS IN BRIEF

■ BLUE FLAG RUNS A NEW SERVICE UP THE FLAGPOLE

The last issue of the Insider mentioned Linklaters & Alliance's decision to opt for a "Rolls Royce" document management system from Documentum. This week Linklaters has revealed that one of the reasons why it chose such an advanced system was to support the next phase in the development of its Blue Flag service.

Called Blue Flag Confirms, this is a joint project between Linklaters and Documentum to combine legal know-how with a document assembly and production system that allows financial institutions trading in the OTC derivative markets to generate legal confirmation documentation automatically. The software, which is delivered on CD-Rom, is accessed via a web browser interface and requires no alteration to an institution's front-end trading systems.

<http://www.documentum.com>

■ LAW BOOKS GO ONLINE

The Hammicks legal bookshop group has launched a web site that provides access to a searchable catalogue of over 18,000 titles. Orders can be placed via the site for next day delivery of all books in stock.

<http://www.hammickslegal.co.uk>

■ KLA SUPPORT SITE

Document management systems specialists Kramer Lee & Associates now has a supporting web site.

<http://www.kramerlee.com>

■ LTI-NET - THE DIGITAL EDITION OF THE INSIDER

LTi-Net is the digital version of Legal Technology Insider. It is available in an HTML file format that can be delivered as an e-mail attachment or accessed via a secure subscriber-only web site.

LTi-NET comes complete with live hypertext links and is designed for firms wanting to access the newsletter across intranets and Lotus Notes databases or individual subscribers who just want to read and print it from the desktop.

Subscription rates start at £135 (inc VAT). To obtain a free sample copy e-mail info@legaltechnology.co.uk

TIME TO SAY GOODBYE TO ATTACHMENTS ?

Has the time come to say goodbye to sending e-mails in which the text of the message is buried in an attached file?

Typically this will be a Microsoft Word document but this does rather overlook the fact not everyone uses Word and that some recipients may encounter difficulty opening or translating the file into a format they can read. Then, of course, there are those files that become corrupted in transmission or have a suffix the recipient's software does not recognise and so defy all attempts to open them.

Leaving aside the security risks associated with attachments (most of the recent viruses to hit the IT world, including Melissa and Chernobyl, have been spread by macros hidden in Word file attachments) probably the biggest grumble, along with the fact they take longer to download, occupy more space on the recipient's hard disk and are more laborious to open, is they are so frequently pointless. A bit of fancy text formatting, perhaps incorporating the sender's corporate logo, and that's it. In fact with many messages the actual text element within the attached file is shorter than the legal disclaimer appearing at the foot of the accompanying e-mail message.

A growing number of publications and commentators (such as Delia Venables) are now criticising the practice and we have even seen legal recruitment ads which specify "no attachments" from applicants submitting CVs by e-mail. Perhaps they have a point.

DOCS OFFERING WEB FEATS

Over the last couple of weeks the PC Docs Group has announced two new Internet-related products that are compatible with the company's existing range of DOCS/Fulcrum systems.

■ The first of these is DOCSite, a web-publishing system that allows document authors to automate the creation of linked HTML publications from any application, without manual coding. The system is compatible with WordPerfect, Excel, PowerPoint and Word and will be available in June.

■ The second product - and this is the one the Insider suspects will have the greatest impact upon the legal market - is an e-mail encryption product that is fully compatible with DOCS Open.

Called iMail, it was developed by MAZ Technologies in conjunction with PC Docs and is intended to allow users to send encrypted e-mail attachments to DOCS and non-DOCS users without disrupting their regular workflow.

US patent attorney Roy Anderson, whose firm Lyon & Lyon has been piloting iMail, said the system addressed the security risks companies and law firms face in protecting and authenticating intellectual property and confidential information when operating in an environment of increased integration between the Internet, intranets, extranets, e-mail and document management systems.

NEW TRADEMARK SERVICE FOR LAWYERS

Internet Domain Registrations (0171 253 3200) has launched a domain name registration service for law firms and other trademark specialists - the first batch of firms to sign up for the service include Dibb Lupton Alsop, Ashurst Morris Crisp, Theodore Goddard and Osborne Clarke.

IDR director Martin Creese said the service was designed for intellectual property law specialists who need to register domain names for clients and protect their trademarks from "cyber-squatting" and other forms of infringement. For example in the USA Porsche Cars is currently suing 130 unofficial Porsche web sites for trademark dilution.

To counter what Creese describes as the "world wide race" that can occur when a new name becomes popular and everyone wants to register it (recently there were over 100 separate applications to register one particular domain name within the space of three hours), IDR has designed the service to be both fast and permanently available. Users can access it 24-hours a day, 365 days a year, with applications handled automatically by digital technology.

IDR has also built the service to be lawyer-friendly when it comes to billing. There are no up front fees to join the service. Instead, law firms are charged on a pay-as-you-go basis, with the option of either having the client billed directly by IDR or taking the bill themselves and re-invoicing it to the client as a disbursement.

<http://www.idr.co.uk>

ONLINE SYSTEMS FEATURE HEAVILY IN 1999 LOTIES

This week sees the final voting stage for the 1999 LOTIES (Law Office Technology Innovation) Awards. The results will not be announced until next month but from the names that have been short listed for an award, it looks as if online systems and services will be among the favourites to win. Nominations falling into this category include Butterworths Direct, SolCase Online from Solicitec, Epoch's Rapidocs downloadable forms and the legal ISP Lawyers Online.

Although the nominations contain some of the best known names in legal technology, including Norwel, Axxia, CMS, MSS, Linetime, DPS, HotDocs and Keystone, the short list also has its fair share of newcomers, notably Open Text's Livelink document management system, Cole Valley's MarketEase marketing software and the InterAction relationship management system from Interface Software.

The four nominations for the best legal web site are:
www.crownofficerow.co.uk - www.butterworths.co.uk -
www.lawersonline.co.uk - www.lovellwhitedurrant.com

■ The LOTIES are organised by *In Brief* magazine and sponsored by Capsoft UK. The full short list of contenders can be found on the web. <http://www.inbrief.co.uk>

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY DIARY DATES

■ **AXXIA IT FOR BUSINESS SEMINARS** - A series of product promotional seminars across England. Ends in London on 26th May. Admission is free, call Claire Jones of Axxia on 01189 602 602 to reserve a place.

■ **THE MILLENNIUM LAW PRACTICE** One day conference and mini exhibition on 18th May at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Liverpool. Organised by the Society for Computers & Law in association with the Liverpool Law Society and the Association of North Western Law Societies. Speakers include John Irving, Neil Cameron and Michael Kaye. Fee £110 + VAT, qualifies for 4 hours CPD. To book, call the SCL on 01179 237393.

■ **KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT WITHIN LAW FIRMS** One day conference on 20th May at the London Marriott Hotel. Now making its third appearance, this is the major UK know-how event for lawyers, with a top line-up of speakers. No consultants plugging their services, just law firm know-how directors passing on tips and practical advice. Fee £445 + VAT, qualifies for 5 hours CPD. To book, call Centaur Conferences on 0171 970 4770.

■ **KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT DATA CAPTURE & INTEGRITY** One day conference and mini exhibition on 26th May at the Fairfield Halls Croydon. The event, which is organised by Ted Clark of E-gnosis, focuses very heavily on the practical and technical issues surrounding electronic document management systems. Fee from £185 + VAT. To book, call 0181 240 4463.

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BUGS DU JOUR FROM MICROSOFT

Microsoft may be the biggest software company on the planet but that does not stop it from having its fair share of bugs and bloomers. The most recent to be reported are found in Windows 98 and Internet Explorer 5.0.

■ The Win98 bugs, three in all, involve Y2K-related issues, including: problems with the OLE (object linking and automation) element which has a double-digit cut off date of 2029 - the result is the date "30" is interpreted as 1930; incompatibility between the DOS xcopy command and yy/mm/dd date formats; and errors caused by some VisualBasic applications ignoring user settings and reverting to the default calendar setting. A bug fix should be available later this month on the Microsoft web site.

<http://www.microsoft.com/year2000>

■ The IE5 bug takes the form of a conflict between the browser and some versions of the Outlook e-mail client. Microsoft says upgrading to Office 2000, which includes a new version of Outlook, should solve the problem.

COMPUTER LORE

■ AND YOU HAVE PROBLEMS FINDING STAFF ?

One problem both law firm IT departments and legal IT suppliers share in common is the difficulty in recruiting and retaining decent staff. However if you think you have problems, consider yourself lucky you are not recruiting for IT staff in New York.

A recent report in the *Wall Street Journal* says the IT skills shortage is now so bad that recruitment consultants have taken to tracking down programmers, analysts and network managers to the places they spend their leisure hours - which in New York just happen to be strip clubs and topless bars. According to one headhunter, the weird thing is that while the IT staff never take their eyes off the girls, they still spend the entire time talking about software bugs and programming issues.

■ THE EGO HAS LANDED

Have you ever wondered why so many law firm web sites are dull, dated or just plain dopey? According to one PR man who works in this sector, the main reason is that in most firms there is an ongoing power struggle "between the madmen and the rational element" for control of the web site project.

In the rational corner are the marketing professionals, with their understanding of design, target audiences and overall practice development objectives. While in the "mad" corner are those partners who know all about the Internet from a man they drink with at the golf club. Sadly for web site design, the lawyers with the largest egos and equity inevitably triumph over those basing their arguments solely on the grounds of reason and aesthetics.