



Queen sends birthday present to Visualfiles

The Queen sent UK case management software market leaders Visualfiles, which celebrates the 20th anniversary of its formation in June, an early birthday present this month in the form of a Queen's Award for Enterprise in the innovation category. Visualfiles, which is the first legal systems supplier to receive the honour, picked up the award at a reception in London last Friday presided over by the Duke of Gloucester.

UTBMS Paris summit

DataCert's European business development director Jeff Hodge is organising a 'brains trust' dinner for about 15-to-20 representatives from law firms, IT suppliers and the legal industry (including the American Bar Association) interested in discussing ways of refining and internationalising the UTBMS (uniform task based management system) standard.

The meeting is scheduled to take place at 6:00pm on Wednesday 11th May, at Le Grand Hotel Paris, on the eve of *Legal Week's* annual Global Legal Forum conference in Paris. For further details email jeff.hodge@datacert.com or visit www.abanet.org/litigation/utbms/home.html

SOS and Eclipse form new alliance

Solicitors Own Software (SOS) and Eclipse Legal Systems have extended the availability of 'best of breed' solutions to mid-sized law firms with the announcement of what Eclipse are describing as an "open systems union".

Under the new alliance, firms running SOS Practice Manager accounts and practice management software will now have the option of integrating with the Eclipse Proclaim case management system, whereas previously their own case management route was to install a Visualfiles system. Similarly, Proclaim users gain greater choice as they will now be able to run SOS as their accounts package. Proclaim can also be integrated with Eclipse's own accounts software, as well as Sage, Lawbyte from Edgebyte and Pericom's Paragon. The first firm to benefit from the new alliance is Nash & Co in Plymouth, which had previously been running separate SOS and Eclipse systems.

Commenting on the alliance, SOS sales director David McNamara said "It is all about suppliers delivering a solution that best suits each individual firm. In some cases this may involve the entire software from a single source but in others, the best solution will involve front and back office software from more than one supplier. Companies such as SOS, Visualfiles and Eclipse all have a mature attitude to such an approach focusing on the needs of the customer first."

SOS and Eclipse are both listed in the Law Society's *Software Solutions Guide* and between them their software is already installed in nearly 700 UK solicitors practices and law offices.

LexisNexis expands into more software applications

LexisNexis has expanded its involvement into the legal software applications sector with the acquisition earlier this month of the Toronto-based Alumni Computer Group, the developers of the PCLaw practice management and Time Matters time recording systems. PCLaw is one of the most widely used accounts packages for smaller law firms in North America.

The Alumni acquisition is in line with the LexisNexis strategy of providing its customers with best of breed productivity tools and services that go beyond research, a strategy which in recent months has also seen LexisNexis acquire Interface Software, the developers of the market leading InterAction CRM system.

PCLaw will continue to be sold as a separate product through existing channels and dealer networks, which in the UK is Law Society *Software Solutions Guide* listed supplier Gavel & Gown.



Legal IT visits Manchester (18 & 19 May)
Register now at www.legalitshow.com

NEWS IN BRIEF**► WHITE & CASE SELECTS TIME KM**

The international law firm White & Case LLP, which has over 1900 lawyers world wide including nearly 300 in the UK, has selected the TimeKM system from PensEra Knowledge Technologies in Montreal as its new time and activity tracking platform. TimeKM is a web-based tracking system, specifically designed for the legal sector and compatible with the major US legal accounts and billing packages, that aims to provide time recording for lawyers 'anytime or anywhere they work'. White & Case will also be running the Blackberry-compatible TimeKM Mobile system.

www.timekm.com + www.pensera.com

► SOLCARA GOES INTO IM

Irwin Mitchell has deployed Solcara's SolSearch information manager system to enable the simultaneous and seamless searching of both internal and external online information sources. At Irwin Mitchell these include PLC, Justis, BAILII, LexisNexis and Sweet & Maxwell, as well as the internal library database and the firm's Tikit Know-How system. www.solcara.com

► JMC GETS GOLD FOR SECURITY

Manchester-based JMC.IT (0161 925 777) has received Microsoft gold certified partner status for its competency in designing and implementing Microsoft security products. JMC.IT already has Microsoft gold accreditation for business solutions, network infrastructure and information worker productivity skills. www.jmc.it

► NEW FUNDING FOR BARRISTERS

Siemens Financial Services (020 8266 4046) has launched BarStart Funding to help new barristers set up in chambers, including investing in the necessary IT systems. The Bar Council's services company BarCo estimates that the average barrister has £40k in debts by the time they achieve tenancy.

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For the latest legal IT news, jobs, events, data and buyers guides visit the Insider web site, described by *The Times* newspaper as "the definitive online resource for legal technology information".

System crashes - are you blaming the right people ?

Following a posting on the US TechnoLawyer discussion forum from a US law firm reporting lock-ups and lost documents with the Hummingbird DM-5 document management system, Tony Heywood, the senior VP for Hummingbird Legal Solutions in Europe, told the Insider that such complaints almost inevitably boil down to issues unrelated to document management.

"As an example, we recently sent in a 'SWAT' team to a certain very large UK law firm that was experiencing quite severe problems. Of course it had to be the DM implementation that was at fault as it was a document management function that was failing. In the event it turned out to be a hardware problem on the firm's SQL Server box but we were the villains until we could prove otherwise. Unfortunately," said Heywood, "this is not an isolated case and it is common for network or other infrastructure issues to be blamed on us, as its the document management environment that most people live in."

Two legal wins for Firstcourt

Firstcourt (0870 350 3660), the IT consultancy formed last year by former Taylor Wessing IT head Adam Westbrooke, has been selected for two new projects in the legal sector.

Reading-based solicitors Blandy & Blandy have asked Firstcourt to help them select a new CRM system, from defining the requirements to managing the tender process. The system will be integrated with the firm's Axxia PMS. And, barristers' set Landmark Chambers are using Firstcourt to design and set up the IT infrastructure for the new offices they are moving into later this summer. Landmark was created two years ago by the merger of 4 Breams Building and Eldon chambers but the set has still been operating out of two locations. www.firstcourt.co.uk

TFB opens new Glasgow office

TFB has secured orders for its Partner for Windows from four more Scottish firms: Morgans, Cockburns, Grossets and Alder Hogg. The wins coincide with TFB's relocation of its Scottish office from Bellshill, on the outskirts of Glasgow, to Woodside Place in the city centre. Allan Radlow, the chairman of TFB's Scottish user group, described the move as showing "real commitment on TFB's part in fulfilling the needs of their expanding customer base" in Scotland.

Gordon Malcolm, who is based in the new Glasgow office (0141 582 1450) remains the general manager for TFB's Scottish and Northern Ireland operations.

TFB has also secured its sixth law firm site in Northern Ireland, with an order placed by Elliott Duffy Garrett in Belfast, plus four more Partner for Windows wins (at Uppal Taylor Solicitors, Lewis Onions, Macks and John Hodge) in England.

Pivotal and Phoenix team up against InterAction

CRM software developers Pivotal and legal systems integrators and resellers Phoenix Business Solutions are now working together to deliver what Pivotal describe as "next generation client relationship management technology" to the legal sector.

Pivotal corporate sales executive Daniel Brown said "that from a Pivotal viewpoint we see Phoenix as a strong and viable alternative to Tikit in the legal sector and believe this is a view shared by many people. With this in mind and the fact law firms need an alternative to Tikit in general and to the Interface InterAction system from a CRM perspective, Pivotal has committed to develop a long term strategic partnership with Phoenix to further develop and fortify our position." Brown added that the two companies "are currently working on several joint opportunities of a significant nature, including a number of InterAction swap outs".

Phoenix will continue to sell and support the Cole Valley ContactEase (previously MarketEase) marketing software. Lee Tomlinson of Phoenix told the Insider the choice would be down to customer demand, with Pivotal offered to firms wanting a more sophisticated CRM solution and ContactEase available for firms merely wanting to upgrade their marketing operations.

www.pivotal.com + www.phoenixbs.com

Videss records best year yet

Staff at Videss are sharing a bonus payment totalling £100,000 at the end of what has proved to be the company's most successful trading year to-date since it was formed 27 years ago. In the 12 months to the end of March, turnover was up by 25%, profits by 28% and the company also recruited 15 new staff across its engineering, helpdesk, software development and training departments.

Founder and managing director Paul Sanderson predicts that "2005/6 is going to be another exciting year for everyone here as our systems division continues to expand and our latest Legal Process Management software v.10 is rolled out, as law firms begin the move towards the next generation of practice management automation".

Update your email address books

If you need to email the Insider, could you please note (and update your email and Outlook address books accordingly) that we recently rationalised our internet services so all messages now go through news@legaltechnology.com and variants of our @legaltechnology.com address. Similarly www.legaltechnology.com is now our main web address and, while the [.co.uk](http://www.legaltechnology.co.uk) and [.org](http://www.legaltechnology.org) suffixes will also bring you to our home page, the old [cloudnine](http://www.cloudnine.com) and [legalnewsmedia](http://www.legalnewsmedia.com) addresses are now defunct.

NEWS IN BRIEF

► **ELITE GOES LIVE IN NINE MONTHS**
After just nine months of implementation and testing, Cripps Harries Hall went live with Thomson Elite at the start of March. The Elite system replaces the firm's old AIM Evolution Classic PMS. With the exception of using Andrew Levison during the contract negotiation, the entire project was delivered using internal staff. The firm's head of IT Mike Burton said "this may bode well for smaller firms wishing to take advantage of what was previously a system considered reserved for larger firms".

► **AND THOMPSONS DO IT IN SIX**
Thompsons has announced that it has just gone live with its new Aderant CMS.Net practice management system in all 20 of its offices nationwide. The implementation and staff training, as well as an integration with a bespoke case management system and the need to comply with the billing requirements of union funded work, was completed within six months from the date of purchase.

► **75% SAVING THROUGH SCANNING**
Dulwich solicitors William Bailey are reporting savings of as much as 75% on administrative time since the introduction of scanning to PDF and OCR technology. The firm, which uses a Fujitsu ScanSnap system, says that along with the obvious benefit of being able to scan incoming documents and attach them directly to the appropriate electronic files within their case management system, scanning is also easing the chores that used to waste secretaries' time. Instead of retyping lengthy draft statements from counsel, these are now OCR'd and edited in Word, while instead of faxing documents to overseas clients, these are saved as PDFs and emailed as file attachments.

► **STEPHENSON HARWOOD PICK SAN**
Stephenson Harwood has chosen DataCore's SANsymphony SAN management software and StorageTek BladeStore low-cost SATA disk systems to meet the firm's growing Windows, Novell and Linux network storage demands. These include high availability mirrors, snapshots and disaster recovery. The systems were architected and installed by DataCore reseller TriSys.

www.trisys.co.uk + www.datacore.com

DDS NEWS IN BRIEF

► BIGHAND IN NORTH YORKSHIRE

North Yorkshire Law has rolled out the BigHand digital dictation system at its network of five offices (three in Scarborough, one in Whitby and one in Helmsley). The firm said one of the immediate benefits has been the ability of different offices to support each other's workloads during busy periods and times of holidays and sickness. This was not an option when the firm still used analogue tape as two of the offices were an hour away from the Scarborough head office – and in opposite directions.

The Insider has also learned that Osborne Clarke has become the latest large firm to order a DDS system from BigHand.

► TFB DICTANET SALES TAKE OFF

Following its 27th contract with a law firm ordering the DictaNet digital dictation system, Technology for Business (TFB) has just won DictaNet's 'sales partner of the month' award. Recent TFB/DictaNet DDS wins include Rawlison Butler in West Sussex, Malcolmson Law in Dublin (via Legal IT – TFB's distributor in Ireland) and Last Cawthra Feather in Yorkshire. The Yorkshire firm will be rolling out digital dictation to 100 users across three offices, with DictaNet running over a Citrix connection. There is free trial version of the DictaNet software at www.dictanet.co.uk

► AUTOMATIC USER MANAGEMENT

Nflow has launched an XML-based automatic user management interface. The AUM means the Nflow digital dictation system can be integrated with any user database source (including Microsoft Active Directory and Novell eDirectory) thereby removing the need for it to be administered as a separate system, which in larger firms can be a significant overhead. For smaller firms, LDAP integration is also available.

► NEW TRANSCRIPTION BUREAU

DictateNow (0845 601 7726) is another new digital dictation transcription bureau that has come to our attention. The bureau's selling point is that all transcription services are handled by UK-based legal secretaries with turnaround time of 45 minutes. The service is available to firms both on a regular and ad hoc basis. www.dictatenow.com

DDS outsourcer reveals Voicepath inside strategy

At a seminar for prospective IT partners last week Voicepath, the UK's leading onshore digital dictation transcription outsourcing service, revealed its new 'Voicepath Inside' strategy.

The heart of the strategy is that any law firm considering investing in digital dictation software should also automatically consider having an outsourcing service, whether for use on a regular basis or as an ad hoc overflow function. To make life simpler for firms, Voicepath is seeking to have a link to its services integrated directly within all the leading digital dictation workflow management systems, as well as dictation hardware products from suppliers such as Olympus, Philips and Grundig.

Voicepath head of sales Francis Davis said he hoped the "Voicepath Inside message will become the ubiquitous definition of legal transcription and stand for quality, speed and security, while simultaneously adding value to our partners' digital dictation solutions, in the same way that *Intel Inside* implicitly adds value to a new PC". Davis also said DDS is only part of the story, as Voicepath is also looking to integrate with case and document management systems and is already talking to a number of key players. www.voicepath.com

Bringing outsourcing back home

After nine months of sending digital dictation transcription to India, Skelmersdale-based law firm Scott Rees has switched from offshore to onshore outsourcing. The firm's chief operating officer Michael Lough said the issues associated with outsourcing to India, such as "poor quality – transcribers often struggled to pick up on dialect or nuances, and a lack of understanding of legal jargon, phrasing and UK geography, meant a lot of time was spent correcting errors and filling in blanks," outweighed the advantages, so the firm began looking at options available closer to home and subsequently outsourced the work to Voicepath.

Management info key to roll-out

Top 30 law firm Walker Morris has begun the first phase of a firm-wide roll out of a WinScribe digital dictation system. The implementation is being handled by SRC who also managed a pilot for the firm. Along with the usual benefits associated with digital dictation, Walker Morris head of IT Dominic Hayes cited the management information available with WinScribe as crucial in the selection criteria. "Not only can we see which secretaries are over or under-worked, we can also identify patterns of work over time and take action to target bottlenecks.

Leeds-based Lupton Fawcett has also begun rolling out an SRC WinScribe DDS implementation. The move follows a pilot which the firm's managing partner Kevin Emsley described as "the smoothest IT project we have ever run".

DDS survey shows need to do homework on price

New research, published earlier this month by David Riggall of the Rose & Bridge Associates (01904 720334) consultancy, reveals that when it comes to buying digital dictation systems, law firms really do need to do their homework carefully on pricing, particularly with regards to the total cost of ownership over a period of years.

Riggall's survey involved looking at both the per seat pricing and annual maintenance charges of 10 digital dictation system suppliers and then calculating the total costs of ownership, taking into account any volume discounts, over a five year period, for 5 users, 25 users, 75 users and 150 users.

In terms of general trends, as might be expected the average per seat price fell from £311 per user for a 5 user site to £214 per user for a 150 user site. However annual maintenance charges moved in the opposite direction, rising from an average of 17% of the per seat price in small firms to 22% in larger firms.

The survey results also highlighted the importance of volume discounts. For example, one supplier who quoted a per seat price of £835 for a 5 user site (by far the highest figure and more than double that of almost every other supplier in the survey) actually turned out to be the cheapest option in a 150 user firm – coming in with a total price of £43,800 – once the total cost of ownership over five years was calculated. By contrast, had you opted for one of the cheaper suppliers who quoted a £199 per seat price for 5 users, even taking into account their volume discounts you would still be paying more – a total of £44,700 – over five years for 150 users.

The survey also identified two very harsh lessons. The first is not to be fooled by a supplier offering a relatively low but fixed price, as for larger firms this could be ruinously expensive over a five year period. For example the total cost of ownership for a 150 user system, with a per seat price of £349 and a per seat maintenance charge of £70 pa, is £104,850 over five years – or over £60,000 more than the cheapest option.

And, secondly, not to be distracted by a relatively low per seat charge combined with a high annual maintenance figure. For example one supplier quoted a per seat price of £125 and a maintenance figure of £96 pa per seat. This seems a beguilingly cheap option – and for smaller firms it is a competitive price – but for a 150 user firm over five years, the total bill clocks in at £90,750 – one of the highest figures quoted in the survey.

The Insider's own research in this area suggests there are still many DDS purchasing decisions being made without first putting the contract out to tender – whereas all the evidence suggests that if pushed, most suppliers will offer substantial discounts to secure an order. We are also hearing that in some firms DDS decisions are being taken directly by partners – on the basis it is a technology they think they understand – without fully considering any of the associated technical issues, such as the impact on network bandwidth or how digital dictation can be integrated with the other software applications they use.

PEOPLE & PLACES

► **LASERFORM EXPANDS CITY OFFICE**
Laserform has expanded its London presence with the opening of new offices in New Street. Initially 35 sales and support staff will be based at the City of London premises, which will also include customer training facilities, however Laserform sales director Mike Boynes said the company "is looking to significantly swell this number by the end of the year."

► **HUMMINGBIRD'S NEW TECHIES**
Hummingbird Legal Solutions has made four new appointments to its technical support and account management teams. They are Peter Li, previously with First Consulting; Veronica Everett, previously with Lovells and most recently Baker & McKenzie; Andy Driskell, previously with Ashurst; and document management systems consultant Mike Brigham.

► **THIS HUMMINGBIRDIE HAS FLOWN**
Simon Black, previously with Autonomy and Hummingbird, has moved to Interwoven where he has become a partner manager on the EMEA Legal & Professional Services team working with Geoff Hornsby and Stephen Murphy.

► **GOODBYE HOLBORN**
Laura Gulliver who, until its acquisition by Tikit earlier this year, was head of marketing at ResSoft at the Hatton Garden end of Holborn in London, has joined workflow specialists Metastorm in Wimbledon. Meanwhile at the Kingsway end of Holborn, Tikit's marketing manager Sally Bellwood (who we on the Insider rate as one of the few consistently competent people working in legal IT PR today) is leaving the company to take up a similar role with Hummingbird in Paddington.

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Legal IT opens in three weeks at Manchester

Legal IT 2005 Manchester, the regional version of the annual Islington Legal IT exhibition, opens its doors for visitors at the New Century House, just opposite Manchester's Victoria Station on Wednesday 18th and Thursday 19th May.

The event, which this year is sponsored by Legal Technology Insider, includes exhibition stands from 17 of the UK's largest practice management, case management and digital dictation systems suppliers. There is also a programme of keynote seminars, including sessions on the future of case and practice management software. Admission is free, the opening times are 9:30am to 4:00pm on both days and you can register online.

www.legalitshow.com

By Legal, For Legal 2005 programme out

The organisers of By Legal, For Legal, the increasingly popular networking and information sharing forum for law firm IT directors, has published the programme for its 2005 event, which this year takes place on 14th-to-16th September at Wroxall Abbey in Warwickshire.

Along with an extensive programme of social events, there will also be three major roundtable discussion sessions. The first, led by consultant Neil Cameron, includes a look at whether 'matter management is an idea whose time has come?' Next Peter Owen, on behalf of LITIG, will lead a session on email compliance and archiving. And the final session, led by the Insider's editor Charles Christian, poses the intriguing question 'are law firms so mean when it comes to IT spending that they get the vendors they deserve?' www.bylegalforlegal.co.uk

THE INSIDER WEB SITE

Latest additions to the Insider web site's know-how & white papers section include two new briefing papers on document integrity and the risks associated with sharing documents in an electronic format, including compliance issues and metadata.

www.legaltechnology.com

LexisNexis data scare in US Senate spotlight

During a hearing of the US Senate Judiciary Committee in Washington DC earlier this month, LexisNexis CEO Kurt Sanford said that personal information relating to as many as 280,000 American citizens may have been fraudulently accessed via the company's recently acquired Seisint database.

The figures, disclosed during a hearing on identity theft, revealed that the number of people potentially hit by the security breach was substantially higher than the 32,000 that LexisNexis originally said may have been affected. The company said its investigations (which went back to January 2003 although LexisNexis only acquired the Seisint business in September 2004) found that security had been breached on a total of 59 occasions, with the majority of these breaches due to compromised passwords, where unauthorised persons had used the IDs and passwords of legitimate customers.

The Seisint database stores a variety of information on individuals in the US, including addresses, drivers licence numbers and social security details. LexisNexis says it has found no evidence of any actual identity theft arising from the security breaches but the company is contacting everyone potentially affected and providing a free service to monitor for and prevent identity theft. There is also no suggestion the breaches have had any impact on the company's online legal information services.

UK forensics company acquired

Vogon International (01869 355255) the UK-based data recovery and computer forensics company, is to be acquired by its main European competitor Ibas of Norway. The deal, which Ibas says will create 'Europe's largest force of private data detectives,' is based on an earn-out model that values Vogon at between £4-to-£9 million. The two companies plan to integrate with effect from January 2006.

Vogon - named after characters in *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which by spooky coincidence goes on general release at UK cinemas - has just extended its forensic operations with the launch of a new service that can investigate the data, including call analysis information, held in the built-in memory of mobile phone SIM cards. www.vogon-international.com

The White Book 2005 out now

Sweet & Maxwell has just published the latest edition of *The White Book*. New features of the 2005 edition include: a rules and forms email alert service that notifies subscribers of amendments to the Civil Procedure Rules and new Practice Directions, as well as any new forms to be downloaded from the web; plus a Rapidforms workflow system that allows electronic forms to be edited, saved and emailed to courts for processing.

FRESH ON THE RADAR

► **CLEAR WEB SITES FROM CLEAR PEOPLE**

London-based web developers ClearPeople (08701 999910) this week launched ClearControl for the Legal Profession, a new, easy maintenance web site management tool. Features include web design and content copywriting facilities, a content management system, web promotion facilities for driving traffic towards a site, email newsletter templates and secure extranet areas. Once a web development project has been completed, ClearPeople will also take responsibility for site hosting, training and ongoing support. www.clearpeople.com

► **NEW PROPOSAL AND BIOGRAPHY MANAGEMENT**

SV Technology has released the latest version of its LawPort Proposal & Biography management system. SV Technology's CEO and president Marty Metz describes the system as a tool to "organise information previously locked in a firm's back office systems and disparate marketing repositories". The system has two main elements: a point-and-click proposal generator allowing firms to collate material and quickly assemble RFP responses; and a biography management tool for creating, storing, updating and publishing lawyers' bios in a standardised format. LawPort is available in the UK and Continental Europe through the Tikit group. www.tikit.com

NEWS IN BRIEF

► **HALLIWELLS SELECT INTERACTION CRM**

Manchester-based Halliwells has selected InterAction from LexisNexis Interface Software as its new client relationship management system. Managing partner Ian Austin said CRM would play a vital role in "linking together the firm's offices and providing a global perspective on client relationships".

► **AXXIA DELIVERS UPDATED KPI TOOL**

Axxia Systems has launched the latest version of its KPI performance management tool and the start of a consultation process with users to determine the priority content for the next release. Enhancements introduced in the latest version include a data warehouse maintenance tool to speed and simplify administration plus a new 'client partner view' covering fees, chargeable time, realisation percentage, profitability, WIP, cash collections, lock-up and outstanding debt.

► **CLIFFORD CHANCE COMPLETE LEGAL KEY ROLLOUT**

Clifford Chance has just completed the rollout of an upgrade, which includes improved search facilities, to its LegalKEY Enterprise records management system. Clifford Chance first began using LegalKEY (which is a Hummingbird product) in anger in 2003 when the firm had to clear 500,000 square feet of office space in preparation for its move to Canary Wharf. The firm's UK records manager Trevor Hughes said that the task of moving 70,000 boxes of documents (over 300,000 folders) in 12 months "could not have been achieved without a strong records management system in place".

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Time to start changing your ideas about IT ?

It's hard to believe but we are already a third of the way through the year and, if the Insider in-box is any indication, some interesting legal IT-related issues are starting to emerge...

For example, prompted by a message from one consultant who said he was looking for a job with a software supplier because "the market for traditional IT consultancy work continues to decline," we'd be interested in hearing your views on whether there still is any demand for consultants offering basic systems selection and procurement services, as distinct from broader technical, implementation and change management skills.

Then, what about speech recognition? According to its fans, the latest systems from companies such as Dragon are better than ever before. However there is another point of view, namely that speech recognition is a technology whose time has come – and gone.

The argument here is that in the 15 years that have elapsed since the first speech recognition systems appeared on the scene, lawyers (largely thanks to them having to deal with their own email) have become far more computer literate and now also have digital dictation systems to help speed up document production, thereby removing the need for speech recognition.

And then there is knowledge management. At a recent MBA in legal practice workshop, facilitated by Insider editor Charles Christian (and we have encountered this view elsewhere) it emerged that the subject of KM had become so strongly associated with search engines, black letter law, documentary precedents and – in the words of one delegate – "had been hijacked by professional support lawyers" that it was increasingly viewed by partners and fee earners as an irrelevant academic exercise.

According to the delegates, KM now needs reinventing as a broader – and essentially PSL-free – 'business intelligence' concept that encompasses best practice, commercial, marketing, financial, HR, client relationship and project management know-how, as well as traditional legal knowledge – if it is ever to be taken seriously and whole-heartedly adopted by lawyers.

The final issue – and don't just take our word for it, this view has also been aired in the *Harvard Business Review* – is whether technology has now moved into what is known as the 'infrastructural stage'. In other words, the pioneering days are over and IT has become just another part of the wallpaper of every modern law firm.

The suggestion is firms should stop kidding themselves their investments in new IT will ever have any strategic value that will give them a commercial edge because all their competitors are already using broadly comparable systems. Instead, runs the argument, firms should now change their IT priorities and focus upon addressing vulnerabilities – including security, technical reliability and the avoidance of service disruption, such as email crashes – rather than chasing after illusory opportunities.

A&O duo set up new consultancy

Sam Suri (07775 904071) and Vicki Garnham Lee (07977 284203) are leaving Allen & Overy to set up their own independent consultancy. Called The Working Practice, the new consultancy will build on Suri and Garnham Lee's experiences at A&O – first as practising lawyers and more recently as senior IT and business analysts – to provide law firms, inhouse legal departments and legal IT suppliers "with an effective bridge across the gap that exists between lawyers and those providing major support services for them".

According to Suri, it will offer advice from a lawyer's perspective on how to ensure that any project to aid lawyers in the way they work is designed appropriately, with full legal consultation, input and direction, implemented in the most 'lawyer friendly way' and accepted and adopted by the lawyers past the initial implementation stage.

Suri adds "We recognise that while it may be possible to design and implement any project, for it to actually succeed working practices will need to be adapted to the new environment. The Working Practice understands the minds of lawyers, what motivates and demotivates them, the risk management issues that affect lawyers on a day to day basis, and the working practices required to allow lawyers to work effectively whilst making the most of the services available to them."

www.theworkingpractice.co.uk

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