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The future is Microsoft, part 98

Insider sources report that Microsoft is working on the development of a new practice management system, with built in business intelligence functionality, that could be used by law firms. The system, which is not yet in a release mode, will be based on Microsoft's Dynamics AX product suite. Elsewhere, we hear that as well as wanting to make the Dynamics CRM system 'its next billion dollar business', Microsoft has set its sights on 'owning the legal CRM market'. *See also Sharepoint opinion piece on page 4*

FWBS get Lynx effect

FWBS has signed up Microsoft multi-gold certified partner Lynx Technology to jointly market the FWBS Matter Centre office management system into larger law firms and inhouse legal departments. The system is already sold by Aderant and FWBS directly and further partnerships are planned. Recent wins include Brachers and FWBS is currently recruiting for sales, support and development staff.

- Indigo, the FWBS accounts and practice management system for smaller firms, has been rebranded as Indigo Practice Centre. www.lynxtec.com

No, your eyes do not deceive you

Relax, there is nothing wrong with your eyesight, we've just changed the paper stock we use for the Insider to a paler shade of orange, which also happens to be a little more environmentally sound.

Inside this Insider...

- 3 Last best hope for CRM ?
- 7 Texas spin of digital dictation RoI
- 9 Readers unimpressed by escrow

Weightmans go with DNA

Liverpool-based top 100 firm Weightmans (number 58 on the Insider top 250 chart) has become the first major firm to go public on its decision to select Axxia's new DNA practice management-meets-process management platform. The firm's managing partner Patrick Gaul said the firm was embarking on a business development strategy that would take it through to 2010 and that DNA would be part of the IT infrastructure that "is integral to every aspect of that strategy... It seemed to us that DNA had excellent process management capability and would help us to understand what is happening in the business and help our people to manage it better. Weightmans will be rolling out DNA to its entire 750-strong staff.

- Fast growing BPL Solicitors, which was formed in 2005 as a breakaway from Battens, has selected Axxia's Artiion system as its new PMS platform.

Gernier quits Tikit for Pilgrim

Jacqui de Gernier, who for the past seven years has worked for Tikit on KM and portal systems, has joined Pilgrim Systems with responsibility for LawSoft new business sales and account management in the south of England. De Gernier, who began her legal IT career in PMS sales, said the chance to work with some of the best names in the market, including Jim Cummings and David Thorpe, was especially appealing.



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News in brief

Research Monitor goes into CC

Clifford Chance has rolled out Priory Solutions' (0845 056 9464) Research Monitor at its Canary Wharf offices. Research Monitor is an online research and cost management system designed to provide greater fee earner access to online information sources while retaining centralised control for cost management and recovery.

www.priorysolutions.co.uk

Integration at JD Spicer

London criminal practice JD Spicer & Co has just rolled out DPS Software's accounts and integrated TeamTalk digital dictation systems at its Kilburn, Wood Green and City offices.

Pannone agree deal with Converge-IT

Converge-IT (0870 770 0790) has been awarded IT supplier status for consultancy, network design and support services by Connect2Law, the solicitors referral and support network headed by Pannone LLP.

Lit support news

- UK litigation support bureau **Millnet** is to offer its customers **Equivio's** technology for detecting near-duplicate files during the discovery review process.
- **Trilantic** has formed a partnership with **Wave Software** to use Wave's Trident system to process and de-duplicate emails during e-discovery projects.
- **iConect Development** has launched the iCONNECTnext Pod, a hosted service (there are Pod sites in the UK and Germany) that allows law firms and corporations to search, manage and review documents online, whether as part of a litigation process or as a virtual data/dealroom.

www.equivio.com

www.discoverthewave.com

www.iconect.com

ILTA attracts good turnout in London

As part of its campaign to expand its presence outside North America and US law firms, the International Legal Technology Association (ILTA) attracted a good turnout for its Insight 2007 conference in London last week. A total of about 140 delegates and vendor representatives attended the sessions, which comprised a twin-track programme of primarily panel sessions rather than death-by-Powerpoint presentations. There were also plenty of breaks for networking (there were no exhibition areas or vendor booths, so everyone got to mingle) and an early evening reception that must have left the organisers wondering if delegates had homes to go to. For information about ILTA in the UK email Peggy Wechsler at peggy@iltanet.org or Nigel Blackwood at nigel_blackwood@wragge.com

- Although most of the vendors present were the usual suspects, we did see a lot of interest in Esquire Innovations who offer a range of redlining and metadata management applications which in the US are proving an attractive and cost effective alternative to Workshare's offerings.

www.esqinc.com

Humber Ashford in CLT deal

Humber Ashford Associates (08700 645060) are working with Central Law Training's inhouse training division to offer bespoke IT training to law firms and corporate legal departments. The courses will be on firms' own systems, including case management, DMS and digital dictation software, as distinct from generic IT training.

- Humber Ashford have also formed an alliance with systems integrators Phoenix Business Solutions (020 7680 4450) that will see them providing the training resource on system implementation projects handled by Phoenix.

Pinpointing accountants needs

Quill's Pinpoint (0161 236 2910) legal accounting bureau service is now attracting interest from auditors, who are using it to log into their law clients' records on a read-only basis, so they can access information as and when they need it rather than having to wait until they next visit a firm's offices. Charles Hewitt of FD OnCall also uses the service to export data into Excel spreadsheets to produce forecasts and management reports for his clients.

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Cuatrecasas go ERM: last best hope for CRM?

The giant Spanish law firm Cuatrecasas has become the first European law firm to sign up for Contact Networks' ContactNet ERM (enterprise relationship management) software. But what is ERM? Is it something different or is this merely putting old CRM wine into new bottles?

According to Contact Networks' founder and CEO Geoffrey Hyatt, ERM is different to CRM, both in terms of concept and technology. So just what is it?

Hyatt was too tactful to say it directly but essentially ERM would appear to be what you need if you want those CRM strategies you've been struggling with for the past few years to actually work properly. Hyatt's view is ignore the hype, CRM systems are not enterprise-wide client relationship management platforms but merely contact data management software suitable for use in marketing departments. CRM, he says, keeps track of the dots whereas ERM helps you see the lines between those dots. The essence of an ERM application such as ContactNet, says Hyatt, is it not only identifies the relationships between contacts but also measures the strength of ➔

TFB in major Corebridge win

Silverbeck Rymer, a firm regularly rated by *The Lawyer* magazine as one of the top 10 rising stars in the legal world, has become the first major UK firm to select the Corebridge integrated telephony system. The deal was secured by TFB, who will be integrating Corebridge with the firm's TFB Partner for Windows case and practice management systems. The initial rollout will see more than 170 users given access to the system.

ILTA to sponsor Law 2007

The International Legal Technology Association (ILTA) has become the latest sponsor for The Solicitors Group's Law NEC 2007 event which takes place on 6th & 7th June. The Solicitors Group is also holding a training conference and exhibition at the Olympia in London this autumn (16th-to-18th October), with its next event, Law London 2008, scheduled for 12th & 13th March, also at the Olympia www.solicitorsgroup.co.uk

For more news see page 5

➔ those contacts. That way, you can distinguish between close contacts and casual acquaintances. ContactNet does this in the same way search engines rank websites: by constantly analysing data. With ContactNet, this data is primarily communications patterns, with the system looking at the frequency, volume and response times for email traffic.

"Just as you don't have to register a website address with Google for it to have a search engine ranking," says Hyatt, "so you don't need to spend six months keying contact data into an ERM system and then manually updating it. Instead the system can do it over a weekend." Contact Networks say reports from their US users suggest that just 15% of the relationships identified by ContactNet are derived by formal contact repositories, such as address books, with 85% drawn from an analysis of email traffic.

Although ContactNet was launch five years ago, the company only entered the legal market last year but since then it has already won business from 15 AmLaw top 100 firms, including Wilson Sonsini, Skadden Arps, Mintz Levin, Duane Morris and Sheppard Mullin.

Currently ContactNet user firms are running ERM in one of three scenarios: some are using it integrated with their existing Interaction CRM software, some are Interaction users but running ContactNet separately, and some have no CRM software and find that ContactNet meets all their needs. (ContactNet can also be integrated with Microsoft Dynamics CRM, as well as Microsoft Exchange and Lotus Domino.)

- Contact Networks has just announced that Tikit will market, implement and support the ContactNet ERM system in the UK and Continental Europe.

www.contactnetworks.com

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Editorial: know your customer

We only heard one bad thing about last week's ILTA conference in London and that was a *cultural* grumble. To quote the words of the IT director of one London firm "Could you tell those very nice people at ILTA that in the UK we like to start events between 9:30 and 10:00am – not at 8:30. And, that lunches should be for eating and networking – not being subjected to a lengthy keynote speech." It may seem a minor point but it can make all the difference between a successful event and a flop. As reported on page 2, the ILTA event had plenty of other things in its favour, so the timing and lunch issues were not critical however as we are in the middle of the events season perhaps it would not do any harm to remind conference organisers, seminar speakers and technology exhibitors that THEY SHOULD DO THEIR HOMEWORK and ensure they really know their customers.

We've lost track of the number of IT vendors, typically those new to the legal market, who still talk about executives, directors and companies, when they should be talking about fee earners, partners and law firms. Likewise we hear people telling small firms and – worst of all – sole practitioners, that their firms' IT departments will be able to sort out any technical problems they may have. What IT departments! There might be 9000+ law firms in the UK but only about 100 (and that's being generous) could be described as large businesses in terms of their manpower and resources. The rest are very much at the small end of the SME scale. But, does this stop people? No, on they go, talking about technologies their audiences will never need and trying to sell them services they will never buy. And then they have the nerve to complain that a particular event was 'not very good' because they had no leads. Well *quelle surprise* but if they'd done their homework they would have known that before they'd stepped out of bed that morning.

...Charles Christian

Opinion: so what exactly is SharePoint ?

There's been much speculation as to whether Microsoft Office SharePoint Server (MOSS) 2007 will become a de facto standard in the legal sector. One of the reasons is SharePoint is being hailed as one of the most cost-effective portal solutions on the market and that it is able to address a wide range of needs.

However an obstacle to its success is people generally do not know exactly what SharePoint is, nor what it can do and how it can be used. Interestingly, there is little information available on Microsoft's own website demonstrating SharePoint's capabilities and the available information can be rather confusing. Given the importance of this product, it is a shame that more is not done to convey its true potential. Another obstacle is SharePoint's first releases had a bad reputation. The fact is SharePoint 2007 is more user-friendly and stable compared to previous versions. Substantial enhancements have been made to all aspects of SharePoint, but especially to document and records management, business process integration, forms and business intelligence.

One of the most popular uses for SharePoint is as an intranet solution, whereby SharePoint can potentially provide a single portal for solicitors to access all information held on existing disparate systems. This portal can also be extended to include a know-how section, encompassing knowledge and document management.

This makes SharePoint an interesting value proposition to firms of all sizes, specially since some of the well-known portal solutions are often over-priced and too complex for most firms. They also require specialised knowledge to implement and support them which calls for a dedicated IT department or expensive consulting fees. Maintaining a Windows/Office environment is, all things being equal, a lot more cost efficient.

Although SharePoint is inexpensive compared to other portal solutions, the cost of set-up and customisation should not be forgotten when agreeing a budget. However firms operating an IT budget on a shoe-string will quickly learn that a large proportion of requirements can actually be covered by standard SharePoint features. For these reasons it is not surprising many firms are already planning or in the midst of SharePoint implementation projects. So, despite the lack of information from Microsoft, SharePoint may very well find its way into many law firms.

...Katya Linossi, consultant, ClearPeople Ltd

Baker Mack add more security

Baker & McKenzie LLP has selected Workshare's Protect software to enhance information security both within the firm and when staff are working externally, using devices such as laptops, PDAs, Blackberrys and USB sticks. Baker Mack's head of IT Duncan Eadie said "Information security is an ongoing challenge and we take a proactive attitude of always looking at new ways to mitigate any risks, now or in the future. Providing a world class legal service is our primary objective and part of that is ensuring our client documents are secure whether employees are handling them in or out of the office or over email".

Nothing but the Net 2007

The Law Society of Scotland has announced preliminary details about its next *Nothing but the Net* annual legal IT conference and exhibition, which this year will be taking place on Tuesday 2nd October at the Murrayfield Stadium, Edinburgh. The event will include three streams, including sessions on making IT pay, in the context of law firm growth and development strategies, and understanding and utilising IT to maximise efficiency and performance.

Calling all VoIP experts

Over the past few weeks we've received a steady flow of requests from firms looking for information on VoIP suppliers, which firms are using what, who are the good suppliers and, in one case, are there any independent consultants who can act as expert witnesses in a claim against a VoIP supplier. To put it charitably, the current VoIP market is like the Wild West – and it's hard to identify the cowboys. If you've any recommendations, let us know and we'll put together a buyers guide of VoIP suppliers. Email all suggestions to voip@legaltechnology.com

Consultation on PI claims

Speaking at the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers annual conference last Friday, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Falconer announced details of a new consultation paper on improving the claims process for personal injury cases. The consultation period closes on 13th July and copies of the consultation paper can be found on the DCA website. www.dca.gov.uk/consult/case-track-limits/cp0807.htm

News in brief

Charles Russell outsource with CCE

Charles Russell has selected CCE (08707 708700) as its managed services provider to supply 'out of hours' support services and staff. CCE was selected out of a beauty parade of 3 outsourcing companies before the firm's managing partner, finance director and IT director Jon Gould. Gould says the advantages of outsourcing are four-fold "Not only do we now have the predictability of expense, the ability to scale up or down in the face of change and the opportunity to deliver agreed service levels but we are now able to focus on other disciplines such as ITIL." www.cce.co.uk

Shergroup install AlphaLaw ClaimIT

The Shergroup, the solicitors and High Court enforcement officers group, have selected a multi-user AlphaLaw ClaimIT debt recovery and litigation system to provide the central hub for their new extended service for SLC (Sheriffs Lodgement Centre) clients.

Eclipse announce 24 new wins in Q1

Eclipse Legal Systems has won orders from 24 firms for its Proclaim case management software during the first three months of this year. These include Charles Platel Solicitors in Wokingham (conveyancing and accounts), Simpson Sissons & Brooke LLP in Sheffield, a new start-up that is taking conveyancing, personal injury, family work and accounts modules, and the Kennedy Partnership in Ormskirk (conveyancing and probate).

No buts ahead for Beavis and CSG AIM

The Beavis Partnership in Essex has upgraded its software with CS Group AIM to a full Evolution InSight accounts and practice management system. The firm said a key factor was the system's integral risk management functionality.



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International news

KM conference in Dublin

Next month (16th May), Solcara is holding a breakfast seminar (8:30-11:00) on knowledge management at the Law Society in Dublin. Speakers include Aileen Johnson from Ashurst and Judith Cryan from William Fry. There will be opportunities for one-to-one meetings with Solcara in the afternoon. For details email helen.dibble@solcara.com

Interwoven wins across Europe

Wiersholm, one of the largest law firms in Norway, is to roll out Interwoven Worksite DMS. The implementation is being handled by Netherlands-based Morningstar Systems. The Wiersholm deal is one of seven new law firms wins by Interwoven in Continental Europe. Others include RP Richter & Partners in Southern Germany and Kyriades Georgopoulos, who will be Interwoven's first Greek site.

All for X in Arnhem

Timesoft has signed up De Kempenaer Advocaten in Arnhem for its All for X integrated legal system. This comprises Open Text eDocs DMS and an Aderant PMS. This will be Timesoft's 30th Aderant site in the Benelux region.

www.timesoft.nl

SmartDraw upgrade

The SmartDraw legal graphics package has been upgraded with the new release SmartDraw 2007 (v. 8.1) now supporting 'mind mapping' graphics for brainstorming sessions. The new version also supports tablet PCs and works with Microsoft Vista. SmartDraw is widely used in the US legal community to create graphics illustrating accident reconstructions, crime scenes and event timelines – last year the US Department of Justice purchased a 25,000 seat licence for the software.

www.smartdrawlegal.com

People & Places

Venables and Holmes to work together

E-publishing expert Nick Holmes is joining Delia Venables as joint editor of her *Internet Newsletter for Lawyers* from the next (May/June) edition. Holmes, who is planning a redesign for the newsletter, has worked with Venables on a number of publishing projects in the past.

www.venables.co.uk

Wyatt going down under

After nine years with Visualfiles in Leeds, most recently as 'matter management product evangelist,' Paul Wyatt is joining the Visualfiles team at LexisNexis in Australia as business development manager.

All change at Cognito

Cognito Software's long time marketing executive Monica Myrie has left to join Middlesex law firm Vanderpump & Sykes. Robert Piper, previously finance director, becomes managing director as general manager Robin Lavery approaches retirement. And David Amies, most recently with FWBS and Pericom, becomes sales director.

Departing from Aderant

Aderant's EMEA marketing manager Aggie Anthimidou has left the company to take up a new role at Ernst & Young. And salesman Stefan Dutczyn has left to become the northern region sales manager for FWBS.

Lawrence now at TFPL

Legal IT recruitment specialist Nigel Lawrence has left Law Support to become a senior consultant at recruitment and training specialists TFPL (020 7332 6051).

Freegard takes on business development role

Axxia has appointed Pauline Freegard to the newly created position of new business sales manager. Freegard joined the company in 2001 as a key account manager.

New head of development at Jordans

Andy Watson, previously with the Landmark Information Group, has joined Jordans as head of commercial development for its property services (and search) division.

Flatt sails into the sunset

Ahoy, captain! Legal IT journalist Kieran Flatt has been appointed the editor of a yachting/boating magazine.

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Dallas firm improves billing with DDS

Dallas law firm McCathern Mooty LLP, one of the fastest growing law firms in Texas, reports that its billing cycle has improved by over 10 days since the installation of a Bighand digital dictation system. According to the firm's founding partner Jerry Mooty "We had some attorneys who used tapes for dictation and some who didn't dictate at all but they all now use the Bighand system to dictate administrative work, billing records and meeting notes. As a result, we found the billing cycle has been shortened by more than 10 days and obviously that has had a positive impact on the bottom line." Mooty added that it made no sense for attorneys to be doing any typing themselves (which is how some had previously prepared billing notes) when they could be concentrating on legal work.

Digital dictation news in brief

Crescendo win top 100 site

Top 100 law firm Stephenson Harwood has gone live with a Crescendo Digiscribe-XL digital dictation system. The software has been rolled out to 350 fee earners and secretaries and supports desktop, mobile and telephone dictation.

- Andrew Corbett, the IT director at Laytons which has also recently rolled out a Crescendo DDS, said the system "...was very subtly marketed to us with a soft approach and a competitive price. Even though we didn't buy into the marketing hype and Rol figures pushed by other suppliers, we did see that digital dictation was a sensible move forward from our old tape system."

More Speechwrite wins

The latest law firms to order DDS software from Speechwrite include Mander Hadley in Coventry and John Collins & Partners in Swansea.

Bighand and Voicepath announce integration

Outsourced transcription specialist Voicepath has teamed up with Bighand to take advantage of Bighand's new 'one click outsourcing' advanced transcription module which simplifies the process of both channelling work to external transcription bureau and tracking its progress. Two firms are currently beta testing the advanced transcription bureau, with one set to go live imminently. ➔

Winscribe launches version 3.7 & Interwoven link

Winscribe has launched version 3.7 of its digital dictation workflow system. New features include compatibility with Windows Vista, support for the latest portable recorders from Philips and Olympus and integrated Dragon NaturallySpeaking 9 speech recognition software. Winscribe has also announced an integration partnership with Interwoven that will provide links between a dictation job and any relevant files in the Worksite document management repository.

Tods Murray go with the Nflow

Tods Murray LLP in Scotland has gone live with an Nflow digital dictation system after going head-to-head with one other 'market leader' on the final shortlist. Nflow has declined to say who the other supplier was but you don't need to be a rocket surgeon to deduce this must have been either Bighand or Winscribe. The firm said Nflow came out as clear leader because of the simplicity of the nFlow approach coupled with robustness of infrastructure, product design, functionality and full Citrix capabilities. The implementation has gone into the firm's Edinburgh and Glasgow offices, with the replication of all databases and audio files across both offices to provide a disaster recovery facility.

- Nflow has selected the e-Service Desk system from ICCM to help manage its help desk and customer support operations. The ICCM system is based on the Metastorm BPM workflow engine and Nflow will initially be running the incident and change management modules of e-Service Desk.

www.iccm.co.uk

Bighand secures 500th customer

Mintons Solicitors in Leeds has become Bighand's 500th professional services customer. The 8 user firm has selected the Bighand3 digital dictation system.

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News in brief

Phillips sign up with Videss

Basingstoke-based Phillips Solicitors has selected the Legal Office system from CS Group Videss as its new case and practice management system.

New facilities & modules from SC@MS

Solicitors Case Management Systems (SC@MS) launched a finances/ancillary relief module at the Resolution (formerly Solicitors Family Law Association) annual conference last month. This is compliant with the Family Law Protocol and the Resolution Code of Practice and includes an expandable, emailable self-calculating Form E. SC@MS has also launched an off-site backup and validation service.

www.scams-law.com

Hopkins pick EMIS

Nottinghamshire firm Hopkins Solicitors has selected the Seneca software suite from EMIS IT to handle its accounts, matter management, digital dictation and CRM activities. The firm will be rolling the system out to 65 users later this summer.

Insider featured job

Technical Consultant, Interwoven UK

Interwoven UK is offering a 'highly competitive' salary for a technical consultant to work on the implementation and design of document and records management systems. Full details on the Insider website. To apply, please email your CV to cclamp@interwoven.com

Looking for legal IT staff, including posts in management, sales, development, KM, support, marketing, accounts or training? The Insider Jobsboard has the best choice of legal IT jobs available in the UK and you can post your vacancies free of charge by emailing jobs@legaltechnology.com

Fresh on the radar

Teneros – an end to email downtime

One product making its debut at last week's ILTA London event was the Teneros Application Continuity Appliance. This is an always-on high availability and disaster recovery system for Microsoft Exchange that is packaged as an everything-in-one-box plug-in device. Teneros developed the system for mid-market organisations (which means most law firms) that don't have the budgets and IT resources of multinationals but who still need 24/7 email coverage. Teneros say the key attractions of the system are that it is non-invasive (you just slot the device into your network next to an Exchange server) and imposes no extra workloads on inhouse IT staff as the system is managed remotely by the Teneros network operations centre. In the US it is being used both to cover Exchange servers within local offices and as a remote disaster recovery facility, so one office can cover another office if a site goes down.

Existing users of Teneros systems include US law firm Gunderson Dettmer and the Royal College of Physicians. The Insider understands that Scottish law firm Dickson Minto has also ordered the system. Resellers for the system in the UK include Westcom, Hydra, 24/7 Mail and E92 Plus. Given the current strong state of the £pound, the entry level ACA 2500i, which supports 250 users and a 100Gb mail store, will sell for about £9500 + VAT.

www.teneros.com

Your name's not on the list

Buried in the minutes of the most recent (2nd April) HMRC (the government body responsible for stamp duty land tax) third party developers meeting is the news that HMRC will "suppress" the manual submission of SDLT returns as soon as possible after 8th May and that suppliers who cannot produce an electronic SDLT 5 form by this date will be removed from the HMRC list of accredited suppliers. Check out the website to see the status of suppliers.

www.hmrc.gov.uk/efiling/sdlsoft-dev.htm

The minutes also discuss the PISCES XML standard and contains the statement "HMRC cannot align itself to any particular company or enforce a data standard other than its own. Our business is diverse and is not just about property transactions, as a consequence we have an overarching strategy for all our customers..."

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Insider readers poll: escrow, what is it good for?

Last month we asked readers what they thought about escrow agreements, this is what you said: Among law firms, 69% said they had escrow agreements in place with their software suppliers, while 31% did not. However of those firms with escrow agreements, only 7.7% reckoned it covered all their systems, while 92.3% made do with just some coverage. When it came to buying new software, 37.5% of firms described the availability of escrow as 'moderately important' (nobody felt it was very important) and 67.5% of you said it was unimportant.

This finding was echoed in the answers to the following question, with only 25% of respondents saying they'd be willing to pay an extra amount in annual support charges for an escrow agreement. We also asked if readers understood the difference between source code and a software application – and 100% of respondents said they did. There again the Insider does have a specialist readership, as witnessed by the fact 68% said they had people in their organisations with the skills to work on source code.

There were also some questions specifically for suppliers: We asked if suppliers offered escrow – 40% said they offered it to everyone, 40% said they only offered it to those who asked and 20% said they never offered escrow. None of the suppliers said they offered escrow as a chargeable extra. We also asked how frequently the issue of escrow arose in sales negotiations – 40% said sometimes, 60% said rarely. No suppliers ticked the other options of 'all the time' and 'never' however 20% did say they had been in situations where the availability of escrow had been crucial to winning an order. Finally, the NCC came out as the most widely used organisation with which to lodge source code, used by 75% of suppliers responding to the survey. *(But see next story.)*

NCC – there is an alternative

The NCC may currently offer the most widely used escrow services in the UK but it is not the most popular as we've received a lot of complaints about the cost of its validation services. One company we are hearing good things about, as a cheaper alternative to the NCC, is Software Escrow Solutions (01625 260620) in Cheshire. Check them out.

www.s-e-suk.co.uk

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Happy birthday x 2

Niche case management software supplier Acculaw has just celebrated its 20th anniversary. The company's founder Tom Hervey dryly commented that "The winds of change sweeping across the industry seem to have passed us by completely. We must be one of the few suppliers still in the original ownership and the only one with exactly the same staff as we started out with in 1987, not to mention a surprising proportion of customers going back to the 1980s. Hervey says that while debt collection, mortgage repossession and uninsured loss recovery still account for the bulk of Acculaw's business (which this year will see pre-tax profits in excess of £250k) "a new growth area is asset finance, which involves repossessing cars and other stuff".

And, in just over a fortnight, on the 11th May, Eclipse Legal Systems celebrates its 20th anniversary – which is slightly ironic as Eclipse is still seen by many as the new kids on the case management block. The original founders – Steve Ough, now technical director, and Russell Thomson, now sales director – are still with the company which last year recorded its best trading figures ever with a £3.2m turnover and profits of £500k.

HIPs news in brief

Intellego to provide HIPs training for Live Org

E-Learning specialists Intellego Systems has devised a 'webversity' of interactive online training programmes for estate agents working with conveyancing support services provider The Live Organisation.

Relieving HIPs pain with PDF

PDF specialists DocScorp say their pdfDocs Desktop software could be just the system for organisations wanting to create HIPs bundles. The technology can take content from multiple sources (Word files, scanned documents etc) and then collate them into one PDF file. The software, which can be integrated with a DMS or PMS also supports redaction, annotation, form filling and digital signatures.

www.docscorp.com

HIPS Assured commits to VisualFiles

HIPs supplier HIPS Assured has selected LexisNexis Visualfiles as its technology supplier and anticipates generating a 'significant number' of HIPs each month.

10 years ago today...

The buzzword in April 1997 was *the Martini factor* – in other words intranets and extranets that could deliver client and matter information "anytime, any place, anywhere". Bond Street lawyers Jeffrey Green Russell (in those days one of the pioneers in the use of online technologies) was one of the first firms to go live with an intranet. In a similar vein north London solicitors Kaye Tesler & Co (senior partner Martin Kaye was another early legal IT innovator) that month launched a series of web-based commoditised legal services.

Anyone for Tiffin ?

The dictation transcription bureau DictateNow has become the official sponsor of the Tiffin Cup. This is a curry cooking competition that takes place at the House of Commons each July (and *no* we are not making this up) where the contestants are chefs from Indian restaurants that have been nominated by their local MPs. A panel of celebrity chefs selects the winner and the proceeds from ticket sales go to charity.

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