



## DPS OUTLOOK OFFICE – GOING WITH THE MICROSOFT FLOW by Charles Christian, editor, Legal Technology Insider

*The development of legal software has always been subject to trends. Sometimes it has been in response to changes in technology. Sometimes it has been in response to changes in the legal services market. And, above all, it has been in response to changes in user demands. For this reason, says well-known legal technology commentator and journalist Charles Christian, the new **Outlook Office** system from **DPS Software** is well worth looking at, as it embraces not one, not two, not three but four of the hottest trends in law office systems design today...*

### • **Non-invasive technology**

Over the last couple of years there has been a growing recognition in law firm management circles that while technology may be a pervasive part of the modern legal office, it need not be invasive. That is, we may not be able to live without IT but it should not be taking over our lives. Ideally, technology ought to be in the background, just part of the overall office landscape – a tool to help rather than dictate the way fee earners get on with their work.

This ideal echoes what complaint lawyers have been saying since the earliest days of computerisation; they want IT systems that fit within the way they already work, not vice versa. Former Law Society president Fiona Woolf summed up this position in her introduction to the 2007 edition of the annual *Software Solutions Guide*:

“Firms of all types and sizes increasingly think of IT as a routine part of their day-to-day operations. Extraordinarily sophisticated technology is rightly regarded as part of the infrastructure necessary to provide an efficient service to clients. Most practitioners are now comfortable with IT as a tool to support their businesses and when it works well it is almost invisible.”

This ‘invisible’ element successfully describes the new *DPS Outlook Office* product because it is embedded within the Microsoft Outlook program – the application you now find open on most computer literate lawyers’ desks to manage their contacts, diaries and email messages. What this means in practise is, instead of requiring fee earners to change their routines to fit in with the software’s way of working, the new DPS system seamlessly mirrors the fee earners’ existing work routines.

Lawyers ‘live’ in Microsoft Outlook - now, with *DPS Outlook Office*, they can continue to live in Outlook but also naturally *access and utilise a whole suite of DPS tools* (including case management, time recording and accounts previewing, recording telephone attendance notes against matters and digital dictation) *from within that same Outlook interface*. Of course all these tools have been available before – but in separate applications, so the typical lawyer would have to hop in and out of Outlook and backwards and forwards between applications.



### • Minimal training burden

Closely related to the benefits of offering a non-invasive, complementary technology, DPS Outlook Office also delivers the allied benefit of potentially minimising the training burden. This is important because one of the biggest headaches facing all law firms today wanting to roll new IT systems (or merely upgrade their existing systems) is not the cost of the software but the costs and upheaval associated with training staff to operate the software. This is particularly a problem when it comes to training partners and lawyers, who are always reluctant or far too busy to break from their fee earning activities to attend training sessions.

As already mentioned, software is a tool and its true value to a firm lies not in its mere possession but in its use – it is what you do with it that makes the difference. So, if an application is not used properly (or hardly used at all) because staff do not know how to operate it, the partnership has just wasted its money. There is however one application that growing numbers of lawyers are already adept at using, namely Microsoft Outlook. It therefore follows that *if another system has an Outlook type interface or – like DPS Outlook Office - is actually embedded within Microsoft Office, the training burden is greatly reduced.*

When it comes to selecting new software, the first question many law firms now ask is: does it have an Outlook interface? DPS Outlook Office ticks this requirement box with a big tick. It not only looks like Outlook, it is actually part of Outlook.

### • Outlook is the fee earner desktop

One of the other trends we have been seeing evolve over the years has been the struggle to dominate and own the fee earner desktop. The logic here has been to create the ultimate in user interfaces. Users can prefer the way that a particular system handles time recording or case management or document management, so that a particular legal software vendor can achieve an element of market dominance. We saw this in the mid-1990s, when some suppliers were quicker than others to abandon green screens and embrace Microsoft Windows.

To this day there are still vendors developing their own unique approaches to the design of the fee earner desktop – some have menu structures, some use a web browser, some have dinky little icons – but why bother? *The reality is that Microsoft Office is, and has been for some years* (since managing email messages came to play such an important role in law firms), *the de facto legal desktop*. With Word for secretaries and Outlook the application of choice for fee earners.

As already mentioned, lawyers 'live' in Outlook and they don't care how clever the interface may be within other applications, such as case management, because as soon as the first opportunity arises, they will be hopping out of that application and back into Outlook. That is why the smart money is now on systems that have a Microsoft Outlook interface. The individual users want it – because they are already familiar with the look and feel. They also want it because *it is more convenient to sit in Outlook than to have to keep toggling between different applications*. And, law firm managements want it because an Outlook interface reduces the training burden and consequently improves the return on their investments in IT.



By embracing Microsoft Outlook, DPS has with its Outlook Office product placed itself at the forefront of legal software design and recognised that there is no shame associated with going with the Microsoft flow, because today, Microsoft Outlook is the fee earner desktop.

#### • **Software as a Service**

The fourth and final trend embodied in DPS Outlook Office is the concept of 'Software as a Service' or SaaS.

Outlook Office can be delivered in the traditional way – namely loaded onto a law firm's server and run across a LAN or a WAN – but it can also be delivered as a service. *This means smaller firms and new start-ups – the type of practices that are frequently strapped for cash and cannot afford major capital investments in technology – will still be able to take advantage of the new DPS software effectively by renting it.*

Although this concept has been around for a number years (in the past it has been called such things as ASP and bureau services), the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies, Microsoft .NET and Microsoft Webservices – all of which are incorporated within DPS Outlook Office – has made SaaS a more practicable, deliverable and sustainable service offering.

You may not have heard of Software as a Service in the past – but you will certainly be hearing a lot more of it in the future. And, once again, DPS is in the vanguard of this new trend.

#### • **Conclusion**

*Lawyers live in Microsoft Outlook – and so does DPS Outlook Office. This is how legal software should be.*

#### **Publisher & editor: Charles Christian**

Charles Christian is a former practising barrister turned independent writer, commentator and industry analyst who has been reporting on developments in law office technology and online legal services for over 25 years. After writing for other publications - he was a Reuters correspondent and a winner of the UK National Newspapers Technology Journalist of the Year Award - in 1995 he launched his own business publishing the industry newsletter Legal Technology Insider.

Christian was also the launch editor for the Legal Technology Journal magazine and his 1998 book 'Legal Practice in the Digital Age' was described as "essential reading for every lawyer in the land" by Professor Richard Susskind. Recently named as one of the "top 10 movers and shakers within the legal IT world", Christian has also been an advisor to the Law Society on its annual Software Solutions Guide - he also wrote the Society's Y2K millennium bug survival guide - and regularly briefs IT vendors, publishers, event organisers and venture capital groups on current industry trends and technology developments.

#### **About: DPS Software**

DPS Software is an experienced Legal Software provider that has consistently supplied innovative products for over 20 years. Their vision is to provide a completely integrated Software solution for the Legal profession and the founder and Managing Director, Osman Ismail, is a regular speaker at Industry events. They are listed in The Law Society's Software Solutions Guide and have a continuously expanding client base of more than 800 firms.

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