

# Internet Newsletter for Lawyers

By Delia Venables

September/October 2004

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*Does e-conveyancing mean disaster for the High Street conveyancer?*

## **The End is Nigh – Or Possibly Not** by Raymond Perry

With e-conveyancing due to begin an incremental national rollout during 2007 some conveyancers are worried. As the Government is keen to see conveyancing carried out by large institutions such as banks and supermarkets on the grounds that this will increase choice there is a concern that the introduction of e-conveyancing means that such institutions will enter the market and force small conveyancers out of business.

Are such fears justified? In fact just as e-conveyancing is unlikely to reduce the cost of buying and selling houses for the consumer it may also turn out to have less impact than anticipated on the structure of the legal profession.

This does not mean that e-conveyancing - assuming that the Land Registry can overcome the remaining technical and security challenges that could still derail the project - will have no impact on conveyancing. Inevitably there will be radical procedural changes in the way conveyancers work.

But it is much more difficult to accurately predict the external consequences, particularly economic ones, of technological development. Even Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, famously failed to spot the importance of the Internet. In fact the introduction of new technology often has unforeseen results – as the recent history of conveyancing illustrates. The widespread adoption of the fax machine in the 1980's brought a big change to conveyancing. But in the same way as safety improvements to motor cars meant people could drive more dangerously the fax led to a fall in standards as conveyancers could now be slapdash and careless in preparation knowing that, say, forgotten enquiries could be faxed over at the last moment.

The fear that the market will become dominated by the large institutions may in part be due to the emergence of the concept of e-conveyancing coinciding with the expansion of Countrywide Property Lawyers (CPL), [www.cwpl.com](http://www.cwpl.com) part of Countrywide plc, [www.countrywideplc.co.uk](http://www.countrywideplc.co.uk). Countrywide plc is primarily a residential estate agency business – it is by some distance the largest chain in the UK - but also provides financial and conveyancing services and owns a 47% share of TM Property Service (one of the three NLIS channel providers). From its creation seven years ago CPL has rapidly become the largest single conveyancing practice in the UK carrying out over 86,000 transactions in 2003. It spends heavily on IT having invested £5.1 million in its new computer system.

The growth of CPL and the appearance of other smaller direct conveyancing operations have led some to believe that e-conveyancing favours such firms. After all a small firm cannot hope to match the IT spending power of CPL or a clearing bank which might enter the conveyancing market.

This overlooks the fact that CPL's success is intimately connected to its ownership by Countrywide plc. As the largest UK estate agent - 865 offices at the start of 2004, and a seven per cent share of the number of estate agents offices nationally - the sale of a property through the agency side of Countrywide will often lead to CPL being instructed as the conveyancers. CPL still only has a small part of the total market - there are close to 1.5 million residential housing transactions each year - but given Countrywide's share of the UK estate agency market there is scope for CPL to grow still further. But for the same reason it is difficult to see any other organisations replicating the success of CPL.

The dream of the "one-stop" financial supermarket that saw Building Societies and Insurers rushing to buy estate agencies in the late 1980's ended in failure - hardly surprising as the clearing banks had never succeeded in doing this.

A large institution that wished to enter the conveyancing market now would naturally prefer to take over an existing business to avoid having to build a practice from scratch, but that is effectively impossible because the market is so fragmented. It is difficult to see how the slim profits from conveyancing would produce the return on capital that shareholders in a bank or supermarket would demand for such a long-term investment. Significantly there is nothing to suggest that e-conveyancing changes this.

It also seems unlikely that economies of scale really apply where IT investment is concerned. Larger firms might be more able (or more willing) to spend large sums on IT but there is little evidence to suggest that the "per head" IT spend is less for large firms than small ones.

There are also some respects where e-conveyancing clearly does not give an advantage to larger businesses. Electronic searching – the part of e-conveyancing which is already with us – merely requires a PC with an Internet connection. There is a comparison here with e-mail - the sole practitioner gets exactly the same benefit as the largest City firm. This is particularly significant as electronic searching may turn out to be the element of e-conveyancing that proves to be of the greatest benefit to the public.

The idea that IT gives a competitive advantage to a business is, for obvious reasons, assiduously promoted by the IT industry. But even this is now being challenged. For example, Nicholas Carr, in his book "Does IT Matter? Information Technology and the Corrosion of Competitive

Advantage" argues that IT has been commoditised and that, whilst there may be a temporary "first-mover" advantage, the fact that technology is available to everyone makes it less likely that use of IT will offer a strategic advantage in the long run (see [www.nicholasgcarr.com](http://www.nicholasgcarr.com)).

In fact the Land Registry have no desire to favour large firms over small firms. There would also be an unpleasant political fallout if e-conveyancing led to the disappearance of lawyers in less affluent or rural areas. Of course e-conveyancing might, quite possibly will, cause unforeseen problems for conveyancers. Security, insurance and usability are all potential problem areas but they are problems for all conveyancers.

None of this means that small firms should ignore e-conveyancing but, as with the typewriter, fax machine and word-processing software (technological developments which all changed the way that lawyers work) the important point is that the benefits are available to everybody.

*Raymond Perry is a partner in Davies and Partners Gloucester and a writer on issues involving the Law and IT. He is the author of a forthcoming book on the e-conveyancing revolution, Future Conveyancing due to be published in early 2005. Aimed at the general practitioner the book will explain what e-conveyancing is, how it works and its likely economic impact on the conveyancing market. Website [www.raymondperry.co.uk](http://www.raymondperry.co.uk) Email [mail@raymondperry.co.uk](mailto:mail@raymondperry.co.uk).*

## The Paperless Office - Has It Worked? by Peter Garsden

In my previous article in this newsletter (May/June 2004), I described how, back in February 2003, our firm, Abney Garsden McDonald, consisting of 2 Partners and 17 fee earners, attempted to migrate to the paperless office. I explained in the article that the centre of operations must be an efficient computer network with shared folders, efficient fast scanning machines and an administrative system which enables documents to be found easily.

I described the hardware and software one needed, how to organise items on the network and the administrative systems that we had introduced to make sure that there were sufficient back-ups on paper and electronically of all documentation in case anything went wrong, and how we delivered post electronically in the morning.

At the end of the article, I explained that our attempt to go paperless had only been a partial success due to the fact that most of the fee-earners were unhappy to completely embrace the concept. The culture change was too sudden and alarming. I include in this article more detail on what we did and the problems encountered and describe where we are up to now. I finish by giving you my forecast for the future as well as my concept of what the paperless office could be like.

### Where did we go wrong?

Before we introduced the paperless office, the subject was mentioned at numerous meetings. We also held 3 or 4 user group meetings to which all staff, from senior fee earners to administrative operatives, were invited. We discussed possible pitfalls and how the new system would work.

A great deal of time was spent devising a postal delivery system which was simple and straightforward. The post is

scanned in, saved to a back up folder divided into years, months and fee earners and then emailed to the relevant fee earner. Additionally, the paper post is delivered. We ensure that the process is completed by mid morning.

From October 2002 until the end of January 2003, we operated the 2 systems side by side. In other words, the paper was not only put on the individual files, but also distributed electronically so that it could be saved in the electronic folders. The purpose of this was to get the fee earners accustomed to the new system.

Although "D Day" was set as 1st February 2003, the message was not properly communicated to all fee earners, who were not aware that from the above date, all paper folders would no longer be updated. The idea was that we would only have a paper file up to the end of January 2003. All new files would only be opened on computer and there would be no cardboard equivalent. Unfortunately the culture shock was too great for some of the senior fee earners.

After 2 or 3 months, the fee earners called a meeting and complained that they did not know where they were up to with their files. It was taking them much longer to work out what had happened on the file. They were feeling lost, frustrated and were starting to panic. Why was this?

\* The fee earners were not universally as adept at using the computer as I had imagined. They could not find their way round the various folders and programmes as quickly and efficiently as I had anticipated. They were becoming frustrated when things went wrong.

\* Taking away the paper file was conceptually too sudden and was creating a feeling of insecurity.

*This is a substantial and detailed article. It is continued online at [www.venables.co.uk/n0409huq.htm](http://www.venables.co.uk/n0409huq.htm) and can also be downloaded from there as a word document.*

## British and Irish Legal Information Institute (BAILII) - Where We are Now by Joe Ury

BAILII's here, it's growing and it won't go away! It is like a scene out of Godzilla but this time it's true (and much more friendly).

Since August last year about 27,000 judgments have been added to BAILII ([www.bailii.org](http://www.bailii.org)).

\* 11,093 of these new judgments were added, often within hours of being handed down.

\* 2,429 were pre 2003 judgments, added to the existing databases. We are currently working on a further 1,261 pre 2003 judgments to fill in any missing past judgments as they become available to BAILII.

\* We have also created new databases with 23,845 judgments from the following:

- Court of Justice of the European Communities (including Court of First Instance Decisions)
- UK Employment Appeals Tribunal
- UK Immigration Appeals Tribunal
- UK Social Security and Child Support Commissioners' Decisions
- UK Financial Services and Markets Tribunals Decisions
- UK Special Commissioners of Income Tax Decisions
- England and Wales Care Standards Tribunal
- Fair Employment Tribunal Northern Ireland Decisions
- Industrial Tribunals Northern Ireland Decisions.

Additionally we have made 19,277 corrections to existing judgments in order improve the BAILII searching facility.

We are currently building five more databases and are in discussion with several sources to acquire more pre 1996 judgments. We are always making improvements to the BAILII systems that collect, convert, enhance and deliver the information that the user requires.

This significant case expansion is reflected in our usage statistics, as more and more people hear about BAILII and find the primary legal material they are looking for.

Irish content on BAILII is the result of cooperation between BAILII and IRLII, the Irish Legal Information Initiative. In addition to BAILII content, IRLII, at [www.irlii.org](http://www.irlii.org) also offers a number of unique services such as a searchable index of Irish cases and a comprehensive listing of academic articles published in 15 Irish journals from 1997 to date.

The BAILII project is fostering an attitude of shared ownership amongst the users and we receive many messages of encouragement and many helpful suggestions via our feedback link. In this same vein we receive a good deal of cooperation from the courts and tribunal staff as they work to provide us with judgments/decisions. In some cases they have even modified their procedures in order to take advantage of our ability to rapidly publish their material.

A great advantage of BAILII is its association with legal institute initiatives in other countries including AustLII (the Australasian Legal Information Institute at [www.austlii.org](http://www.austlii.org)), CanLII (the Canadian Legal Information Institute at [www.canlii.org](http://www.canlii.org)), PacLII (the Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute at [www.paclii.org](http://www.paclii.org)), HKLII (the Hong Kong Legal Information Institute at [www.hklii.org](http://www.hklii.org)), SafLII (South Africa materials at [www.saflii.org](http://www.saflii.org)) and indeed a single site which tries to include all the materials offered from those above, WorldLII at [www.worldlii.org](http://www.worldlii.org).

These legal information institutes agree:

- \* To promote and support free access to public legal information throughout the world, principally via the Internet;
- \* To cooperate in order to achieve these goals and, in particular, to assist organisations in developing countries to achieve these goals, recognising the reciprocal advantages that all obtain from access to each other's law;
- \* To help each other and to support, within their means, other organisations that share these goals with respect to:
  - Promotion of public policy conducive to the accessibility of public legal information;
  - Technical assistance, advice and training;
  - Development of open technical standards;
  - Academic exchange of research results.

The WorldLII databases include case law, legislation, law commission reports, law journals and treaties from around the world. A lawyer can search refugee jurisprudence across many jurisdictions. A law student can have access to law commission papers throughout the common law world on say, defences to murder. WorldLII allows for focused and exhaustive legal research – and all for free.

The WorldLII association is slowly developing and a recent outcome is the overnight mirroring of BAILII databases on the WorldLII service. If you are ever unable to connect to BAILII keep it in mind that BAILII content, usually up to the day before, can be found in the Europe collection on WorldLII. It is in conjunction with WorldLII that some of our EU databases will be developed.

Regular users will probably have noticed that, as the body of materials on BAILII grows, the number of hyperlinks between neutral citations in documents have grown. You can quickly go between, for example, a Court of Appeal judgment and the Immigration Appeal decision cited, between a House of Lords Decision and the judgment on appeal or from a VAT & Duties Tribunal decision to a High Court judgment cited therein.

BAILII as a charity is supported by the donations of organizations and individuals who promote and support the concept of free access to public legal information. A good example of sponsorship is Matrix Chambers' sponsorship of the Employment Appeals Tribunal Decisions database. We, or I should say you, now have a huge (11,093 decisions and growing) fully searchable database of EAT decisions as far back as 1989, many of them difficult to locate anywhere else.

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Lawyers Online [www.LawyersOnline.co.uk](http://www.LawyersOnline.co.uk) Hereford House, Offa Street, Hereford HR1 2LL, tel 0870 777 8980.

With all resources going toward the basic running costs of BAILII your donations have a direct influence on the quality and quantity of BAILII content. BAILII needs your support so if you are able to donate or the organization you work for would like to be a BAILII sponsor please get in touch or donate via our "Donate to BAILII" button on our home page.

The staff of BAILII consists of myself (Executive Director), Roger Burton West (BAILII System Administrator and Developer) and Vicky Martzoukou (Project Officer - RCJ Judgments).

Joe Ury, BAILII Executive Director, [jury@bailii.org](mailto:jury@bailii.org).

## Five years of Free Law - BAILII 5th Anniversary Celebration

Monday 1st November 2004 18.15 pm for 18.45 pm

Chairman: The Rt Hon Lord Justice Brooke

Hosted by Baker & McKenzie, 100 New Bridge Street,  
London EC4V 6JA

Meeting fee £25.00. Registration form and more details will be posted soon on BAILII at [www.bailii.org](http://www.bailii.org)

## Is Online Backup Feasible for Lawyers?

### A Preliminary Investigation by Roderick Ramage

I am a single handed sole practitioner working at home with no staff and one PC and a Psion, so my needs are relatively simple. My two main concerns are security of confidential information and backup for lost files.

#### (a) Security

My solution to this is to keep all my confidential files on an external hard disk connected by a USB cable, so I can remove it when I am away and keep it in a locked cabinet with my paper files. My present external hard disk drive is a Freecom FHD-2 which appears on Windows Explorer as F drive. My precedents, know-how and other law files are all on C drive so I or others can do research, write articles etc without access to the confidential files.

#### (b) Back up

My gee-whiz computer friends had difficulty in advising me about back-up because they could not understand how simple a user's requirements can be. After failing to find any "system" that seemed to make sense, I simply backup my files onto CDs. An incidental bonus of backing up on CDs is that I can take my precedents and working files to another solicitor or a client's office and carry on working.

### So Why Online?

My main problem with CD backup is remembering to do it! Perhaps also, the CD is a bit flimsy and, for lack of all one's software and personal settings, it cannot give instant rescue in the case of a catastrophe. CDs would certainly be quite inadequate, and their use too haphazard, for a partnership. I would like a system that feels more substantial than CDs and so I started to look for on-line services.

The attractions of backing up my files online are, if the suppliers' claims are to be believed, that:

- \* I can do so at the click (or two) of a mouse, every day,
- \* the data is stored off-site (how many of us actually remove our backup disks or tapes from our office buildings?),
- \* the system is technically more reliable and secure than my own computer, and
- \* if disaster strikes I can restore my files into any computer and be back at work without break.

### Confidentiality

After reading every page of the first UK site I found ([www.backupdirect.net](http://www.backupdirect.net)), it was obvious to me that the most

important feature was missing - Confidentiality. If an online service has a greater risk of breach of confidentiality than an in-house system, then all other features (price, technical competence, ease of use etc) are wholly irrelevant. A breach of a solicitor's duty of confidentiality can lead to claims for damages and discipline for professional misconduct. My initial thoughts are that in this context there are three elements to confidentiality:

#### (a) Technical

The provider's computer system must be secure, both in its physical location (so that intruders cannot remove or damage the hardware) and electronically (so that intruders cannot hack into it to copy, delete or interfere with the data). I and other average users, even if moderately computer literate, cannot assess whether or not a computer system is technically safe from intrusion. Some form of independent 3rd party certification is desirable.

#### (b) Contract

The provider's conditions of business must contain express obligations by the provider to keep all data confidential and to prohibit its disclosure or migration and to provide for, or at least not to exclude, compensation for the consequences of breach. Indemnity insurance is desirable.

#### (c) Personnel

No matter how good a provider's technology and contract terms, they are of little value unless supported by the personal integrity of all of the provider's staff who have access to the data and the hardware on which it is stored. Fidelity bonding is desirable.

### The Market

My search on Google for "online backup uk" produced only a few UK suppliers; these included [www.backupdirect.net](http://www.backupdirect.net), [www.databarracks.com](http://www.databarracks.com) and [www.fluffy.co.uk](http://www.fluffy.co.uk). I looked at all the pages which seemed to be relevant and whilst some of the sites may have the information one wants it is frequently absent or very hard to find. There are generally no express confidentiality provisions and in one case, the company reserves the right under the Data Protection Act to transfer data outside the UK! Emailed enquiries get partial answers or (worse) flippant ones.

### Conclusion

For my part I do not feel that I can safely use any of these services and I must continue to rely on my simple home made solutions. I hope that these preliminary findings may prompt others to write about what they do or have found elsewhere or to research more deeply.

*Roderick Ramage, is a sole practitioner;*  
See [www.law-office.co.uk](http://www.law-office.co.uk).  
email [roderick.ramage@law-office.co.uk](mailto:roderick.ramage@law-office.co.uk).

# Shopping in Tesco Legal Store

by Neil Howlett

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**Legal Store** DIY legal solutions at great value prices

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- Unmarried Couples and the Law
- DIY Separation & Divorce
- Employment Law
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- Claim for all the benefits you are due?
- Make an agreement to rent a house or flat?
- Write a letter of complaint?
- Make sure you qualify for...

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**Jargon buster** Legal terms explained more

**Useful links** Helpful legal websites more

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Tescolaw ([www.tescolegalstore.com](http://www.tescolegalstore.com)) opened its virtual doors in July 2004. I have strolled down the electronic aisles as a mystery shopper. By the time I reach the exit, I have been reminded of how scared some people must be of lawyers and I have been given a lesson in customer service. However, I am still unconvinced that this development is a major contribution to access to justice.

Tesco Legal Store is a part of the Tesco website, along with groceries, DVD's, books, power, holidays, wine, mobile phones and financial services. It offers free information online, links to other legal sites, and products for sale.

It advertises itself saying "Legal Store Customers like": -

- \* Saving costly legal fees
- \* A 30 day money-back guarantee
- \* Simple, clear information
- \* Forms to download and use straight away
- \* Earning Clubcard points on purchases.

The free information is categorised by legal topic, but is largely unstructured. It is mostly random legal FAQ's, which are unlikely to help a consumer looking to help with a specific problem. By comparison with the CLS site at [www.clsdirect.org.uk](http://www.clsdirect.org.uk) (the new CLS site which used to be JustAsk) or NACAB's [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk) it is poor. Most of the free pages link directly to offers of commercial products, although that is the way the internet often works.

The free advice pages do also link indirectly to "our" Find a Lawyer Service, which is actually a link to the Law Society's website. The Law Society says that the directory has received an increased number of hits since Tesco Legal Store started. However, this site is not without problems, (e.g., it only includes membership of Law Society accredited Specialist Panels, or self accredited specialities). There is

a real need for a website which includes all accreditations and other sources of help, such as advice centres.

To be fair, the Tesco site says that it does not offer legal advice. However it offers products that purport to help with legal problems. The exclusions of liability which pop up at various stages are complicated, and go to the full limit of the law; Tesco and Lawpack say they will only accept any liability if you are killed or injured from using their products, which seems unlikely. The site does encourage consumers to seek legal advice but exactly at what stage they should do so is unclear. I fear from experience that some of the people who think they can do it themselves will only accept that they need professional advice after they have created situations that will cost them even more to put right.

Much of the site is concerned with selling forms and "How To" books produced by Lawpack. The forms can be downloaded as zip files, which open as Word documents, and most cost £1.99. Some less experienced computer users may be unclear whether they should save the forms to disc or open them directly, but Mac users will be pleased there is an option for them. Books can be ordered and come by first class post, many with forms on CD. Are they good value for money compared with the information and forms available for free online?

I looked at two of the forms available under the heading "Accidents and Injury". The first was an "Insurance Claim for Property Damage Form", which the site says you can "send to your insurance company to tell them you're making a claim, and to ask for a claim form to be sent to you". This amounts to a half page letter, which highlighted options to complete. It is hard to see the value in this, unless you are the kind of person who will forget to include your Policy Number or address in a letter to your insurers.

That is really a detail; the whole form is redundant. Most home insurers register claims by phone, and do not bother with claim forms. This includes Tesco themselves, and I would praise the explanation of their telephone claims process in the FAQ's on [www.tescofinance.com](http://www.tescofinance.com). Why pay £1.99 to do something more slowly?

I then tried the "Referral to Ombudsman Form", of which the site says, "Send this letter to the Insurance Ombudsman to explain a dispute you're having with an insurance company, and ask them to investigate the problem". As the Financial Ombudsman Service site at [www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk) provides well written explanations of procedures, FAQ's and referral forms to complete online or download (or which they will complete for you over the phone) I wondered what LawPack could be offering for £1.99. What they offer is an even shorter letter addressed to the Insurance Ombudsman Service. To start with the IOB was replaced by the FOS in November 2001.

It is hard to think of any words to describe these products other than "rip-off". The most prominent paragraph of the site warns "Lawyers can be expensive - why not see if you can handle the problem yourself?" It is no defence to say that the unit price is small if the products offered are poor.

I raised these points with Tesco under their 30 day money back guarantee and I had both a refund and a reasoned response and apology within one working day. Within a week the IOB form was removed, and an amended FOS letter was made available for free. That is commendable, although I still think consumers would be better advised to go to the FOS website.

I also compared the "Separation and Divorce - Self Help Kit" for £9.99 with the free information available online. The book was written in 2003 so does not include anything about FDR Hearings, and it could say more about Mediation. It is practical and is clearly and simply written but includes little beyond what is available from free websites accessible through sites like [www.venables.co.uk](http://www.venables.co.uk), such as [www.divorceaid.co.uk](http://www.divorceaid.co.uk) or [www.divorce-lawfirm.co.uk](http://www.divorce-lawfirm.co.uk).

Much of this free information could in fact be accessed via the Tesco Legal Store Links page, which is good, up to date and with enough information to make it more than just a list of URLs. For instance, the "You and the Courts" section of the Court Service website has new simple stage by stage

explanations of processes, which also has the direct links to the forms in PDF format, and includes features such as a user friendly calendar to show how to calculate dates.

There is so much good information available for free on the web that it is hard to see that it is worth paying for this, although you can read a book in private (my children got quite worried looking over my shoulder while I was researching this article). I could have got the book cheaper on Amazon, and I was amazed to be offered so many other books on the same subject, including "Divorce for Dummies". On price the best value seemed to be the Dorling Kindersley book of Divorce and Finances second hand for only £2.35!

Tesco Legal Store may be a curate's egg, but the bits that are bad really stink (though Tesco have said they will review them). Generally consumers would save money by being directed to free sites, and there is a conflict to be resolved between selling things they could get for free, and funding their access to that free information.

There is so much good information on the internet. I use it myself, and I refer my clients to it when appropriate. The demand is there, not just "silver surfers", but the motley crew who now fill that part of my local library given over to "The People's Network". The USP of libraries was that their resources were organised in a structured way and if you got lost there was always someone to ask where to find it and which book would be best for you. The internet hasn't solved that problem yet, or worked out how to finance it.

Readers of this article are likely to be in the legal profession; they will know of [www.venables.co.uk](http://www.venables.co.uk) and they will have their own list of "Favorites". If Tesco Legal Store helps members of the public access good advice that is a good thing. They will get some, but they may pay for it when they don't need to.

*Neil Howlett is a solicitor in private practice who suffers a fascination with the internet, which variously delights and exasperates him. Email [neilmhowlett@hotmail.com](mailto:neilmhowlett@hotmail.com).*

*There will be an article next time by Alan Chance, of Lawpack, about how the site was developed. Other contributions to the general debate are also invited; What do you think of the site? What does it mean for Solicitors?*

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### ***(Message from Context)***

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## **E-mail Marketing Regulation Across Europe** *by Eduardo Ustaran*

Legal harmonisation within the European Union is a wonderful idea. Imagine being able to run a pan-European business operation without having to dissect the regulatory nuances of every single Member State. Imagine being able to deal with just one set of regulatory authorities. One might even be able to achieve full legal compliance and get on with running the business.

An area where this appears to be a hopeless ambition is e-mail marketing. When the European Commission published its original proposal for a new data protection directive for the electronic communications sector in July 2000, harmonisation was a key driver. The desirable prospect of a common EU e-privacy regime seemed achievable. Four years later, the differences are still there. The directive concerning the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy in the electronic communications sector (2002/58/EC) was fiercely negotiated by all camps and as a result, there is quite a bit of room for national divergences in its interpretation.

This article looks at the different ways in which some EU Members States have interpreted the rules established by the directive in the area of e-mail marketing. Unfortunately, a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to work.

### **Targeting your own customers**

Whilst the main rule is the requirement to obtain consent prior to the sending of unsolicited e-mails, in practice the most heavily relied upon provision of the directive is the exception to this rule under Article 13(2). According to this provision, a direct marketer may send unsolicited e-mails to customers whose details are collected "in the context of the sale of a product or a service" as long as:

- (a) the e-mails relate to similar products or services to those for which the recipient is regarded as a customer;
- (b) there is always an opportunity to opt out of further unsolicited e-mails; and
- (c) certain transparency conditions are met – the identity of the sender must not be disguised or concealed, and a valid address that the recipient may use to opt-out must be provided.

However, relying on this exception on a pan-European level can be problematic because of the different approaches to the concept of "customers".

In the UK, the so-called opt-out exception is set out in Regulation 22(3) of the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations. According to Regulation 22(3)(a), the contact details of the recipient of the e-mail must have been obtained directly from that individual in the course of a sale or negotiations for the sale of a product or service. Here, the interpretation of what constitutes "negotiations for the sale" is linked to the concept of inducement. For example, where a competition is part of the inducement to raise interest in a product or service, this will be regarded as part of the negotiations for a sale.

Similarly, in the Netherlands, Article 11.7 of the new Telecommunications Act allows the sending of marketing e-mails on an opt-out basis to individuals with whom the sender has had prior contact in the context of selling its good or services. This suggests that the Dutch Authority's

interpretation is likely to follow the approach of the UK's Information Commissioner. The position in Austria is even more relaxed, according to its data protection authority, as the practice of sending marketing e-mails without consent is generally allowed as long as the e-mail provides the recipient with the opportunity to object to any further messages.

However, in most EU countries, the interpretation of customers appears to be much stricter. In Sweden, it is now prohibited to send advertising by e-mail to people who have not agreed to receive the advertising beforehand. This prohibition does not apply where there is an established customer relationship, which the Swedish Consumer Agency interprets as existing where a person has already purchased goods or services from the advertiser. A similar approach has been taken in places like Belgium, Denmark, France and Spain. In Denmark, for example, the Consumer Ombudsman (who sits within the Danish Consumer Agency) has already indicated that for an individual to qualify as a customer, there must be an actual purchase.

The harshest stance from an e-mail marketer's point of view is likely to be the one adopted in Germany. Given Germany's traditionally protectionist approach to consumer privacy, the courts are likely to adopt a strict interpretation of the new Unfair Competition Act. Recent cases have indicated that a one-off transaction is insufficient to make the purchaser qualify as a customer.

As for other EU jurisdictions, they either have failed to implement the directive or have incorporated pretty much the wording of the directive, so it is too early to say how the words "in the context of the sale" are likely to be interpreted. This is the case, for example, in Ireland where the Data Protection Commissioner has yet to publish an official interpretation of the black letter of the law.

### **Individuals v. corporate subscribers**

An area where the directive purposely allowed Member States to decide what to do is the application of the new e-mail marketing regime to subscribers who are not natural persons. However, the divergences in the interpretation of that concept have created an array of regulatory variations. In Sweden and the UK, the general prohibition only applies when the recipient of the e-mail is a natural person, but this includes partnerships and sole traders. In France, the opt-in regime will not apply to corporate subscribers either.

In Belgium, the consent requirement does not apply to corporate subscribers if the e-mail address does not contain personally identifiable information. However, any corporate e-mail address that includes a person's name will be subject to the general consent requirement. Similarly, in the Netherlands the opt-in regime only applies to natural persons, but this includes individuals using corporate e-mail addresses.

In Ireland, sending marketing e-mails to business recipients will only be unlawful if the recipient has notified the sender that they do not consent to the receipt of such communications to that address. This is a fairly straightforward way of solving the uncertainty created by the Directive, as it does away with some of the technicalities in the distinction between natural and legal persons.

However, in countries like Germany, Italy and Spain, the opt-in regime applies to both natural and legal persons, although the German courts have allowed a lower threshold for the opt-out exception in relation to business-to-business marketing.

## Legacy data

Another issue which is causing confusion among European businesses is the regulator's position with regard to data that was collected before the new laws implementing the directive came into force. In theory, it is clear that the directive is meant to apply retrospectively as no provision was made for a transitional period. In other words, old data will be subject to the new regime from day one.

This contrasts with the position adopted in the UK, where the Information Commissioner has publicly stated that it is prepared to take a pragmatic view on pre-existing lists for the time being, provided that the direct marketers ensure that any opt-out requests received either before or after the coming into force of the privacy and electronic communications regulations are acted upon promptly.

In a similar fashion, although Belgian law does not provide for a transitional period to comply with the new regime, in November 2003 the Commercial Court of Nivelles held that it was lawful to send marketing e-mails to addresses which

had been collected on an opt-out basis before the new opt-in regime had come into force, but that companies should cease to send marketing e-mails as soon as the right to opt-out was exercised. This approach has been upheld by the Belgian data protection authority.

All in all, the laws dealing with direct marketing by e-mail in the European Union are a regulatory labyrinth and for many international organisations it is almost impossible to explore every single turn. One can only hope that the EU data protection authorities will choose to go after the real spammers, rather than to penalise those companies that try to respect individuals' wishes but fail to get to grips with the technicalities of the law.

*Eduardo Ustaran is an e-commerce and data protection lawyer at Field Fisher Waterhouse, [www.ffw.com](http://www.ffw.com). He is the editor of Data Protection Law & Policy and co-author of E-Privacy and Online Data Protection (Butterworths, September 2002) and of the Law Society's Data Protection Handbook (July 2004). E-mail [eduardo.ustaran@ffw.com](mailto:eduardo.ustaran@ffw.com).*

## The Government's New Site, Directgov, at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

The screenshot shows the Directgov homepage with the following sections:

- Welcome to Directgov**: The place to turn to for the latest and widest range of public service information.
- Choose a topic**:
  - Full list of topics
  - Britons abroad
  - Businesses (external link)
  - Employment
  - Health and well-being
  - Home and community
  - Learning
  - Money
  - Over 50s
- Directories and reference**:
  - Search the site or use the directories below
  - Quickfind
  - A-Z of central government
  - Find your local council
  - N. Ireland, Scotland and Wales
  - Popular forms
  - Browse by subject
- Do it online**:
  - Full list of services
  - Take a mock driving test
  - Plan a journey (external link)
  - Search for childcare
  - Find a job
  - Do your tax returns
  - Book a driving test
  - Get foreign travel advice
  - Search family records
- Parents**:
  - Go to this section...
  - Having a baby
  - Adoption and fostering
  - Child safety
  - Schools and learning
  - Parental leave
- Motorists**:
  - Go to this section...
  - Learning to drive a car
  - Paying your road tax
  - MOT your car
  - Buying and selling your car
  - Motorcyclists
- Disabled people and carers**:
  - Go to this section...
  - Independence at home
  - Special educational needs
  - Money
  - Your rights
  - A-Z index
- News headlines**:
  - nhs recruitment success ... latest employment figures ... uninsured drivers face crackdown ...
  - Newsroom
- Top five queries**:
  - Council tax
  - Jobs and work
  - Education
  - Passports and travel
  - Cars
- Get the most out of Directgov**:
  - Find out how to get the best from this site
  - Help with this site

Directgov has now replaced the previous government site, ukonline.

The left hand section describes the general topics covered - Britons abroad, Businesses, Employment and so on. Some of these sections link to other government sites, for example "Businesses" goes to the Business Link site at [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk) which is managed by the DTI and includes information on finance, grants, employment and health and safety.

The Government is trying very hard to provide a seamless whole, so that the viewer does not have to understand exactly how or where the topics are handled (e.g. which central government or local government department is involved) but can move straight to the information required.

The middle section provides a number of useful directories of central government and local government. There are also a series of popular forms provided in pdf form. These include maternity benefits, lost or stolen passports, tax credits, back to work, child benefit, community care grant, off road notification, student grant and incapacity benefit.

The "Do It Online" section includes searching for childcare, finding a job, making a planning application, preparing a tax return online, claiming various allowances and tax credits and booking a driving test. This is one of the most important sections of the site. The more services which can be accessed online, the fewer real people the government (and local councils) need to employ. This is certainly part of Gordon Brown's promise to save billions by cutting back on "bureaucrats".

One successful feature of this section is a claims recovery facility called MCOL (Money Claim Online) provided by the Court Service, which was described in the last newsletter. There is also a section called "Crime, Law, Justice, Rights" which includes Report a Minor Crime, Find a Legal advisor (which links to the Community Legal Service Direct site, [www.clsdirect.org.uk](http://www.clsdirect.org.uk)), Become a Prison Visitor, Join the Police Force, Join the Specials and the Money Claim Online site.

At the top of the main page (not shown here) is a simple search process (just type in the words e.g. income tax) and also an advanced search which allows words to be combined in various ways and also enables you to narrow down the process before you start, e.g. Central Government, Local Government, finding your MP, local Services etc.

A related site is called the Government Gateway at [www.gateway.gov.uk](http://www.gateway.gov.uk). This is a centralised registration service for e-Government services in the UK which allows you to sign up for any of the Government's services that are available over the Internet for example, Self Assessment, PAYE Internet Services for Employers and Electronic VAT Returns. You are provided with a User ID and a digital certificate which then enables you to send and receive forms, such as Tax returns and VAT returns without having to enter your personal details every time.

## Accessibility in Practice

### Antony Nicholls

Last month's newsletter featured an article by David Gilroy "Is your website accessible?" in which he discussed the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and how it relates to services provided via websites. With the Act coming into full force in October 2004 and as a firm that specialises in Employment Law we recently took steps to address the issue of "accessibility".

In the absence of any concrete do's and don'ts to ensure and demonstrate accessibility in the UK, we have to borrow good practice from the Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C) and their Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) at [www.w3.org/WAI](http://www.w3.org/WAI). The WCAG does not have any legal standing in the UK but is perhaps the closest thing we have to a minimum standard for web accessibility and applying these standards enables us to demonstrate that we are taking "reasonable" steps to ensure access to our services by disabled people.

### Do We Start Over or Recycle?

Like most firms, we have put a lot of time and resource into our website, opting in our case for a "Flash" site which portrayed a strong visual image. Design became paramount and usability and accessibility whilst a big consideration perhaps regrettably took a backseat.

After consulting much material on the Internet relating to the DDA and the W3C guidelines we decided that we had two options open to us: either to start again from scratch or to "Retrofit" our site to achieve compliance with the standards. (To "Retrofit" the site means to modify the present pages in order to make them compliant rather than creating accessible content from the beginning).

We wanted to preserve some if not all of the investment we had made previously and therefore decided on the "Retrofit" route. Hopefully, this would also retain some of the good features we had achieved in the original site.

### Validation of Conformance

In order to work towards an accessible website and in order to demonstrate that we have made a commitment to making our services available to disabled people, we decided to adopt the WCAG 1.0 framework. (These are currently under review and there is a draft of new ones, known as WCAG 2.0, available on the WC3 website but the new ones are not yet in force).

The W3C site publishes some useful tips on how to validate your site against its guidelines:

1. Use an automated accessibility and browser validation tool. (However, note that software tools do not address all accessibility issues, such as the meaningfulness of link text, the applicability of a text equivalent, etc.)
2. Validate syntax (e.g. HTML, XML, etc.).
3. Validate style sheets (e.g. CSS).
4. Use a text-only browser or emulator.
5. Use multiple graphic browsers, with:
  - sounds and graphics loaded
  - graphics not loaded
  - sounds not loaded
  - no mouse
  - frames, scripts, style sheets, and applets not loaded.
6. Use several browsers, old and new.
7. Use a self-voicing browser, a screen reader, magnification software, a small display, etc.
8. Use spell and grammar checkers. A person reading a page with a speech synthesizer may not be able to decipher

the synthesizer's best guess for a word with a spelling error. Eliminating grammar problems increases comprehension.

9. Review the document for clarity and simplicity. Readability statistics, such as those generated by some word processors can be useful indicators of clarity and simplicity. Better still, ask an experienced (human) editor to review the written content. Human editors can also identify potentially sensitive cultural issues that might arise due to language or icon usage.

10. Invite people with disabilities to review documents. Expert and novice users with disabilities will provide valuable feedback about accessibility or usability problems and their severity.

### Testing Tools

There are a number of automated testing tools available which provide reports on how a website complies with the WCAG 1.0 guidelines. For a list of these tools consult [www.w3.org/WAI/ER/existingtools.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/ER/existingtools.html) and for a review, consult [www.dimi.uniud.it/~giorgio/papers/hfweb00.html](http://www.dimi.uniud.it/~giorgio/papers/hfweb00.html).

When testing a site it is important to note that automated tools can not check everything and subsequently can not guarantee compliance. In fact they will often generate "false positives", i.e. they will identify an issue that does not exist.

We opted to use the BOBBY accessibility testing tool at [bobby.watchfire.com](http://bobby.watchfire.com). The Bobby site allows one page per site to be tested for free. Alternatively you can purchase the product and it will assess the whole site and produce a complete picture of how each page scores against the WCAG 1.0 checkpoints.

At first glance, the Bobby report can appear overwhelming and depending on how your pages are structured can be completely confusing. It consists of three sections Priority 1 Accessibility, Priority 2 Accessibility and Priority 3 Accessibility. Each of these sections corresponds to the respective WCAG 1.0 priority levels. Within each of these sections you will find issues identified which Bobby can check automatically against the guidelines (denoted by a policeman's hat icon) and also a number of items that cannot be checked automatically and require manual examination. These are presented in the User Checks subsection of the priority level and are denoted by a question mark icon.

### Our Experiences

The first time we ran the Bobby tools against our site, many shortfalls were identified. Through a reiterative process, we eventually eliminated all the key accessibility shortfalls and we were left with the remaining user checks. The user checks as mentioned earlier are items which the Bobby tool cannot automatically test; many of these are not relevant to the page being tested and many are standard clauses which will be included in any test on any web page. Determining the website's accessibility particularly against the user checks will always be subjective, and will require human analysis. Therefore we considered the report from the tool as a guide only and proceeded to decide whether the reported issues were relevant and needed to be fixed.

During testing we found numerous "false positives" which we eliminated and, since all our pages have a similar structure, we could effectively get one page to comply and then use this page as a template for the remaining pages.

The testing left us with a small subset of issues which we actioned and subsequently achieved Bobby AAA compliance which translates to compliance with WCAG 1.0 priorities 1,2 and 3.

## Speech Enabling

Further to testing with Bobby and manual analysis against the WCAG 1.0 guidelines, we have also opted to "speech enable" our site using a screen reader called Browsealoud ([www.browsealoud.com](http://www.browsealoud.com)). You need to purchase a license from Browsealoud, after which you can publish a link on your site to the browsealoud reader download area. Visitors to your site simply download the software and install it following which the full text of the site is available as a spoken word.

Browsealoud can also produce statistics for you on how many downloads have originated from your site and therefore give you an indication of how often the tool is being used and an inference of how many disabled visitors have viewed your site.

Hopefully through adopting the WCAG 1.0 guidelines as a benchmark we have demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that disabled people have access to our services and that we have taken reasonable steps to achieve website accessibility.

We plan to continue monitoring developments arising from the DDA and to review the site accordingly. We are also planning an overhaul of our Intranet and Extranet, again using WCAG 1.0 as a framework.

*Antony Nicholls is IT Director of Lees Lloyd Whitley, [www.llw.co.uk](http://www.llw.co.uk). Lees Lloyd Whitley are a national practice, with offices in the North West of England and London. The firm undertakes both Private Client and Commercial work. Email [asn@llw.co.uk](mailto:asn@llw.co.uk).*

## Website Design for Lawyers by Alex Heshmaty

### 1. Structure and Navigation

One of the most important elements of a good website is a clear, logical structure. This makes it easier to maintain the site and also reduces the likelihood of a user "getting lost" in the site or not being able to find what they are looking for. On arrival at the home page, the user should be able to see all the relevant areas of the site and to get to their chosen destination immediately. A good example is Campbell Hooper's website at [www.campbellhooper.com](http://www.campbellhooper.com).

If designed well, frames can offer a good system of navigation, ensuring that a single navigation bar is seen throughout the site and giving the user some consistency. However, care must be taken to avoid "frame within frame" problems and, where there is information that a user may wish to print out, it is a good idea to provide a "print" button which will print the contents of a single frame.

### 2. Content is King

Many websites exist solely as a kind of online brochure which can be valuable in its own right. However, in order to actually gain value from the site, good content can provide a "hook" for attracting clients. There are various ways to provide good content. This could simply consist of writing the occasional article, in-house, on a relevant legal topic and uploading to the site or sending out regular email newsletters highlighting developments in a certain area.

As an alternative to writing your own material, content can be "purchased" (or licensed) from companies such as:

- \* Emplaw, [www.emplaw.co.uk](http://www.emplaw.co.uk)
- \* Conscious Solutions, [www.conscious.co.uk](http://www.conscious.co.uk)
- \* Words4Business, [www.words4business.com](http://www.words4business.com) or
- \* Editing for Law firms, [www.editingforlawfirms.co.uk](http://www.editingforlawfirms.co.uk).

### 3. Simple Layout and Use of Whitespace

The less clutter on a website the better. A good design will be fresh and crisp, and have different elements well spread out whilst taking into account the limited screen acreage. Scroll bars should be used with care as pages which scroll too far can be extremely annoying and may cause the user to feel like they are looking for a needle in a haystack. Plenty of "whitespace" ensures that different elements are kept apart and makes browsing a more pleasant experience. Take a look at [www.capsticks.com](http://www.capsticks.com) for an example of a well laid out site with good use of "whitespace" which maintains a simple, fresh and crisp appearance.

### 4. Maintenance/Updating

It is vital that your website is well maintained and kept up to date. Some web designers will charge extortionate amounts to make simple updates so if you intend to have your website maintained externally it is a good idea to agree to the terms of maintenance in advance, before agreeing to the initial build, or alternatively, have the website built using a content management system which can be maintained by your own non-technical staff. Links to external sites should be regularly checked. Try Xenu's Link Sleuth (it's free) at <http://home.snafu.de/tilman/xenulink.html>.

### 5. Use of Web Technologies

HTML, Javascript, Flash, CSS, ASP and XML are just a few of the languages, applications and server technologies which can be used to build a website. In general, the more complex the technologies used to build a site, the more expensive but not necessarily the better. If used inappropriately, some website "enhancements" can actually have a negative effect on a site. For example, Flash can be used to add smooth, interactive animation to part of a site or even to build a complete website but it can sometimes look "gimmicky" and slow down the loading time of a site. As a general rule, only use the web technology which is necessary for the design or the usability of your website.

### 6. Style and Consistency

Choose and stick to one set of fonts and colours. Sans-serif fonts (eg. Arial, Verdana, Tahoma) are usually easier to read on-screen whereas Serif fonts (eg. Times New Roman) look better in print. Georgia is an exception to the rule, as it is a serif font that was designed to be easily read on a computer monitor. As for colours, it is better to stick to different shades of a small palette rather than using a large palette. It is also important that the same layout is retained throughout the site for ease of navigation. A company logo displayed on every page can strengthen corporate identity. A site which maintains good consistency, style and identity is Norton Rose ([www.nortonrose.com](http://www.nortonrose.com)).

### 7. Accessibility

Accessibility of a site is becoming increasingly important, as described in more detail in other articles in this newsletter, and there is every likelihood that increasing pressure will be put on website providers to ensure that their designs are as accessible as possible to all users. Flexibility is an important element of accessible design, enabling the user to resize text or change colour schemes. CSS is a useful language for ensuring that a single page can be displayed in many different ways, with different colours, fonts and other styling.

## 8. Browser Compatibility

Although the most widely used browser is Microsoft's Internet Explorer, there are a wide range of other web browsers which can be used, including Netscape, Opera and Mozilla. Then there are all the different versions of each browser as they are constantly being upgraded (IE 5, 5.5, 6 etc), as well as different platforms (PC, Mac, Linux, FreeBSD etc) and different operating systems (Windows 98, 2000, XP etc.). Each browser variation can interpret a website differently but a well designed site will minimise these differences. It is worth downloading at least one different browser and testing the results, e.g. Mozilla Firefox ([www.mozilla.org/products/firefox](http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox)).

## 9. Loading Time

Although the advent of broadband has reduced the concern for loading time, this is still an important issue. Heavy graphics and processor-hungry applications (eg. Flash and PDF) can slow down a website and create a negative user experience. Badly designed code can also have the effect of slowing down a site. It is always worth testing your website using a 56k modem before making it live, as that is the speed at which many users will arrive. A fast-loading home page is of great importance but do avoid the mistake of the "Click Here to Enter" welcome page as this just increases needless clicking and can be frustrating.

## 10. Contact Details

After speedily entering your site, easily navigating to the updated content and marvelling at the pleasing colour scheme and clear layout, a potential client will hopefully want to contact you. It could be said that the whole purpose of having a website is to communicate with clients or potential clients. Therefore it is of utmost importance that contact details remain prominent throughout your website.

Aside from all the usual details (name, address, telephone, fax, email and perhaps departmental contacts) it can be useful to provide a form and maybe even a ring-back service. Placing a "contact details" link on a navigation bar which can be seen on every page will usually be enough to ensure that contact details remain prominent. Hopefully, this will help to convert website users into paying clients!

*Alex Heshmaty graduated with an LLB (Hons.) in English and European Law at UWE, Bristol in 2000. He became interested in web design and, after training with an ISP in Bristol, became Systems Manager at DiscLaw Publishing Ltd, taking charge of the technical side of web operations at [www.emplaw.co.uk](http://www.emplaw.co.uk). He left DiscLaw earlier this year in order to start his own web design consultancy. Email: [alex@heshmaty.com](mailto:alex@heshmaty.com)*

## What's New on the Legal Web by Delia Venables

The Law Society site at [www.lawsociety.org](http://www.lawsociety.org) now has a new "clean and lean" look to it. The main sections are indicated at the top of the screen: About the Law Society, News and Events, Products and Services, Choosing and Using solicitors, Influencing Law, Becoming a Solicitor and Professional rules, support and guidance. Each of these has extensive sub-sections which appear when the mouse "hovers" over the main section. At the right hand side are small blocks of colour (essentially logos) leading to the Gazette, Rules of Professional Conduct, and Find a Solicitor; the latter is the same as the main directory site which can be reached directly at Solicitors-Online.

The central part of the opening page is a news section which gives the site a topical feel to it and there is a section on the left called "Site Highlights". There is also a search screen and a log-in area for members. Given the massive amount of information which the Law Society must provide, the site is pretty good and also seems to be "accessible", with resizable text.

It is now possible to search for a solicitor in any part of the UK or Ireland.

**For England and Wales**, The Law Society's Directory ("Solicitors Online" at [www.solicitors-online.com](http://www.solicitors-online.com)) lists all firms and branches, with each solicitor's name, their specialisms, languages spoken, location maps and web site links. Users can look for a named firm or individual, or do a search for a firm in their area with the specialism they need.

**The Law Society of Scotland** at [www.lawscot.org.uk](http://www.lawscot.org.uk) provides a directory of all Scottish firms which can be searched by name of firm, town or category of work. There is also a separate section to search for individual accredited experts (solicitors) in specific fields of law.

**The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission** at [www.nilsc.org.uk](http://www.nilsc.org.uk) provides a register of all solicitors in Northern Ireland which can be searched by County or town, and by specialism (take "Solicitors" from the list of options on the left).

**The Law Society of Ireland** at [www.lawsociety.ie](http://www.lawsociety.ie) provides a directory of Irish firms (not individual solicitors) which can be searched by name or by location. (I do not think there is yet a search by work type or specialisation.)

**Community Legal Service Direct (CLS Direct)** at [www.clsdirect.org.uk](http://www.clsdirect.org.uk) is the new site for what was previously Just Ask! The site provides free information, help and advice direct to the public on a range of common legal issues and also offers a national helpline (0845 345 4 345). Links are provided to approved information providers under the appropriate topic. There are also the CLS Legal Information Leaflets, which can be printed from the site. These were produced by the Consumers' Association and cover key areas of the civil law of England and Wales, such as Employment Law, Welfare Benefits and Debt. The viewer can also use an online calculator to see if they qualify for legal aid. The site is clear and easy to use and it also looks as if it satisfies the accessibility requirements.



**The Solicitors Support network** provides an overall site at [www.solicitorsupportnetwork.com](http://www.solicitorsupportnetwork.com) for several separate groups providing support and assistance to solicitors with professional or personal problems or who are just needing a bit of encouragement at a particular stage of their career. The site contains links to the Solicitors Assistance Scheme, the Solicitors Benevolent Association, LawCare, the Young Solicitors Group, the Trainee Solicitors Group, the Black Solicitors Network, the Solicitors Sole Practitioners Group, the Association of Women Solicitors, Group for Solicitors with Disabilities, and Solicitors in Local Government.

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