

practice which need relatively little coordination.

It makes more sense for a large law firm to achieve a reasonable level of reliability, at a lower cost, by having many small computer systems, each supporting relatively few terminals, yet connected together in order to achieve the coordination and communication that is required. When one small machine fails, only part of the organisation is affected, not the whole firm.

A network of smaller machines also allows upgrades in smaller increments. If there is a single large machine, there is more likely to be a large amount of capital invested in unused capacity, in readiness to add more screens. Hence the opportunity costs for a central machine may be high.

### Standard Technologies

The common practice of computer suppliers for many years was to lock their customers in with proprietary programming languages, proprietary ways of storing data, proprietary ways of transmitting data, unique operating system features, special hardware, etc. Once an organisation becomes dependent on its computer systems, and those systems have only one supplier, its negotiating position is weakened because the expense and potential disruption of converting to an alternative can become too great.

What is meant by "standard technologies"? Think of

Australia's different gauge railway systems. Computers have more areas of difference, as indicated above. In the last ten years, standards bodies such as the I.S.O. and the I.E.E.E., driven largely by the demands of computer users, have been moving against this. The process of standardisation in computers is far from complete, hence computer experts are needed to thread their way through the tangle of competing technological standards. The ultimate purpose is to allow different systems to be connected together as easily as different railway carriages.

The main use of "standard" computer technologies whenever possible is to heighten the chances of connecting different equipment, and, as outlined above, to ensure that competition between suppliers will be maximised.

### "Text" Processing the major application

The phrase "text processing" is used deliberately in preference to "word processing", since it is also meant to encompass free text information retrieval, the administration of precedents, and even electronic mail.

Note that, in this area, we are talking about more than the reliability of word processing. Although it is vital to the large law firm that word processing downtime be minimised, we are also suggesting that, as a matter of policy, data processing

### NEW SOUTH WALES SOCIETY NEWS

Our last publication generated a considerable degree of interest. Fiona Crosbie, the author of the article "The Chamberlain Inquiry Database", has been asked to present a paper at a forthcoming conference for the Australian and New Zealand judiciary on litigation support.

Other recent achievements include the release of the "Australasian Computerized Legal Information Handbook" by David Lewis committee member, Graham Greenleaf past Secretary of the Society and Andrew Mowbray Lecturer in Law, University of Technology. A review of the book will be included in our next edition.

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### NEWSLETTER

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