

Find IT Trust IT

By Bruce McGregor, Director PDMS

Information Accessibility

In today's 'Googled' world we are all used to the concept of 'Information Accessibility' and the fact that more information is now being made available to us. However, often the process of locating the definitive information is not actually as easy as it at first appears. This combined with the concern that, "can the information now to hand be trusted, is it definitive?" leads to doubt, which in today's high pressured, performance driven and often more litigious times is not a position anyone wants to be in. As recently outlined by Heather Croft, Business Director of the Police National Legal Database (PNLD), "greater accessibility can make business more vulnerable to crime. Increasingly a major concern for many people running businesses is that their knowledge of criminal law is limited and often coloured by fable and folklore. Staying on top of criminal law requires total concentration, total focus, persistent practice and a wealth of experience."

Find It

So, there is an increasing demand to be able to find relevant legal information, to be able to trust this information and to be able to achieve this while under more pressure and in less time. The Police National Legal Database (PNLD) addresses these fundamental points of 'find' and 'trust' by providing an easy to understand, computerised database of up to the minute legal information, case law and standard offence wordings. This information resource is available for use throughout the Criminal Justice Sector, including Police Officers, the Crown Prosecution Service and the National Crime Squad, to name a few.

Trust It

Both the PNLD system (www.pnld.co.uk) and latterly the new Police FAQ system (www.askthe.police.uk) set out with the same simple and incredibly valuable mission: to provide a single, universally accessible, version of the truth in their subject area. This, once accepted, represents a huge productivity gain for the whole of the Criminal Justice community. The system ensures information provided is presented at an appropriate level, carefully and consistently structured, and importantly legally validated. This continuity and quality of information represents the core value proposition and so creates the necessary trust in the information provided.

The Solution

The use of internet technology ensures that the information is as up-to-date as possible whilst also permitting 24/7 access. This approach minimises costs both in terms of client software and training as well as maximising the value of both public infrastructure and closed network

initiatives such as CJX, the Criminal Justice Extranet. Also, since document content is stored directly and formatting is applied only on demand it is also far easier to provide the specialised interfaces often required by other front line mobile systems and to comply with emerging national data and accessibility standards. Using the systems sophisticated search facilities Police Officers and other users can quickly identify the right offence information. The facility to add local (region specific) documents is a huge benefit with forces being able to tailor regional content to meet their own specific needs. In 2004, PNLD received more than 2 million document hits from some 30,000 work stations. An average hit lasts 6 minutes, whilst practical evaluation demonstrates that the time taken to locate the same information manually would be 20 minutes. Therefore, PNLD has saved an estimated 28 million minutes or 466,667 hours of valuable Police resources in 2004 alone!

Summary

The role of technology should be simply to maximise the efficiency with which information assets are managed and distributed. PDMS used their forward thinking approach to component based development (Foundations TM) to deliver a solution which allows the Criminal Justice user to easily find the legal information they require at any time. PNLD used their experience in the legal information business to provide an information resource which is centralised, continually managed, kept up to date and which consequently can be trusted. In the end it comes down to people to deliver the goods and PDMS and the PNLD team worked very closely together to deliver what is a dynamic, simple to use leading edge solution which delivers real business benefits.