technology in Australia. Many years of research and planning are behind its establishment and this research will proceed to ensure that the system reflects developments in current technology. Additional services will be offered as the user group grows and the secondary material content of the database will continue to evolve to compliment the primary material which will remain the core of the system.

Clearly it will not be possible for CLIRS to be "all things to all people" from the day it first becomes available to the public, however, with the regular input of suggestions for users and feedback from any problems experienced, it has the potential to be the best Legal Information Retrieval System in the world in terms of its practical value to the practitioner.

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CLIRS, A CANADIAN STUDY

During 1981 the Canadian Law Information Council (CLIC) commissioned Michael Iosipestu and John Yogis to compare computer aided legal research with traditional research.

The key phrase is "computer aided". The idea of a CLIRS is not to use a computer exclusively, but to use it to maximise the effectiveness of available printed materials.

The study was carried out using the Quiclaw Data Base, marketed by QL Systems. Development began on the Quiclaw Data Base in 1968 at Queens University in Ontario. The software used by Quiclaw is very similar to that used by Westlaw in the U.S.

The method employed in the study was to have a problem researched by two people using different methods. One method involved the use of Quiclaw and the other did not. In all, 10 problems were researched in this way and the results tabulated, both in terms of total time taken and the effectiveness of the research (i.e. the number of relevant cases missed and the number of relevant cases examined).

The problems themselves covered a wide range of topics - from finding cases similar to a narrow set of facts to assessing the likely quantum of damages or preparing a summary of an insurance agent's duty to an injured person.

The aim of the use of the CLIRS was as a guide to where to look. Computer time is too expensive, in general, to actually read a case at the terminal. Using the data retrieval system a researcher can find cases and determine their relevance at least to some extent. A researcher would usually go to the traditional printed copy, using the reference elicited with the aid of the computer, to do the actual research.

The findings of the study are quite startling and perhaps somewhat too good to be believed. The time saved by using the computer varied from 40% to 92.5% with the average being 72.3%. The greatest saving of time was in the case of a client who wished to use the defence of a health reason for refusing a breathalyser. The researcher, using CLIRS, was able to retrieve cases very quickly where a reasonable excuse had been argued in relation to breathalysers and then scan them for cases of primary relevance.

In this example the computer found all the most useful cases (other than cases not included in the Quiclaw Data Base such as English cases) and an answer was given after 1-1/2 hours research, as opposed to 18 hours of research using traditional methods.

The least impressive result for the CLIRS was 40% but this still represents a large number of hours saved: 15 hours were used instead of 25 hours. Of the 15 hours spent only 3 were actually used scanning cases on the computer, the rest were spent checking the references etc. in the normal way. Thus 3 hours on the computer saved 10 hours of research time, so even taking into account the substantial computer charges (around $1 per minute for Quiclaw) there is a substantial saving in cost to the client.

Relevant Cases

An important issue is, of course, the effectivenss of the automated method of research. Over the 10 problems there were a total of 154 cases turned up by at least one researcher which were found to be useful. Of these 143 (92.8%) were found by the manual method and 122 (79.2%) by automated research. The 13.6% difference is certainly a black mark for the computer aided research but it is not a fatal flaw. A more comprehensive combined search may have been able to narrow the gap and as researchers become more adept at using the computer tools and more cases are added to data bases the difference will surely be in the other direction.

In conclusion, it seems that properly conducted computer aided searches can lead to significant savings in both time and money. It is, however, something that is likely to require more rather than less skill from the researchers. It is particularly important that a lawyer know the limitations of the data base(s) he is searching and be prepared to fill in the gaps as well as do the follow up work.

> ✱ James FitzSimons
> 7 March, 1984.