

price-performance ratio in recent years. This means that the amount of "bang" for a buyer's computer "buck" doubles every two years. Thus a machine of a given power is either 50% cheaper from one year to the next, or a buyer can purchase a 50% more powerful machine for a given dollar amount of the same period.

A result of this plummet in computer prices and boost in computer power is that software applications which in the past were too processor power-hungry are now within range of the desktop machine or the general office computer. One class of software applications which became more accessible were those associated with expert systems.

At the same time, there was a massive development in the software to run expert systems. Although the legal profession has been relatively slow to take up these types of advances, the promise of expert systems presents a different potential.

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From the Editor's Desk:



This issue is devoted to the uses of artificial intelligence and expert systems in law.

'Why should I be interested in such an experimental application?' you may well ask. Artificial intelligence (AI) and its subset, expert systems (ES), represent one of the cutting edges of current computer research. Even as a computing science discipline, AI is in its infancy - other equally theoretical computer specialities are grandfathers and grandmothers in comparison. However this is not the main reason we examine the field in this issue of the newsletter.

Rather, AI looks at representing or modelling human thought processes, and the output that results. A huge body of human thought exists which includes complex rules, reasons and rationales. This body is called Law.

Computer researchers are particularly interested in Law because it provides a large set of rules, reasons and rationales. Perhaps more importantly, Law also provides a set of techniques for using and interpreting these rules. For researchers looking into the way we handle rules, Law has a great many lessons.

It is not surprising then that an entire subset of AI and ES research has arisen in AI and Law. Recently, Oxford University hosted the third International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Law (ICAIL). Along with luminaries from the USA, England, Italy, and the Netherlands, four Australian research groups presented papers. Two of these groups, Tyree et al. and Zeleznikow et al, have papers included in this issue. We hope to bring out another issue which includes papers from those Australian groups who were unable to prepare papers in time. At last count there are at least five groups engaged in AI and Law research in Australia. For such a small country, with a lack of funding in the science sector, these figures are

remarkable. Indeed, a noted American in the field, Professor Donald Berman, who spoke at a recent seminar at LaTrobe University, said that he came to Australia not for the money (which was poor), but to discover why Australia produced so many notable projects in the field.

This issue of the Newsletter provides an introduction to the area from the perspectives of both the lawyer and the computer researcher. The lawyer's perspective is provided by articles of Richard Wright, and Graham Jefferson, while the computer researcher's view is given by Greenleaf et al. and Zeleznikow et al. We hope that you find the articles as illuminating as we have.

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