

A New Barrister's Computerised Billing System

The number of barristers using computers in their practices appears to be increasing. Particularly amongst younger members of the Bar, there is a realisation and recognition that it is inevitable that increasingly a capacity to organise your practice effectively will require some facility at the keyboard. The article by J S Douglas QC in the Winter edition of *Bar News* illustrates the significant impact a computer can have in a barrister's practice.

There has been a traditional reluctance on the part of the Bar to want to understand how to operate computers. Indeed, it is fashionable to disclaim any necessity for knowledge of a computer to successfully practise as an advocate. However, many barristers at the Sydney Bar, including me, have commenced to use Macintosh computers in preference to IBM computers because of their apparent ease of use.

From my experience of thirteen years as a barrister, the maintenance, supervision and collection of fees is one of the most neglected areas of a barrister's practice. Many barristers operate manual cash books or card index filing systems in an effort to keep track of fees. I did this myself for over ten years. The system was imperfect, clumsy and the amount of fees outstanding at any given time was impossible to determine quickly. The sending out of account rendereds became a chore which took my secretary literally hours to perform. Further, the demands of practice are such that the chasing up of fees became one of the last tasks to which time was devoted.

When I purchased my first Macintosh in late 1989 there were a number of standard accounting software packages available but none of them was specifically tailored to the needs of a barrister and most of them were far more complex than that required by a barrister for accounting which is fundamentally simple.

I then approached Andrew Macintosh, a well known Apple computer consultant who has had considerable experience in computers, law and litigation support, to see if a simple program that would be user-friendly to barristers could be devised for the recording and monitoring of barristers' fees. Originally a database program using the Claris program Filemaker II was used to devise a system for recording fees. With the advent in 1991 of an improved software program known as Filemaker Pro, a much more intuitive billing program has now been created. We call it BAR FEES (Barristers' Fees Program). The program has now been used by myself and five other colleagues for several months. It has all the advantages of the Apple easy-to-use interface with a series of buttons that can be clicked to perform the following tasks:

1. create new accounts;
2. record the payment of accounts;
3. prepare memoranda of fees;
4. generate statements as to fees owing; and finally,
5. to report.

An example of the entry layout is shown here.

Account ID	100864	Matter ID	10003	Rendered	365+
Matter	Donoghue v Stevenson				
Billing Matter	Donoghue v Stevenson				
Sol ID	cc	Crabbe & Crabbe			
Contact	Mr Crabbe	Phone	331.6151		
Bill To ID	la	Legal Aid Commission			
Billing Solicitor	Legal Aid Commission				
Date Open	11 Dec 31	Age Rendered	21,714		
Date Rendered	26 May 32	Total Fee	\$140.00		
Date Closed		Balance	\$140.00		
Print message?	<input type="checkbox"/> No				
Print comments?	<input type="checkbox"/> No				
Total Fee		\$140.00	Balance		\$140.00
Date	ID	Activity	Fee		
1	10 Dec 31	pre Reading and preparation (6 hrs)	\$30.00		
2	26 May 32	pre Conference	\$10.00		
3		both Brief on Hearing	\$100.00		
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
Total Fee					\$140.00

The reporting function is particularly useful as it allows you, for example, to find out on a solicitor-by-solicitor basis moneys that have been owing for 30, 90, 180 days or as desired; it will keep records of your fees earned in any particular month and will allow you to find out for any period what moneys are outstanding. I am able to find out in approximately thirty seconds the amount I have rendered in any month; how much money I have received; and this procedure can be undertaken for any periods I desire. By 30 June each year, I know precisely what fees have been rendered and received. I am in a position to indicate to my bank what moneys are owed to me for work in progress, what accounts have been rendered and which accounts are unpaid.

The billing system will automatically generate account rendereds for any period I desire. This exercise takes no longer than the time required to print the various invoices generated by the process.

A memorandum of fees, to be customised to each individual's needs, is built into the package.

Naturally, such a system inevitably involves the creation of a solicitor database with telephone and fax numbers which may be used for those attorneys with whom one is in almost continuous contact. The program requires each brief to be assigned a number when it first comes in and this then allows one to keep track of the position of the brief. This is particularly useful for those barristers who have high volume practices. I find additionally it is a check against briefs lying dormant in

chambers or filing cabinet, unacted upon because of inactivity on the part of the solicitor.

It is anticipated that the feedback from the present members of the Bar who are using the program (apparently successfully) is such that the program will be continuously reviewed and it is anticipated that there will be regular upgrades to reflect suggestions from users. The program is currently being marketed at \$250. It will be necessary for users to have a copy of Filemaker Pro in their Macintosh. If you are already using Filemaker II, the cost of an upgrade is approximately \$129. Filemaker Pro is a much more intuitive database program because of the button layout and colour feature of the program.

As far as the author is concerned, this is the only software program in either the IBM or Apple environment that has been tailored specifically for the needs of barristers. The price of \$250 includes installation, one hour's tuition and sixty days' telephone backup.

It has been my personal experience that the system has the effect of immediately highlighting delinquent accounts and recalcitrant payers.

For further information regarding BAR FEES contact Caroline Smith on telephone 232 5714 or fax 233 7416. □

Paul Blacket

Memories, memories

Coram: Gleeson CJ, Priestley JA, Handley JA
Mr McAlary QC for the respondent and cross-appellant.

Gleeson CJ: The submission you have made is the exact opposite of that made by the GIO and accepted by this Court in *Radnedge*.

McAlary: ... Can I read a few notes that I wrote down and I wrote them down last night in bed so I apologise for the state ...

Priestley JA: There is no need to go into the intimate details, Mr McAlary.

McAlary: Your Honours, John Paul II could sit at the end of my bed these days.

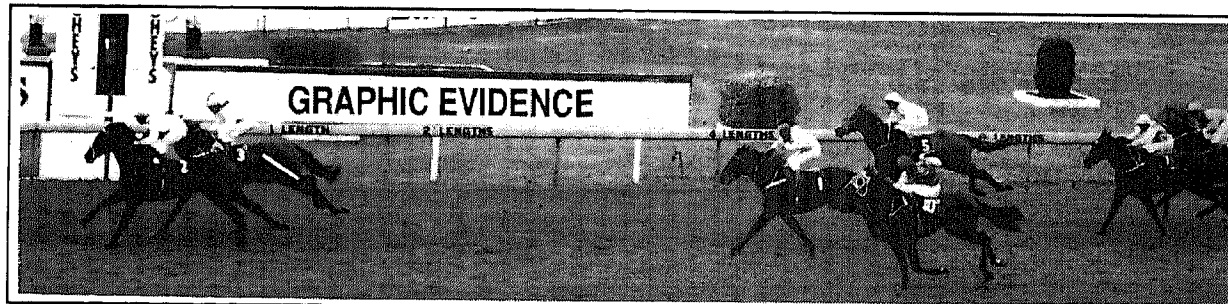
Priestley JA: His Honour Mr Justice Murphy has found that there is no tax deduction for such activities.

Handley JA: I remember it well.

(*Saroukas v Sutherland Shire Council*

Banco Court: Thursday 28 November 1991) □

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