

## New Financial Management Software for Barristers

On Friday 5 June, a new and exciting piece of computer software designed specifically for barristers called *Counsel's Companion* was launched at Blackstone Chambers. This is the first professionally designed and produced software for barristers which will run on either the Apple Macintosh or IBM and compatible computers running Microsoft Windows. Priced at \$1450, it represents good value for money. Attractively packaged with a comprehensive manual, *Counsel's Companion* is customised for each purchaser.

Whilst there are one or two other programs available which attempt to manage barristers fees, they depend upon a product called "Filemaker Pro" which is a "flat-file" general purpose database program which only runs on the Apple Macintosh. *Counsel's Companion*, however, has been written using the much more powerful "relational" database language called "Omnis 5". Consequently, it is a totally integrated "stand-alone" program for both Macintosh and IBM PC computers, and incorporates many features that are not available on programs which depend upon "Filemaker Pro".

Because it takes full advantage of the pull-down menus, and "point-and-click" techniques available on both the Macintosh and under Windows, *Counsel's Companion* can easily be used by either the barrister personally or his or her secretary. It would be ideal if used on either an IBM PC based 386 notebook computer or a Macintosh PowerBook. A laser or ink-jet printer will produce the best printing results.

*Counsel's Companion* has been designed to remove a substantial part of the burden of managing the financial side of a barrister's practice. Barristers practising in New South Wales, and in those states which do not have the advantage of a centralised clerking system, have long had to undertake the billing and collection of their own fees. Those who do not employ a full-time secretary find their evenings and week-ends consumed by the frustrating task of writing up fee books, dictating memoranda of fees and following up unpaid accounts. Enquiries from solicitors about fees unrendered and unpaid often interrupt conferences or chamber work and can often not be answered on the spot. The result is that a barrister's cash flow, although intermittent by nature, is often seriously disrupted whilst good financial management is difficult if not impossible. Barristers who do employ a secretary find that much expensive secretarial time is consumed by these tasks, at the expense of productive work. Also the tracking of expenditure is usually left to the end of the financial year and then passed to accountants to sort out with consequential costs.

*Counsel's Companion* has been designed and produced with the object of removing these difficulties by replacing the traditional manual fee books, card indexes, ledgers and piles of paper, with an integrated and easy-to-use software package. When a brief is received, the relevant information about it, including the solicitor's name, direct telephone number and the firm's accounting reference, is entered immediately. Then, as work is done, fees are entered in a Fee Book and may be billed at any convenient time. *Counsel's Companion* creates a fee memorandum in traditional format, and then keeps track of it until it is paid.

All of the relevant information about a brief, including fee memoranda outstanding receipts and unbilled fees, is available

from one window simply by clicking on the relevant items. Responses to enquiries from solicitors can therefore be instantaneous. (Fig 1)

Briefs/Receipts ... click for details	Briefs ... double click for unbilled work
7 FEB 92 1,250.00	1 JAN 91 1,250.00 Freeman v Fox
	21 JAN 92 2,350.00 Marrowfat v Marrowfat
	26 MAR 92 3,200.00 Fardell and Potts

Fig 1

Perhaps the most ingenious and powerful feature of the program is the debt collection facility. With a couple of mouse clicks, a barrister can create a statement, either on the screen or printed, showing all fee memoranda for any firm or any particular solicitor within that firm. Gone forever are the hours wasted preparing "accounts rendered". Reports of unpaid fee memoranda by age or amount can also be produced at the click of a button (Fig. 2), and the program even prints two reminder letters (the second more harsh than the first) upon request.

STATEMENT OF FEES DUE TO HARRY SILVERTONGUE by Freemantle Hollingdale & Page			
Freeman v Fox Instructing solicitor: Ms G. Van Owen 7 FEB 92 Fee memorandum # 15	Your ref: QFD-SYZ-654321 Debit 1,250.00	Credit	
	New owing: \$1,250.00		
Fardell and Potts Instructing solicitor: Mr A. P. Becker 25 MAR 92 Fee memorandum # 10	Your ref: 205/AB-98765 Debit 3,200.00	Credit	
	New owing: \$3,200.00		
Marrowfat v Marrowfat Instructing solicitor: Ms G. Van Owen 14 FEB 92 Fee memorandum # 13 3 JUN 92 Cash received	Your ref: GVO-MBC-896763 Debit 6,350.00	Credit 4,000.00	
	New owing: \$2,350.00		
Total owing \$6,800.00			
Freemantle Hollingdale & Page Solicitors DX 361 SYDNEY ATTENTION: Ms G. Van Owen			

*Counsel's Companion* also incorporates an "expenses" feature which allows a barrister to set up a chart of accounts and then keep track of all expenses. Income and expenditure reports are available for any period, so all information necessary for the preparation of a tax return can be produced at the end of the financial year, printed and sent to the barrister's accountant. Reports of fees (billed or unbilled) are available by matter or by day, so a barrister can constantly monitor his or her performance against budget. The time and cost savings which will be generated by this program in a barristers' practice are potentially substantial. Its effect upon a barrister's income ought to be equally favourable through its ability to enable the prompt billing of fees and the constant monitoring of unpaid accounts.

*Counsel's Companion* is available from DLA Software, 22 Crown Street, Woolloomooloo (02-357 4777). Demonstrations are available upon request. □