

The Estate Mortgage Case

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Computers In the Courtroom

With more than two million documents, nine parties and a hearing expected to last 12 to 24 months, the Estate Mortgage litigation is setting a new standard in case management and document retrieval systems.

It was apparent from the outset that document management systems would need to be put in place in order to deal with the large number of documents in the Estate Mortgage case. In 1993, the parties agreed to use an electronic form of discovery - the procedure by which parties compulsorily disclose to other parties prior to trial information relating to questions for determination in the case. A "discovery protocol" was established and documents were imaged onto CD with certain categories of information provided for each document.

In mid 1996, in anticipation of the commencement of the trial in the Victorian Supreme Court in February 1997, the parties convened a series of technology meetings to determine the specific document management needs. It was agreed that technology services were required to optimise the efficiency of the proceedings, reduce the duration of the trial, and allow the

parties maximum flexibility to use both the court technology system and private technology in the presentation of the case.

The Court Book

To save the costs of producing a hard copy version of the Court Book containing thousands of documents, it was decided that the Court Book would only exist in electronic

form. It would include all the images contained on CD and correlating data. The courtroom technology system developed for the case was required to allow parties to access and search this electronic Court Book.

Courtroom Technology
Proposals for courtroom technology were subsequently considered and the services of Systematics Pty Ltd were engaged to supply and operate the system. A unique system for the Estate Mortgage litigation was developed. Using

software developed for the Internet, customised for the parties in the case, the Estate Mortgage system runs as an "Intranet_R" web site within the courtroom. It provides database management of the electronic Court Book and all other court documents, including pleadings, exhibits and transcript.

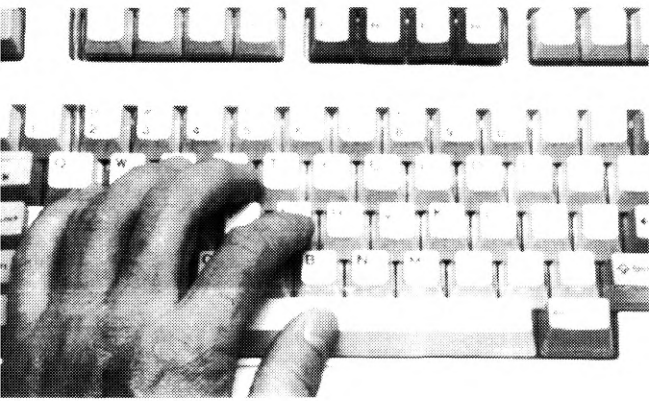
"Surfing the Net"

A single "browser interface", Netscape Navigator, makes the system simple to learn and use. Using Netscape, parties access the "Estate Mortgage Home Page" which allows parties to perform all of the following functions: access and search the Court Book database and image library;

- search realtime and historical transcript;
- access pleadings of all parties;
- exchange information, or serve documents via email;
- search "private" document databases;
- exchange "Aides-Memoire" - outlines of opening by the parties, with hypertext links to documents;
- exchange outlines of legal argument, with hypertext links to relevant cases;
- remote access to the Estate Mortgage court room system.

"...the Estate Mortgage system ... provides database management of the electronic Court Book and all other court documents, including pleadings, exhibits and transcript."





The Intranet System provides a high level of integration of databases, images and transcript by using "hypertext links" between resources. For example, the system provides links between a document image and the data relating to the image, or between transcript and documents/exhibits referred to in the transcript. By asking questions of the system, information can be easily retrieved and displayed on the screen within seconds.

Remote Access

The system has been designed so that parties will have 24

hour access to all features of the system, using a remote dial-up connection from within their offices or homes, both in Melbourne and interstate. The remote access capability enables practitioners to monitor the proceedings from a distance by "dialling in" to view realtime and historical transcript, to make annotations in relation to the transcript, conduct searches of the Court Book and generally follow the proceedings as if they were actually present in court. This facility has tremendous cost saving advantages for clients.

The Future

The document management processes developed for the Estate Mortgage litigation are not limited to large scale litigation involving hundreds of thousands of documents. Technology, such as document imaging and the creation of document databases as searching "engines" can be used to optimise the efficiency of case preparation and proceedings generally.

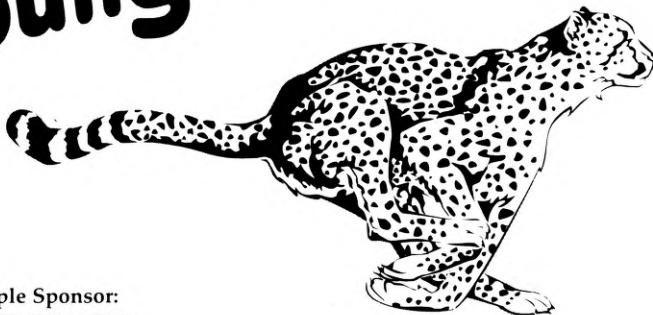
Corrs recognises the importance of developing discovery databases and document retrieval systems in response to client needs to maximise identified case strategies.

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Corrs acts for a principal defendant in the action, which centres upon the collapse of the Estate Mortgage Unit Trusts in 1990.

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