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Technology
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Center

Case management in the High Court of Australia: The first year of a new system

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Aim of this presentation

- explain why the High Court of Australia chose a particular solution for its case management needs
- outline the system's
 - problems
 - benefits
 - potential



Structure of this presentation

- role of the HCA
- the court's case management needs
- choice of solution
- structure of the new system
- demonstration
- plans for its future development



Why am I telling you this?

- High Court's solution is
 - interesting and unusual
 - has now been operational for more than 18 months
 - may well suit courts in other jurisdictions



Why am I telling you this?

- formerly Deputy-Registrar
- responsible for general design of system
- liaised with developers from PricewaterhouseCoopers while they developed it



High Court of Australia



High Court of Australia

- highest court in the Australian legal system
- hears cases
 - on appeal from
 - other federal courts
 - state and territory courts
 - in its original jurisdiction
 - interpretation of the Constitution
 - matters arising between States



Registries

- High Court building, Canberra
 - principal registry
 - virtual tour of the building
www.highcourt.gov.au
- other offices of the registry
 - Sydney and Melbourne
—High Court staff
 - Adelaide, Brisbane, Darwin,
Hobart and Perth—staffed
by officers of other courts



Registries

- services to the Court
 - managing case flow
 - information concerning matters filed
- services to practitioners and the public
 - information about case flow
 - advice about practice and procedure
 - enquiries
 - by telephone
 - by letter
 - at the registry counter



Caseload

	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Special leave applications	380	369	358
Appeals	48	69	51
Writs of summons	28	35 *	81
Removal applications	6	9	14
Orders nisi / referred to FC	32	21	39
Electoral matters	4	0	0
Other	18	7	5
Total	516	510 *	548

*excluding 665 related writs



Case management

- 1903–1987
 - paper files
- 1987–1997
 - Prime mid-range 5340 processor
 - Prime Information (Pick) language
 - Primos operating system
 - basic information concerning the status of cases
 - paper files



Case management needs

- 1998–
 - facilitate workflow
 - graphical user interface
 - intuitive to use
 - allow “objects” to be embedded
 - robust
 - secure
 - open architecture; capable of running on a variety of platforms



Case management needs

- 1998–
 - flexible enough to allow routine changes to be made by registry staff
 - old system required a consultant even to add a new Justice
 - integrated with existing desktop applications
 - extensive statistical information
 - old system required a lot of counting case names on printouts



Case management needs

- 1998–
 - reporting and ad-hoc queries
 - (optional) publication of data, at field level, to the Internet
- still using paper files (need file tracking)



Choice of solution

- prepared formal specifications
- reviewed existing systems in other courts
- decided to construct system “in house”
- PricewaterhouseCoopers developed system using Lotus Notes
- 1997: application development
- 2 January 1998: system “went live”



Why Lotus Notes?

- has required functionality
- proof-of-concept before development commenced
- believe that Notes will be available, and continue to be improved for many years
- people skilled in maintenance and improvement widespread



Some Notes concepts

- *Databases*
 - *documents*
 - *fields* (any kind of electronic information)
- *forms* (document templates)
 - *determine how information displayed*
 - *hide information*
 - for clarity
 - for security (depending on user's security level)



Some Notes concepts

- *views* (hierarchical lists of documents)
 - assist user to traverse databases
- *LotusScript* scripting language
 - process information in databases
- all data, including embedded objects (*attachments*) in a field in a document, can be indexed for full text searching
- *replication* of databases for distributed organization of data (not used)



Relational aspects

- Notes is not relational
- case management system makes use of this freedom from the requirement of referential integrity
- some relational functionality added (will explain later)



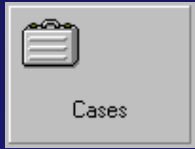
Structure of the new system



Interconnected databases

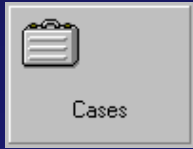
- information passed between the databases
- users move between databases by following links between documents
- however, users need not be aware of the division of information within the system





Cases database

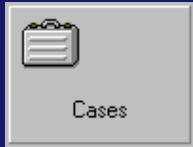
- three different kinds of document
 - cases
 - parties
 - events



Cases database

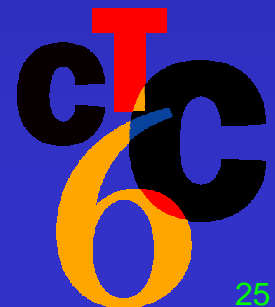
- case documents
 - one for every case in the Court
 - information about the case
 - name and type
 - where and when was it commenced
 - who is the responsible officer
 - where is the (paper) file
 - what is it about
 - fields displayed vary by type

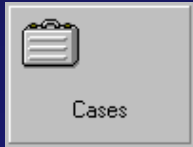




Cases database

- party documents
 - one for each party to each case
 - name
 - legal representatives
 - summary of information on each party is displayed in case document
 - link in case document opens party document
 - similar connection with representatives database





Cases database

- event documents
 - information about events that have occurred, and which may occur, in the case
 - basis of system's structure
 - explained later





Representatives database

- information about representatives of parties to cases
 - firms of solicitors
 - self-represented persons



Practitioners database

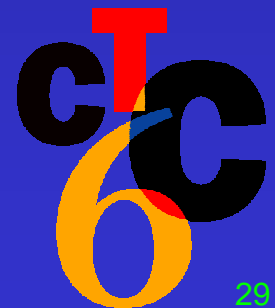
- (paper) roll of legal practitioners
 - entitled to practise in one or more States or Territories
 - must be on this roll to practise in any Australian federal court
- practitioners database mirrors (paper) roll
- generates practising certificates





Letters database

- more than 20 standard letters, some with complicated variants
- generated on occurrence of various events
- can be edited before being
 - printed and mailed
 - faxed, without being printed
 - e-mailed
- stored, as record of correspondence, attached to relevant event





Reports database

- generates 30 tables, analyzing judicial workload, for HCA annual report



Private database

- most information in the system is public
- private information stored separately
- Example: parties to a case involving child custody are known by their initials
 - initials stored in party documents in cases database
 - links to parties' real names in private database





Private database

- high security level required to access
- having separate database
 - ensures private information can't be guessed using text searching
 - improves security for publishing to Internet (discussed later)

Events

- Three types
 - a document having been filed
 - e.g. a notice of appeal
 - correspondence having been sent out by the registry
 - e.g. a draft index to an appeal book, to all parties for comment
 - something else having happened
 - e.g. a hearing



Events

- events can be shared by several cases
 - e.g. cases heard together
 - a single hearing event (and a single event document)
 - transcript attached to the event document not to each case document
 - a search for text occurring in the transcript returns the hearing event



Events

- an event is either
 - *past* (it has happened)
 - *pending* (it may happen)
- case documents show lists of past and pending events to show, at a glance, status of case



Events

- past events
 - created when user confirms it happened
- pending events
 - created by user, or
 - created automatically by system



Events

- pending events, created by user
 - system assists by listing
 - normal sequence of events, for that type of case, and the current place in that sequence
 - all events for that type of case, or
 - all events



Events

- pending events, created automatically by system
 - automatically created by system when another event becomes "past" (because the normal sequence of events, for that type of case, suggests that pending event will follow the one that just happened)



Events

- For example
 - index to an application book is settled ("index settled" event set to past)
 - application book is due in 28 days (pending "application book" event, dated 28 days ahead, is created)
- status of case clearly indicated
- many fields of the pending event are already filled-in
- letter also generated



Views

- different ways of listing documents
 - restrict the documents shown
 - e.g. show only current cases
 - sort them on different bases
 - e.g. by responsible officer
 - group them logically
 - e.g. parties, grouped by case
 - calendar views



Security

- seven levels of security determine
 - what can be read
 - what can be changedright down to field level
- some information shown differently, or not at all, depending on user's level
 - e.g. pending hearing event
 - names of Justices, or
 - number of Justices

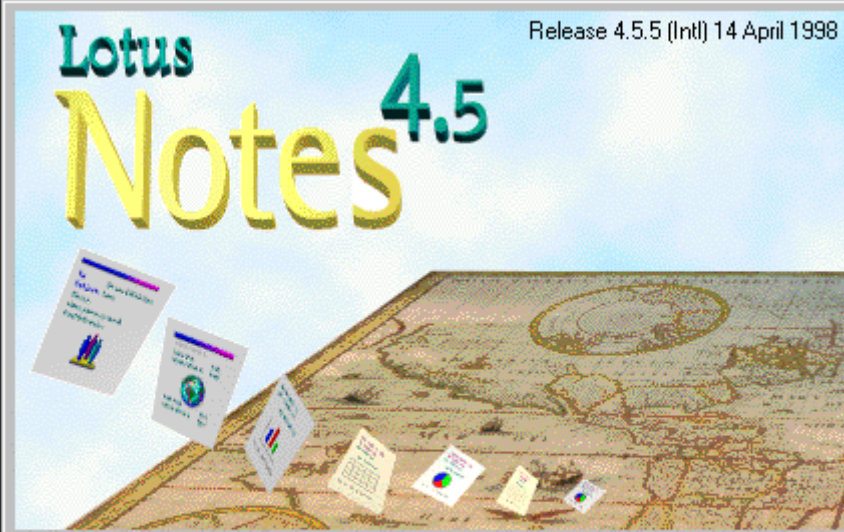


Ad hoc queries

- use Notes's text indexing
- search queries constructed and saved for future use
 - simple to construct and modify
 - meet most of the registry's needs
- for more complicated statistics
 - reports database
 - other statistical packages



Demonstration



Lotus
Notes 4.5

Release 4.5.5 (Intl) 14 April 1998

©1985-1998 Lotus Development Corporation. All rights reserved.
This software is subject to the Lotus Software Agreement, Restricted Rights for U.S. government users, and applicable export regulations.
International CorrectSpell™ ©1991 INSO Corporation, All rights reserved.
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Lotus Notes

The image shows the software box art for Lotus Notes 4.5. The title 'Lotus Notes 4.5' is prominently displayed in a stylized font. Below the title, several floating icons represent various features of the software, such as a calendar, a mail icon, and a document. The background features a map of the world, suggesting global connectivity. The text at the bottom provides copyright information and legal notices.

(Slightly) relational features

- if barrister changes address/phone number
 - barristers self-employed
 - changes are made in the practitioners database, and reflected throughout the system (as in a relational database)

(Slightly) relational features

- if solicitor changes address/phone number
 - solicitors usually employed by law firm, so probably just changed firm
 - still want to keep the old contact details
 - changes are made in the practitioners database, but not promulgated throughout the system
 - representation information in parties documents is marked as questionable



What's ahead

- publish selected information to the Internet
 - for parties and interested members of the public
 - reduce routine enquiries
 - regularly replicate information to proxy server
 - only selected fields copied
 - private database not copied
 - Notes Domino server on proxy dynamically producing HTML



What's ahead

- historical data
 - *full, partial and minimal* case records
- electronic lodgement
 - not currently permitted by HCA Rules
 - documents attached to relevant event
- Internet publishing and electronic lodgement pending approval from the Court



Conclusion: problems

- summary lists of events not automatically updated
 - because not relational
 - can cause anomalous results for ad hoc queries
 - could be overcome by updating all case documents before entering query
- slow annual report data generation
- generation of daily lists not yet implemented



Conclusion: benefits

- assisted workflow
- improved management of cases
- generates sophisticated correspondence
 - previously prepared using Word mail merge, with data entered for each letter
 - improved amount and quality of information provided to parties



Conclusion: benefits

- low cost
- flexible design
 - new event types can easily be created, and different case flows anticipated
- being adapted for Egyptian courts

Australian court technology

- Australian Institute of Judicial Administration
Second Technology for Justice Conference
- Melbourne, 8–10 October 2000
(the week after the Sydney Olympics)
www.aija.org.au



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