

# Computers? Say 'no'

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By [Kerry Underwood](#)

The legal profession would have been better off if computers and case management systems had never been invented, says Kerry Underwood

Would the legal profession, the public and the world generally be better off without computers?

On balance, yes.

I love word-processors, faxes and photocopiers, quite like mobile phones and email, but as far as case-management systems, Excel spreadsheets, reams of "MI" (management information) online forms, etc, go— no thanks.

I accept that the problem is not computers as such, but the way they are used and also virtually everyone connected with computers, whose technical jargon-filled arrogance makes lawyers seem positively user-friendly.

## **E-traffic jams**

Take the internet for example. Is anyone seriously suggesting that this has speeded things up? Sure you can read the Sydney Morning Herald online and get today's weather forecast for East Timor, but I will let you all into a little secret about law and lawyers. We quite like getting paid. So we do not allow our books, or extracts from them, or our lecture material to be available on the internet, so you will always miss out on the leading works and commentators in any given field. Anyone using only the internet for legal research is very much getting a second-rate service. The problem is that most people using the internet fail to realise that it is the showcase of the losers.

The availability of statutes and cases online is valuable, but it is still much quicker to look in books. If we are looking up a point of law in my office and I go to the books and another lawyer looks on the internet, I win every time. The abacus always beats the calculator.

## **Powerpoint-less**

PowerPoint. Now there is a laugh. Has any PowerPoint presentation ever gone off smoothly? It is the Tommy Cooper of software. Absolutely hopeless, but hilarious.

I love it. Or rather I love fellow-lecturers using it – it just puts my fees up. Perfectly good lecturers are reduced to half an hour of staring at a keyboard. Priceless! It makes Clive Sinclair's C5 car look like a good invention.

## **Case management con**

Case management systems are entirely useless, expensive and very damaging. They slow down every type of work. They are always slower than the uncomputerised lawyers in my, or any other decent firm. It is true that bad firms may do routine work better with case management systems than without, but good firms do not need them, and do not use them. Ask the City firms (and they are good – if expensive and possibly socially undesirable).

Indeed so slow and inefficient are such systems that some firms operating them will not take cases in the last year of limitation!

Judgment goes out of the window. The case management system will not work out that Plodshire Constabulary probably do not want any more negative publicity about race relations in its area and so will settle that claim now, or that Mistakeshire NHS Trust might be keen to settle, having just come top of the list in “Your Guide to the 100 Filthiest Hospitals”.

Case management systems are at worse a con and at best a prop for firms who should not be in business anyway. Computerisation has led to the virtual collapse of the National Health Service.

I can see great benefits in electronic filing, with every solicitor having access to every pleading in the land. Firms could see which companies are frequently being sued for the same employment or health and safety issues and claim additional damages and get cases consolidated. Class actions, group litigation orders, special public funding. Aggravated damages. Now we are talking! Except we are not, because lawyers in the UK, in contrast to the US, are showing a marked lack of interest in electronic filing, which involves a bit of thought.

## **Web adverts: waste of space**

Websites can be good adverts for firms, but keeping a good website up-to-date is time-consuming. Any idea that much business will ever be received “online” is misconceived. Last year we opened more files for taxi-drivers whose cabs I had ended up in, than from the internet. Websites work as an electronic brochure, but not as an order form.

Computers cut the profitability of law firms. They go wrong much more often than people and cost far more to put right. There is a direct correlation between the introduction of case management systems in personal injury work and its reduction in profitability and the extraordinary increase in negligence claims.

I accept that this is probably one genie that cannot be put back in the bottle, but the world generally, and law firms in particular, would be better off if computers had never been invented.

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