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PUBLISHING SERVICES

Case Study



Developing an Online Publishing Channel

The Incorporated Council of Law Reporting for England and Wales (ICLR) is the leading publisher of law reports established by the legal profession in 1865 specifically to produce their official series *The Law Reports*. They are still the preferred choice of judges as citations in court: see *Practice Direction (Citation of Authorities)* [2012] 1 WLR 780. Other series published by ICLR include *The Weekly Law Reports*, *The Industrial Cases Reports*, *The Business Law Reports* and *The Public and Third Sector Law Reports*.

The ICLR have 34 Law Reporters (themselves barristers or solicitors) sitting in the higher and appellate courts and an archive of some 77,000 law reports dating back to 1865.

The Challenge: Develop an Online Publishing Channel

As the official law report publisher for England and Wales, the ICLR publishes around 700 law reports per annum over its 5 different series and have an archive of some 77,000 law reports dating back to 1865. Having implemented an XML workflow and taken control of its content and publishing process, the ICLR were keen to develop its own online channel to deliver its digital content directly to its customers.

Case law (in a “Common Law” system) evolves over time through precedent and the ICLR only report on cases of legal significance to the development of the law. What this means is that any of the judgments in its reported cases could have considered the judgments of 1 or more other cases reported in the past – and each of the judgments in these cases likewise could have considered 1 or more earlier cases, and so on, potentially creating linkages back to 1865 and earlier. In addition, there are 16 possible types of legal considerations.

The challenge was therefore to:

- design a subscription access system which would integrate all the archive and future law reports
- capture the complex network of relationships between reports and between reports and their cited legislation

- deliver this information in a way which was optimised for use by the legal practitioner, and
- integrate this with the ICLR XML-based publishing workflow

MintoGordon led the project for the development of this channel.

The Solution

The first step was to appoint a developer with significant systems experience of online publishing systems for heavily text-based content; that developer was *Catalysts Ltd* and the publishing platform used was Rocket Software’s *NXT* platform.

The next step was to capture the entire archive of law reports to the ICLR XML structures put in place in 2008 (developed by MintoGordon) and ensure consistency across the entire ICLR catalogue. Once completed, with highly-structured XML law reports available, a prototype system was rapidly developed for the delivery of the law reports via a web browser. The paginated, published form of law reports is still a court requirement and this need was satisfied by enabling the user to toggle between the ‘dynamic’ content view and the paginated PDF used for the print publication.

Then there was the index data: there were volumes of printed index data dating from 1960 to the present day which contained information on the relationships between cases and between cases

The screenshot shows the ICLR website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'CitorPlus', 'Case Search', 'Case Results', 'Case Report', 'PDF', 'Briefcase', and 'Quick Find'. Below this is a search bar with the text 'Enter party name eg Donoghue, Hedley Byrne'. The main content area displays the case 'Smith v Ministry of Defence' under the heading 'Index Card'. Below this, there is a section titled 'Cases Considered' which lists several cases, including 'Barrett v Enfield London Borough Council', 'Bankovic v Belgium', 'R (Smith) v Oxfordshire Assistant Deputy Coroner', 'Multiple Claimants v Ministry of Defence', 'Van Colle v Chief Constable of the Hertfordshire Police', and 'Brooks v Comr of Police of the Metropolis'. Each case entry includes a brief description and a link to the full report. The right side of the screenshot shows a preview of the case document, including the title 'Smith and others v Ministry of Defence', the court 'Court of Appeal', and the date '2012 June 25, 26, 27; Oct 19'.

and cited legislation. Unfortunately changes to editorial styles over the years and a lack of unique identifiers for cases, such as case names (neutral citations were only introduced in 2001), meant the job of reverse engineering this information programmatically to create a database was not a straightforward task.

Next came the challenge of storing this index data, integrating it with the law reports content and serving up the required subset of index data to the screen to accompany the relevant law report. This was achieved by storing the index data in a separate SQL Server database working in combination with the NXT content database.

The many challenges surrounding the databasing of the index material were met through MintoGordon and Paul Magrath, Head of Online Content at ICLR, working very closely with Catalysts to bring combined expertise to bear on resolving the underlying complexities of the network of data. User access to and subscriber payments for the content are controlled by the *Think Enterprise* subscription management software.

“MintoGordon has been extremely thorough and painstaking in its approach both to the assessment and specification of the project and in its management and execution.”

Paul Magrath, Head of Online Content

The Outcomes

- The ICLR now has its own online channel to a world-wide market (particularly relevant to any country whose legal system is founded on English Common Law) to complement its print publications
- The online system is easily maintained and is updated on a daily basis with XML law reports and index content with the results immediately available to the end user
- Users can view a case report alongside all of its index material with easy navigation through the network of linkages to other reports, making it a very efficient research tool
- the ICLR can segment their digital content to produce any number of other customised products
- an additional benefit is that the content for the complex front-of-part and annual volume *print* indexes are now generated directly from the online Index database

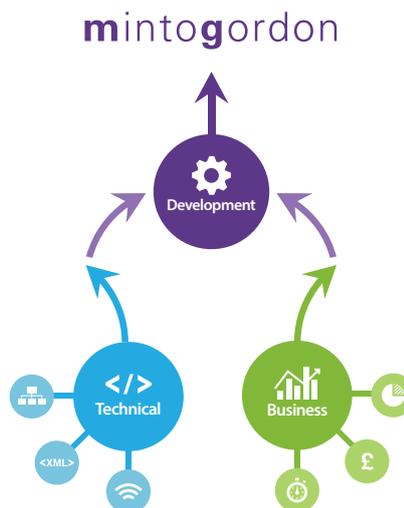
In fact, the online channel helps the ICLR to fulfil its original remit from its Memorandum and Articles of Association (1870):

“preparation and publication, in a convenient form, at a moderate price, and under gratuitous professional control, of Reports of Judicial Decisions of the Superior and Appellate Courts in England and Wales”.

about MintoGordon

With over 24 years’ experience to draw on, MintoGordon can help organisations to develop and maintain a unified information strategy. We can help business leaders identify a role for information technology in value creation, undertake requirements capture and manage the actual implementation of, and training on, new systems and processes.

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about Catalysts

Catalysts is a specialist system integrator designing, developing and supporting information systems for publishers and corporate information providers. Catalysts offers a full range of skilled services and software chosen for its performance and reliability and they are fully committed to their clients’ success.

