IBM

IBM Network Station paves the way to justice.

Pre-Paid Legal Services, Inc., an Ada, Oklahoma-based company that under-writes group legal service plans, prides itself on providing members with "afford-able access to justice." And ever since the company began using IBM Network Station™ network computers in 1997, it, too, has found access to justice more affordable than ever.

Pre-Paid Legal has 200-plus employees and more than 400,000 members in nearly every state in the U.S. Its business is providing local legal representation for members wherever and whenever they need it. To do this, the company contracts with an extensive network of general practice law firms and local attorneys throughout the country.

To answer questions that arise in servicing accounts, Pre-Paid Legal representatives must have access to a variety of data about the company's customers and corporate policies. But while customer information resides on an IBM AS/400®, most of the company information has been stored on paper.

Bringing information together
"We knew that we needed a more efficient way to access information and better technology to make information available

to users," says Jack Cornell, network engi-neer at Pre-Paid Legal.

One part of the company's solution involved converting paper-based material into a searchable, online "knowledge base" available via the company intranet. The other part of the solution was replacing existing text terminals with IBM Network Station Series 300 network computers.

"The Network Station is ideal for the things we are doing," Cornell says. "It's very flexible. Its terminal emulation lets us access all our native AS/400 applica-tions, and its browser lets us access the intranet and HTML-based applications

Application	Access to policy knowledge base on company intranet and customer information system on IBM AS/400
Hardware	IBM Network Station, IBM AS/400
Software	Custom-developed knowledge base with Java search functions, customer information system, IBM Network Station browser, Lotus Notes

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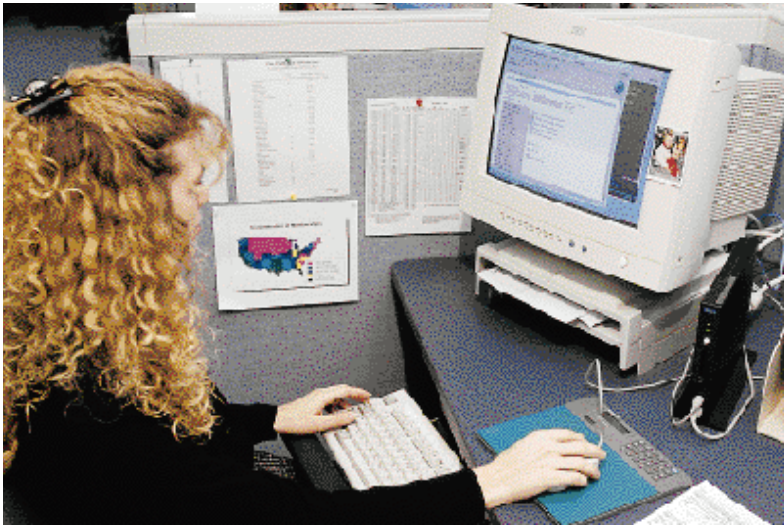
like our knowledge base. The user can simply point and click to find the information he or she needs."

Cornell also likes how the Network Station connects to multiple servers. "We will probably hook up some people to our Internet server, as well as to a desktop NT server running Lotus Notes® groupware and various Windows® productivity applications," he says. Eventually, he envisions running NT and Notes directly — and scalably — on the AS/400, using the AS/400 Integrated PC Server.

Easy conversions

To bring Pre-Paid Legal's knowledge base to the Network Station desktop, the company worked with CIMCASE (a data integration specialist) to map AS/400 data into Notes and then used Notes to generate dynamic HTML for the intranet.

"Navigation and screen design are very easy with HTML and a browser," Cornell says. The browser interface has powerful capabilities, as well. For instance, to simplify topic searching, CIMCASE developed a "smart query" written in Java™ for the knowledge base. Users pose questions using natural language and syntax, and the program returns a categorized view of all relevant topics.

The physical conversion from terminals to the Network Station was painless, as well. "We just connected the cabling on

the hub to the connector on the Network Station and assigned each box an IP address," Cornell says. "We installed them on Sunday and people were using them on Monday.

"Users couldn't believe that they had the intranet on their desktops, plus access to multiple applications and the ability to cut and paste text between applications," Cornell recalls.

Working more efficiently

Pre-Paid Legal currently has 35 Network Station network computers, but expects to add 200 more Network Stations in 1998, both as terminal replacements and PC replacements.

"When you look at what people do, you realize that most don't need PCs or hard disks or CD-ROMs," says Cornell. "All they need is access to the applications they use. The Network Station gives them that, at a much lower cost than PCs."

Overall, Cornell says, the IBM Network Station has provided Pre-Paid Legal with an easy-to-use, easy-to-manage system that puts up-to-date information right at the users' fingertips. So now, when a member calls in with a question, Pre-Paid Legal can be sure it is providing accurate and consistent information to the member quickly.

For more information

To find out more about how network computing with the IBM Network Station and the IBM family of servers can help you make the most of your business opportunities, call 1 800 IBM–7080, priority code 6N7BK005, in North America. Outside North America, call 416 383–5152, priority code 6N7BK005. Or contact your IBM Business Partner or local IBM representative.

If you have access to the Internet, you can find additional Network Station information via the World Wide Web at *www.ibm.com/nc.*

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