



of debit client account balances and credit office account balances.

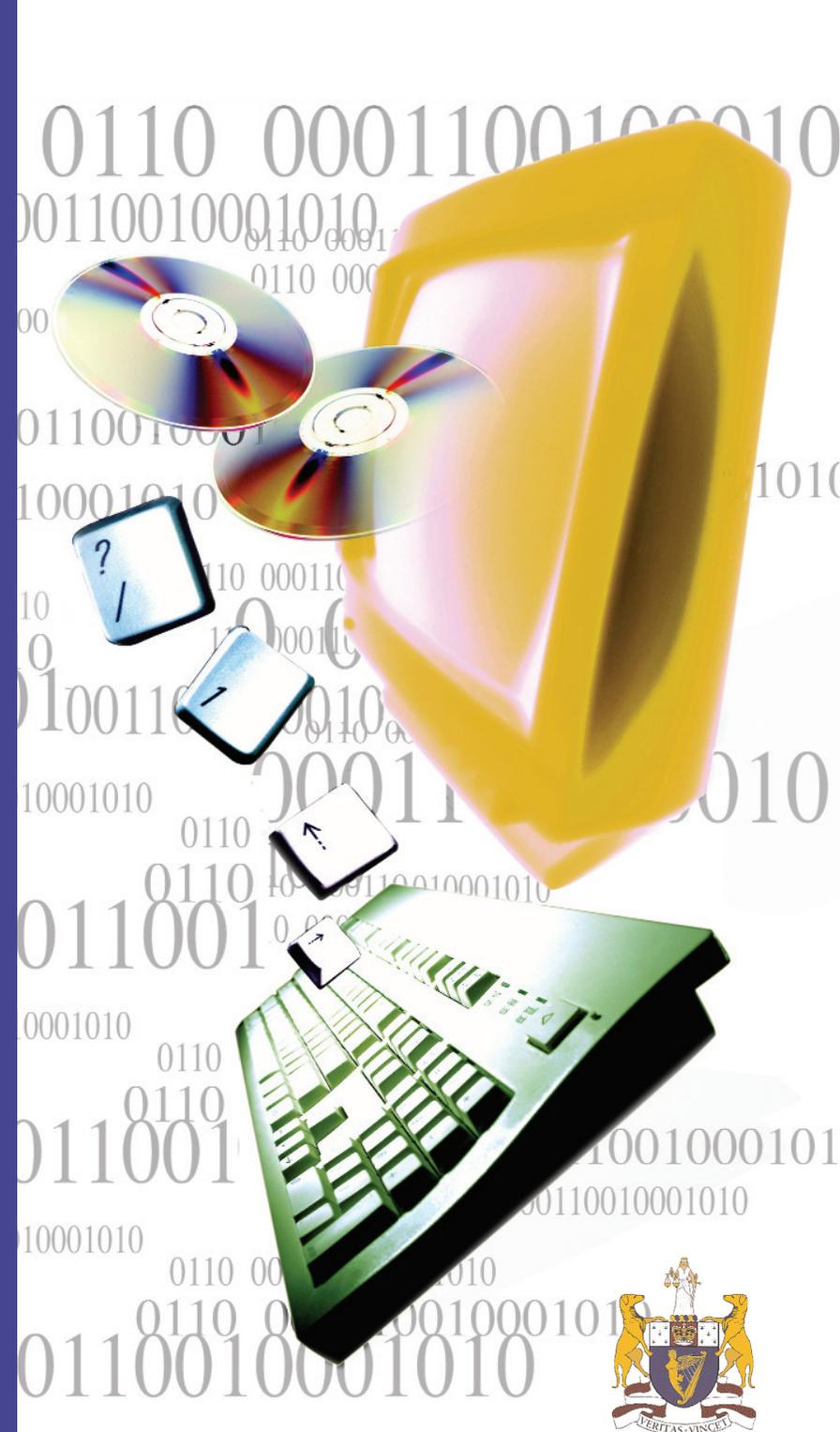
- A good system will record the date that the account was opened and was last active.
- The system should provide bank reconciliations, client and office ledger control accounts for the period and for the year to date.
- There should be adequate space for a full description of any transaction. (80 Characters).

AUDIT

- It should be possible to obtain computer printouts of the different types of entries such as payments and lodgements from at least the date of the last accountants report. These lists should be totalled, to enable manual client control accounts and reconciliations to be prepared.
- Most computers generate a run number every time an entry is made - the numbers should not be specific to a particular category of entry.
- The system should not allow information to be backdated, altered or deleted beyond the current month.
- Some systems delete information from the cashbooks when an account is achieved. Unless the book keeper follows the suppliers instructions very carefully complications may arise as part of the audit trail has disappeared.
- A simple method to check that the computer is in balance is especially important following an electrical failure.

FINALLY

- Attend a demonstration of at least two or three systems.
- Seek references from colleagues; some companies may have better back-up support in your location.
- Tidy-up the current system before the change over date.
- Do not underestimate the amount of time required to set the new system up.
- If transferring from a manual system, extra time will be required to run the two systems in parallel for a while.
- Invest in a good back up system. (Zip drive or CD writer). Keep back ups for each month end.
- Using all the system should improve the efficiency and profitability of the practice.
- Good Luck.





Acquiring a Computerised Accounts Package: Some Key Points

Firstly, decide what is the objective of computerising or updating the accounts. Most of the software accounting packages conform to the requirements of the Solicitors Accounts Regulations. Many accounting packages will assist the solicitor in the management of the practice, such as the control of outlays and debtors and the monitoring of performance, but computerisation will rarely be the solution to sorting out a mess.

The items to be considered are as follows:

GENERAL

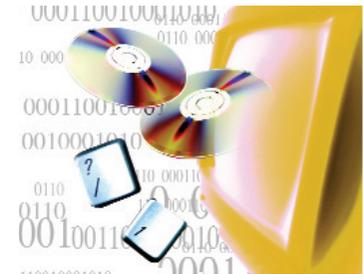
- The system should be capable of being viewed on a number of other screens for a modest cost to enable each fee earner to have access to the information.
- Training and back up assistance are important; initial training should be included, there should be an option of more advanced training later to enable the practice to make full use of the system and it should be possible to train replacement staff for a modest fee. Establish the response time for offsite and onsite assistance, as well as the cost and method of the support.
- Consider the hardware that the program will run on, some of the more advanced programs may take up more space on the computer and the system may be slow.
- A good software company listens to its clients and updates the packages on an ongoing basis.
- Consultation with other users, not just for initial appraisal, is often a good source of ongoing assistance.

OTHER MATTERS TO CONSIDER

- The way the system manages clients with a number of different matters.



- Some systems will carry forward full details of the client account transactions when the system is updated, even if it is a different system provider.
- Some systems work in periods and do not allow data to be entered until the previous month can be closed off, this may result in not being able to enter current data until the middle of the month. Failure to do this correctly may cause complications with the VAT return. A good system should allow the client ledger to be closed off separately and allow the nominal ledger to be worked on still.
- Some systems allow a user to search on a large variety of fields such as matter number, amount, cheque number, and date. It should be possible to search on matter number as well as account number and an old reference number. It should be easy to search for a specific client with limited information.
- Will the system prepare the VAT return? Preferably on a cash and/or invoice basis.
- The option to print cheques.
- What sort of management information will the system provide, such as budgets, analysis of income, fees due, “dormant” client accounts etc.
- Links to current file management and/or time recording systems.
- Ability to link to other programs such as Excel and Word.



THE USE OF THE SYSTEM

- Ease and efficiency of imputing data (some systems require the same information to be entered more than once).
- Ease of viewing clients ledger cards (in some systems a number of screens have to be accessed before a ledger account can be viewed). The workings of some systems are simplified by the use of function keys.
- Consider a ledger card that shows the office account, the client account and a client deposit account in landscape format preferably with a running balance.
- The solicitor should be able to obtain listings of client and office balances. It should be possible to sort these listing in a variety of ways such as per fee earner, dormant accounts, in sub sections such as A to C. It should be possible to obtain a separate list