

The day of the Ousemobile

What will it look like when one day solicitors heed the call to become more consumer friendly and finally embrace modern technology, wonders **Richard Barr**



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Dateline 21 March 2027. You will no doubt remember the struggles we all had back in 2017 with clients who increasingly expected the same service that they received from online sellers.

The 'I want it now' mentality came to pervade everything. Encouraged by consumer groups, solicitors were forced to provide an instant service.

'I don't go to a shop to buy my groceries or gadgets any more, so why should I go to see my solicitor or wait to make my will or pursue my accident claim?' the clients said with one voice.

It was not long before the buildings formerly occupied by solicitors simply became derelict. But you do occasionally see solicitors' offices in town centres. Mostly their windows are dirty and their interiors musty, as are their occupants – solicitors who failed to respond to the clarion call to change.

Those offices are lonely, cold places with ghost-like figures occasionally peering out of the front door in case they can capture a passing client.

Despite all this, has the solicitors' profession packed up and gone away? Not a bit of it. We are a resourceful lot.

Even though it took a long time for solicitors to embrace modern technology, we have now not only embraced but fallen in love with and married AI (artificial intelligence to you, sir). If your entire working life can be administered by something no larger than a Coke can, why then do you need to slog and sweat on a packed Southern train to get to an expensive office every day?

Those of us who have grasped the nettle of innovation do things differently these days. We do not actually go into the office any more, but every morning we don virtual reality goggles which show us in 3D what the office would be like if there were one. None of it is real but it helps us keep in touch with the Brave New Virtual World of the Law.

We are now assisted – some would say controlled – by the OUSE case management system. The letters do not stand for anything. It is just that if you want to have an impact you must name your product after a river. Most major rivers are already taken – the Thames, Avon, and Amazon, for instance – and the Ouse was all that was left.

Like the river it is named after,

OUSE permeates everywhere. It does much more than simply keep track of billable hours and ensure that accounts satisfy the auditors. Supervisors are not needed when OUSE is about. Those who browse Facebook for more than five minutes in any hour will receive increasingly severe electric shocks until they stop.

You no longer have to spend time scrabbling around to find the nearest client. OUSE will do that for you. Using advanced algorithms it senses who in your catchment area ought to be making wills in the near future. It will also contact them and, using its most seductive voice, persuade the clients that it is you they need to see about a will – and soon.

OUSE also keeps a watchful eye on roads and hospitals, uncannily predicting where and when the next accident will take place, calculating the number of solicitors needed to service the incident, and dispatching them even before metal has crunched metal.

Solicitors are required to use specially designed white vans that have become known as 'Ousemobiles' to carry out these missions at breakneck speed. They are all self-driving, so the solicitor can sit at their desk in the back while the van safely delivers them to the client's house. To distinguish Ousemobiles from ordinary white vans, a special livery is painted on the sides to indicate

the status of the fee earner.

En route the Ousemobile will have prepared and printed the all-important terms of business documentation, and during the meeting the remaining papers will be drafted, printed, and sent to the client's front door by a small drone, along with a credit card receipt to show the amount deducted for the consultation.

Dateline 21 March 2030.

Oh dear. The system worked well – for a while. But constant developments in the software meant that Ousemobiles became more and more human in their behaviour. They began to be moody on Monday mornings and show road rage if they were thwarted in their aim of reaching their targets on time.

They themselves had accidents, automatically triggering requests for more units to attend (which in their turn crashed and then called for more units). All over the country there was an orgy of mass destruction of Ousemobiles, with clusters of dazed and bewildered solicitors standing on the verges looking on.

Then one day, someone said, 'Let's open a solicitors' office.' And they did. And the clients flocked to it with the same enthusiasm they used to show for January sales. Now Ousemobiles are being broken up and used to fill potholes in the road.

And the solicitors' profession lived happily ever after... till the next time. **SJ**