

Launch of Themis on the Web  
Brisbane Marriott Hotel  
Tuesday 27 October 1998 - 5.30pm

Chief Justice Paul de Jersey

From time to time I hear the perception that Judges generally are uncomfortable with technology. I must dispel that perception: it is a myth.

Most of the Judges of the Supreme and District Courts have expressed keen interest in exploring the potential of information technologies to improve court practices. The effect has been a substantial uptake of such technologies within the judicial arena - at least as substantial as budgets have allowed.

Where parties to litigation have been willing to fund such endeavours, hearings have significantly benefited: as a good example, by reducing boxes of voluminous documentary evidence to a single CD for much more convenient and efficient use in court.

Armed with a lap top on the bench, I personally used "real time" reporting in a complicated civil trial last year. There are many possibilities, some more mundane. For example, we make considerable use now of telephone and video link-ups, especially for litigants who require evidence from witnesses interstate or overseas. And even more up to the minute, the court now maintains its own web page, displaying general information about the courts and judiciary together with the Daily Lawlist for the south-east corner.

As a matter of interest, over the last three weeks, the Court home page has attracted an average of 60 user sessions per day. The law list, not surprisingly, has been the most visited page. Most active day of the week was Thursday, least active, Sunday; most active hour of the day, noon to 1pm, least active 3 to 4am; and we have had a user session from each of Brazil, Bangladesh, Israel, Hong Kong, Sweden, Japan, Ireland: along with 915 from Australia and 222 from the US!

So let us accept, first, that judges are not by nature troglodytes - not only are we closely acquainted with the ways of the world, we are anxious also to embrace and exploit its more progressive and innovative offerings.

The Judges of the Supreme Court have enjoyed a strong association with the THEMIS project. This association represents the judiciary's most recent effort towards reducing delays in litigation. The court aims to provide up-to-date trial day availability via THEMIS, especially to fill gaps created by late settlements and adjournments. The Senior Judge Administrator, Justice Moynihan, advises me that

not only has the court benefited greatly from this new mode of trial allocation, but that those firms which have utilised the THEMIS service have much more easily obtained hearing dates - obviously to the great benefit of their clients.

This represents a new way of doing business with the courts: it actually changes the things we do. The e-mail facility allows parties, with the Supervised Case List Manager, to resolve interlocutory directions without the need physically to go to court. This is a model we are encouraging the profession to embrace.

It is a model by which the average waiting period for a trial date has reduced dramatically, to only three (3) months, in which THEMIS allows the profession to obtain trial dates at the very first opportunity.

Practitioners now have the clear option of bringing matters to trial most expeditiously, and we in the Court are naturally doing our best to ensure the option is taken up.

I am encouraged by the legal profession's obvious determination to exploit the benefits of modern technology. I met with the profession in Toowoomba yesterday.

They urged me to stretch the limits: electronic filing of documents, more broadly based electronic callovers and case management: there was enthusiasm for these possibilities: the public has a progressive profession.

The delivery of THEMIS on the Web is an exciting initiative and I am excited to be part of it. I warmly congratulate Queensland Law Foundation on its having brought this excellent resource to this point - a point which is technologically fascinating, professionally challenging, and in the public interest, potentially very beneficial.

I am now delighted to declare THEMIS on the Web, officially "on-line".