Product review

Into Perspective

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As a person who has spent some time 'learning computers' from his 14- and 11-year-old daughters, the idea of relying upon a computer for technical support did give the author some real apprehension. However, with training, leading to interest, leading to increasing usage, confidence and ability, the outcome has been a good one. And anyway, boys must have their toys!

Two of the most useful benefits of 'Perspective' are timeliness and comprehensiveness. First, it is up to date, so that one can feel confident in using it without having to worry that you are giving advice based upon old and superseded material. Secondly, the wide range of current and historic materials is invaluable, particularly the ability to search them all or selected groups of them. It covers: pensions and related Acts, Statutory Instruments, regulatory materials (including all relevant Inland Revenue and National Insurance Contributions Office materials), Parliamentary materials including debates and questions, reports, white papers, all Opra materials, law reports, Pensions Ombudsman's determinations and so on, almost *ad infinitum*. It even has a substantial collection of local authority content. The daily news service is especially useful.

Technically, the 'Perspective' service has a variety of features that make it easy to learn and use for beginners and experts alike, and which turn it into a

powerful tool for the individual user and for the firm. Technical support over the telephone, including on the content, is very helpful and reassuring.

Perhaps the most impressive feature is called 'time travel'. Essentially, this feature allows the user to type in a date and the text is then reconstituted as in force on that date. If involved in a matter that occurred some time ago, the user can instantly see what the law was on that date. By hand, this is often a difficult and time-consuming task, with the fear that possibly something may have been missed. Furthermore, using different views of the text, the amendments to the text can also be seen visually on screen. The legislative history is set out in notes available at one click of the mouse. 'Perspective' can do this not only for current law, but also for an increasing range of older legislation such as the Social Security Act 1985. Time travel works forwards in time as well as backwards. When the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill is finally enacted, by using time travel users will be able to see the effect of the amendments it makes to existing legislation even before the appointed dates are announced.

A particularly valuable feature is cross-referencing. Defined words and phrases are all marked, and clicking on them instantly shows their definition. All references to other places in a document or to other documents are similarly marked and clicking on them instantly

opens another window on that part of that document. One can work on several documents at the same time and even have them on screen at the same time.

Finding what one needs is also quite easy. There are a number of ways of accessing documents. A table of contents is one method, an abbreviations system for the main documents is another (for example one can open the Pensions Act 1995 in one key stroke), bookmarks and, of course, searching. Searching is an art but the 'Perspective' method makes it relatively easy. Type a phrase and 'Perspective' will find every reference to it. The author would like to be able to refine searches, that is, to carry out a search within a search, and 'Perspective' does not allow it. However, I understand that this will be available with an improved search format in the next release, following a request at a user group meeting.

Some other features are also worth mentioning. It is possible to make 'Perspective' part of your own 'knowledge-base' by adding comments or linking it to precedents, opinions, gossip and so on by annotating documents. The author understands that shortly it will be possible to launch your word processor

with a standard document or access a particular document in your intranet directly from the annotation. Annotations can be made available only to the user that wrote them, or to everyone in the firm.

Being of a certain age, I am not always entirely comfortable reading from the computer. However, I find that I am more able to do this as time goes by. By using a combination of 'Perspective' and books and papers, when I can find what I want in print, 'Perspective' has fundamentally changed and improved the way I deal with this material. I can use the print as my text but use the cross-references and definitions in 'Perspective' to check these references, and I can check that the paper version is up to date as I read. The next generation will probably not need or want the paper at all!

As can be seen, this author is rather a fan of 'Perspective'. For me, it saves time and engenders confidence. And the more I use it, the better I am at using it to help me.

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